The Romans knew it. “Practice is the best of all instructors” wrote Publilius Syrus in the first century B.C., and today, the advantage of hands-on learning is no more evident anywhere than in the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department at the University of Minnesota, Crookston. Students in equine science and animal science are given opportunities to practice what they learn in the classroom. They are engaged in real-life work experiences that will benefit them in whatever they choose to do once they graduate.

Ron Del Vecchio, Ph.D., professor and head of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department on the Crookston campus is proud of his students and of the programs his department offers, “We focus on hands-on learning and strong academic rigor in the classroom. I believe it makes our program attractive to students and gives them a competitive edge.”

One of the graduates Del Vecchio is referring to is Tony Dank, ’10, who is currently attending graduate school at the University of Missouri in Columbia. When Dank graduated he had already been accepted into several veterinary programs, but he chose Missouri because he liked the fact that they spend more time engaged in learning in the field—something Dank came to appreciate as a student at the U of M, Crookston. “I have had opportunities ranging from throwing bales with the head of the department to conducting an ultrasound on a cow and everything in between,” Dank smiles.

He didn’t graduate from high school in Sartell, Minn., with becoming a vet in mind. “I thought I would go into teaching and attended Bemidji State University with a degree in education as my goal,” Dank recalls. “After my first year, I began to contemplate a
change either working or entering the military.” Dank enjoyed working with his family’s horses so before making a decision, he looked for an equine program. His attention was drawn to the one available on the Crookston campus. After transferring, Dank decided to incorporate an additional degree in animal science.

“I thought when I started in Crookston I would take every equine science class I could and eventually work in the horse industry,” he explains. “It turned out I took every animal science class I possibly could.” Dank had definitely found his calling.

While on campus, he gained working experience in the meat-animal barn, the horse barn, and the dairy barn. He also availed himself of the many organizations and clubs on campus serving as president of both the Horsemans’s Association and the Dairy Club. He was also vice president of Ag Arama and belonged to both the Animal Science Club and the Pre-Vet Club as well.

As a teaching assistant for ADawn Melbye, instructor in the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, Dank helped coordinate Ag and Natural Resources Day, and the following year, he managed the dairy show part of the competition on his own. These experiences along with his work in the classroom and the lab have provided him a wealth of experience preparing him to pursue an advanced degree. One day, Dank sees himself in a veterinary practice focusing primarily on large animals.

“Tony is one of the most outstanding students I have had an opportunity to work with,” Del Vecchio claims. “He possesses all the qualities necessary to serve him well in his professional career. Not only is he intelligent, he has a solid work ethic and is a great young man.”

For students interested in veterinary medicine, the U of M, Crookston provides varied experience and a solid foundation in preparation for graduate school or a career. Dank values the opportunities afforded him and will take the experience and education with him.

“What I learned as an undergraduate prepared me well,” he reflects. “I am taking my learning and experience with me to Missouri, and looking forward to the challenges ahead.”