



Bellwether Magazine

Volume 1
Number 71 *Fall 2009*

Article 12

10-1-2009

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Caroline Cantner
University of Pennsylvania

Nathanael Oster
University of Pennsylvania

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VBMA Draws on Contrasting Elements to Empower Students

BY CAROLINE CANTNER, V'11 AND NATHANAEEL OSTER, V'12

This year marks a decade of success for the Veterinary Business Management Association. Originating in 2000 at Penn Vet as a small student club, it has experienced dramatic growth into a national association with chapters at all 28 U.S. veterinary schools and at four international schools today.

The VBMA's mission is to advance the profession through increasing business knowledge, creating networking opportunities and empowering students to reach their personal and professional goals. This focus has resonated with students and within the profession and can be credited, along with the dedication and passion of the students involved, with the organization's rapid growth. What began with a handful of students at Penn has now become an organization encompassing 2600 veterinary students throughout the country and the world. Currently, more than 78 percent of Penn Vet students in the Class of 2012 are participating.

To complement the traditional science curriculum, the Penn VBMA organizes speakers and events that cover both the nuts-and-bolts of traditional business topics as well as the softer skills of leadership and communications.

The Business Certificate Program, sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health, is unique among the VBMA chapters world-wide. Run by students, Penn's certificate program offers a series of 14 business-related courses taught by leading veterinary business professionals. Courses range

Holly Stewart, V'12, Sarah Cannizzo, V'12, Nathanael Oster, V'12

from the softer skills such as communication styles, exam room skills, and employee motivation and management to essential business skills such as practice valuation, marketing and branding, understanding financial statements, and personal investment vehicles.

In addition to the certificate program, the VBMA hosts a variety of events and speakers, which have included Pennsylvania Governor **Ed Rendell, C'65** and Richard Teerlink, the former chairman of Harley Davidson. These events are, in great part, made possible by the generous support of Commerce Bank (now TD Bank) and its founder, **Vernon W. Hill, W'67**.

The 2009/2010 series began with **Dr. Micaela Shaughnessy, V'93**, a successful relief veterinarian and expert on gender issues in veterinary medicine, providing a lunch forum on the topic, "Gender Economics in the Veterinary Profession." A dinner workshop is planned on how to succeed in an interview, hosted by Dr. Ralph Schickel and sponsored by Hill's Pet Nutrition. Added to the lineup this year is a lunchtime game show in the style of "The Price is Right," hosted by Phil Francis, chairman of PetSmart, and John Francis, vice president of MWI Veterinary Supply. This informal event heightened students' understanding of common inventory cost—the lack of which is a traditional complaint of established veterinarians who hire new graduates.

In the past year, the VBMA has earned many awards and distinctions. It was selected as "Chapter of the Year" by the National VBMA, recruited more students to register on the national website than any other chapter, received the award for "Best Business Club" by the Student American Veterinary Medicine Association, and had two club officers selected for leadership positions on the 2010 National VBMA board.

Dr. Meghan Stalker, V'06, one of the founding members of the VBMA explains, "Ultimately the VBMA teaches veterinary students that anything is possible. We do not have to limit ourselves to the way things have been done in the past. With the brilliant, passionate, altruistic members of our community, veterinarians are keenly positioned to pioneer novel business models to overcome the current shortcomings of healthcare delivery to animals. They can, and hopefully will, define new standards of efficient, compassionate and personalized care to which human medicine can aspire." 🍷

