

[Skip to main content](#)

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[Search Cornell](#)

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## Magazine name

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- [Home](#)
  - [Table of Contents](#)
  - [Cover Story](#)
  - [Archive](#)
  - [About](#)
  - 
  - [Search](#)
  
  - [PDF Version](#)
  - [Flash Version](#)
- 

**DEANS Q&A**



Dean Michael Kotlikoff in his lab with research associates Bo Shui, left, and Frank Lee, center.

### **What are you most proud of so far?**

We've started a number of exciting projects at the college. We have a very exciting capital project to adaptively reuse much of our 1957 space. We've started a large new referral hospital, Cornell University Veterinary Specialists (CUVS), in Stamford, Conn. We are working with City University in Hong Kong to create the first AVMA-accredited college in Asia. But, I think the thing that I'm most proud about so far in my deanship is the development of an outstanding leadership team in the college that includes outstanding department chairs, faculty leaders, and associate and assistant deans, and is aimed at transparency and developing collegewide consensus among faculty in making what are often difficult choices. I think that we've really come a long way in establishing a strong leadership core that will last at the college for a long time after I'm gone.

### **What is the main reason you opened CUVS?**

It serves a number of functions for the college, long term. First of all, it does diversify our revenue in a way in which we don't rely in the long term on the state so exclusively. We're the one [statutory] college in Cornell that's not an undergraduate school, and we rely on the state more than any other college because the percentage of our revenue that comes from tuition is much, much lower than the other schools.

Plus, there's the fact that we're seeing changes in the profession that really call for some engagement of academic institutions in clinical practice. ... Many specialty referral hospitals have grown up in the New York metro area that are terrific hospitals. They are highly efficient, but they don't participate in teaching and aren't doing the discovery that is important to keep the profession healthy. So we wanted to balance that and went to an area where there were not a lot of referral options, and we created something that is a kind of hybrid academic private-practice unit, which is financially very nimble and very strong. We are projecting about \$9 million in total revenue from CUVS this year, which I think is fantastic for a start-up in its third year of operation, since the practice only succeeds if the referring veterinarians in the area view it as valuable. Finally, this practice is very important for philanthropy, as the college depends enormously on the support of grateful clients.

### **What is something that most people outside don't know about the college?**

Probably the breadth. It's unique on the Ithaca campus in that we run three major units that interface directly with the public: our teaching hospital for animals, our diagnostic lab and our Stamford clinic. Together these represent in aggregate more than \$40 million in revenue that is associated with direct interactions with clients. This is something that is quite different from the other schools on campus. And, we have an enormous research infrastructure annually attracting about \$30 million in federal grants.



Kotlikoff with recent graduate Kevin Render '13. [See larger image](#)

### **What's the biggest problem in animal health today?**

The lack of research funding that's available for investigating spontaneous diseases in animals. Over my scientific lifetime, [National Institutes of Health] funding has progressively centered more and more around human clinical research, and this is a very narrow-minded approach to understanding medicine and the biological basis of disease.

Many diseases – more than 60 percent of the infectious diseases that humans get – arise in animals; their natural hosts are animals; they should be studied in their natural hosts. As global population increases, we have more and more stress on environments, on wild animal populations, on food animal production. All of those areas have enormous impact on human health – they're just not quite as proximate an effect as the funding agencies are set up to deal with.

I've always felt that animal health, human health, environmental health really are different views of the same problem.

### **What avenues of inquiry are big now at your college or ripe for further investment?**

The use of the dog as a genetic model for complex genetic diseases. Our human genomes are very similar – we probably have tens of thousands of differences between each of us humans, and so it's very difficult to isolate the thousands of differences in those genes that are linked to specific disorders. That's really where the dog comes in. Because dogs have a very similar genetic makeup, we can link those genes in a way that's much clearer, because the rest of the genome is so much more similar. Some very thoughtful and farsighted faculty more than a decade ago at Cornell developed a canine DNA and bio bank that banks material and DNA for specific diseases. So, you can imagine a dog with, for example, hip dysplasia and dogs that don't get hip dysplasia from the same breed, you can start to understand the specific genetic variations that really result in that hip dysplasia. Not only does that allow you to influence the health and well-being of dog populations, it also informs osteoarthritis in people.

A major opportunity here is with cancer. If a Great Dane lives long enough it will get osteosarcoma, a devastating disease that we see in rapidly growing bones of kids. This is a complex genetic vulnerability related to the size of the dog's long bones, which we are poised to be able to understand. This is one of those areas that provides a real impact on the health of animals, but also has an outstanding impact on gene discovery in people.

**What's the most surprising thing you've heard lately from a student?**

My wife, Carolyn, and I recently went to a dance consortium that is organized by students who are dancers, which was just superb. The time that they take outside of the classroom, the energy and commitment to produce something like that, within our own space (it was in the James Law Auditorium) is really phenomenal. And it isn't just dance. We have a choral group. We have a drama group. We have students doing musicals. Virtually every evening as you walk through the hallways here, you'll see some students rehearsing, singing, playing the piano, dancing, and that part is really surprising to me. It didn't exist when I was in veterinary school. It's something that's really a component of this college that is precious.

**The dean**

Michael Kotlikoff, the Austin O. Hooey Dean of Veterinary Medicine

At Cornell since 2000

Dean since 2007

Area of expertise: Processes underlying cardiovascular development, function and dysfunction; study of regenerative capacity of the heart

**The College of Veterinary Medicine**

Population: 210 faculty members, 360 professional students, 120 graduate students

Areas of future growth: infectious disease research, genomics, medical genetics, stem cell biology, cancer research, expanded clinical networks, and international collaborations in animal health, public health and food safety

Endowment: \$186 million (as of June 2013)

Cornell Now campaign goal: \$75 million; raised so far: \$36.1 million (as of July 2013)

**Laurie Glimcher**