



American Association of
Veterinary Medical Colleges

ADVISING THE PRE-VETERINARY STUDENT:
**HEALTH PROFESSIONS
ADVISOR GUIDE**



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ADVISING THE PRE-VETERINARY STUDENT: HEALTH PROFESSIONS ADVISOR GUIDE



I. INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) recognizes the role advisors play in supporting, motivating, nurturing, and guiding health professions applicants through the preparation and application process. We want to provide advisors with tools and resources to help them advise students to be well-prepared and successful veterinary school applicants. It is critical that the veterinary workforce reflects a diverse society, and advisors are in a pivotal role to help encourage and support students from underrepresented and minority populations apply to veterinary school.

This guide to advising Pre-Veterinary students is for individuals who advise for the health professions. The guide provides easy-to-read information so you can accurately discuss career opportunities in veterinary medicine and the process for applying. The guide includes information about prerequisite coursework, experiential preparation, the Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS), broaching sensitive topics, career options and much more.

Thank you for helping Pre-Veterinary students reach their dreams of becoming a veterinarian!

II. DO I EVEN WANT TO GO TO VETERINARY SCHOOL?

When meeting with students who have yet to decide what health profession they wish to pursue and even for students who have chosen veterinary medicine is the path they want to take, here are some things to consider discussing. Ask the question, “Do you love animals, science, and people?”

Do you love:

Animals

Love of animals is great, but if your student only states they love animals, this is the opportunity to pivot the discussion and address the other significant areas encompassing veterinary medicine. See below.

Science

Students should have a love and interest in science as veterinary school involves four years of strenuous science and practice-based curriculum. Veterinarians are doctors and stewards of science, research, and continued education.

People

Students should understand that veterinary medicine is more like 80% people and 20% animals. Veterinarians interact with clients, technicians, support staff, other veterinarians, the public, and more.

If your student can answer yes to loving science and liking people, you can talk veterinary school. And of course, a healthy love of animals is helpful.

TIP: It is important to note that veterinary medicine is for students who understand the realities of the profession, including student mental health and wellness, student debt, veterinary salary, and understanding that you cannot save every animal (this can be one of the hardest things to learn).

III. CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTING SCHOOLS: CLIMATE, CULTURE AND COST

Veterinary schools/colleges both in the US and internationally, are accredited by the [AVMA Council on Education \(COE\)](#). The COE reports to the US Department of Education. In order to be licensed in the US, you must graduate from a COE-accredited veterinary school. There are currently 33 accredited veterinary schools in the US, (Figure 1). 5 accredited Canadian schools, and 16 COE-accredited international veterinary schools (Figure 2). Many of the US veterinary schools are state-funded; therefore, they give priority to in-state residents. For states that do not have a veterinary school, there may be contract veterinary schools that will accept a certain number of students from those states, except New Jersey, which currently does not have any contracted schools. Students may want to take in-state versus out-of-state residency (contract if applies) into account when choosing where to apply. Importantly, tuition costs are generally less for in-state residents and sometimes also for contract-state students. It's important to remember that schools vary with regard to granting contract students in-state or out-of-state tuition. Tuition costs, and number of students each school accepts, including state-residents, contract and out-of-state students are summarized on the general information table available on the Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements website: <https://applytovetschool.org>. The general information table is updated each year, so be sure to check the [website](#) for annual updates. Any student can apply to any vet school as a non-resident/out-of-state student provided they meet the school's requirements.

The climate/location is one of the first things to consider when selecting where to apply. As mentioned earlier, state residency or contract-state residency can impact priority consideration. But there are considerations related to climate/location to consider, such as where you want to go to school, where you see yourself practicing and whether you want to go to school in the US or abroad. Other things the student may want to think about: is there airport access, is the school close to family, and is there something there for their significant other. Additionally, applicants should consider the cost of living at the various schools where they are thinking of completing the DVM program. For example, tuition at one school may be higher than tuition at another school but the cost of living may be less at the higher-tuition school versus the lower tuition school. Look for cost-of-living calculators, such as <https://www.nerdwallet.com/cost-of-living-calculator>.

