



SVMAA Meeting – September 7, 2024

Meeting called: 9:38am

1. Attendees:

- Debbie Olbrich, Ann Sherwood Zieser, Holly Hovanec (18), Kristi Thorson, Jen Lorenz, Ty Vannieuwenhoven (89), Kathy Reilly (90), Brad Poff (87)
- Charity (2007), Taneka (2007) and daughter, Jeff Zuba (87), Anna Uhl (2016), Lisa Lindsmith (88), Erica, Peter Rayne and wife, Chris Olsen (94)
- Special guest Dean Jon Levine

2. History of SVMAA – Kristi Thorson

Sue Hyland initially led the charge for organizing a group of alumni for the SVM 17 years ago. The first alumni reunions began around the 20th anniversary of the school and were formal and included all classes who had graduated. With input from the alumni group, it was determined that the events should be more informal, more mixer style. The alumni group has continued to evolve from there. The SVMAA began as an advisory board and has recently evolved into an association to engage more alumni. Alumni leadership decided that any alumni who makes a gift to the SVM will become an active member of the association. Alumni have driven the growth and organization of the association and we very much look forward to its continued structure and involvement from SVM alumni veterinarians!

3. Updates over the years – Jen Lorenz

The SVMAA began as a board – often as just a group of 3 alumni meeting informally. Some of the founding communications to link alumni were to launch an alumni-focused newsletter and helped to establish the school's 'class notes' publication. The board also facilitated fundraising efforts for the SVM, communicating between the SVM and alumni to address needs and feedback from alumni. Another activity the SVMAA took on was taking nominations to acknowledge alumni in the form of Alumni Awards – for 5 years now! There are three categories: Young Alumni, Distinguished Service DVM and Distinguished Service MS/PhD. Recently, our objectives have included supporting diversity initiatives within the school, as well as bolstering the student/DVM mentorship program which was recently launched at the SVM. In the future, we would like to offer an alumni store online for SVM alumni swag! Another goal is to continue updating our webpage frequently in an effort to better define our purpose and accomplishments. We aim to collect information and feedback from alumni more frequently in the future, engaging veterinarians to become involved in the SVMAA. The primary tenet of the

SVMAA is to connect SVM alumni around the world to the SVM, and in doing so, support veterinary students and the future of our profession.

4. Alumni Survey – Summer 2024 – Ty Vannieuwenhoven

The purpose of this SVMAA survey was to gain insight into what alums know of the SVMAA, expect/want from the organization, and polling alumni perception of the SVM. There were 123 responses, fairly evenly distributed among the 35 classes (1987- 2024).

Resultant themes: management of alumni class composites, mental/financial wellness of graduates, preparation of graduates by the SVM curricula, SVMAA information gathering

- Class composites: in 2020, SVM students brought a petition to the Dean's Office to remove hung/printed class composite photos based on feelings of exclusivity based on the race composition depicted in the photos of alumni. The photos were removed from the halls of the SVM. During this time, many alumni were outspoken about their disappointment in this action. Alumni expressed their perception of this action as the SVM being ashamed of alumni. This was never the opinion of the SVM leadership. A component of the decision included that space within the school was being diminished annually as another class graduated and photos continued to be hung, and there was disgruntlement about where certain classes were displayed within the building. It is important to note that other alumni were supportive of the decision to remove the physical composites.
 - o In response to feedback from alumni the dean decided to hang the physical composite pictures of the last 5 graduating classes as well as those from the current reunion classes. The rest of the classes are portrayed on two digital screens at the entrance to the school on the 1st and 2nd floors, which are continuously displayed.
 - o The school asked alumni for their input and convened an interested group of alumni in 2020-2021 to discuss the best outcome and future plans for the photos, as well as the story of alumni and classes over time. One idea that this group harbored is to have a digital presentation of all classes with links to people and their career information – the alumni storytelling project. This initiative has lost steam in the last few years, so we are seeking involvement and engagement from alumni as the skybridge is completed – this is where the stories will be portrayed on an interactive platform! To learn more visit <https://www.vetmed.wisc.edu/alumni-storytelling-project/>.
 - o Ty highlights that there are many ways to become involved at the SVMAA as a living, breathing alumni! We acknowledge the results of the survey and will utilize the information to grow this organization.
- Wellness of graduates: financial and mental
 - o Please be involved with this initiative if you are interested. The WVMA has a mental health and wellness working group which is actively seeking ways to support Wisconsin alumni.
 - o Remember that the VPAP is a free program available 24/7 to veterinarians and their families at

https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/VeterinaryProfessionalAssistanceProgram.aspx

- Curriculum revision and learning:
 - o Alumni have been involved in the curriculum revision, but most do not fully understand the breadth of the reworking of the learning at SVM.
 - o 4 years of planning took place to plan the changes, which will be launched in fall of 2025.
- SVMAA history and purpose:
 - o We realized that there is some confusion surrounding the purpose and mission of the SVMAA. The SVMAA will devote time and resources into gaining new membership and exploring new routes of engagement from alumni.

