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Contact: Jaymie Noland

805-756-5072; jnoland@calpoly.edu

Record Number of Cal Poly Students Move On to Vet School in 2009

Cal Poly is sending a record number of its students to veterinary school after spring Commencement, at a time when university officials say the industry is in need of new professionals.

As of June, 34 Cal Poly students have confirmed acceptance to vet schools around the U.S. and internationally. A total of 55 Cal Poly students applied to vet school this year, and professors in Cal Poly's Animal Science Department expect additional students will gain acceptance by the end of the summer.

Over the past five years, the acceptance rate for Cal Poly grads applying to vet school has stayed around 72 percent, said Jaymie Noland, a professor in the university's pre-vet program. But the program is producing more applicants in recent years than it previously had.

"In the last four years, 43 to 55 students applied to vet school each year," Noland said. "In the 10 years prior to 2006, we averaged only about 25 applicants per year."

Noland points to improvements in the Animal Science Department's approach to mentoring students and supporting them through the pre-vet program for increasing the numbers of those applying and those accepted. One such change was mandating that students not overload themselves with heavy science classes in the same quarter early in their undergraduate studies (which Noland said was straining qualified students and prompting many to switch majors).

As well, she said, the department is working to establish Cal Poly's reputation as a training ground for food-animal, or livestock vets.

"We have students who have the tools to be veterinarians," Noland said. "But many of them have never even seen farm animals up close. So we have to introduce them. We've changed our curriculum to get students working with livestock in their first few weeks."

Veterinary schools now know that Cal Poly students have experience with livestock animals, giving graduates a leg up when applying for vet school.

"I think that's our niche, Noland said, "and it's where we'll play a big role in the industry."

Just as Cal Poly is stepping up its efforts to produce veterinary school students, the industry is in need of more new professionals. Noland cited a Time Magazine article from March of this year showing veterinarians and vet technologists and technicians among the 10 jobs expected to experience the most growth in the U.S. by 2016.

Moving forward, Noland said additional changes are being examined to continue to improve the department's applicant numbers and acceptance rate. One change is the development of a new concentration focused on Food Animal Health. As well, the department is working with the Career Services Center on campus to establish stronger counseling programs for students preparing to apply to vet school, including practice interview sessions.

For more on Cal Poly's pre-vet program, contact Noland at 805-756-5072 or jnoland@calpoly.edu.

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Cal Poly Public Affairs
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
805.756.1511
polynews@calpoly.edu

