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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Success in Grateful Client Philanthropy: Insights from Veterinary Faculty at North Carolina State University

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ABSTRACT:

The veterinary literature contains few publications or empiric research on the impact of grateful client philanthropy. To improve our understanding of the impact of philanthropy on veterinary medicine, we surveyed the faculty at NC State University College of Veterinary Medicine. This qualitative study involved an anonymous survey of 153 North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine faculty members administered and analyzed through an online survey software program, QualitrixXM™. 33% (51) of faculty responded to the survey. 73% (37) of the respondents indicated that their personal interactions with clients led to gifts to their research or service and 29% (15) indicated that they have received six or more gifts from their interactions with clients of the hospital. The top three examples of direct beneficial impacts from grateful client giving were research support (13.1%), technological improvements and equipment upgrades (10.5%), and professional development (4.6%). The top three negative impacts of faculty interactions with a grateful client program were the perceived need to address the overwhelming needs of the donor (19%), the faculty's concerns regarding the owner's higher expectations of service (7.1%) and time (7.1%). 61.9% of the respondents did not note any negative impacts. Top three responses to donor inquiries regarding philanthropic giving were to direct the client to a development officer (76%), discuss gift opportunities with the client (45.1%), and discuss individual research needs and opportunities (19.1%). Overall, faculty reported positive impact with grateful patient philanthropy. Continued development and understanding of the philanthropic process is recommended to maximize donor support of academic medical efforts.

Keywords: grateful client; philanthropy; fundraising; faculty; veterinary medicine

1. Introduction

Grateful client philanthropy is defined as philanthropic donations that are made in recognition of excellent medical care received by grateful clients and their animals.¹⁻⁷ Within veterinary colleges, these programs are increasingly seen as a reliable source of funding especially in the advent of increasingly difficult economic conditions, declining clinical revenues and reduced research budgets.^{1, 2, 6, 8-10} Furthermore, the role of veterinary faculty in a successful grateful client program cannot be understated.⁶ When clients develop strong relationships with the veterinary faculty, staff, and students, they can become profoundly invested in hospital programs and needs, its people and research.

To improve our understanding of the impact of philanthropy on academic veterinary medicine, we surveyed the faculty at NC State University College of Veterinary Medicine (NC State CVM) regarding their attitudes towards grateful client philanthropy and its role in supporting education, research and veterinary care. This article aims to characterize and describe faculty perspectives about grateful client philanthropy and its impact in veterinary medicine.

2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative study involved an anonymous voluntary survey of 153 NC State CVM faculty members administered and analyzed through an online survey software program, QualitrixXM™. All faculty members received an email invitation to participate in the survey. The results were confidential and the investigators were not aware of the identity of faculty participants. Demographic data (i.e., gender, department, academic rank, years of employment, area of specialization) and key personal experiences with philanthropic giving were recorded. An Institutional Review Board at NC State University approved the study and informed consent was obtained from all subjects prior to initiating the survey.

3. Results

3.1. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

33% (51) of faculty responded to the survey. Faculty from all three academic departments (Clinical Science (64%), Molecular Biological Science (21.6%) and Population Health and Pathobiology (13.7%) and all academic ranks (Professor (49%), Associate Professor (25.5%), and Assistant Professor (25.5%)) completed the survey. 23 (45.1%) and 27 (52.9%) of the respondents were women and men, respectively. The years of employment were distributed over 25 years with faculty from 15 specialty services (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic data of the Faculty Surveyed (N = 51).

Demographic Category	Variable	N (%)
Gender	Women	23
	Men	(45.1) 27 (52.9)
Academic Rank	Professor	25
	Associate Professor	(49.0)
	Assistant Professor	13 (25.5) 13 (25.5)
Academic Appointment	Clinical	7 (13.7)
	Research	1 (2.0)
	Tenure	42
	Not Specified	(82.4) 1 (2.0)
Employment Years	1-5	7 (13.7)
	6-10	3 (5.9)
	11-15	15
	16-20	(29.4)
	21-25	6 (11.8)
>25	9 (17.6) 11 (21.6)	

