

Graduation: Looking Forward, Looking Back

By Herb Whiteley, dean

How many of you can remember what you thought about on graduation day?

On May 13, just moments after reciting the Veterinarian's Oath, Dr. Jonathan P. Stack stepped to the podium in the Krannert Center Great Hall to address 121 fellow graduates in the Class of 2012 and the audience of proud family and friends.

Dr. Stack hails from Charleston, Ill., and he aspires to one day practice in a teaching hospital so he can educate future veterinarians. He is also the recipient of the CVMA President's Scholastic Award for demonstrated achievement in small animal medicine and surgery.

As you read this excerpt from his remarks, think back to your own graduation experience.

... This [veterinary] degree is a license to learn, discover, and contribute to the health of the profession, to be a mentor to younger veterinarians and hopeful veterinarians, and to be a partner for all those who are fighting on behalf of the welfare and humane treatment of animals.

In 25 years, I hope we remember what it was like looking for a job as a new graduate when all the listings only wanted experience. I hope we all advocate for this profession whenever we can; pay attention and be proactive in supporting measures which can help alleviate the financial burden of earning this degree. We must ensure that those who have yet to achieve this same dream can succeed without becoming financially crippled...

I was impressed that even as he and his classmates face a challenging job market and even more challenging student loan burden, he urged them to think ahead and see themselves as successful practitioners in a position to give back: to mentor, to advocate for the profession, to ensure that the dream of becoming a veterinarian remains accessible.

I commend CVMA and its members for the many ways you are giving back. In addition to the President's Scholastic Award, you are generously sponsoring another student scholarship and an outstanding instructor award. This year's recipients of those awards were Jolie Hunsinger, a second-year student from Pennsylvania, and Dr. Megan Mahoney, who teaches neurobiology to first-year students.

There are also many among your ranks who have established named scholarships on their own.

Every gift helps tremendously, in a time when the average educational debt at graduation exceeds \$140,000. The College achieved a record high for scholarship awards this year, surpassing \$500,000. And still the need is very great among our 500 students.

So, I urge you, whether your graduation was 25 years ago or 2 years ago, to consider the call to action that Dr. Stack issued to his classmates and be inspired by the aspirations and altruism of these newest members of our profession.

If you'd like to talk to me about veterinary scholarships or any other matters, you can always reach me at dean@vetmed.illinois.edu.