

# Pre-Veterinary Medicine Program:

## A History of Success

By Charlene J. Hankinson

The barn at the entrance of The University of Findlay's 152-acre farm on County Road 40, just off Ohio State Route 68, boasts the sign, "Center for Equine and Pre-Veterinary Studies." Inside the more than century-old barn are massive beams of native timber and stalls that house cows, sheep, pigs, goats, and sometimes donkeys or llamas, with the occasional cat meandering through. It reminds one of the family farm of yesteryear.

Most students who are interested in a career in veterinary medicine no longer come from farm backgrounds and have no large animal handling experience when they enter veterinary schools.

That's where The University of Findlay's pre-veterinary medicine program makes a big difference. It began in 1976, when then-Findlay College took the bold step of creating an equestrian studies program that married academic preparation with horse training. Circumstances converged to take advantage of the expertise of Dale Wilkinson, a nationally respected horseman, whose farm was eight miles south of campus.

After a few years, C. Richard Beckett, D.V.M., a young local veterinarian who took care of the horses at Wilkinson's farm, and who would more than 25 years later become the chair of The University of Findlay's Board of Trustees, proposed that another

barn on the farm would make a great place to bring in livestock to start a pre-veterinary medicine program.

Beckett, the late William Jack McBride, Ph.D., who was the vice president for academic affairs, and Linda Peck, D.V.M., a veterinarian Beckett hired right out of Ohio State University in 1979 for his practice, began to talk with area veterinary schools. Their goal was to create a pre-veterinary medicine program that produced exceptionally well-prepared students. With Findlay's 300-horse herd, and the addition of livestock, Findlay could provide the perfect environment to school students in the rudiments of farm animal behavior and health.

The first class of seven students began in 1982, with Robert Brennan, Ph.D., as the first academic director and assistant professor of animal science, teaching for both the equestrian and pre-vet programs. Peck, who began teaching equine reproduction classes as an adjunct faculty member in 1980, added animal handling classes and helped develop the pre-vet curriculum.

When Wilkinson relocated his horse training business to Georgia in 1984, then-Findlay College bought his farm. By 1986, Peck had transitioned to full-time faculty in the pre-vet program, enrollment having increased to 40 pre-vet majors, and was named director in 1989. A second veterinarian was added to

the staff in 1992 with the hiring of Michael Kerns, D.V.M., when enrollment had more than doubled.

The English equestrian program opened at the James L. Child Jr. Equestrian Complex in 1992, located at the southwest corner of Olive Street and Brookside Drive. With two equestrian facility increasing the need for veterinarians for the horses, University Equine Veterinary Services Inc. was established in 1997 at the Child Complex. Richard Henninger, D.V.M., a board-certified equine surgeon, and Greg F. Hass, D.V.M., farm veterinarian, staff the equine clinic, which now cares for more than 430 horses.

The clinic also has proved a great asset to the pre-veterinary program, which by 1997 had grown to more than 200 majors. "It gave us an opportunity to get pre-vet students with equine clinicians on a regular basis," Peck pointed out.

In 2002, Farabee McCarthy, Ph.D., succeeded Brennan as director of the Center for Equine and Pre-Veterinary Studies and serves an associate professor of equestrian studies.

While providing student contact with large farm animals makes Findlay's program unique, the program's ability to adapt readily also has contributed to its ongoing success. "The vet schools are continuously changing their prerequisites," Peck noted. "We'll adjust our curriculum. We've done that numerous times because we want our students to be successful in vet school."

From the beginning, the three aims of the program have remained consistent: making sure the academic program is strong, providing hands-on experience and advising by practicing veterinarians, Peck said.

"The secret of the whole success is the association of veterinarians being (the students') advisers," Beckett asserted, "because no other program in the country offers quite what we do in regard to the attention that the pre-vet students get."

By the 2007-08 academic year, the pre-vet program had the largest number of undergraduate majors at the University with 316 students, totaling 10 percent of the undergrad population.

Not only has the program prospered, the facilities and educational philosophy have remained unique. According to Beckett, who has provided a guiding hand throughout the program's development, "No one has duplicated, to my knowledge, what has taken place here."



Through the years, the instruction and personal investment of such individuals as C. Michael Kerns, D.V.M., (small photo, above left) professor of animal science, Linda Peck, D.V.M., (small photo, above, right) director of pre-veterinary studies, and C. Richard Beckett, D.V.M., (bottom, left photo) chair of the Board of Trustees have contributed greatly to the program's success.