

Veterinary Research News

Issues

Survey finds veterinary colleges generally supportive of student diversity

Most minority veterinary students say they experience a high degree of support from college faculty, staff, and fellow students.

That's according to a survey by the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges assessing the comfort levels of veterinary students from minority groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, those with impairments or disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students.

A total of 5,268 students from all 28 U.S. veterinary colleges participated in the 50-question campus climate survey distributed in 2011, for a response rate of 48.1 percent of total student enrollment. Key findings were presented at the AAVMC Annual Conference March 10 and during the Student AVMA Symposium at Purdue University a week later. The veterinary college deans were provided with survey data relating to their individual institutions.

The research suggests veterinary academic institutions are generally succeeding at fostering a climate of inclusiveness on their campuses. Approximately two-thirds of survey respondents said minority veterinary students receive high to very high levels of support from their veterinary colleges and communities. Almost all students also reported being either very comfortable or comfortable with others of a different race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion.

Additionally, a low incidence of harassment and negative comments by faculty, staff, and other students were reported.

"Overall, the results are good. We are doing something right when it comes to creating positive learn-

ing environments on our campuses," said Lisa Greenhill, AAVMC associate executive director for institutional research and diversity.

Racial and ethnic minorities comprised 12.9 percent of total student enrollment at U.S. veterinary colleges in 2011, according to the AAVMC.

Notably, the association's study provides the first quantitative data on the size of the LGBT veterinary student population. About 6.5 percent of respondents identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning their sexuality, with another 0.5 percent saying they are transgender.

A. Nikki Wright, the Lesbian and Gay VMA student representative at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, considers this particular finding "profound." For Wright, the data legitimize an often marginalized portion of the veterinary student population whose members may feel compelled to hide their sexual identity.

"Many people expressed their feeling that this number may be under-representative of the actual population, and this is furthered by the observation that 81 percent of students reported knowledge of 'out' faculty, staff, or students," said Wright, who is also the Penn delegate to the Student AVMA.

The AAVMC climate survey did identify areas for concern, however. Veterinary students were queried about the frequency of intolerant language on campuses and whether students experience harassment at the colleges. Results show fellow veterinary students were more likely than college faculty or staff to make racist, sexist, or homophobic remarks on campus.

Just more than 21 percent of female students and 23 percent of

transgender students indicated hearing faculty making sexist comments occasionally to very frequently. Nearly a third of racial and ethnic minority students reported hearing racist comments from student colleagues occasionally to very frequently. More than 20 percent of LGBT veterinary students reported hearing homophobic comments from student colleagues occasionally to very frequently.

"There aren't a lot of reported racist, sexist, or homophobic remarks or behaviors, but there are some findings that merit further study," said co-researcher Dr. K. Paige Carmichael, associate dean for academic affairs and a professor at the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine.

Fourteen percent of all respondents reported experiencing some form of harassment. Of those, 76 percent said it had happened on campus, most often in a common area with the classroom the next most likely place.

Approximately 58 percent of students thought their institutions were not overly sensitive to, or accommodating of, minority groups, and nearly 22 percent said they were.

A little more than 35 percent of students reported not having a faculty or staff member in whom to confide. These numbers were higher for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students—42.4 percent—and for transgender students—52.4 percent. Less than 3 percent of all respondents reported having no supportive group of friends or acquaintances on campus.

Like Dr. Carmichael, Greenhill says the climate survey findings raise new questions that warrant further investigation. The AAVMC will begin the work of answering some of those questions later this year with a follow-up study of LGBT students' experiences at U.S. veterinary colleges.

Human-Animal Bond Research Initiative launches database

The Human-Animal Bond Research Initiative Foundation and the Purdue University College of Veterinary Medicine have launched an online resource to advance study of the human-animal bond.

