

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Women Veterinary Deans

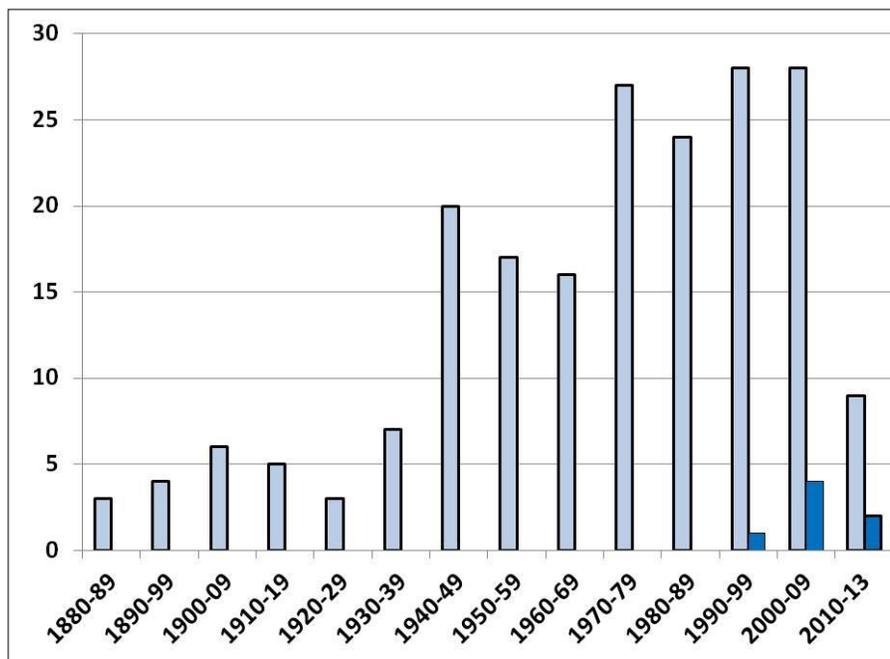
By Dr. Donald F. Smith and Julie Kumble

July 11, 2013

The previous two stories about United States veterinary college deans presented data on where U.S. deans received their veterinary degrees¹ and the length of their terms.² The present story, co-authored with Julie Kumble of the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts, offers data and brief commentary on the appointment of women to dean positions.

People familiar with the veterinary profession are aware that the proportion of women admitted to US veterinary colleges increased abruptly in the 1970s and reached 50% approximately three decades ago. Women became the majority in the profession in 2009³ and the percentage of women veterinary students has been relatively stable in the last few years at just under 80%.⁴

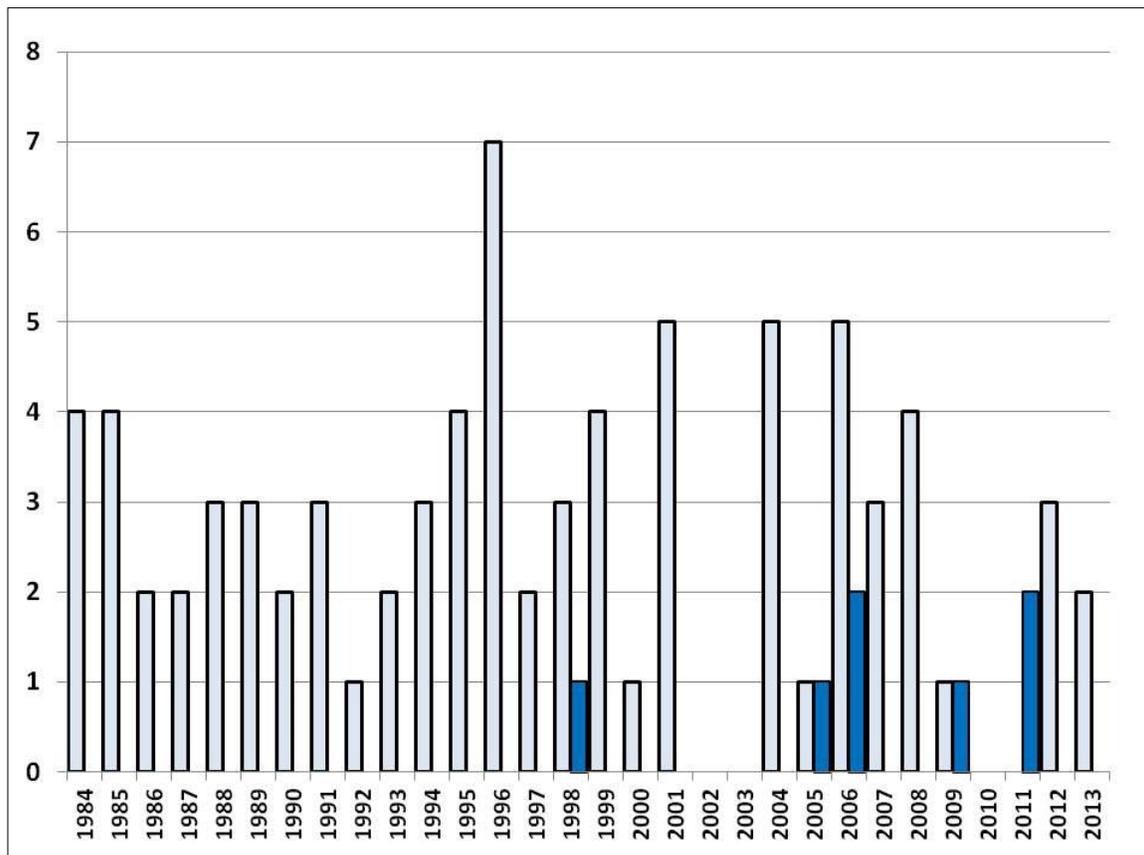
The following graph which shows the decade-by-decade distribution by gender of the 205 dean appointments by year for the 29 AAVMC-member veterinary colleges⁵ (1880 – 2013), provides visual evidence of how recently women have entered the deanship in veterinary medicine in this country.



