

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

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The University of Pretoria's [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#) recently 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.



Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science Professor Vinny Naidoo at the Faculty's centenary celebrations.

"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.



UP Vice-Chancellor Professor Tawana Kupe with students from the Faculty of Veterinary Science.

“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.”

- Author Primarashni Gower

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