

Joint Veterinary School



HERD HEALTH

PHOTO BY HENRY MOORE JR., CVM/BCU WSU

Washington, Idaho, Montana and Utah form a cooperative program to provide residents veterinary school opportunities.

by **Paige Nelson**, field editor

According to the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), the United States boasts only 30 accredited colleges of veterinary medicine. The entire western region, 13 states, is home to only six. Thus, western states have had to find solutions to ensure their residents have access to affordable veterinary training.

The latest measure taken by some western states has been the Washington-Idaho-Montana-Utah (WIMU) regional program in veterinary medicine.

University of Idaho

For the past 40 years, the state of Idaho has contracted with the Washington State University (WSU) College of Veterinary Medicine in Pullman, Wash., to enroll 11 Idaho residents per year in its veterinary medicine program. Through the contractual agreement and with funding support from the Idaho legislature, Idaho students pay resident tuition to WSU all four years.

The University of Idaho (U of I) places faculty members throughout Idaho that are

“veterinarians that help teach our livestock programs, particularly in the fourth year,” explains Bryan Slinker, dean of the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine.

“Idaho has resources invested in the University of Idaho that help them accomplish their research and teaching missions along with teaching our students, as well,” adds Slinker.

Utah State University

In 2008, WSU began discussions with Utah State University (USU) in Logan, Utah, for a joint program.

Those discussions led to an agreement and legislative funding to create a 2+2 program between the two schools that began in the fall of 2012.

“Students do their first two years at Utah State before moving up here to Pullman,” describes Slinker. “In that cohort, there are a

total of 30 students. Twenty of them are Utah residents, and 10 of them are nonresidents.

“We’re in the fourth year of that

agreement, and we’re getting ready to graduate the first group of students that started at Utah State University.”

Associate Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine at USU Dirk Vanderwall says WIMU has increased the number of students Utah can send to veterinary school.

Along with opening more

spots, Utah was able to initiate a concerted effort to attract students who would pursue a livestock-oriented practice, particularly in the more rural, underserved areas of the state.

Because of that, USU is proud to offer its veterinary students expertise in large-animal medicine before they head to Washington.

“We capitalize very heavily on our productive large-animal teaching complex at

“Ranches around the area and also (veterinary) clinics are happy to have the vet students come and participate.”

— **Mark Quinn**

► **Above:** WSU faculty member George Barrington teaches Pullman veterinary students about beef cattle health.

for Northwest



► Utah State University (USU) second-year veterinary students learn proper breeding soundness examination procedures from clinical veterinarian Rusty Stott.

Utah State University. We have all the large animal species well-represented,” boasts Vanderwall.

“We have an open-door policy that all our veterinary students can be involved in any and all of the clinical veterinary work being conducted at our farm animal units, when time permits.”

Slinker admits the Utah and Montana students get more hands-on experience with livestock in the first two years than do the Pullman students.

Montana State University

When the USU-WSU program proved successful, Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman, Mont., got involved. Subsequently, in 2014, WIMU was born.

“We did not have a veterinary school here,” says Mark Quinn, professor and director of WIMU at MSU. “We probably don’t have a population to support one, but we do have a lot of need for veterinarians.”

In Quinn’s opinion, WSU ranks in the top five veterinary schools in the country. He is more than happy to send his students to a renowned university that provides a broad education, with a strong emphasis in livestock.

There are 10 Montana resident students in the MSU program, explains Slinker. The 1+3 program allows those 10 students to

spend their first year at MSU and then move to Pullman for years two, three and four at WSU.

“The real benefit for Montana students is that with a small program we can do some things that are harder to do with the larger class size in Washington,” states Quinn.

“We have a lot more hands-on experiences

that we can offer the students as far as animal handling. They can also learn some actual clinical procedures like blood drawing, and they are able to use that skill to draw blood from livestock on local ranches.

“Ranches around the area and also (veterinary) clinics are happy to have the vet students come and participate.”

Like Utah, Montana is interested in training its residents in a good career, but also in having them eventually return and practice inside the state.

WIMU overview

In each state, the legislature appropriates the funds to its university, either USU or MSU, necessary to support the cost of the veterinary medicine program.

When the students transition from their home states to WSU, their states’ legislatures appropriate funds to pay the students’ out-of-state tuition costs, and students pay Washington resident tuition, says Slinker.

Because of accreditation, all 130 will graduate with a WSU Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree from WSU. Those students from Utah and Montana will see their home university represented on the diploma, but the transcript is issued from WSU.

Transition

If it’s still a WSU diploma, why attend the 2+2 or the 1+3 programs? Wouldn’t it just be easier to spend all four years of veterinary school in the same location?