Demographic Category	Variable	N (%)
Department	Clinical Sciences	33
	Molecular Biological Sciences	(64.7)
	Population Health and Pathobiology	11
		(21.6)
		7 (13.7)
Specialty	Anesthesia	1 (2.0)
	Basic Sciences ¹	6 (11.8)
	Cardiology	3 (5.9)
	Dermatology	1 (2.0)
	Emergency and Critical Care	1 (2.0)
	Equine Internal Medicine	1 (2.0)
	Equine Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine	1 (2.0)
	Equine Soft Tissue Surgery	1 (2.0)
	Exotic Animal Medicine	3 (5.9)
	Small Animal Internal Medicine	7 (13.7)
	Medical Oncology	2 (3.9)
	Neurology	1 (2.0)
	Nutrition	1 (2.0)
	Ophthalmology	4 (7.8)
	Small Animal Orthopedic Surgery	2 (3.9)
	Pathology	1 (2.0)
	Soft Tissue Surgery	1 (2.0)
	Swine Health	1 (2.0)
	Radiation Oncology	2 (3.9)
	Radiology	2 (3.9)
Ruminant Health	3 (5.9)	
Other ²	6 (11.8)	

¹Pharmacology, Physiology, Toxicology, Microbiology, etc.

²Molecular epidemiology, Theriogenology, Wildlife and Exotics, and Zoological Medicine

3.2. KEY PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH PHILANTHROPIC GIVING

72.5% (37/51) of the faculty report interactions with a donor that led to a gift being given to either themselves or their service and 29% of the faculty

indicated that their donor interactions led to 6 or more gifts (Figure 1). Common benefits mentioned by faculty were improvement of resources and unrestricted funds for research support (Table 2).

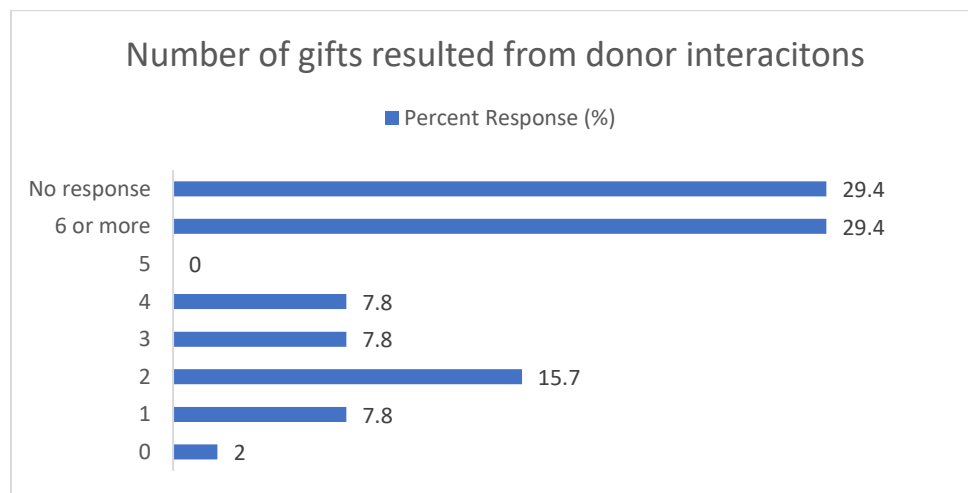


Figure 1. Number of gifts resulting from donor interactions (N = 51)

Table 2. Beneficial Impacts of Philanthropic Giving (N = 37)

Summary of Faculty Comments	Times Mentioned/Frequency	Percent of Responses (n = 37)	Percent of Faculty (N= 153)
Technological improvements, equipment upgrades, purchase of equipment/laboratory supplies	16	43.5	10.5
Research support, unrestricted research funds	11	29.7	7.2
Financial support for research	9	24.3	5.9
Travel for professional meetings, student/resident travel	7	18.9	4.6
Renovation of work spaces	5	13.5	3.3
Scholarship funding for students	5	13.5	3.3
Training of resident/fellows	4	10.8	2.6
Salary/personnel support	2	5.4	1.3

3.3. IMPACT OF A PHILANTHROPIC GIVING ON FACULTY

3.3.1. Select thematic examples of what our faculty thought about the direct beneficial impacts that philanthropic giving has had on their service or themselves are presented verbatim below.

- Without philanthropy my efforts at the CVM would have been greatly curtailed. Individual donations and a generous endowment have allowed me to pursue research and teaching efforts that would not have been possible otherwise.
- Opportunity to purchase equipment or build space that would not have otherwise available.
- The White Coat of Excellence directly benefits the individual faculty and service. We have

used the service monies to pay for resident recruitment, travel clinical initiatives.

- Academic freedom – the ability to pursue research that might be risky or develop a new idea that wouldn't likely get attention through intramural or extramural funding...flexibility to have funds without the time-consuming process of grant writing.
- Development of personal relationships with donors.

