



The University of Georgia

CICEP

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES
AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE
STUDY
2014

Experiential Entrepreneurial Learning for Veterinary and Pharmacy Students

Practice Management Rotations

For more than 10 years, the curriculum for students in the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine and the College of Pharmacy has included introductory business courses. Despite the good intentions to expose students to the importance of accounting, marketing and management, business principles have remained abstract concepts to students within a packed scientific curriculum. In 2006, business instructor Jeff Sanford, director of entrepreneurial services for the UGA Small Business Development Center, started looking for new learning experiences to complement the existing business courses—real-world experiences that would help students become better practitioners in their fields.

In 2007, he launched Practice Management Externship programs to provide experiential learning to fourth-year veterinary medicine students—similar in concept to their fourth-year clinical rotations.

Through the programs, students get an inside look at independent veterinary practices. Over a three-week period, groups of seven or eight vet students spend a few days in each of two private practices alongside the office staff, observing client visits and analyzing the workflow, service and financial performance. When they return to campus, they analyze practice data collected, determine main themes and write recommendations and courses of action. Everything is compiled into a comprehensive evaluation report, which the practice owner can use to improve the business.



UGA College of Veterinary Medicine student Mandy Webb helps veterinarian Les Sales treat a dog at Sales' practice in Washington, Ga.

The students, particularly those with an interest in entrepreneurship, get a firsthand look at the inner workings of a private practice and are in a better position to determine if that is the career path they want to follow. The program has become quite popular with students. During the last academic year (2013–14), 36 of the 105 fourth-year students participated, or 34 percent. Seven of the eight students who participated in the first externships in 2007 and 2008 currently own 10 private veterinary practices.

In 2010, Sanford launched a similar program for students in the College of Pharmacy. During the rotations, fourth-year pharmacy students travel with Sanford in groups of six to visit independent pharmacies. Over a five-week period, students spend about 40 hours a week alongside three to four pharmacists analyzing their businesses and returning to campus to assess their findings and prepare an evaluation report. As with the veterinary program, this helps students prepare for post-graduation, possibly owning a business, perhaps even addressing a critical need. The average age of a pharmacy owner in Georgia is 63; this rotation could create a pool of future pharmacists to buy independent pharmacies from retiring owners and fill the important role they play in many Georgia communities.

In addition to the value students get from these rotations, the business owner benefits as well. The student evaluations are thorough, with observations of the practices they visit as well as business analyses. The observations run from the appearance of the facility and the practitioners to the way clients are treated during their visits, and include a list of strengths of each as well as opportunities for improvement. A 108-page spiral-bound report from a May 2014 evaluation of a clinic in Peachtree City, Ga., included observations of 28 client visits, from the time they entered the building to the time they left. A frequent observation was that clients had to wait more than 10 minutes past their appointment time to be taken to an exam room and then had to wait several minutes after the exam to check out because of the backlog. Under strengths, the students noticed that the doctors had good bedside manners, explaining the treatment procedures and patiently answering clients' questions. Under opportunities, they recommended the practice consider checking people out before they leave the exam room and providing friendlier and more efficient employees at the front desk.

A financial analysis of the practice showed it had increased its annual revenue by more than 13 percent over the previous year, mostly through a new Healthy Canine and Feline Club, a wellness program that recommends bringing pets to the doctor twice a year for routine care. A bar graph shows the revenue trends of the practice over the previous three years. The students used accepted veterinary economics benchmarks to conduct a profit/loss analysis of the business and a breakdown of revenue generated by services and products sold, and by each of the medical employees in the clinic.



From left: UGA College of Pharmacy students Adrianna Hesselbring and Jonathan McKoy, look over the paperwork at Village Drug in Athens with pharmacist Chris Thurmon, right, and Jeff Sanford, who runs the SBDC practicums.

Other materials included in the report are reviews of the clinic's marketing practices, a market analysis of the population around the clinic and demographic trends in the area.

In a letter to College of Veterinary Medicine Dean Sheila Allen, a veterinarian from Covington, Ga., who had been evaluated by Sanford's students, wrote, "We are extremely appreciative of the programs that allowed us to utilize Mr. Sanford at no charge for his services as we realized this type of service is quite valid and necessary... this is an amazing service."

Sanford's program was the only one of its kind in the country. The uniqueness of the program is getting attention from other universities. In 2012, two University of Florida (UF) veterinary medicine students participated in Sanford's rotation program in Georgia. Last year, with Sanford's help, the University of Florida piloted its own a veterinary rotation program, with 16 students visiting four veterinary practices. In a letter nominating Sanford for the 2013 Walter

Barnard Hill Fellow Award, the highest honor UGA bestows upon public service and outreach faculty members (which he won), Dr. Dana Zimmel, chief of staff for the UF Veterinary Hospitals wrote, “ This unique experience generates enthusiasm and confidence to be practice owners. Students learn that as practice owners they can successfully experience high professional satisfaction in both medicine and business.”

Sanford was invited to the 2013 American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Annual Convention, where he presented the practice management rotation program to representatives of the 23 colleges of veterinary medicine in the U.S. He has been invited to help launch a program at Auburn University and North Carolina State University and has received numerous queries from other universities.

College of Veterinary Medicine practicums

Year	Students	Practices
2007	2	2
2008	5	3
2009	15	10
2010	22	11
2011	20	9
2012	31	10
2013	30	10
2014	36	14
Total	161	69

College of Pharmacy practicums

Year	Students	Practices
2009	4	6
2010	4	6
2011	4	6
2012	12	7
2013	12	10
2014	12	10
Total	48	45