

Monday 10 February 2020

MEDIA RELEASE

UP's Faculty of Veterinary Sciences celebrates 100 years of animal production

PRETORIA – The University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Science on Friday celebrated a century of veterinary education in South Africa. Established by Professor Sir Arnold Theiler, a Swiss veterinarian in 1920, the first intake numbered eight students. Today it has 1 200 undergraduate and 300 postgraduate students. The Faculty's training covers all aspects of veterinary medicine, from primary animal health to advanced veterinary care. This training is boosted by work in a community clinic located in a world-class academic hospital using advanced diagnostic techniques.

According to Faculty Dean Professor Vinny Naidoo, UP's Veterinary Science faculty is the only one in South Africa that trains veterinary scientists and nurses. "Through its history – the old UP, MEDUNSA faculties and new, merged national faculty – it has trained 5 040 veterinarians and 1 170 nurses. I believe it can, with organised agriculture, become a driving force behind the South African economy in terms of animal production. Furthermore, better food production will not only result in a healthier nation, but can help build foreign reserves from trade with international partners.

"Our training also empowers our students to work in any environment they choose. We also offer some of the best clinical training in the world as a result of our large caseloads," Prof Naidoo said.

The Faculty features in the top 50 for veterinary rankings in the QS and Shanghai Global rankings, and is ranked number one in Africa. Its postgraduate syllabus includes training towards 22 different specialisations, meaning that whereas conditions such as equine colic would have been fatal in the past, they can now be easily managed in modern theatres by veterinary specialists.

Prof Naidoo explains that students and new graduates can play a role in training farmers to keep good records, follow trends in animal health, and be more proactive in vaccinating animals to prevent disease. "Many farmers keep animals as a source of wealth. Unfortunately these animals do not breed optimally, and large amounts of income can be lost from failure to produce calves for sale." Furthermore, better management of animals in winter can result in lower weight losses, which has the positive effect of more productivity in the summer months.

Prof Naidoo believes that the Faculty has helped position South Africa as a leader in the management of animal disease and vaccine development. Numerous research projects are being undertaken by master's and doctoral candidates. In addition, many vaccine development projects are being managed by UP academics. He would like to ensure that the profession is supported by cutting-edge developments in science, whether through epidemiological studies, new vaccine development, or big data science.

“Scientists need to have a better understanding of disease spread to enable control. Diseases such as the recent foot and mouth outbreak or avian influenza can wreak havoc on the economy. We need better vaccines to manage the local disease,” he said.

“We need to embrace digital technologies like the use of more cell phone-enabled technologies to monitor animal well-being. Drone technology and capture-mic technologies also offer an interesting means of monitoring animals on a farm. Currently, if you want to check your animals you need to pen them and potentially place them in a handling chute, and this can be stressful to the animal.”

The Faculty has spearheaded the advancement of specialist care of animals in the country. Prof Naidoo plans to develop the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital from tertiary to quaternary care (which is highly specialised).

UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Tawana Kupe congratulated the Faculty on its milestone. “The Faculty is helping the government address food security challenges and is filling gaps in scarce-skill careers. It produces world-class, cutting-edge research that matters, while the highly evolved skills and expertise of its wildlife vets are sought internationally.”

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Media enquiries:

Please call Prim Gower on 083 229 9011 or email Primarashni.Gower@up.ac.za

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 112-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In June 2019, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial

Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za