3.4. PERCEIVED NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF PHILANTHROPIC GIVING.

61.9% (26/42) faculty did not perceive any negative impacts on their service or themselves. The remainder of the faculty mentioned the negative impact of the time commitment in the service of the donor's needs (Table 3).

Table 3. Negative Impacts of Philanthropic Giving (N = 42).

Summary of Faculty Comments	Times Mentioned/Frequency	Percent of Responses (n = 42)	Percent of Faculty (N = 153)
No negative impacts	26	61.9	17.0
Needs of donors can be overwhelming; donors require a lot of extra attention; donors have higher expectations	8	19.0	5.2
Donors require a time commitment	3	7.1	2.0
Perception that donors receive higher quality of care	3	7.1	2.0
Clients complain about the phone campaign for fundraising	2	4.8	1.3
Resentment from coworker	1	2.4	0.7

3.4.1. Select thematic examples of the perceived negative impacts that philanthropic giving has had on their service or themselves are presented below.

- My donors have required lots of personal interaction, which at time could be overwhelming.
- The perception that clients who are labeled as “VIP” might get more attention or better care than “normal” clients. I don’t think this is true, but the perception is likely there.
- More wasted time for those who suggest they might be interested in donating but then do not.

- Concerns and stress wondering how to interact and keep the relationship going.

3.5. COMMON FACULTY RESPONSES WHEN A CLIENT ASKES ABOUT WAYS TO SUPPORT.

The most common faculty response to the question, “How do you respond when a client asks about ways to support either your laboratory, the hospital, or your service area, students or trainees, of the CVM?” was to direct the client to a development officer for more informaton (76.6%) or to directly discuss gift opportunities with the client (45.1%) (Figure 2). Other miscellaneous responses (11.8%) included directing the client to various websites, department heads or a professed uncertainty of how to respond (5.9%).

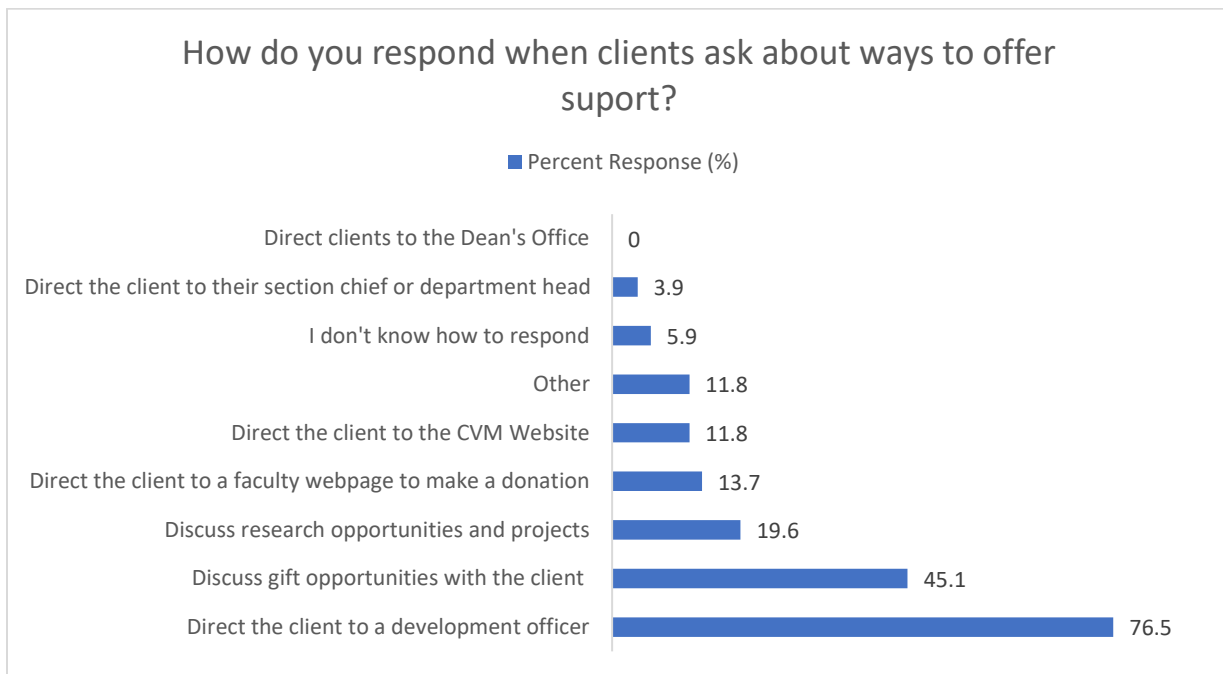


Figure 2. Faculty responses when a client asks about ways to support (N = 51).

