The Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) is bringing new approaches to veterinary medical education. The course, “Agile Innovation in Animal Health & Hackathon,” jointly taught by the CVM and Cornell SC Johnson College of Business, exemplifies Cornell’s forward-thinking approach to preparing students for the veterinary profession and helps them make connections to students from other degree programs.

Advances in veterinary medicine require innovation in the business models that deliver services and the ability of veterinarians to work effectively with other professionals, partners, and advisers.

Jorge Colón, DVM (1995), is an associate professor of practice with the Center for Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship. Formally trained in business education with an MBA from Colorado State University, Colón co-leads the course.

“Teamwork, problem-solving, and creativity are vital skills for all veterinarians, no matter their intended career path,” he says. “This course helps build these crucial skills that may otherwise be overlooked or undervalued in traditional clinical education.”

Designed to train learners to apply innovative thinking toward animal health, it provides didactic exposure to concepts through the Agile Innovation lectures and hands-on experience through the Animal Health Hackathon, a weekend-long event that challenges students to generate solutions to real-world problems. This course fosters key skills to prepare students for clinical practice and other diverse veterinary careers: specifically, design thinking, communication, leadership, and teamwork.

During the Hackathon, veterinary students partner with students from other colleges and disciplines such as business, computing, engineering, and design and together develop marketable ideas that address issues in animal health. Past innovations included a sonicator to clean oil off wild birds that have been caught in oil spills, an app that assists beekeepers in monitoring colony health, and an artificial intelligence–powered pet weight detection tool.

Veterinary students have overall found the course and event motivating and relevant to their future careers:

• “Through this course and the weekend of Hackathon, I feel like my world of veterinary medicine (including my plans for the future) has been altered. A whole new world of innovation regarding the improvement of animal welfare was introduced to me and opened a new door in terms of my knowledge about innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-ups. I feel like I’ve been renewed and my worldview about [veterinary medicine] expanded tremendously.”—Xin Rou Tan, CVM Class of 2026
• “As someone who is interested in owning and/or opening my own veterinary practice, I believe these skills will be valuable for me to utilize in order to evaluate the development of my clientele.”—Vianna Bassani, CVM Class of 2027

Two innovations with clinical relevance that emerged from the most recent iteration of the course include a wound closure system that involves barbed, biodegradable microneedles that reduce anesthesia time in the operating room and a device using electric conductivity to detect subclinical mastitis in dairy cows.

From intensive teamwork to creative problem-solving, “Agile Innovation in Animal Health & Hackathon” equips students with a novel set of experiences and skills that will serve them as future clinical practitioners and in other veterinary career paths.