



Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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Faculty receives SAVMA National Teaching Excellence Award

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Dr. William E. Hornbuckle, an emeritus professor in the Department of Clinical Sciences at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, received the National Teaching Excellence Award from The Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA) for achievements as an educator and inspiration to his students. The annual award draws from student nominations, aiming to recognize excellence, innovation, and enthusiasm in the field of clinical veterinary science and education.



Dr. Hornbuckle spent years as coordinator of the Community Practice Service (CPS) rotation for Cornell veterinary clinical students. The CPS educational experience is at the core of the College's Southside Healthy Pet Clinic where the students take on even greater responsibility. Based at Ithaca's Southside Community Center since 1996, the clinic allows first- and second-year veterinary students to hone skills that are used during typical wellness visits on pets that may not otherwise have access to veterinary care.

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“I am a facilitator of service learning more so than a teacher per se,” said Hornbuckle. “As a facilitator, I have been blessed to be a part of a collaborative alliance with dedicated colleagues, technicians, and support staff, as well as Cornell's veterinary medical students. Without collaboration, I would have fallen short of my purpose in the College. I was deeply moved by my nomination for this award by the veterinary medical students at Cornell University and extend my thanks to the SAVMA House of Delegates for supporting their confidence in my contributions to their education.”

Hornbuckle collaborated with other faculty members in creating clinical venues which favored students' continued development of communication and examination skills beyond what they learned in lectures, seminars, and related laboratories. Subsequently, first and second year students at Cornell University now participate in primary care appointments where they are mentored by third and fourth year students and participate in Southside, an off-campus veterinary clinic for pets owned by low-income clients.

Hornbuckle was selected from a pool of several faculty members from other veterinary schools across the country. Student Becky Donnelly '16 was the nomination's principle author, with help from two peers.

“Dr. Hornbuckle encourages problem-solving skills every chance he gets,” said the students. “He knows thorough details about each case but withholds his thoughts and opinions until students have had a chance to fully digest. He is available for consultation if a student clinician gets stuck, but he generally gives students full autonomy as clinicians in his service and truly treats them as colleagues. Dr. Hornbuckle really goes above and beyond to foster students to maximize their potential as excellent clinicians.”

Hornbuckle brought a philosophy of experiential learning to managing CPS. There, students for the first time see appointments from beginning to end, taking patients’ histories, communication with clients, examining and discharging patients, and following-up with clients. Students act as primary clinicians on all cases in an active and engaged learning process.

“Once students were allowed to actively engage, they became incredibly animated and involved,” said Dr. Hornbuckle. “It completely transformed them. Seeing that transformation has been a key motivational experience in my life and probably the best thing I’ve gotten from my career.”

Nominators described how Dr. Hornbuckle’s respectfulness, professionalism, and friendly demeanor merge to build rapport with students and co-workers outside the classroom. They also describe his ability to field questions in ways that cultivate new ideas.

“Because he is such a respected resource when it comes to clinical knowledge, students approach him with questions constantly,” said the nominators. “Not only does he answer students’ questions but he also expands them into larger discussions to turn every question into a learning experience. He is also famous for his ‘ultrasonic Hornbuckle hands’—they say he could tell you what denomination coin is stuck in the GI tract of a cat, and he is eager to ensure that all Cornell DVM graduates are excellent at palpation technique.

“He finds an excellent balance between rewarding students for good performance and helping them develop as clinicians with recommendations for improvement. He knows all of his students’ strengths and weaknesses, and he monitors their progress from the first time they shadow in their first year to the last discharge they write on his service.”

The Student AVMA House of Delegates presented awards during its annual session March 20-21 at Colorado State University. He received a complimentary registration along with all travel and lodging expenses, as well as an engraved glass plaque awarded at the reception. A smaller internal reception at Cornell commemorated his award in May, 2014.