What are the Teaching Academies About?

Growing a Community of Teachers

Teachers learn, adapt and evolve their ability to transfer knowledge and life-long learning skills to their students. Teaching and learning methodologies change with evidence provided through research in education and cognitive psychology, with changing technology and the increasing body of knowledge that must be constantly reprioritized. To promote the best practices as veterinary educators, our faculty are engaged in both a Regional Teaching Academy (RTA) and a local UC Davis Teaching Academy.

The regional academy was formed as an initiative of the Consortium of Western Regional Colleges of Veterinary Medicine to provide the highest quality education experience possible. The Consortium consists of five veterinary schools (from California, Oregon, Washington and Colorado), and is supported by an industry partner, Zoetis Inc. Unlike other groups, the regional academy's 55 members (15 from UCD) agree to be working members and each take on an active assignment. The full membership has met at two bi-annual conferences in 2013 and 2015 to organize the academy, outline goals and discuss how to build a culture of excellence in teaching and learning. At the heart of the initiatives is the desire to grow a community of teachers excited about the art and science of teaching and methods to engage students for optimal learning experiences. This year's conference focused on a "Paradigm Change in Teaching: Leveraging Cross-Institutional Collaboration."

> "All of us come with expertise in veterinary medicine, but most of us lack an academic background in the discipline of education," said Joie Watson, professor of equine medicine. "Forming a Community of Teachers around the science of teaching and learning has been an exciting opportunity for us as a faculty."

The regional academy seeks to: generate innovative concepts to advance veterinary education; develop, review and disseminate educational best practices; contribute to and promote the development of instructional scholarship and educational leadership. By pursuing these goals the academy will collectively build greater expertise at the individual schools and across the region, fostering shared resources as well as a true community of veterinary educators.

Here at UC Davis, the faculty have developed and implemented an integrated curriculum based on learning outcomes and core competencies, with plenty of case-based discussions, problem based learning sessions, lectures, laboratories, and clinical experience to prepare the entry-level DVM graduate. Students also have a broad array of externships, research training programs and community outreach programs to enhance their educational experience. Additionally, the school has invested in career, leadership and wellness programs and continues to build a robust scholarship endowment to help off-set student debt. These efforts provide a strong educational environment and foundation of support for students.

The school formed its own local teaching academy in the spring of 2016 to support faculty interested in learning together, promoting excellence, and growing a community of outstanding teachers. This inclusive working group has engaged in a number of activities including a journal club, discussion sessions with invited speakers, faculty development, educational initiatives and summer book clubs.

Last year the group read and discussed "How Learning Works – 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching." This book reviewed the current literature on learning theory and provided strategies for teachers based in the best evidence. The faculty discussed factors that motivate students to learn, how students develop mastery, what kinds of feedback enhance learning and why student development and classroom climate matter for student learning. This summer more than 35 faculty are reading and discussing "How We Learn" by Benedict Carey which is focused on factors affecting storage and retrieval strength, evidence for contextual effects on memory, spacing study sessions to learn and how testing, a desirable difficulty, improves learning.

Through the regional and local teaching academies, the faculty are embracing new ways to foster engagement in the classroom, assist with deep understanding and improved information retrieval, and promote successful life-long learning.