3.6. FACULTY PERCEPTION OF THE MOST COMMON AREAS OF SUPPORT FROM PHILANTHROPIC GIVING

Approximately 80% of the faculty identified four areas of support: Student scholarshps (86.3%),

small animal specialty hospital (84.3%), equipment purchases (82.4%) and research (78.4%) (Figure 3). Other areas of support are detailed in Figure 3.

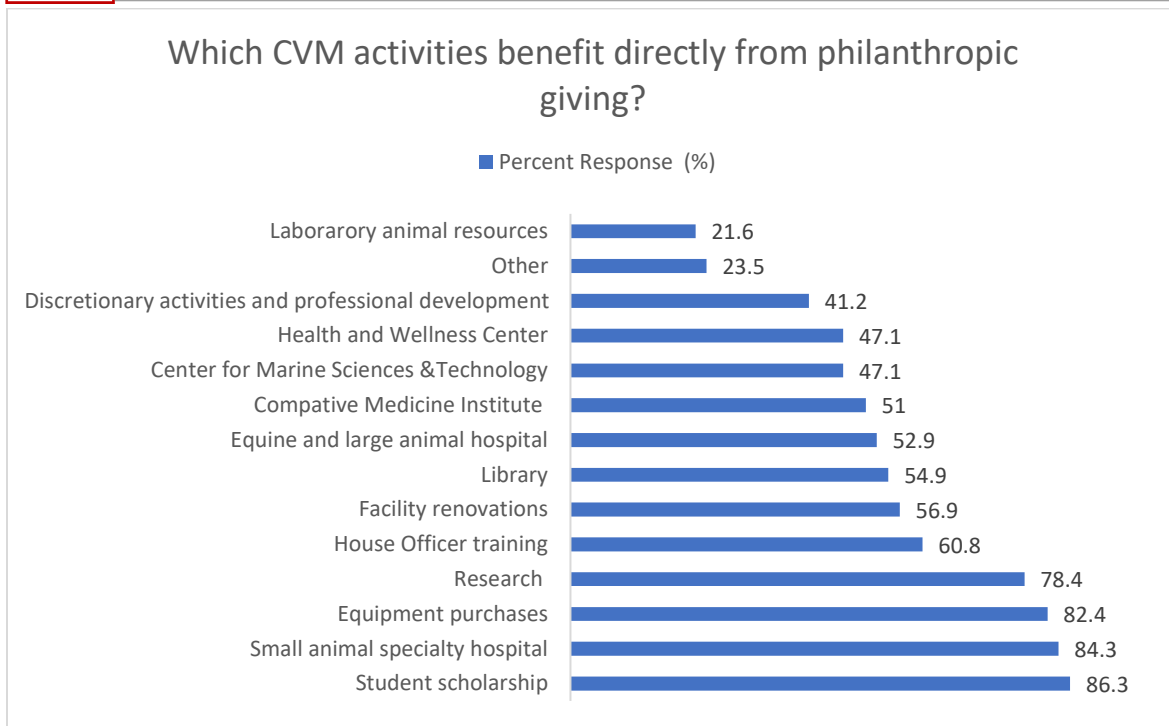


Figure 3. Faculty response to the question, “Which CVM Activities benefit directly from philanthropic giving?” (N = 51).

3.7. REPORTED COMFORT LEVEL OF FACULTY WITH DISCUSSIONS RELATED TO PHILANTHROPIC GIVING.

Approximately 59% of the faculty reported feeling moderately to extremely comfortable having discussions regarding philanthropy with clients,

9.8% feeling slightly comfortable, 21.0% neutral and approximately 10% of faculty reported feeling uncomfortable (slightly to extremely uncomfortable). The reported full distribution of comfort may be found in the Figure 4.

