

SPOTLIGHT ON University of Florida Veterinary Medicine

Innovative approaches in teaching the next generation of veterinarians.

At UF, caseload and approach set us apart

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What happens when you combine one of the top clinical caseloads in the United States with early and extensive access to hands-on skills training? You get a second-to-none veterinary clinical training experience, arguably the best in the world.

Two decades ago, the University of Florida (UF) College of Veterinary Medicine pioneered a split curriculum that introduced students to core knowledge and skills training in their first 2 years, followed by an early, immersive clinical experience during the junior year before returning to elective courses. This approach remains unique among accredited veterinary colleges and has allowed generations of UF graduates early access to clinical training and an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world experiences.

UF has always been known for its diverse caseload, which supports training in companion animals, large animals, exotic and zoo animals, wildlife, and aquatic medicine. However, a 100,000-sq ft, state-of-the-art small animal hospital built in 2010, a subsequent satellite small animal emergency clinic in Ocala, and a growing reputation for clinical excellence in a fast-developing state have led to a staggering 350% small animal caseload increase this past decade. Nearly 100,000 animals were treated in 2021 by UF specialists representing every major field of veterinary medicine. The future only brightens with the launch of the 40,000-sq ft, world-class UF hospital at the World Equestrian Center in Ocala, offering equine sports medicine and diagnostics as well as small animal primary and urgent care. To provide additional primary care and emergency cases that will comprise most graduates' typical practice, UF works with area veterinarians, offering students roughly 75 practice-based clerkship options.

Key innovations at UF have vastly increased students' exposure to surgery. Foundational skills are offered during the first 2 years using low-fidelity models and simulations to provide hands-on experience from catheter placement to client communication. Subsequently, students perform surgery on an anatomically detailed, high-fidelity synthetic model that even bleeds, called Syndaver. Our faculty teamed with a private company to develop the model, re-



Collaborations with area zoological parks enhance student learning at UF

ducing the need for canine cadavers. We also led the way in supervised live animal surgical experiences for students with Operation Catnip, a paracurricular activity created at UF that involves students in a trap, neuter, and release program for community cats. Students can later take 3 separate surgery courses through collaborations with community shelters. Each year, UF students perform over 6,000 spay/neuters on animals that are then adopted: a win-win.

Many of the world's top experts have trained at UF through unique clinical learning venues. We created the only master's degree program in shelter medicine, with 83 graduates since its inception in 2015. We were the first in the world to offer 3 ACVS-approved Fellowship opportunities: Minimally Invasive Surgery-Soft Tissue, Minimally Invasive Orthopedics, and Joint Replacement Surgery. Certificates in veterinary business management, food animal, aquatic animal, and shelter medicine further enhance learning opportunities.

Through teaching innovations, a split curriculum, and a massive caseload, UF proudly offers what every veterinary trainee wants: an opportunity to gain broad clinical competency in a dynamic, supportive environment.