Beyond the Classroom: Service Learning is a Win-Win for Vet Tech Students and the Community

Jennifer Wells, DVM

Program Director

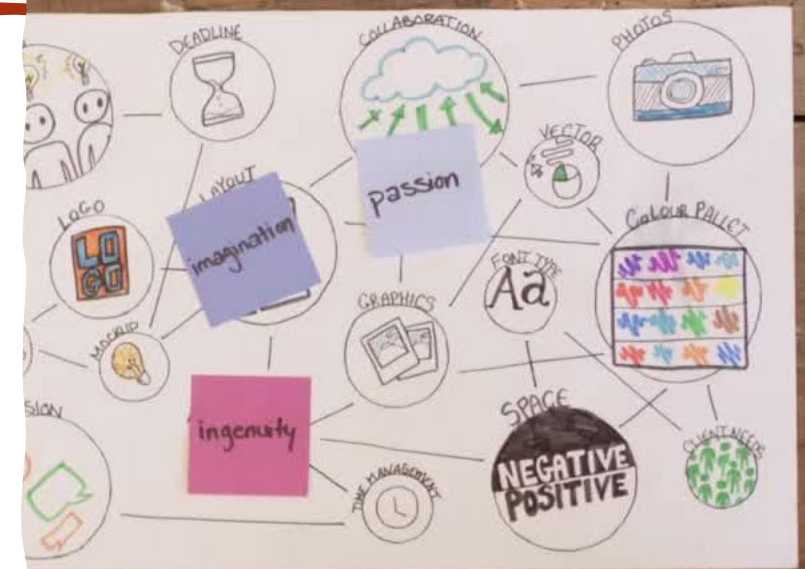Professor of Veterinary Technology

University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash College

SESSION GOALS

Ever wish you could provide meaningful community service AND hit all your course objectives?

Learning Outcomes:

1. Outline the key components of a successful service-learning project.

2. Develop a framework for curriculum integration.

3. Identify potential funding sources.

WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

- Definition: Structured learning integrating community service & reflection.

- Compare:
  - Volunteering
  - Internships
  - Experiential Learning

WHY SERVICE LEARNING IN VET TECH?

- Benefits:
  - Real-world skill application
  - Civic responsibility
  - AVMA-aligned learning
  - Reduced animal use (per animal)

GETTING STARTED

- Steps:
  - Define educational goals
  - Identify community partners
  - Align service with course outcomes

CASE STUDY: UC BLUE ASH

- 15+ years of partnerships

- Core courses with built-in service

- Student reflection assignments required

- Local Animal Shelters/Humane Societies (small animal)

- Greenacres & Winton Woods (farm animal)

- Pets in Need (low-income veterinary clinic)
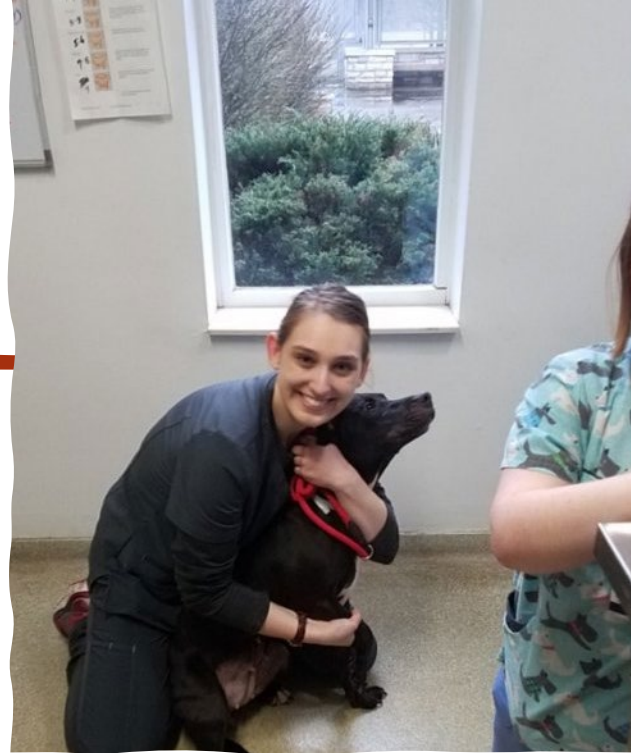
- 900+ animals served annually!

