

## **The Illinois Veterinary Graduate: Meet Your Practice-Ready Partner**

*By Herb Whiteley*

May 12, 2013, marks an important moment in the history of the College of Veterinary Medicine and the evolution of veterinary education. As the 117 men and women of the Class of 2013 received their diplomas, the college celebrated the full delivery of its new veterinary curriculum.

It is a program you can be proud of. In April, the college hosted the AVMA Council on Education reaccreditation site team. These and other leaders in the field are hailing the new Illinois curriculum as an innovative model.

Of course, Illinois has always provided a thorough education, as many of you who are reading this can attest. So what distinguishes today's Illinois graduate? It seems prospective employers have been asking our students that question during interviews this spring, and I'm happy to offer my perspectives.

Six goals informed the construction of the curriculum, all supporting the development of new professionals with outstanding practice-ready clinical skills, a broad and well-founded knowledge of biomedical sciences, and the ability to be lifelong learners.

- **Integration of clinical and basic sciences.** The Illinois curriculum uses a holistic approach to deliver the spectrum of biomedical sciences. Students take only one integrated core course at a time. Consolidating content helps eliminate redundancies and emphasizes seeing the “whole picture” of animal health and disease. Clinical correlations are highlighted within the basic science material.
- **Curricular flexibility.** Integrated courses mean more faculty interaction and awareness of exactly what is being taught when and by whom. In addition, milestone examinations in the second and third years allow faculty to pinpoint students' trouble spots and remediate the delivery of that material.

This will also allow students to do a self-assessment of their own skills and knowledge, helping them individually to improve their competence.

- **Increased clinical experience.** Illinois students begin the program with eight weeks of clinical rotations, and spend seven weeks on clinics in the second year. These early rotations are structured to include practical instruction by experienced coaches in an extensive clinical skills learning center. The result is that students feel confident in their clinical skills as they enter senior rotations in the third year.
- **Refreshed clinical rotations.** Offering clinical rotations in all four years pushed the faculty to tailor rotation experiences to the understanding and skill of the student. Rotation areas were added in years one and two, such as clinical toxicology/pharmacology, poultry medicine, and laboratory animal medicine, to give students exposure to the breadth of practice areas.
- **Career focus.** When the core courses were consolidated, some advanced material was used to develop elective streams for students pursuing a career interest. Streams exist in equine medicine and surgery; wildlife, zoological medicine, and ecology; small animal medicine and surgery; food animal; all-species specialties (diagnostic imaging, laboratory animal, ophthalmology, clinical pathology, gross pathology, and therapeutics); business and communication; and public health/one health.
- **Transition into practice.** In the final six weeks of the curriculum, deemed the “professional development” course, students tailor their own experiences, with supervision by a faculty mentor. Most use this opportunity to further delve into practice areas of interest to them.

These are the features of the new Illinois curriculum. Today’s graduates have practice-ready competence and the tools to manage their own careers, thanks to a unique curriculum created through the tremendous innovation and hard work of Illinois faculty.

Having served on the AVMA Council on Education for the past six years and evaluating the programs at

veterinary institutions around the world, I can say confidently that there is no better veterinary education than what our students have available to them. I am eager to hear the perspectives of those of you who hire a 2013 graduate.

On a personal note, as I finish my twelfth year as dean and prepare to pass the reins to a new leader, I want to thank the Illinois veterinary community and especially the ISVMA leadership of the past decade for the strong support and partnership they have provided to the college. It has been my honor to work with you to enrich the lives of veterinary students, improve the health of Illinois people and animals, and strengthen the profession of veterinary medicine in this state.