The culture at each veterinary school will vary. This growing diversity of the profession may impact the culture of a school. It's important for students to investigate the educational environment of each school. For example, how are classes

Figure 1. US Veterinary Schools



Figure 2. Foreign Veterinary Schools



taught – block style, problem-based learning versus traditional lecture. What types of hands-on experiences are available to the veterinary students and when (first year vs. other years)? What student support systems are in place, such as tutors, career advisors and mental health support? Does a student have specific programmatic interests that may be featured at some schools but not others (e.g., exotics, marine, zoo animal medicine, research, dual-degree programs)? Rest assured that at all veterinary schools you can learn about general small animal, equine, and food animal medicine (cows, sheep, goats), but some schools may have larger caseloads for equine or food animals.

Then there is the BIG C – Cost. As mentioned earlier, state residency or contract residency often cost less than out-of-state residency. Interesting, a handful of schools allow for you to obtain residency after your first year of school (North Carolina State University, Ohio State University, University of California - Davis, University of Illinois, University of Minnesota, University

of Missouri, and Washington State University). The student should inquire about this before applying to the school, so they understand the requirements for state residency and the process involved. Some schools offer scholarships and financial aid, but students will need to inquire with each veterinary school what options they offer. In addition to tuition, students need to consider cost-of-living and "other expenses" (e.g., pets, car, renter's insurance) when evaluating the total costs between veterinary schools. The AAVMC and the VIN Foundation both have resources to assist students in evaluating overall veterinary school costs:

- <https://www.aavmc.org/becoming-a-veterinarian/funding-your-degree/cost-comparison-tool/>
- <https://vetschoolbound.org/>

So how many schools should a student apply to? That depends on the applicant, their interests and the 3 C's. In general, most students apply to 1-5 schools. It's fine to only apply to the student's one state school, if that is all that will work for them (often financially). If the student is applying as a contract-state student, then consider applying to at least one other school. All schools accept out-of-state students, but the number varies with each school with some as low as 20% and some as high as 70%. Remember that it costs money to apply to each school for both VMCAS fees as well as supplemental application fees. If they have no intention of attending a school, then they should not apply there.

TIP: Applying to veterinary school is different from applying to undergrad or medical school. Unlike medical school where many applicants apply to around 25 schools, this is not necessary for veterinary schools.

Figure 3. Applytovetschool.org

The screenshot displays the Applytovetschool.org website interface. At the top, there are navigation options for "General Info Chart" and "Prerequisite Chart". Below this is a "Directory" section with a search bar and sorting options. The main content area lists three schools: Atlantic Veterinary College at the University of Prince Edward Island, Auburn University, and Colorado State University. Each school entry includes its logo, location, and a set of comparison criteria: VMCAS Application, Council of Education Accredited, Allows to Establish Residency, Bachelor's Degree Required, Interview Required, GRE Required, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs. A prominent orange callout box on the right side of the page points to the "AAVMC Cost Comparison Tool". The footer includes the copyright notice "© 2021 AAVMC".

The Veterinary Medical School Admissions Requirement website (applytovetschool.org) (Figure 3) is a newer resource provided by AAVMC. It has all kinds of useful information about all veterinary schools, both US and international. It has filters so you can sort the schools, for example by those that still require the GRE. Figure 3 is a screen shot of the website showing the two tabs that provide links to the general information chart and the prerequisite courses chart. You need to register the first time you go to the website, but there is no cost for using it. Registration just helps the AAVMC understand who is using the website. Check it out!

TIP: As an advisor take the time to explore the Veterinary Medical School Admissions Requirement (VMSAR) website (applytovetschool.org) so you can guide your students.