The significance of the SVMAA is to connect alumni to the SVM. Donations and monetary support is NOT a primary goal of this group. Many gift requests come from the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association (WFAA), not specifically the SVM.

Question: how much funds go to the SVM vs the University?

- Any gift that goes to an SVM fund is 100% credited to an SVM specific fund.

Question: can people be members without donating?

- Yes. There are two options on the website: to join with or without a gift. You may enroll to participate and receive communications without contributing.
- <https://www.vetmed.wisc.edu/alumni/alumni-association/#give-and-join>

5. Open floor for alumni feedback:

- Jen comments that serving on the SVMAA board and donating time to supporting the SVM is one way to contribute without expending finances.
- Another alumna describes that she has recently moved back to Wisconsin and this group will be a great way to remain connected to the student experience and SVM.
- Our meetings are available anywhere – they are virtual.
- Class listservs: managed by Kristi, not completely up to date if email address has changed. These are used for reunion planning.
 - o Remember that other platforms can be used for classes such as Facebook groups or private email chains.
 - o There are also privacy issues with sharing contact information to classmates.
- Social media presence:
 - o This has been discussed, but has not formally been launched.
 - o A committee and formal person to monitor any accounts would likely be required.
- Should each class have a 'leader' or representative? Perhaps it would be beneficial to have a primary contact for each class.
 - o Please contact SVMAA if you would like to represent your class.
- Please reach out to us if you are interested in serving on the board and contributing to our group.

6. Dean Levine – introduction

- Dean's motivations for joining us at UW: people make the SVM great and our collaboration and appreciation of each other, as well as commitment and excellence.
 - o The SVM is student centric. The resources on campus are vast.
- Foci for this year:
 - o Listening, communicating, and accomplishing early priorities are Dean's goals.
 - o Curriculum: competency based shift – pragmatic to meet the needs of practice from day one through years in practice
 - Increased emphasis on communication, leadership, entrepreneurship
 - Integrated: the foundational sciences are intertwined with clinical activities
 - o Research enterprises: campus has granted 4 positions for research scientists
 - Positions include start up money and one focus is on AI (artificial intelligence)
 - o Building improvements: research building enhancements (Hanson building)
 - o VMTH: attracting and retaining excellent staff as well as maintaining a gold standard of care
 - Highlighting SVM community outreach: WisCARES, Dairyland Initiative, Shelter Medicine
- Comments and questions for Dean Levine:
 - o Coming from TAMU, how can we improve our alumni association: Dean Levine expresses that the association at TAMU was perhaps quieter than our group. The school there is so much bigger, but our smaller size and connectedness between departments and resources is an asset. He was not intimately involved with the organization or its workings.
 - o What are fears of the new curriculum:
 - Concern about the diminished role that foundational science will play in the curriculum – the volume of foundational science will decrease as emphasis on communication and clinical skills increases
 - There is general change resistance.
 - o How to engage recent alums or people in general?
 - We have to understand what people want and what it takes to engage them, instead of expecting them to want to be engaged
 - There may be some bitterness towards the school, with different motivations from each class. The approach to engagement and clarification will vary between people.
 - For example, early 2000s grads graduated in a recession where it was difficult to secure a job. Recent graduates experienced COVID type, disconnected learning, or were the classes right before COVID who are in the thick of career establishment or early family life.
 - o Tuition contribution from the state?
 - The SVM receives about 90% of tuition costs back into the school, but those funds do not cover nearly enough cost of educating students
 - 14% of the UW Madison budget comes from the state

- It was commented on that alumni gatherings at meetings and conventions are well done and offer a great opportunity to reconnect with other Badgers!
- Are meeting minutes captured?
 - Yes! And posted on the website.
- A future goal is to have an SVM communications audit to discern the value of emails and content, versus printed communications and what is preferred to reach people.

Thank you for joining our meeting today. Please participate in our upcoming meetings:
Future meeting dates: **October 7, December 2, 2024**

Meeting adjourned: 1122.