

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# Cornell's Student Chapter of the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative Wins Prestigious Cook Award for 2015

By Dr. Donald F. Smith  
March 19, 2015

In the company of the university provost, several vice presidents and deans (including veterinary college dean, Dr. Michael I. Kotlikoff), President David Skorton presented the Alice H. Cook & Constance E. Cook Award to a distinguished group of ten faculty and students “who have made significant contributions to changing the climate for women at Cornell University.”

Included in this group were the first veterinary students ever to receive the Cook Award in its 19-year history. On March 11, 2015, the four officers of the Cornell Student Chapter of the Women’s Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative (WVLDI) received one of Cornell's most prestigious awards.



*Cornell President David Skorton (left) presents the Cook Award to Yuan Kang, Anastasia Handwerk, Rebecca Donnelly and Michelle Forella as Dr. Antonia Jameson-Jordan, one of three faculty advisors,<sup>1</sup> gives the citation.  
(Photo by the author)*

"It was an honor to be recognized for our efforts in promoting diverse leadership in the veterinary field and opening up a forum for students to discuss gender-specific issues," Yuan Kang '17 commented after the award ceremony.

The WVLDI is a national organization that started following the summer 2013 meeting of the American Veterinary Medical Association. Among the founding directors was Julie Kumble of the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts who joined me in co-presenting an all-day workshop on women's veterinary leadership for Cornell students in March 2014.<sup>2</sup>



Yuan, Michelle and Anastasia enjoy the celebratory lunch.  
(Photo by the author)

Michelle Forella '17, current president of the chapter, describes her involvement,

*My classmates and I were inspired during a Women's Leadership Seminar (March 2014) to continue to promote the advancement of women with the College of Veterinary Medicine student body. Together, we formed the first student chapter of WVLDI. Our goals mirror that of the national organization, which are to support women in seeking and achieving leadership, policy, and decision-making positions within all areas of professional veterinary activity. We are helping further these goals across the county by serving as a model for new student chapters at other veterinary colleges.*

Yuan Kang '17, chapter treasurer, continues,

*One year ago, we established the first ever student WVLDI chapter in order to carry on important conversations from a daylong class on women's leadership and help our peers hone career development skills. Despite establishing ourselves fairly late in the school year and missing out on campus funding for student organizations, we secured grants to hold two well-attended lectures.*



Vice President Becky Donnelly '16, with her mother, Martha, who travelled from Buffalo to join the lunch and celebration.

(Photo by the author)

Anastasia Handwerk '17 also accepted one of the officer positions, in her case that of secretary.

*I am known to be a behind-the-scenes person, quietly accomplishing my tasks and seeing what I can do to help others and advocate for them. My pattern has been to soak up all the different opinions, but not necessarily participating in the debates before deciding what I believe to be true. But WVLDI forced me out of that comfort zone, encouraging me to speak my mind in our small group discussions and TED talks. I have come to realize, along with some of the other student members, just how present gender-inequality is in today's society, affecting mindset and paycheck alike. I have also come to realize that it will take both women and their male counterparts to work for change. While our organization is still new, we have managed to hold some extremely meaningful events and I believe we are truly changing the mindset of our female and male colleagues in our Cornell Vet Med community.*

Programs for this academic year started up again early in the 2014 fall semester with a college-wide lecture and discussion by WVLDI founder and president, Dr. Karen Bradley. Other programs have continued through the year, and will culminate in April with a class on Cheryl Sandberg's popular book, "Lean In," presented by the president of the North American

Veterinary Community, Dr. Charlotte Lacroix.

“WVLDI began as an impulsive, spur-of-the moment project and has turned into one of my most meaningful extracurricular activities,” added Yuan.

*I took on the role of Treasurer to challenge myself with an unfamiliar job. Asking for money is not my greatest strength, and the responsibility of securing funding for this fledgling club has challenged me to be more assertive about seeking out resources. Furthermore, organizing WVLDI events has given me valuable opportunities to reach out to impressive women at Cornell and at the national level. Studies show that women are more apt to advocate for others than for themselves, though I hope my extracurricular leadership experiences will translate into a more proactive personal search for externships and jobs.*

The impact of these four officers on Cornell as well as on other veterinary colleges across the country has been exemplary. The recognition by this extraordinary award raises the bar for veterinarians and veterinary students everywhere. The entire veterinary college community is grateful for their efforts and proud of their impact.

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<sup>1</sup> The other faculty advisors are Drs. Tracy Stokol and Kathy Earnest-Koons.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Donald F. and Julie Kumble. Women’s Leadership in Veterinary Medicine: A Course for Veterinary Students. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 2, 2014.

**KEYWORDS:**

Women’s Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative  
Cornell University  
Cook Award  
Women in Veterinary Medicine  
Yuan Kang  
Anastasia Handwerk  
Rebecca Donnelly  
Michelle Forella

**TOPIC:**

Women in Veterinary Medicine

**LEADING QUESTION:**

Did you know there are now student chapters of WVLDI?

**META-SUMMARY:**

The student chapter of WVLDI at Cornell recently won a prestigious university award for leadership.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

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.