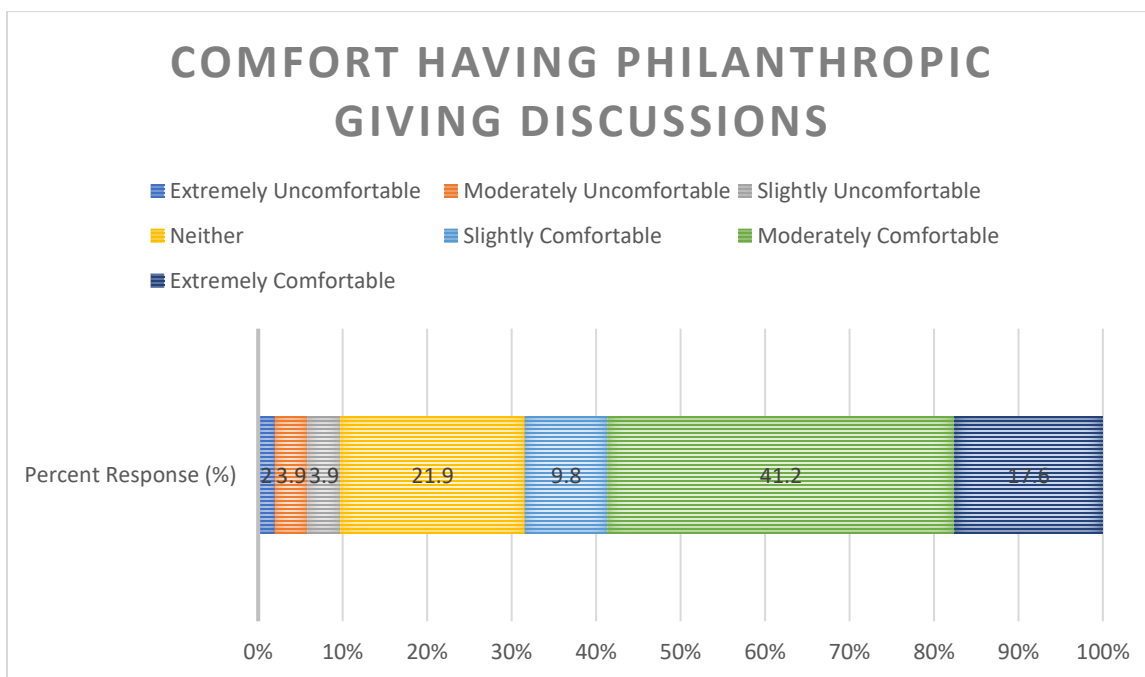


Figure 4. Faculty response to the questions, “How comfortable are you with discussions related to philanthropic giving related to CVM activities?” (N = 51).

4. Discussion

Increasingly, grateful client philanthropy is reported as an important source of funds for innovative research, new technology/equipment and professional training/development.^{7, 17} Within human literature, there is a growing body of literature that demonstrates the importance of training physicians on ways to discuss donations with patients and donors and developing responses ready for when a client queries “How can I support your work?”^{1, 8, 17} In the present survey, a majority of veterinary faculty reported one or more positive philanthropic gifts arising from the College’s Grateful Client Program. Our survey revealed that the majority of faculty felt comfortable discussing philanthropic needs of the college, their service, or program. Furthermore, most faculty recognized the need to either direct clients to the college development office or discuss gift opportunities directly with their client. Given the current lack of formal faculty training programs in philanthropic giving this survey results suggest that NC State University College of Veterinary Medicine faculty have an inherent understanding of the need for client engagement to foster grateful philanthropy. This finding may be influenced by positive prior individual faculty experiences with client philanthropy. An important limitation of the current study is that faculty with little to no experience with philanthropic giving may be under represented in the survey. Future efforts to formalize philanthropy training academy for faculty are under consideration by the leadership of the College.

Several common areas of philanthropic giving were repetitively identified by faculty including student scholarships, hospital programs, equipment purchases, and support of research. These responses provide development officers with an improved understanding of faculty preferences and help define strategic goals for future development. Future efforts to formalize philanthropy training for faculty are under consideration by the leadership of the College.

Finally, the majority of faculty did not report negative impacts when working with the grateful client philanthropic program. However, it should be noted that the needs and expectations of donors still require time and can seem overwhelming for faculty in their day-to-day work on behalf of the

College. In our experience, working closely with a development officer will help alleviate some of these concerns as it is our natural role to pay attention to the client’s needs outside of the medical arena.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, this study relied entirely on self-reported experiences and perceptions, which may be exaggerated or subject to bias. Second, this study is largely qualitative in nature and is limited to one institution. Other institutions may have different faculty experiences and perceptions of grateful client philanthropy and therefore the findings may not apply. However, studies in the human literature have reported similar positive findings related to philanthropy but have hypothesized on the possibility that some institutions may be more or less “philanthropically friendly” or have variable levels of philanthropic cultures of acceptance.⁷

5. Conclusion

The results of this survey show that the majority of veterinary faculty at our institution feel comfortable engaging clients and have seen benefits from grateful client philanthropy. As the critical interface for grateful client philanthropy rests with the clinicians, our conclusion is that future training may yield further benefit and positive interaction with prospective grateful client donors.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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