

Scholarships Help Buffer Students from State Budget Woes

Herb Whiteley

FACT: Over the past ten years, the college's recurring budget has been cut by \$8.3 million, and the proportion of the budget from state vs. tuition dollars has shifted from 75/25 to 49/51.

FACT: Over the past ten years, the college has offset loss of state dollars by increasing annual tuition costs by 125 percent (from \$9,630 to \$21,740) for in-state students and 54 percent (from \$25,150 to \$38,704) for non-resident students and by increasing class size from about 100 to about 120.

FACT: If the current trend of declining state support continues, the college will need to raise tuition by 20 percent or higher to continue delivering the resource-intensive DVM program.

On April 6 ISVMA members convened in Springfield to deliver this message to state legislators: the impact on veterinary education of cumulative state budget cuts in Illinois has been devastating to students, and the long-term impact on the state may diminish the ability of the veterinary workforce to protect both animal and human health.

I want to thank all of you who participated in this year's Lobby Day. Because you took the time to put the facts in front of them, legislators gained a greater understanding of the importance of the College of Veterinary Medicine and of higher education.

A packet of information for legislators also included data showing that our state support in dollars per student falls far below the national average: \$51,615 for Illinois vs. \$75,602 for all 26 state-funded veterinary colleges.

Ultimately students are the ones who shoulder the costs when state funding goes away. The average educational debt at graduation for members of the Class of 2006 was \$76,016. Just four years later, the Class of 2010 left with an average debt of \$178,693.

Andrew Hennenfent, a veterinary student in the Class of 2012, joined ISVMA members on Lobby Day to speak with legislators from his home district and those representing Champaign-Urbana.

He said, "I talked with legislators about the rising cost of vet school. Since I started vet school, tuition has gone up nearly \$4,000 a year, and if this trend continues, Illinois will lack a strong veterinary force."

Although the state is struggling with financial issues of its own, there is one measure legislators could take that would help our bottom line while costing the state nothing. Simply by voting to do away with

legislative waivers—the practice of legislators doling out free rides to students in their district—our college could recoup as much as \$400,000 a year.

With no end in sight for the state's budget problems, scholarship support for veterinary students becomes increasingly important. Cost should not keep good students from being able to pursue their dream of a veterinary career, and graduates who achieve that dream should not be saddled with decades of loan repayment.

In April the college was able to award the highest amount ever—nearly \$475,000—in scholarships to 154 of our students, thanks to the generosity of alumni and friends. However, when you consider that we have nearly 480 students, most incurring well over \$100,000 in debt, you can see that much more is needed.

We are grateful for the partnership of the ISVMA in being our voice in Springfield as well as being a champion of our students through scholarships and many other forms of support.

The fact is, the need is great. I urge Illinois veterinarians, collectively and as individuals, to seek out ways to relieve the financial burden of students.

If you'd like information about starting a class endowment, or you'd like to discuss estate planning options, please contact Brenda Betts, our assistant dean for advancement, at 217-333-5545, or me at dean@vetmed.illinois.edu.