The new resource, HABRI Central, debuted in early March at the Global Pet Expo. The resource provides researchers, medical practitioners, health and pet industry professionals, and pet owners with access to a bibliography and repository of scholarly material on the human-animal bond.

HABRI Central also offers an online publishing platform for peer-reviewed content on the human-animal bond and a virtual collaborative community for those involved in studies of the human-animal bond.

Topics in the database include the positive effects of pets on humans with various health conditions—such as autism, Alzheimer's disease, depression, coronary heart disease, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"The recent influence of human-animal bond studies has expanded quickly into vast industries and fields, many of which can benefit immensely from learning and knowing more about how the human-animal bond affects us," said Bob Vetere, president of HABRI and the American Pet Products Association. "HABRI Central allows us to join the extensive research community and access existing findings on the subject as well as collaborate and perpetuate new breakthroughs and valuable discussions."

The APPA, Petco, and Pfizer Animal Health established the HABRI Foundation. The AVMA is a member of the foundation's steering committee.

AVMA

Whitehair elected to AVMA Executive Board

AVMA members living in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Utah elected Dr. Michael

L. Whitehair to be their new AVMA Executive Board representative.

The large animal practitioner from Abilene, Kan., defeated Dr. Billy R. Clay of Stillwater, Okla., in the election to succeed Dr. Ted Cohn as AVMA District IX representative this August. The AVMA announced the election results April 3.

Earlier this year, Dr. John A. Howe of Grand Rapids, Minn., was elected to replace Dr. Clark K. Fobian as the District VII board representative. Drs. Howe and Whitehair will each serve six-year terms on the Executive Board.

The Kansas VMA nominated Dr. Whitehair for the AVMA board seat. His clinical interests include beef cattle, feedlot, and equine medicine.

A 1974 Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine graduate, Dr. Whitehair has been active in organized veterinary medicine for many years. He is a former president of both the KVMA and the Academy of Veterinary Consultants and represented his home state in the AVMA House of Delegates from 1997-2011. During that time, Dr. Whitehair was elected to the House Advisory Committee and served a year as its chair.

Dr. Whitehair served on the committee that selected the AVMA executive vice president in 2007. More recently, he participated on the AVMA 20/20 Vision Commission and American Veterinary Medical Foundation Scholarship Committee for Rural Recent Graduates.

Additionally, Dr. Whitehair has been active in KSU's volunteer service. He has been a presenter for fourth-year students interested in food animal medicine at the College of Veterinary Medicine since 2006.

Dr. Whitehair believes the AVMA must think strategically to help the



Dr. Michael L. Whitehair

veterinary profession overcome the substantial challenges it faces. "AVMA must explore and advance all opportunities to continue to provide a leadership role in addressing the needs of society and our members. This requires a unified voice willing to recognize the diverse strengths of the members of our profession," he said.

"We as (board) members want to be part of the team that expands the role of veterinary medicine as an integral part of our global community," Dr. Whitehair continued. "This comes with a focus on good communication and a willingness to listen to member input. I appreciate the opportunity to serve in this capacity as a member of the AVMA's Executive Board these next six years."

AVMA seeks input on welfare policies

The AVMA is seeking member input on 14 animal welfare policies. Members may submit comments at www.avma.org/issues/policy/comments through July 1.

Community

Nine microbiologists certified

The American College of Veterinary Microbiologists certified nine new diplomates following the board certification examination it held Dec. 4, 2011, in Chicago.

The new diplomates are as follows:

Bacteriology/Mycology

Kris Clothier, Ames, Iowa
Abdul Lone, Lethbridge, Alberta
Jean Mukherjee, North Grafton, Mass.
Ashutosh Verma, Lexington, Ky.

Immunology

Tamara Gull, Stillwater, Okla.

Virology

Melissa Bourgeois, Atlanta
Yun Young Go, Lexington, Ky.
Baibaswata Nayak, College Park, Md.

Dr. Anurag Sharma, New York, received dual certification in immunology and virology. 🇮🇳