

Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine Makes Research Advancements

As one of 28 veterinary colleges in the U.S., Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine was built on the foundation of two of the nation's leading land-grant universities: Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., and the University of Maryland at College Park.

By Leila Lotfi

Dr. X.J. Meng (left), a professor in the Department of Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology, works in his lab with Dr. Sheela Ramamoorthy. Meng was recently awarded two research grants totaling almost \$3 million from the National Institutes of Health to study the hepatitis E virus. The ultimate goal of the work is to develop a vaccine to protect people and animals from Hepatitis E. Meng's laboratory in the college's Center for Molecular Medicine and Infectious Disease is considered one of the world's leading hepatitis E virus research centers. As one of 28 veterinary colleges in the U.S., Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine was built on the foundation of two of the nation's leading land-grant universities: Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., and the University of Maryland at College Park.

Since its first graduating class in 1984, the college has trained more than 2000 veterinarians.

"We're a two-state, three campus partnership in education," says Jeff Douglas, communications director for the college. "Two states have been able to successfully partner on a school and flourish for more than 25 years."

Flagship campus facilities are based at Virginia Tech and organized into three separate departments: Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences, Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences and the Department of Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology. The Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center is on the Leesburg, Va. campus, and the Avrum Gudelsky Veterinary Center is located at College Park, Md.

"Our mission is to create more veterinarians and future generations of veterinarians," Douglas says.

Besides the college's two-state heritage, the Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine sets Virginia-Maryland apart from other veterinary colleges. This center trains veterinary students and graduate veterinarians for career opportunities in the public and corporate areas of the veterinary profession. The college also offers a career-emphasis curriculum which enables students to concentrate in one of the following areas: equine, mixed, food animal, small animal and government and corporate veterinary medicine.

With a dozen treatment rooms, extensive animal holding facilities, intensive care units and diagnostic laboratories, the teaching hospital treats about 40,000 agricultural and companion animals each year.

"We offer a tracking program where we allow students to self-declare their own concentration," Douglas says.

The college also prides itself on the expansion of its research program over the past few years.

At the Center for Molecular Medicine and Infectious Diseases, researchers have developed a vaccine for brucellosis. The RB-51 vaccine was invented by current Dean Gerhard Schurig and his colleagues and it is currently in use around the world. On the Leesburg campus, advancements in equine research are underway including surgical adhesions, lameness and equine colic, the leading killer of horses. On the Maryland campus, researchers continue to work on avian and food-animal infectious diseases including virology.

Infectious disease research is becoming a huge initiative for the college as a whole. "Our college is making considerable progress in leading the university in infectious disease research," Douglas says.

At a Glance

Location: Blacksburg, Va.

Opening date: 1980



Number of students: 360

Financial aid offered: Yes

Programs offered: DVM, MS, Ph.D., Residency

Website: www.vetmed.vet.edu The college is currently undergoing a three-phase construction program. The first phase will add new clinical and research facilities space, which is expected to start in late 2008 or early 2009. The second phase will expand instructional facilities with the goal of expanding enrollment. The third phase will add a translational medicine facility which combines basic scientists and clinical researchers on programs that change biomedical innovations into practical clinical solutions for animal and people

"We believe we can expand 135 students per year once we complete these facilities," says Douglas, referring to the 90 students they currently enroll each year.

The Veterinary Teaching Hospital at the college serves as a primary care facility for animals residing within a 35-mile radius of the Blacksburg campus. With a dozen treatment rooms, extensive animal holding facilities, intensive care units and diagnostic laboratories, the teaching hospital treats about 40,000 agricultural and companion animals each year.

"We're an institution that values partnership and innovation in all that we do," Douglas says. "We're willing to take risks in order to receive great results."