

Building on Quality Undergraduate Programs in Animal Science

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Story in Brief

Growth of an academic department is essential if that entity plans to graduate students who will shape an industry and positively impact society. Departmental growth can be assessed by the number of students majoring in the degree program, the number of students enrolled in courses offered by the department, and finally, by the breadth of programs offered by the department. Our department is in the midst of growth in all three of these areas.

Mission

As outlined in our strategic plan, the teaching mission of our department is to *provide an outstanding teaching program ensuring that students can obtain the best possible training to prepare them for productive careers in the Animal Sciences and related fields*. This mission comes out of our overall mission to be a demand-driven program focused on the needs of the state of Arkansas. Therefore, our quest is to envision programs and prepare students for the future needs of animal scientists.

Number of Animal Science Majors

What is the desired number of animal science students? That question is hard to answer, but one hopes to graduate as many students as there are job openings. However, quality and breadth of education affects the number of jobs that are available for graduates. Currently, the Department of Animal Science has approximately 110 students, which is about 16% of the agricultural students in Bumpers College. Based on projected increased student enrollment at the University of Arkansas and Bumpers College, we had anticipated having 200 undergraduate students by 2005. That number was based on a number of factors, but primarily on recruitment efforts and increased retention and graduation rates. The University of Arkansas is implementing more rigorous entrance requirements that initially restrict the pool of prospective students. This, coupled with a restricted number of out-of-state tuition waivers, may make our projected numbers somewhat optimistic in the short run. However, increasing entrance standards has led to an increase in retention and graduation rates at other universities around the country. Placing nearly twice as many graduates in traditional animal science jobs could be problematic. Therefore, we are developing programs that broaden our base and create opportunities for our students.

Undergraduate Programs

Last year we offered three new courses aimed at students interested in companion animals, primarily dogs, cats, and other pets. This year, we are proud to offer an expanded equine science program. New courses include Introduction to the Equine Industry and Selection, Merchandising Livestock and Horses, Principles of Equine Behavior and Training, and Topics in Equine Law. These courses supplement the traditional capstone course in Horse Production. As we have developed these new courses, there has been considerable discussion, both within the department and within the animal science community at large, as to where animal science curricula and programs are going. Does the inclusion of a greater number of species under the animal science umbrella mean that we are trying to move away from our traditional base? No! What it does mean is that the animal science faculty are the most qualified to teach our disciplines to any student interested in animals. As we look to the future, it appears that the number of people employed in the traditional livestock positions are limited to about the current number of graduates; however, those students interested in companion animals and the biomedical and allied industries have many opportunities.

Maintaining Quality

As we transition into the future, how do we maintain quality in our graduates? Our department has established a career fair and training opportunities for our students. We are advising students to be active in leadership programs and to take the opportunity to do an internship or two. In addition, all prospective graduates are required to take a species examination with the American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists. Those tests satisfy the requirement of the state legislature that all Arkansas colleges provide evidence, beyond granting a degree, that students have gained critical skills. To their credit, our graduating seniors who have taken the ARPAS tests have all passed their examinations. We believe that broadening our teaching program expands the opportunities for all of our animal science majors, giving us the opportunity to impact our industries and society as a whole.

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