INTRODUCTION

• Challenges faced by today’s graduates include obtaining business and political acumen, assessing the needs of and satisfying clients and stakeholders, keeping current in a rapidly changing profession, and focusing one’s career and balancing one’s life (Lewis & Klausner 2003).

• Delegates from Australasian veterinary schools at a recent symposium identified six broad attributes within the professional life theme: professional duty of care, effective and empathetic communication, an understanding of veterinary business management, capacity for self-management and self-identification of and compliance with ethical and professional standards and adaptability and ability to collaborate (Collins & Taylor 2002).

A template for a recommended professional studies curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success” was created and published recently. (Lloyd & Walsh 2002)

Three major constraints to the implementation of such a professional studies curriculum have been identified: faculty attitudes and skills, curricular challenges and student acceptance of such material (Lloyd & Walsh 2002).

This study details student perceptions and acceptance of a professional studies and life skills course.

OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate student perceptions of the importance of various topics covered within the professional life skills course for final year veterinary undergraduate students at UQ

2. To describe the non-technical themes involved in professional communications elements of this course via the use of principle components factor analysis

MATERIALS AND METHODS

• In 2007, VETS5011 – Practice Management and Professional Life included an intensive series of 36 one hour didactic lectures and group workshops, in addition to six hours of small group teaching involving video trigger- tapes, discussion and student role-plays.

• Students filled in a survey about their perceptions of the professional life skills course

• Student responses were analysed using SPSS 14.0 and involved descriptive statistics, correlations and principle components factor analysis

RESULTS

Student Demographics

• 85 students responded (92% response rate).

• 24% were male and 74% were female.

• The mean age and range 25 ± 3 (21 – 35) years.

• 50% of students intended to work in mixed and small animal practice, 33% intended to work in small animal and 13% large animal practice (Figure A)

Importance of specific lecture content

• 5 of the 22 lecture topics (darker blue) were acknowledged to be important by ≥ 90% of students including veterinary law, finding and applying for jobs, recent graduate tips and advice, the Veterinary Surgeons Legislation and grief and euthanasia (Table 1).

• 6 topics including the Calgary-Cambridge guide to the consultation, effective communication, the veterinary healthcare team, ethics and morality, general accounting and the human-animal bond, were recognised to be important by ≥ 80% of students

Organisation, importance and enjoyment of lecture series

• Overall 86% agreed that they enjoyed the lecture series (Figure A)

• Overall 91% agreed that material covered in the lecture series helped them to prepare for entry into the workforce (Figure D).

• Overall 94% agreed that the lecture series helped them to understand their roles and responsibilities as veterinarians (Figure C).

• Overall 87% agreed that the material covered in the lecture series was important for students in the fifth year of the program.

• Overall 93% agreed that the lecture series was well organised

Lecture Series Content Themes

• When principle component analysis was performed, seven themes emerged for the lecture content presented (Table 2).

Student feedback

• “The eclectic mix of lectures was fantastic”

• “The course was well organised and was enjoyable as a result of this, and the variety of material covered. I appreciated being taught about the different aspects of Veterinary Science that no one has covered before”

CONCLUSION

1. Final year veterinary students in Australia accepted and believe that topics covered within a professional life skills course were important for their careers

2. The themes identified will aid veterinary educators to design, structure and sequence lecture delivery within a professional life skills course

3. This study found that undergraduate students regard professional studies as an important component of a veterinary curriculum regardless of their age, gender and intended field of practice. Continued faculty support and development of this type of course is warranted.