COURSES

- VETN 2061L and 2062L
  - Principles of Anesthesia and Surgery I and II
  - Small animal handling, care, and surgery
- VETN 2043 and 2044
  - Animal Husbandry and Diseases II and III
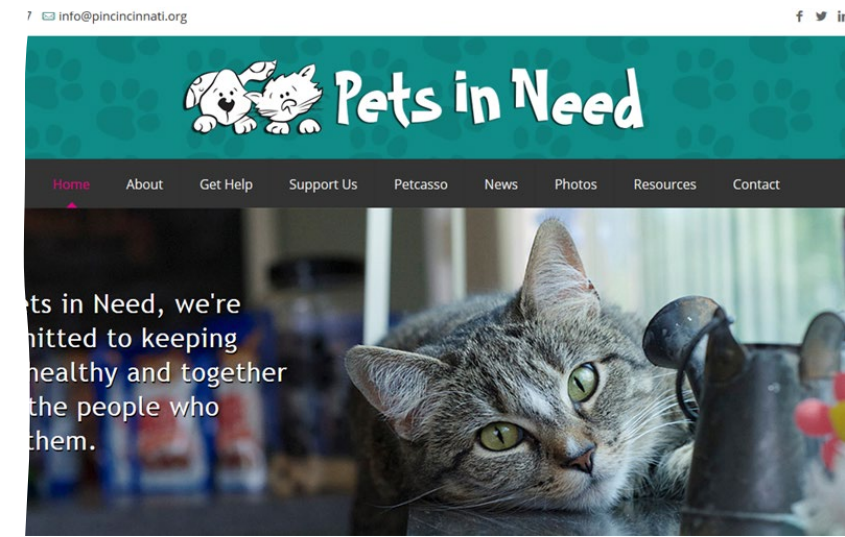 - Farm animal handling and care

SPCA CINCINNATI

- Since 2008, our students, faculty, and staff have provided:
  - Wellness Exams
  - Vaccination
  - Deworming
  - Spay/neuter surgery
  - Dental Cleanings

- Both on site at the SPCA and at UC Blue Ash!

PETS IN NEED

- Since 2010 students, along with a DVM faculty instructor, have been seeing patients at Pets In Need.

- Students take a history, perform a physical exam, and any needed diagnostic testing.

- They work with the DVM to get a treatment plan together and implement it with the owner.

DENTAL CLEANINGS FOR PETS

- From 2012 to 2020, hundreds of Pets in Need pets came to UCBA to have a FREE dental cleaning performed!
- Now, we perform needed dental care on sheltered animals
  - SPCA Cincinnati/Animal Friends Humane Society (dogs and cats)
  - Ohio Alleycat Resource (cats)

WINTON WOODS RIDING CENTER

- Students provide preventative health care to 45 horses at the farm twice a year:
  - Physical exam
  - Vaccinations
  - Parasite control
  - Equine infectious anemia testing (Coggins)

PARKY'S FARM

- Students provide preventative health care to ~20 ruminants at the farm once a year:
  - Physical exam
  - Vaccinations
  - Parasite control