Slinker recognizes the validity of those types of questions, but offers a rather straightforward answer.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 62



► Originally from Hawaii, Naomi Kamakau is a third-year WSU veterinary student learning about and getting practical experience with large-animal medicine.

“A Utah student or Montana student can’t apply directly to WSU. The joint program is the only way they can be accepted,” he explains. “It’s the cheapest alternative compared to other choices because most of them would have to go out of state and pay nonresident tuition to some other school.”

There are transition issues for the Utah and Montana students. Yet WSU has proven they can handle it.

Before school starts, all 130 veterinary students are brought together in Pullman for orientation. They spend one week together before ever attending a class. WSU faculty regularly travel between WSU, MSU and USU.

Some teaching happens through interactive video conferencing, so students become accustomed to the WSU teaching style. A few student clubs even meet via video conferencing.

During the fall of the second year, USU students spend a week in Pullman for a diagnostic challenge, in which they are blended with the WSU and MSU students.

“[The transition’s] not on their mind as much as it used to be, because now there are students who have made that transition,” says Slinker.

Demographics

According to Slinker, worldwide veterinary school demographics show no more than 25% male, maybe even closer to 15%-20% male in more urban areas enrolled in veterinary school. The WIMU program attracts a solid 25% male or slightly higher. Slinker attributes some of that to the rural-and farming-oriented nature of the region.

Regardless of gender, WSU attracts a strong number of students interested in a livestock or mixed practice, Slinker says. “It’s not just the men that want to be livestock veterinarians. Many of the women that come here do, as well.”

At USU, Vanderwall believes close to 30% of students are heavily interested in a livestock-oriented or mixed practice.

“That seems to be higher than what we’re aware of on a national average, where it’s more likely less than 10% would express an interest in [a] large-animal, mixed-practice-type career pursuit,” he says.

The Angus influence

Lane Schmitt, owner of Schmitt Angus, is a veterinary student who does express an intense interest in large-animal practice. He attributes his strong love of livestock reproductive technologies to his Angus experience.

At the age of 9, Schmitt purchased his first



PHOTO COURTESY KELLY GORHAM

► MSU first-year veterinary students Jessica Scherr (left) and Katie Olson (right) get hands-on livestock experience and take advantage of their small class size.

registered-Angus female for a 4-H breeding project. He has since grown his herd to 35 registered cows and 35 commercial cows and will be marketing 11 bulls this spring.

Besides his love of Angus, Schmitt has dreamed of being a large-animal veterinarian since he was 5 years old. He grew up watching his father, also a vet, work on beef cows and specialize in equine reproduction in the small town of Chinook, Mont.

Of his MSU experience, Schmitt says, “When we were in Bozeman, we were able to make of it what we wanted. We toured small feedlots, dairies and Ted Turner’s ranch outside of Bozeman. We had palpation opportunities. We were in on bear surgeries.

“Through the area’s practitioners, we had great opportunities to get the kind of beef experiences we wanted,” he continues.

Now in Pullman, Schmitt appreciates the opportunity to work in the veterinary teaching hospital and use the advanced technology available to him, but he says it’s harder to make the drive home to check on his cows.

To make calving less taxing for his parents, Schmitt installed a video system in his calving barn. Now he checks his cows anytime with his smartphone, saving his parents plenty of time and effort.

Similar programs

Although the partnership between WSU and U of I is one of the oldest in the country, and included Oregon State University for nearly 25 years, there are a few other states participating in similar joint programs.

“Idaho is unique because the partnership of the state and investing resources in their own university to benefit our program. In general, that doesn’t happen, and many states just simply contract with another state to take their students,” says Slinker.

Maybe the closest partnership to WSU and U of I is that of the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine. The veterinary school is located on Virginia Polytechnic Institute’s (Virginia Tech’s) Blacksburg, Va., campus, but both states contribute financially to the program by providing resources to both University of Maryland and Virginia Tech.

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln has operated a 2+2 program with Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine for several years now. A 2+2 program between the University of Alaska–Fairbanks and Colorado State University College of Veterinary Medicine is in its first year of operation, says Slinker.

Overall, the WIMU program offers residents a more affordable route for veterinary medical training, while encouraging them to return and practice in their home state.

“It’s sort of in our blood to do these types of things. We’re committed philosophically to serving our region as an agri-vet school. We’ve got the most experience of anybody in the country doing this, and we think we do it well,” concludes Slinker.



Editor’s Note: Paige Nelson is a freelance writer and cattlewoman from Rigby, Idaho.