Number of men appointed as deans of colleges of veterinary medicine (light blue) and women appointed (dark blue) by decade from 1880 to 2013.

Data from annual AVMA Membership Directories and Resource Manuals (to 2007)⁶

The second graph (below) represents the most recent 30-year time frame during which women have accounted for the majority of graduating DVM (and VMD) students. Of the 87 dean appointments during this period, seven (8.0%) have been women. A paucity of women in dean applicant pools in the 1980s and 1990s is not surprising because the average length of time between veterinary college graduation and dean appointment for both genders is almost three decades (28 years). However, given that the length of time from graduation to appointment for women deans is 26 years, we might have expected that there would have been more than just six woman appointments (19.4%) in the last decade. The current percentage of women deans in the 29 AAVMC-member colleges is 20.6%.



Number of men appointed as deans of colleges of veterinary medicine (light blue) and women appointed (dark blue) in the 30-year period 1984-2013.
 Data from annual AVMA Membership Directories and Resource Manuals (to 2007)⁷

While women have entered the veterinary profession at an accelerated rate over the past three decades, change has been slower at the top. The 20% mark that we report here isn't unique to academic veterinary medicine. Despite the marked difference in the number of women across professions, the percentage of female deans, 20%, parallels the proportion of female leaders in many other professions, including what we reported in an earlier article on the House of

Delegates of the American Veterinary Medical Association.⁸ Across ten major professions studied by the White House Project,⁹ from media to the military, 20% is the average for women in leadership positions. In academia, the rate is 23%, the highest of the ten professions in the study.

In the veterinary profession, however, where the gender profile has shifted significantly and dramatically in the last 30 years, the leadership gap is more pronounced between our student demographics and deans compared to other professions.

Though we don't show data here, we are aware that the proportions of women in professorial ranks as well as department chairs, directors and associate deans is higher than at the dean position; and that these ranks represent the senior positions on the pipeline to the deanship. In some of our interviews with women deans, they have expressed disappointment with the "leakiness" of that senior level of the pipeline.

In future articles on this subject, we shall present more information on this issue, including the importance of mentoring in developing leadership skills in executive positions in academia, the role of family-friendly policies, and work-life balance. We shall also discuss some of our findings from interviewing the women deans referred to in the above graphs.

We feel that the large proportion of women in veterinary medicine provides not just a wonderful opportunity to show leadership in the medical professions with respect to raising the bar above that "sticky" 20% level. We also feel the profession has a strong obligation to understand the issues that are preventing more women from seeking the highest roles of leadership, and being successful candidates once granted those opportunities. Given the fact that veterinary medicine is now entering the fourth decade of graduating more than 50% women, this issue should be one of our highest priorities in academia as well as in organized veterinary medicine, clinical practice and industry.

Addendum:

The current women veterinary deans in chronologic order of appointment are:

Dr. Shirley D. Johnston, Western University of the Health Sciences, 1998 (to 2007)

Dr. Sheila W. Allen, University of Georgia, 2005

Dr. Joan Hendricks, University of Pennsylvania, 2006

Dr. Deborah Kochevar, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, 2006

Dr. Eleanor M. Green, Texas A&M, 2009

Dr. Lisa K. Nolan, Iowa State University, 2011

Dr. Jean Sander, Oklahoma State University, 2011

¹ Education of a Dean. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 7, 2013.

² The Duration of Deans' Terms. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 9, 2013

³ Women in Veterinary Medicine. *Veterinary Practice News*. 2013 July 9

⁴ The percentage of women students is approximately 78.5% (see ref 3, above).

⁵ For simplicity, both colleges and schools of veterinary medicine are referred to as colleges. This total number includes the recent addition of Midwestern University to the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC).

⁶ AVMA Membership Directories and Resource Manuals were discontinued in 2007. For more recent deanship information, we consulted contemporary college web sites and press releases.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Women's Leadership in the U.S. Congress and the AVMA's House of Delegates: Exploring Parallels and Looking Forward. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 28, 2013

⁹ *The White House Project Report: Benchmarking Women's Leadership*. Rep. The White House Project, Nov. 2009. Web. 2011. <http://thewhitehouseproject.org/documents/Report.pdf>

KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine
Women in Veterinary Medicine
Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine
Deans in Veterinary Medicine
Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges

TOPICS:

Women in Veterinary Medicine
Veterinary Colleges in the United States

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.

Julie Kumble is Director of Grants and Programs, *Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts*, Easthampton, Massachusetts 01027. She can be reached at juliek@womensfund.net