Due to animals constantly entering or leaving, cats and dogs may acquire infectious diseases after only a few days in a shelter—the greater the number of animals housed together and the longer an animal’s stay, the higher the risk of disease. A dog or cat who becomes significantly ill is at increased risk for euthanasia.

A dozen faculty members, representing disciplines such as small animal internal medicine, behavior, epidemiology and microbiology will be involved in student instruction, resident training and health studies in shelter medicine.

“We need to work together to prevent the spread of diseases in shelters, which calls for a large-population approach.”

Another goal of the program will be to prevent or reduce behavior problems, such as excessive barking, aggression or separation anxiety, in order to improve dogs’ and cats’ chances of being placed in new homes.

Advanced Education in Shelter Medicine

Through residency training in shelter medicine for veterinarians and elective courses for veterinary students, a well-informed pool of specialists will become an important resource for shelter managers nationwide.

A great deal more needs to be learned about improved shelter design, prevention and treatment of infections unique to high density housing, and solutions to behavioral problems that can occur when animals are placed, even temporarily, in a shelter. During a three-year program, residents in shelter medicine will carry out and publish a study in epidemiology, infectious disease or behavior, and will scientifically test and validate methods to prevent disease in the shelter environment.

Residents will provide diagnosis and treatment of shelter animals, consultation for infection prevention and outbreak control, and may contribute advice on shelter design and provide training for shelter staff.

In addition to certification of specialty training in shelter medicine, a resident may elect to earn the master’s degree in preventive veterinary medicine (MPVM) or board certification by the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (ACVB).

A well-informed pool of specialists will become an important resource for shelter managers nationwide.