

## Working for you: Student Education & Outreach Committee

By Scott Toppin, DVM, and Rhonda Rathgeber, DVM, PhD

Entering its second year as an AAEP standing committee, the Student Education & Outreach Committee is comprised of 16 members from diverse practice types and experience tasked with overseeing all aspects of student programming within the AAEP, sharing a positive and accurate picture of equine practice with students, and encouraging them into a career with horses.

### Strengthening knowledge and skills

Organization of the Extended Student Program at the annual convention is perhaps the most high-profile responsibility of the committee. At the 2025 annual convention in Denver, program participation expanded from the traditional 100 students to 144, thanks in part to the award of two \$500 travel stipends per school funded by The Foundation for the Horse and Altano. Program participants received hands-on training in the areas of dentistry, reproduction, wound suturing and musculoskeletal ultrasound.

The committee also engaged students throughout the year by hosting three case-based webinars on the topics of lameness/imaging, endoscopy, and colic/ultrasound. Additional webinars are planned for 2026, with topics expected to include reproduction/foals and starting a solo practice.

### Invigorating student chapters

Led by Dr. Callie Fogle, the committee created a well-received toolkit for student chapters that shares examples from successful chapters of effective operations pertaining to everything from governance and fundraising to wet lab and meeting opportunities. Each chapter has a hardcopy and a link to a digital copy, and the intent is for this to be a “living” document that is utilized and updated regularly.

Improving communication with and between student chapters has been among the committee’s focal points. In 2025, the committee hosted a pair of virtual meetings with all student chapter presidents and faculty advisors to convey goals for the year and provide a forum for discussion and feedback.

Grass-roots creation of a regional student liaison program also has bolstered inter-chapter communication. The program divides schools into regions, and the student liaisons from all schools in the region meet virtually along with a committee member to share ideas and strategies to break down barriers to entering equine practice.

### Advocating for equine practice careers

The committee continues to organize and facilitate “Why I Love Equine Practice” presentations at each school. These talks are aimed at pre-vet as well as first- and second-year students and given by an AAEP member who



*Future horse doctors expand their skills in dentistry as part of the Extended Student Program at the 2025 convention.*

shares their personal journey into equine medicine along with information gleaned from the important work of the AAEP’s Commission on Equine Veterinary Sustainability.

In addition, committee co-chair Dr. Rhonda Rathgeber led administrative outreach to the deans of several veterinary schools and the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges to discuss the challenges facing equine students and the AAEP’s recruitment and retention efforts.

Finally, the committee initiated a social media video contest among student chapters in late 2025 to showcase and celebrate the fun and meaningful aspects of equine practice. Congratulations to St. George’s University for their winning submission, which aired during the Opening Session at the annual convention and can be viewed by scanning the QR code.



### Looking ahead

The committee endeavors to expand its outreach efforts by augmenting the resources available to veterinary and pre-veterinary students on the AAEP website. This would include resources about applying to veterinary school, identification of AAEP-member veterinarians open to shadowing and mentorship, recordings of several Why I Love Equine Practice presentations, and more.

AAEP student membership is at an all-time high near 2,600. Several newly appointed committee members are also faculty advisors to their school’s student chapter, which will provide invaluable perspective moving forward.

*Drs. Toppin and Rathgeber are co-chairs of the AAEP’s Student Education & Outreach Committee.*