

New Department Head Balances “Veterinary” with “Biosciences”

I am very pleased that Dr. Duncan Ferguson joined our faculty in November to head the Department of Veterinary Biosciences. Throughout his career, Dr. Ferguson has embraced both the rigor of scientific inquiry and the value and tradition of the veterinary profession.

Dr. Ferguson decided as a chemistry major undergraduate at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, N.H., that he wanted to pursue both a veterinary degree and a PhD. He entered a joint degree program at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, and completed both degrees (the PhD in pharmacology) as well as a residency in small animal internal medicine.

He then taught at Cornell’s veterinary college for 3 years before joining the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine, where he served for the past 20 years with a joint appointment in Physiology/Pharmacology and Small Animal Medicine. He is double-boarded in veterinary internal medicine and veterinary clinical pharmacology.

He has also chaired the Scientific Advisory Board of the Morris Animal Foundation, served on numerous editorial boards, and published and lectured widely. In 1990 he co-founded the Veterinary Information Network, Inc. (VIN), the first online information and continuing education service for veterinary practitioners.

Dr. Ferguson served on the Curriculum Committee at the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine, including during periods of intense scrutiny and revision of the veterinary curriculum. I look forward to his insights as Illinois rapidly completes an assessment of its own curriculum. Using the results of faculty forums, a concept mapping exercise, and other research, our faculty will have reviewed the present curriculum and proposed changes to the curriculum by the end of the coming spring semester.

As a veterinarian, Dr. Ferguson understands the important role his department plays in shaping the pre-clinical education—in such areas as anatomy, physiology, and toxicology—of future veterinary practitioners.

“The importance of being a veterinarian has always informed my teaching,” he says. “Our teaching needs to leave veterinary students with something they can apply. At the same time, I believe professional students will benefit from exposure to our world-class researchers, and I will look for ways to increase interactions of students with all members of the department’s faculty.”

Veterinary students, graduate and post-doctoral students, and undergraduates will all find a home in Dr. Ferguson’s laboratory. He brings a strong commitment to exposing students at all levels to the research experience.

Dr. Ferguson will also provide leadership in translational biomedical research, one of the top priorities of our College. His research focuses on endocrinology, endocrine disruptor toxicology, and clinical pharmacology, areas that lend themselves to a movement from laboratory insight to clinical application.

Recent collaborations with his wife, Dr. Margarethe Hoenig, who will also join the College faculty, have examined the obese cat as a model of insulin resistance and early Type 2 diabetes. He has also studied the influence of environmental chemicals on the hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid axis. These interests dovetail well with the strengths in his department in environmental toxicology and developmental biology as well as research programs in our clinical medicine department and on the Urbana campus in endocrinology, nutrition, and obesity.

I believe Dr. Ferguson will be a tremendous asset in advancing the research strengths of the College and enhancing the professional veterinary degree program.

Please contact me at dean@cvm.uiuc.edu. —Herb Whiteley