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# First International Feline Genetic Disease Conference

## From the Dean

**T**oo often we read reports of international comparisons showing that US school children are poor in mathematics and science. Inevitably, this sets off a national debate about the quality and dedication of science teachers in this country. It has always struck me as curious that in spite of these discouraging results public support for science in the United States is markedly greater than anywhere else. This country leads the world in the quality and magnitude of its scientific research program; our science is the envy of every other country on earth. I was therefore interested to read a recent publication by the National Science Foundation entitled *Science and Engineering Indicators, 1998*, showing that an astonishing 70% of Americans claim they are interested in science and among the adult population, understanding of science is higher than in many other countries.



Could it be that our science teachers are doing a better job than the international comparisons lead us to believe? I would like to think so and would like to see the comparisons extended to look at long term retention of scientific information by school children and young adults in different countries. However, I believe there are additional factors at work. The National Science Foundation report goes on to show that the American people are vastly more positive about the impact of science and technology than those in Europe and Japan. In these countries advances in transgenesis, the experimental modification of individual genes in plants and animals pioneered by the School's distinguished faculty, Ralph Brinster, are surrounded by suspicion and fear. The Swiss even held a referendum on whether to permit the creation of transgenic plants and animals in their country despite the fact that they have a large pharmaceutical industry and transgenic techniques are enormously valuable to medicine and agriculture.

In the United States, I believe our news media also play a role. They are replete with scandal and gloomy stories about ethnic cleansing, drug offences, abuses of

managed health care, handgun violence and so on. But in the past few years we have become accustomed to much more positive and illuminating news reports of scientific advances, crops with improved resistance to disease, the identification of genes that cause heart disease, neurologic disease or cancer, about new vaccines and about the prospects for gene therapy and improved health. By and large, Americans appear to be interested and enthused by the news of these discoveries and are increasingly supportive of the molecular biology revolution in science. This bodes well for America's leadership in research and technology and for our capacity to embrace change as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We have reason to be especially grateful for the support of an enlightened American populace for the School's research budget increased by a remarkable 40% in the academic year just ended. This is a wonderful barometer of the success of the School and it creates an environment of opportunity and discovery that energizes students and faculty alike.

Alan M. Kelly

*The Gilbert S. Kahn Dean of Veterinary Medicine*

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### First International Feline Genetic Disease Conference

More than 120 scientists from the US, Canada and Europe met at VHUP the end of June for the First International Feline Genetic Disease Conference, organized by Dr. Urs Giger, Charlotte Newton Sheppard Professor of Medicine and, chief, Section of Medical Genetics. Two days were devoted to the presentation of scientific papers on feline hereditary disorders and the feline gene map focusing on the future of feline health. The third day offered a series of presentations on the same topics for cat breeders and veterinary practitioners. This session drew more than 180 participants. The more than 70 presentations during the three days stimulated a lot of discussion and interaction between scientists, breeders and practitioners. The conference and the breeder/practitioner session were underwritten by the Ralston Purina Company and the Winn Feline Foundation.

### New Name for Center

Dean Alan Kelly announced that the School's Center for Equine Sports Medicine has been renamed the Mark and Lila Allam Center for Equine Sports Medicine in honor of former dean Dr. Mark W. Allam and his wife, Lila G. Allam. Dr. and Mrs. Allam died this spring within weeks of each other.

"Mark and Lila were an integral part of the School for many decades," said Dr. Kelly. "They were instrumental in the 'birth' of New Bolton Center and in its development. Their dedication to the idea of creating at New Bolton one of the outstanding teaching and research facilities for horses and other large animals was truly inspirational. It is fitting that their names are linked now with the School's Center for Equine Sports Medicine, an interdisciplinary center to advance equine health and fitness."