

"The ethics of reverence for life prompts us to keep each other alert to what troubles us and to speak and act dauntlessly together in discharging the responsibilities that we feel. It keeps us watching together for opportunities to bring some sort of help to animals in recompense for the great misery that men inflict upon them, and thus for a moment to escape from the incomprehensible horror of existence."

– Albert Schweitzer in *Kultur*.

Western University Opens Newest College of Veterinary Medicine In Pomona, California

Reverence for life philosophy key element to program

By Jill Dolan, Public Information Officer,
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Photos by Jess Lopatynski

"As it was for Dr. Schweitzer, the principle of 'reverence for life' has been one of three cornerstones for which Western University of Health Sciences College of Veterinary Medicine has developed its program for the inaugural class in 2003," said founding Dean Shirley Johnston, DVM, Ph.D.



As early as the first year of study, students, under the supervision of a faculty member, are able to work directly with animals at the college's Hill's Wellness Center.

The nation's newest college of veterinary medicine, located in Pomona, California, which opened in August with 85 students, signals some steps forward. This is the first college of veterinary medicine to open in Southern California and the first in the country in over 20 years. Further, Dr. Johnston is the only female dean of a college of veterinary medicine in the nation.

The new college has a unique mission as it begins to train veterinarians to fill the growing need for pet and animal care professionals in California.

In addition to an extended focus on student-centered learning and clinical education through partnerships in the veterinary private sector, the college is providing a different approach to the operating philosophy of veterinary education.

"There's so much more to the curriculum than meets the eye," said associate professor Dr. Lara Rasmussen. "You can't understand our approach by comparing it to traditional schools."

Under the school's curriculum, the reverence for life philosophy will entail an unprecedented emphasis in many areas. These include its willed body program, anesthesiology training, technical live-animal training and veterinary issues seminars that will encompass ethical discussion pertaining to reverence for life.

Dr. Josep Rutlant, associate professor for preclinical programs, chairs the Willed deceased Animals for Veterinary Education (WAVE) program, which has already received more than 200 willed body donations.

"These gifts serve veterinary education in anatomy, pathology and acquisition of clinical skills," said Rutlant, who added that students also develop compassion toward guardians of the animals who have died. Students also learn grief management skills, often critical in the practice of veterinary medicine.

The WAVE program is the sole source of animal specimens used in the college's anatomy, surgery and clinical skills courses. The exact use of

the donations is dependent on the donor's wishes, the inherent value of the animal and the respective legal restrictions.

All donations to the WAVE program must have died or been euthanized due to serious illness or injury. Ownerless animals who are euthanized to combat over-population issues are not accepted.

A memorial service is held on campus at the beginning of each term to emphasize the importance of the gift the animals and their families are providing.

The college's most unique application of the reverence for life philosophy is in its classroom and clinical instruction. The college's faculty have created a program where, under no circumstances, will a healthy animal be harmed or killed for educational purposes. An otherwise common practice in veterinary education, animals are often obtained from local pounds and shelters to be used for clinical exercises. When the utility of the animals have ceased for study purposes, they are euthanized.

Under the philosophy adopted by the college, such practices will be

eliminated as the College of Veterinary Medicine faculty find them to be contradictory to the mission statement of the program.

"There is little logic to be found in harming animals so that we may better our ability to heal them," said Rasmussen. "Life is life, whether you are dealing with a patient who is a human or an animal. Students of our program will see that philosophy on multiple levels."

As a means of upholding that rule, the college is devoted to increasing the confidence and proficiency of its graduates through alternative means of clinical studies that work within the guidelines of its philosophy. The inaugural class will use inanimate and dynamic models and computer-simulated programs as a preliminary form of training to master their psycho-motor skills before working with live animals.

The program's structure will generate confidence in its students' clinical skills and allow them to be not only concerned with the medical situation at hand, but the patient and its guardians as well.

"We are upholding a reverence

Top: Philip Pumerantz, president of Western University of Health Sciences, and College of Veterinary Medicine Dean Dr. Shirley Johnston cut the ribbon to the new college in August. Bottom: The college's facilities include a state-of-the-art anatomy lab, where students use what they have learned in the classroom.



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The College of Veterinary Medicine’s student-centered learning philosophy encourages students to work together to find and evaluate information and apply that information to cases.

for life by educating better veterinarians,” Rasmussen said. “Veterinarians need to treat animals as patients in the same respect that a family practitioner treats patients and their families.”

For many veterinary students, having the opportunity to begin working directly with dogs and cats—and their guardians—doesn’t start until their third or fourth year while on rotations. But for Western University College of Veterinary Medicine students, that chance starts in year one.

Just shortly after the college opened, so did the Hill’s Wellness Center, an off-campus facility that features several exam rooms, a cat ward, exercise area and a pharmacy. The center was created in large part with a grant from Hill’s Pet Nutrition, whose pet food products are available for sale to those who visit.

Students will provide wellness services to the dogs and cats of Western U students, staff and faculty. Students from the college will work with faculty and learn how to conduct wellness exams. When problems are found, pets and their guardians will be referred to local veterinarians for treatment.

Dr. Elizabeth Boynton, the col-

lege’s wellness professor and director of the center, said she is eager to have the college’s students begin working with their four-legged patients.

“It starts the students right at the beginning of their education,” said Boynton, who operated a similar program at University of Minnesota. “They can appreciate it and find value in it earlier in their education than at other universities where it may come later.”

Boynton said the wellness center will give students a real “client interaction” to follow over the years while they are on campus.

“It’s the heart and soul of veterinary medicine,” she said. “This allows the students to get to know pets and their guardians and contribute to a healthier and longer lifespan.”

Vet Med student Cindy Kinney, who was joined by her Labrador Riley during an open house of the facility, said she is enthusiastic about acquiring practical experience at the center.

“It’s the best part of our education,” said Kinney. “It’s just so enjoyable for us to be with the animals.” 🐾