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# Pet education — not for them, for us

*Colleges overrun with abandoned pets may offer lessons on managing the abandoned-pet problem in general.*

ABANDONING pets as so much throwaway trash reflects either callousness to suffering or appalling ignorance that ought to be dispelled.

College campuses have been plagued by the practice, prompting cat lovers in particular to organize rescue efforts. Neighborhoods beleaguered by similar problems — some parts of Roanoke County come to mind — might look to the example for possible solutions.

Abandoning a pet may solve an immediate problem for its owners, but for the animal it's just the start of a desperate struggle. And if the animal does not stumble upon a new home — as most do not — yet manages to survive a year or more, it's the start of a long-term problem for the humans who must live with the results.

Just two cats able to reproduce can multiply into 20,000 offspring in four years. Two dogs can multiply into 5,000. These feral cats and wild dogs not only live short and savage lives, but they also can become a

dangerous nuisance to the communities where they become established.

Simply snaring and killing feral cats solves little: Other abandoned animals quickly take their place and restart the cycle. Instead, organizations such as the Mason Cat Coalition at George Mason University in Fairfax feed but also "fix" the abandoned felines, so they cannot reproduce. Those not too wild get new homes.

Long-term management is cheaper and more effective than kill programs, the animal lovers argue — and they have some evidence to support their claim. At Stanford University, a rescue operation reduced the semiwild cat population to about 150 from about 500.

Still, the most important element of this or any other animal-control strategy is educating pet owners not to abandon animals in the first place. Pet owners must learn that to chuck pets out on their own is to consign them to a horrible fate, and to contribute to a public-health and public-nuisance problem.