Developing compassionate, career-ready veterinarians

Jennifer Gauntt, MA*

School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX
*Corresponding author: Jennifer Gauntt (jgauntt@cvm.tamu.edu)
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When the School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (VMBS) at Texas A&M implemented its redesigned DVM curriculum in 2017, it was with the intention of adding additional emphasis on hands-on, comparative experiential learning, including sequential ultrasound and surgical skills training, starting in the first week of the first year of the DVM program.

The introduction of the Professional & Clinical Skills course series provides weekly opportunities for students from day 1 of the program to strengthen technical skills through simulation, low- and high-fidelity models, and live animal experiences; to practice communication, leadership, and wellness; and to develop strong problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.

The Professional & Clinical Skills courses, which build cumulatively and sequentially each semester of the preclinical curriculum, along with the other revised curricular content in the updated curriculum, provide exposure to all aspects of veterinary medicine, which are critical for veterinary professionals today.

Since implementing the updated DVM curriculum, it has become clear that the hard work that went into developing the new curricular framework has paid off for Aggie DVM students. Graduates of the updated curriculum report increased confidence in their skills at graduation compared with graduates from the legacy curriculum, and this is supported by feedback from employers.

To increase accessibility to veterinary medicine—and prepare graduates to serve in areas where there is a critical need for increased numbers of large animal and rural veterinarians—the VMBS also has established the Veterinary Education, Research, & Outreach (VERO) program, located in Canyon, Texas, on the campus of West Texas A&M University.

At VERO, outstanding opportunities exist for veterinary education, outreach, and research across the Texas Panhandle and beyond.

In 2020, fourth-year clinical rotations were introduced at VERO for students interested in feedlot medicine, dairy medicine, rural practice medicine, and cow-calf production medicine.

In 2021, the 2+2 DVM program at VERO was launched. The first veterinary educational model of its kind, the 2+2 program allows students at VERO to experience the same curriculum and the same course and program outcomes as their classmates 527 miles away; instructors are members of the VMBS faculty and have academic homes in departments at Texas A&M.

Aggie veterinary students also are exercising their veterinary husbandry and wellness skills through a number of recently developed outreach programs that offer preventative care to the pets of residents in Bryan-College Station and surrounding communities.

For example, clinics are regularly hosted by the VMBS Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital’s primary care and telemedicine services in which fourth-year students provide care for the pets of low-income and elderly populations.

Another example includes the REACH Pet Health Fairs, sponsored by the REACH project of Bryan, the VMBS, and the student-affiliate Ags REACH. These fairs allow preclinical DVM students to work with fourth-year clinical students in serving the university’s contracted, essential third-party employees, including those in food service, custodians, and grounds and maintenance workers, many of whom face daily struggles.

“The REACH event was a great opportunity for me to practice both my soft communication and my clinical skills, such as drawing blood and giving vaccinations,” said 4VM Rachael Barton, who participated as a 3VM. “Through outreach events such as this one, we can make preventative care much more accessible for our community.”

At Texas A&M, we are committed to ensuring the graduation of Aggie veterinarians who are well-rounded, compassionate, and capable of successful practice in any rural community or veterinary professional discipline. Ensuring that DVM students graduate as practice-ready veterinarians has always been the goal of the VMBS, and by updating the DVM curriculum, we have provided opportunities for students to experience all aspects of veterinary care and to enhance performance as veterinary professionals following graduation.