

# Shaking the Ivory Tower or “When I Think of All I Could Have Learned”

by Scott Fraser Harman

*Editor's Note:* Mr. Harmon is a second-year student in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Iowa State University. Below is a Guest Editorial submitted for publication.

Often we have a misconception of the relationship between ourselves as students and our instructors. Frequently we feel it's "us versus them", and too often it seems the instructors view things the same way. This is detrimental to the learning process. It also leads to a rift in communication between students and instructors.

The function of an instructor, however, is not to become a thorn in our flesh. The instructor, rather, is to fulfill the role of a trusted servant who leads his or her charges (that's us) down the pathway of knowledge to the place where we intelligent and hard-working students can become competent veterinarians. The fact that few of us stray from this path is testimony to the abilities of instructors to keep our goal in mind. It may even be that the success of these "institutions of higher learning" which we attend may be due to the instructors spending many long hours in their ivory towers gazing out over the pathway of knowledge looking for potholes to fix and detours to avoid so we can work unhindered (unhindered, at least, by the teacher).

Once in a while, however, an instructor chooses a wayward course, loses sight of the goal, and leads his beloved charges into a swamp, and, alas, loses some of us completely—some disappear into the mire and aren't found for almost a whole year. (Sometimes a student gets lost without such help, but that's another matter altogether.) This instructor has seen a different goal from on high: he or she has ceased from looking to aid us to our proper end, but instead has seized upon some other target to pursue. At times like these, we students need to consider the

swamp we are in and work toward getting up onto the straight and level pathway we were on before. We need to think about shaking the ivory tower of our misguiding mentor and setting things right again, so those who follow us can keep out of that particular swamp and learn something more than avoiding alligators.

We need to remind our beloved but misbehaving servant about his or her responsibilities and so help them do what we're paying them to do. But lo! How shall we do this? For we are but poor (in more than one sense) ignorant students and can not hope to give advice to our teachers. Can we do nothing but entrust our brains to these people and let our precious gray matter get dropped, squashed, cooked (Do you prefer your brains boiled, or would you rather have them fried?), sliced, or put in jars of formalin and forgotten?

No! Let us not suffer such depravities in silence! Let us tell these miscreants of our displeasure, kindly and courteously, but tell them nonetheless. But what can we say to them? That the swamp stinks to high Heaven? Perhaps, but change probably won't be accomplished by scornful abuse, even if it does feel good at the moment. The probability of change will increase if we are gentle and firm with our remonstrances and can make constructive comments. We should courteously and carefully remind the instructors that they need to consider three questions when preparing to teach a course.

First, what exactly does the instructor want the students to learn? This is called "teaching by objective." An objective is a very precise statement of what the instructor wants us to know. The statement "The dog has a single-compartmented stomach" is precise and to the point. However, "Know about digestion" is too general to be of use. Using objectives

leads to several good things: Organized, coherent lectures; prepared printed notes we can use (Are you tired of playing stenographer?); a sense of purpose and direction in the course; easily understood exam questions.

Second, how well does the instructor want the students to learn the material? If the objectives of a course are clear and precise, then there should be no need to engender competition among students by grading on a curve. True, a grading scale should be allowed to slide around a little bit just in case there occurs a "bad exam" (but of course these don't happen very often). We should be able to figure out how much work we need to put into a course in order to meet the instructor's standards without having to consider how our class-

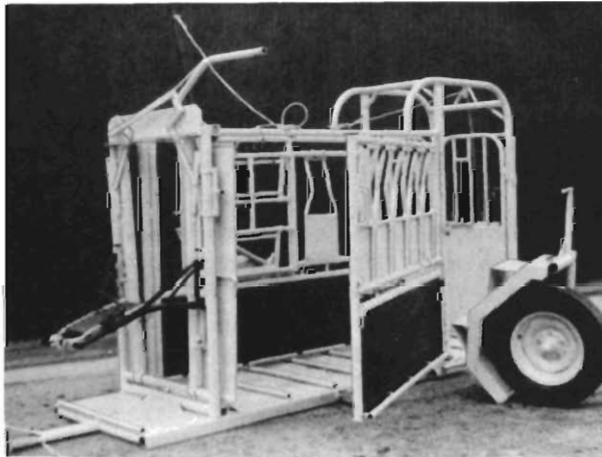
mates are performing.

Third, is the material the instructor teaches necessary to help make us into competent veterinarians? After all, we are not becoming scientists, not yet anyway. It should be possible to learn fewer facts well, instead of lots of stuff poorly.

Mind you, in dealing with these adventurous teachers who have us gallivanting around their own favorite bit of swamp, be courteous. We don't need to be abusive, even if we feel that violence has been done to us. We can still shake things up quite a bit without making enemies. After all, someday (and here I repress a shudder) some of these servants of ours will be our colleagues.



## MODEL 300 SUPER CHUTE



Designed and built for professionals. •Ease of operation and safety for both the operator and the critter. •New extra heavy wide opening, front exit head gate. •Side opening for exit. •Removeable wheels and fenders. •Palp cage with arched entry, welded to chute - doors swing in or out. •Heavy-duty floor, axle and tongue. •Choice of head table or hose bar assembly. •Removeable lower panels. •Available with right or left hand controls. •Stationary model available.

**FOR-MOST INC.**, Box 322 Hawarden, Iowa 51023  
Phone: 712-552-1438