

## **A Culture of Mentoring Energizes Our Profession**

*By Herb Whiteley*

Here's the open secret about mentoring: it's almost always as beneficial for the mentor as it is for the mentee. What's more, it not only enhances the individual mentor's career satisfaction, it also reinforces a culture of involvement and connection within our College and ISVMA that ultimately extends to the veterinary profession as a whole.

Over the past two years ISVMA and our College have renewed a joint mentoring program with resounding success. Presently 337 of our 420 professional veterinary students are matched with one or more mentors. A total of 259 veterinarians serve as mentors, with several of them mentoring more than one student.

According to Mary Kelm, assistant dean for student affairs, both mentors and students gain from the experience.

"Mentors are as hungry for the information students bring from their studies as students are for the experience and perspective practitioners can provide," she says. "They learn from each other."

Students understand the value of forging connections with practitioners who are working in their area of interest. Last fall Shelley Rairden, program manager in our Office of Academic and Student Affairs, painstakingly identified mentors to fit students' requests.

"Students wanted mentors not only in specialties by species or clinical specialty but also in such career paths as research, government, the military, industry/corporate, zoonoses, infectious disease, exotics, and public health," she says.

And she matched by geographic area, too, finding out-of-state mentors when necessary.

Some mentors requested students who would be facing the same challenges they had, such as being a second-career student or raising a family while in school. These requests were also honored.

Kelm and Rairden in our student affairs office and Kyle Christiansen at ISVMA are committed to providing support for participants beyond making the initial match. A mentoring program manual given to both parties offers guidance and insights about mentoring. The first rule is: "You are not allowed to get stressed about this effort!"

The student and mentor are encouraged to discuss expectations and decide together such issues as how frequently they will communicate, whether in person or by other means, and whether they will focus exclusively on professional topics or also engage in social activities. The important thing is to make it a rewarding experience for both participants.

College-sponsored social events for mentors and students are planned for spring and fall. On October 6, they were invited to the College's pre-game tent party. Many students and mentors also met up at ISVMA's convention in November.

Staff at the College and at ISVMA are always available to help sort out issues or find a different match, if need be.

I'm excited to have a strong mentoring program in place again, with a large percentage of our students participating. The culture of mentoring established today will yield long-lasting benefits to our College, state association, and profession.

As students graduate, many seek positions in practices that have a commitment to fostering the professional growth of new veterinarians. Graduates who have been mentored well will go on to be mentors themselves, perhaps even choosing to give back by teaching at a veterinary college. Twenty faculty members at the College participate in the mentoring program.

In addition to jointly sponsoring this program, ISVMA promotes a culture of mentoring by including students on its board and by extending membership to all our veterinary students.

Later this spring all ISVMA members who have been in practice at least one year will receive an invitation to participate in the mentoring program. I encourage you to give serious consideration to the impact you could have by engaging with students through mentoring.

If you have questions about the program, please contact Shelley Rairden or Mary Kelm at 217/265-0380 or Kyle Christiansen at 217/523-8387.

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### **Mentoring: What's In It for You?**

#### **Benefits for students**

- having a role model for effective leadership
- learning about various career paths
- seeing concepts from their studies put into practice
- creating a professional support network

#### **Benefits for mentors**

- satisfaction of sharing knowledge and experience
- keeping abreast of what's currently taught in the veterinary curriculum
- expanding professional contacts
- making a lasting contribution by helping future practitioners