

## **Invest in Our Profession, One Student at a Time**

*By Herb Whiteley, Dean, University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine*

Few activities in your professional life can be as personally rewarding as mentoring.

For the past year, Dr. Tracey Hlede has worked for the College's Chicago Center for Veterinary Medicine, devoting a fifth of her time to recruitment activities, especially in outreach to young people from underrepresented populations.

She visits a different high school every week, meets with pre-vet clubs at Chicago area colleges, and now leads the Veterinary Mentor Program at the Anti-Cruelty Society, a partnership begun in 2000 that reaches more than 100 high school students and their parents with lectures and activities one Saturday each month during the school year. Earlier this year she and our Chicago clinic staff hosted eight Chicago public high school students as part of a national job shadowing day.

"Wherever I go, the most frequent question is 'Can I shadow a veterinarian? Can I work with someone?'," says Dr. Hlede. "The greatest need is among high school students, because the ones who have made it to college have already made great strides in figuring out how to achieve their goals."

The time commitment can be demanding, but the return on investment—the impact you can have on the life of a young person—is priceless.

Here's what one student said about her involvement with the program at the Anti-Cruelty Society:

"Because of the veterinary mentoring program I learned that this field is right for me; I've also learned that there are things that I need to work on as an individual.

"When I interviewed Dr. Hlede she gave me great advice, emphasizing the importance of being able to communicate. ... I've actually been more proactive in class and I've been applying for other volunteer opportunities because of her advice and the things I've learned in the program.

"The program also showed me that there are unending possibilities in veterinary medicine; I have no clue yet about what I'm going to focus on because so much of it interests me!"

Dr. Hlede points out that mentoring yields dividends for our profession as well as for the individuals engaged in the mentoring relationship.

"If veterinarians want our field to improve, then we need to reach out to our community," she says. "Here's our chance to let people know what the veterinary profession is really like and to shape our community and public opinion."

So how do you get started? It can be as simple as contacting your local school and offering your time.

Dr. Hlede says, “When I contact a school, so often I hear: ‘We’ve always wanted a veterinarian to come talk to the students. So many students have an interest in veterinary medicine’.”

If your local school already has a strong program in science and health careers, you may discover that only human medicine, dentistry, and nursing are represented, and veterinary medicine is not.

Dr. Hlede also urges potential mentors to look beyond their own community to students from less privileged backgrounds.

“There is a big gap between students from poorer communities, where there are not many veterinary clinics,” she says. “The students want more exposure, but they have no one in reach.”

The annual Veterinary Medicine Open House, slated for 10 am to 4 pm on Sunday, April 11, this year, is a wonderful way to introduce prospective veterinarians to our College and the veterinary profession. I encourage you to spark an interest in a veterinary career by bringing someone to Urbana that day. Details are available at [vetmed.illinois.edu/openhouse](http://vetmed.illinois.edu/openhouse).

In addition, if you would like to provide students who are seriously considering a veterinary career with information about our new curriculum and current admissions procedures, our Office of Academic and Student Affairs is happy to provide materials for you. Please call 217.333.1192 or send email to [admissions@vetmed.illinois.edu](mailto:admissions@vetmed.illinois.edu).