

## Rigorous Review at College, Association Levels Ensures Quality of Veterinary Education

By Herb Whiteley

For many months the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine has been preparing for reaccreditation by the AVMA's Council on Education (COE) this year. In late February our comprehensive self-study document was sent to the members of the team coming for an on-site review April 7 to 11. By the end of the visit, the college will receive broad strokes feedback from the team, but we won't have the final report and notification of steps needed for full reaccreditation, if any, until much later this year.

As a member of the COE for the past six years representing research, I have been on many site visits. In preparing our self-study documentation, I am extremely proud of the program at Illinois. Our faculty are highly engaged in teaching. Our facilities, though not the newest or biggest, offer tremendous support for learning, especially our extensive and growing Clinical Skills Learning Center and the many uses of educational technology. Overall, Illinois has emerged as a pacesetter in veterinary education focused on developing graduates who are clinically competent and adept at solving problems.

There have been a lot of changes in the reaccreditation process since Illinois was last reviewed in 2007, although the basic areas examined remain the same: organization, finances, facilities, clinical resources, library and information resources, students, admission, faculty, curriculum, research programs, and outcomes assessment.

Of course, there have been huge changes at Illinois since our 2007 reaccreditation. Feedback from that process helped spur the college to take a close look at the curriculum. Ultimately, faculty chose to implement an innovative approach to veterinary education, the Illinois Integrated Veterinary Professional Curriculum, which has been fully implemented throughout the four-year program since last fall.

Among the features of our curriculum that will be showcased during the site visit are the mechanisms for assessing student performance, including the two "milestone examinations," occurring at the end of the fall semester in the second year of the program and midway through spring in the third year. Students take a NAVLE-type comprehensive written exam and are assessed on performance of 16 clinical skills. We're also using curriculum software that allows us to collect and rapidly respond to feedback from students and faculty at frequent intervals within each course.

In the midst of our college reaccreditation process, the COE itself is also undergoing assessment for re-recognition by the U.S. Department of Education as the approved accrediting body for veterinary education in this country.

As you may have heard, several members of the veterinary profession have used this process to raise concerns about the COE, including questioning how members are selected and whether standards are uniformly applied. A summary of the issues surrounding the COE review can be found in the February 15, 2013, issue of the *Journal of the AVMA*.

Major changes may lay ahead for the COE, just as our college embraced major changes after its 2007 accreditation visit. In both cases, the process of looking critically and responding with innovative solutions is a positive thing. We share the goal of improving veterinary education to better serve the public and the profession.