Building a Strong Alumni Tradition

Western University of Health Sciences College of Veterinary Medicine Dean Phillip Nelson recently received the Distinguished Alumnus award from the Tuskegee Veterinary Medical Alumni Association.

Dr. Nelson earned his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree in 1979 from Tuskegee University, a storied institution with more than 120 years of history and tradition to draw from.

Dr. Nelson leads a college that is much younger, having recently graduated its second class of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine students. But he wants to build a strong tradition at WesternU.

The college is making every effort to maintain contacts with alumni, he said. Maintaining ties with alumni will allow the college to celebrate their accomplishments and acknowledge their contributions to society.

“We will have to build our own traditions,” Dr. Nelson said. “These traditions will be established to provide continuing support for our alumni. We won’t forget them just because they graduated and we won’t let them forget about us.”

The newest CVM graduates hope they stay connected.

“I hope I keep in touch with people, simply because they’re my friends,” said Jonathan Williams, DVM ’08.

Being one of the first classes at the College of Veterinary Medicine was stressful but helped the class build a strong relationship, said Sara Stoll, DVM ’08.

“After you share an experience like this you’re bonded forever,” she said.

Giving back to the college as alumni isn’t simply about monetary contributions. Many graduates look forward to serving as mentors to younger generations of students. Terence Krentz, DVM ’08, will be working at Bay Area Veterinary Specialists in San Leandro, Calif., where WesternU students have rotations.

“I want to help them grow in their knowledge base, realizing my knowledge base is imperfect,” he said.

When he goes to large veterinary conferences he notices that most schools have class reunions, something he is in favor of having.

“I would love to come back and see these guys, especially knowing we’re all scattering,” Krentz said. “I think down the line I would like to have this network to come back to.”

Summer Wetzel, DVM ’07, works on the WesternU campus at Banfield, The Pet Hospital. WesternU students also work at Banfield, and she is able to provide good insight into what’s good for them, Dr. Wetzel said.

“I know where they’re coming from,” she said. “I think they can relate to me.”

Cynthia Kinney, DVM ’07, gave the Alumni Association welcome speech at the CVM commencement ceremony on May 16, 2008. She told graduates they have a responsibility to give back to the generations of students to come. Dr. Kinney works at VCA Central Animal Hospital in Upland, Calif., where she serves as a third-year preceptor.

“I love it,” she said. “I’ve been in their shoes, which gives me a better perspective of what they’re going through.”
A strong alumni group provides interaction between students and alumni, she said.

“It’s important to build an alumni tradition for the sake of the school and for the sake of the profession,” Dr. Kinney said.