

## University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine Keeps Small, Large Animal Programs Innovative

**Mobile Equine Diagnostic Service and Zoological Medicine Residency boost students into working world.**

*By Angela Pham*

The Mobile Equine Diagnostic Service (MEDS) truck travels throughout Florida and elsewhere in the Southeast to provide accessible state-of-the-art diagnostic capabilities to horse owners and their veterinarians. (Photos courtesy of the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine) At the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, both the small- and large-animal hospitals feature programs that take students from the classroom and put them into the working world of veterinary medicine.

In November 2004, this sole veterinary school in Florida expanded the reach of its large-animal hospital by creating the Mobile Equine Diagnostic Service, taking its diagnostic program beyond the Gainesville community and into areas as far as Orlando, Tallahassee and neighboring Georgia.

The service comprises an extended ambulance vehicle--the only vehicle of its size in the country--that is fully equipped to provide all diagnostic abilities for equines, says Michael Porter, DVM, Ph.D, Dipl. ACVIM, director of the service and an internal medicine specialist.

MEDS, a farm-based program, offers clients a number of portable services for their horses, including chronic disease evaluations, specialty musculoskeletal imaging, lameness exams, echocardiography and video endoscopies. The mobility of the service offers clients convenience and efficiency and is entirely self-sufficient, Dr. Porter says. The vehicle can drive to the middle of vast pastures without the worry of loss of power.

Students have the opportunity to join work on the vehicle for up to a full month, though the program typically takes two students for two weeks at a time, Porter says.

"It's a pretty great option for them because it's me, my technician and my students," Porter says. "They literally have to be involved with everything because it requires everybody out there on the med truck. They're a big part of the program."

### At a Glance

Location: Gainesville, Fla.

Opening date: 1976

Number of students: 347 DVM students; more than 120 master's and doctoral students; 42 residents; 11 interns

Financial aid available: Yes; Health Professions

Student Loans, College of Veterinary Medicine scholarships, long- and short-term emergency loans

Programs offered: DVM; master of science degree; doctor of philosophy in veterinary medical sciences; residency; internship

Website: [www.vetmed.ufl.edu](http://www.vetmed.ufl.edu) MEDS visits a different city each day of the week to bring its state-of-the-art technology regularly to a number of areas, and the result is positive feedback from referring veterinarians, clients and students: Porter says 85 to 90 percent of feedback from veterinarians is positive, and horse owners are typically thrilled with the program. Students who spent time working for MEDS also often feel inspired enough to think about starting their own mobile equine practice after graduation.

"At our graduation day, the students thank me," Porter says. "They're very happy about their experience on the truck. Some decide that's what they want to do, get out on their own vehicle and start working."

The program also serves as a business model and inspiration for other schools interested in creating their own mobile equine diagnostic service. University of Florida's mobile program was created based on a business plan that pays for itself,

Porter says.

As a bonus, Porter adds, Florida's substantial equine population keeps the service busy, and the consistent demand is leading to another division: a Mobile Equine Veterinary Service. This vehicle, which would function as a full ambulatory service, is projected to start next spring.

On the small-animal hospital side of the College of Veterinary Medicine, equally unique opportunities are available for students interested in pursuing the specialized field of zoological medicine.

The Zoo Med Residency program is one of the oldest in the nation, as well as one of the few whole-service zoological medicine programs. Maintained since the inception of the veterinary school, the residency has since graduated more than 20 students in its competitive program.

Ramiro Isaza, DVM, Dipl. ACZM, says that 30-50 applicants for the Zoo Med residency come from throughout the world to compete for one position each year, with a total of four residents in the program at any given time. The thoroughness of the residency draws competitive applicants: For the first two years of the residency, a student rotates through the Zoological Clinical service, working with exotic pets and wildlife at zoos, including Central Florida Zoological Park and St. Augustine Alligator Farm. The third is devoted to working the White Oak Conservation Center, a private conservation facility that houses endangered hoofstock, cheetahs and birds.

In 2000, the residency was boosted with a full additional year, creating a complete four-year program. During this year, a resident joins the veterinary staff at Disney's Wild Animal Kingdom, working with some of the best and most experienced zoological veterinarians in the country, Dr. Isaza says.

The result is a win-win situation, he says, as clients like to see new faces learning the art of zoological medicine, and students gain substantial experience with every year of their residency.

The intensive residency program is one of the few full-time of its kind among national veterinary colleges, especially among those that have continuously run since their inception, Isaza says. And the efforts tend to pay off: Most residents get job offers immediately, usually moving straight into zoological medicine boards, Isaza adds.

"The academic zoological medicine program allows for diverse training with lots of patients in a specialty atmosphere as opposed to just a zoo atmosphere," Isaza says. "It's a wonderful place to work and train residents.

"It's been a very comprehensive program that gives training through the boards and makes students well-groomed for employment right after the program."