GREENACRES FARM

- Students provide preventative health care to all 200+ horses, cattle, and sheep at the farm every year:
  - Physical exam
  - Vaccinations
  - Parasite control
  - Equine infectious anemia testing (Coggins) for horses
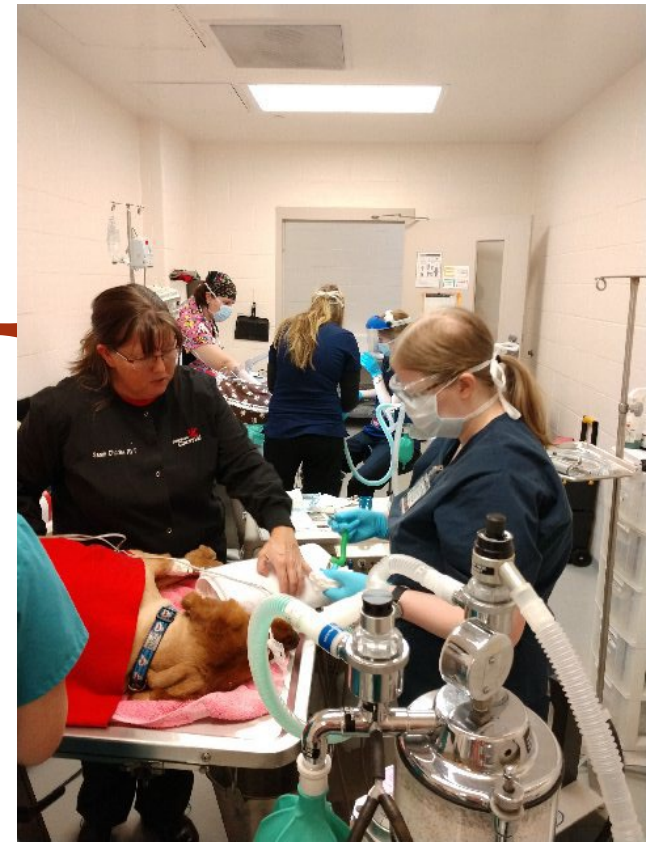 - Imaging equine lab

CATTLE AND SHEEP

- Students learn how to use a Temple Grandin-designed cattle system and chute to move and restrain cattle

- They provide each cow a physical exam and vaccinations

NEEDS

- Administrative buy-in
- Scheduling & logistics
- Clinical oversight by faculty

SCHEDULING AND LOGISTICS

- Three-pronged approach
    1. Weekly rotations to partner facilities with faculty member
    2. Animals rotate in and out of facility each week
        - Usually stay about 1 week
        - Usually, 4 dogs and 4 cats per week
        - Receive all needed health care including spay/neuter surgery
    3. Field trips - best for large animals which we can't house on site☺

- Many possible options available depending on your program's schedule!

- Remember to have MOU's in place with all providers!

REFLECTION AND ASSESSMENT

- Assessment tools:
  - Reflection essays
  - Surveys
  - Discussions
  - Connect experience to outcomes

ASSESSMENT/ STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

- Increase in preparation/skill practice

- Exposure to different populations

- Decreased anxiety about speaking with clients and working in new situations

- Increased awareness, empathy, and understanding about the social and economic issues that affect sheltered animals and people with limited financial means

MULTIPLE BENEFITS

Student benefits

- Clinical proficiency
- Communication skills
- Broader perspective of client needs

Community benefits

- Expanded care access
- Cost savings
- Enhanced nonprofit missions

MUTUAL GROWTH - A SHARED WIN

- Outcome:
  - Students learn and serve
  - Communities gain support
  - Long-term trust builds

INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

- 2022 UC Jack Twyman Award Winner

- Increased visibility for the program

- Reputation booster

- Helps lead to other opportunities and funding

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Common Challenges

- Time & staffing
- Transportation
- Liability concerns

Solutions & Tips

- Start small
- Use existing courses
- Foster core partnerships

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Resources:
  - University/College experiential learning offices
  - University/College Foundation
- AVMF, community grants
- In-kind donations
  - Vaccine companies
  - Diagnostic test kits
  - Distributors

SUSTAINING THE PROGRAM

- Share success stories

- Long-term partner commitment

- Student involvement & feedback in planning

YOU CAN DO THIS

- 3 First Steps:

  1. Identify one community need

  2. Match to a course goal

  3. Add one reflection assignment

QUESTIONS & CONTACT

- Thank you!

- Questions?

- Contact:

  - Jennifer Wells, DVM

  - Email: jennifer.wells@uc.edu