

WesternU News: College of Veterinary Medicine Reaches Out to Young Students

College of Veterinary Medicine faculty members at Western University of Health Sciences want to foster an interest in science and mathematics among young students, which is beneficial for the community and the veterinary profession.

Peggy Schmidt, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACVPM, Director of Fourth-year Curriculum and Assistant Professor, Production Medicine and Epidemiology, recently spoke to 120 students at the Math/Science Conference for Eighth-Grade Girls, organized by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), at Rio Hondo College in Whittier, Calif. She let students listen to the heartbeat of her dog, Trooper, who has a heart murmur.

“We try to encourage girls to choose career paths involving science and math,” she said.

High school students interested in becoming veterinarians should gain experience by volunteering at an animal shelter or job shadowing at a veterinary clinic, Dr. Schmidt said. In college, students should get at least a B average in science and math classes, she said.

Math classes are important to understand the physics behind physiology, blood flow dynamics and the biomechanics of movement, said Peggy Barr, DVM, PhD, College of Veterinary Medicine Associate Professor, who also participates in AAUW outreach activities.

These outreach activities help elevate girls' interest and confidence in themselves, she said.

Faculty members and veterinary students have participated in outreach activities such as “Expanding Your Horizons” workshops for sixth to 10th grade girls, organized by American Women in Science (AWIS), middle school and high school career days, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts events and CVM Open House, providing activities and information on veterinary medicine for all ages, Dr. Barr said.

Middle school is a perfect time to start introducing students to different professions, said Suzana Tkalcic, DVM, PhD, Assistant Professor, Veterinary Pathology. As they acquire more knowledge in high school, their idea of what they would like to do in life becomes clearer, said Tkalcic.

The veterinary profession offers a choice of many specialties after graduation, such as private practice, surgery, food safety, public health, pharmaceutical industry, pathology and research.

“I talk to them about the great diversity our profession can offer to a veterinary graduate,” Dr. Tkalcic said.