

AN EVIDENCE-BASED CANINE COMPANION TRAINING CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

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One aspect of modern dog training is a movement from *competition-based* to *companion-based* curricula -- where the primary goal is satisfactory integration of the pet into the household. This shift in focus has facilitated innovative paradigms (e.g., clicker training) and development of activities targeted at more casual canine enthusiasts (e.g., nose work^[1]). However, as offerings de-emphasize competition, measuring progress is more difficult. While adherents of each path tout advantages, claims are made largely via anecdotal observations. For dog training to continue progress toward being a scientific discipline, these claims must also withstand the rigor of unbiased, systematic, evidence-based analysis.

Our research proposes such an analytic methodology for quantifying training curriculum effectiveness. We apply this framework within a retrospective cohort study of 63 clients that completed a three level training program resulting in an AKC CGC designation, followed by enrollment in at least one non-competitive activities course (Rally-O Skills, Fun Run Agility, Companion Sniffer Dog Training^[2]). Improvement is measured through differences in responses to a three-point Likert scale evaluation of eight common obedience commands contained in a survey module^[3] first given during level one orientation and again after training at our facility for at least six months. Standard safeguards are used to control for acquiescence bias.

We first performed a Wilcoxon signed-rank test to demonstrate statistically significant improvements in all obedience commands, noting differences in skill advancement -- which can inform future curriculum modification. Secondly, we conducted a comparative-effectiveness multivariate regression analysis to determine which higher-level activities courses led to better "obedience outcomes". Finally, we use a similar regression analysis to compare the expected total income derived from each of the respective activities courses to contrast corresponding client retention and satisfaction.

^[1]A. Herot and J.M. O'Brien. K9 Nose Work. The Association of Pet Dog Trainers Annual Educational Conference (Presentation), October 2010.

^[2]L.R. McCluskey, S.A. Larson, E.C. Bess, and K. Small. Utilizing the companion sniffer dog training method to develop aptitude in locating target scents. The Association of Pet Dog Trainers Annual Educational Conference (Poster), October 2010.

^[3]K. Overall. Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Small Animals. Mosby, 1997.

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