IV. PREREQUISITE COURSEWORK

Each veterinary school has their own mix of required coursework. However, virtually all veterinary schools require introductory biology, introductory chemistry, organic chemistry, physics, and biochemistry. Other courses that some schools require are microbiology, physiology, genetics, animal nutrition and medical terminology. It's important to consult each school's website for specific details about required coursework. Also, each school will provide information how they equate quarter credits or units to semester credits. Students can take classes at community colleges or standard 2- or 4-year colleges/universities. Most veterinary schools will accept AP credits as long as they were accepted by the college and listed on the student's college transcript. One exception is some veterinary schools do not accept AP credit for English courses. Please refer to Table 1 Guide to Prerequisite Coursework for a summary of pre-veterinary prerequisite coursework. Given many pre-health advisors are most familiar with medical school advising, the table includes pre-med coursework as a point of comparison.

Please refer to the [AAVMC Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements \(VMSAR\) website](#), for the most up-to-date information. Each school has their own entry with specific details, and you will find a course prerequisites summary.

TIP: Help students create a coursework plan that works for the majority of the schools that focus on their interests.

GPA

There are many types of GPAs calculated for veterinary school admissions. Below we will review them.

Table 1. Guide to Prerequisite Coursework

Medical School Prerequisites/ Recommendations	Veterinary School Prerequisites
Math/Calculus	Most vet schools
Statistics	Most vet schools
General Chemistry (2 semesters)	All vet schools
Organic Chemistry (2 semesters)	All vet schools
Biochemistry	All vet schools
Physics (2 semesters)	All vet schools
Biology (2 intro plus physiology – at least 2 lab courses)	Most want 2 semesters intro Bio. Multiple schools require Physiology but not all.
Psychology	Humanities/Social science electives
Sociology	Humanities/Social science electives
English (writing)	All vet schools
	Other courses: Genetics, Microbiology, Public Speaking, Animal Nutrition, Medical Terminology,
MCAT	Only a few schools still require GRE. Many have phased it out.

What makes up your GPA?

- Prerequisite coursework
 - [Applicants should become familiar with the different GPA calculations in the VMCAS application](#)
 - [VMCAS GPA Calculator](#)
- Other upper-level college classes (300 level or higher)
- Science courses (Science GPA – BCPM – biology, chemistry, physics, and math)
- “Last 45 hours”

GPA may help you “get your foot in the door” for meeting minimum GPA requirement, but what will admissions committees see on your transcript?

- Challenge yourself, when possible, with a rigorous course load
- If during college you face other challenges (e.g., working part-time while going to school, family hardship, medical

issues), it's important that you share this information with the admissions committees through the VMCAS explanation box that is in the Personal Information section of VMCAS.

Remember AP courses don't count in the student's GPA but may satisfy a prerequisite depending on the school.

Does Your Major Matter

The simple answer is NO, but-

- Some majors make the transition to veterinary school easier (e.g., biology or animal science)
- Choosing a non-traditional major (e.g., psychology, engineering [BME, ME], journalism) can add to the diversity of the candidate
 - Remember with this route to try to complete the prerequisite coursed with high marks

When choosing courses outside of prerequisites and major requirements, consider courses outside of "science": public speaking (required by some schools), interpersonal communication, stress & anxiety management, which can all help with the social side of veterinary medicine.

- **REMEMBER** – Life experience and opportunities in undergraduate school are extremely important to admissions committees

Table 2 can be used as a guide for choosing a degree plan.

GRE

- Many schools have dropped the GRE requirement. Currently, only 6 US veterinary schools still require the GRE to be considered for admissions. On the <https://applytovetschool.org> website you can easily filter and find the schools that require the GRE.
- Double check with each school for each application cycle and clarify by when testing needs to be completed.
- See if schools superscore (i.e. some programs will accept the highest score from each section).
- Ask how important the standardized test is to the admissions process. This can impact how you prepare and spend your money on these tests.
- Some schools have dropped the GRE but added Casper testing. Please see the section later in this guide about Casper.

Table 2. Choosing a Degree Plan

Degree Plan	PRO	CON
Non-degree seeking	Inexpensive, great for non-traditional students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially can't take upper-level/ prerequisite courses • Won't have a degree
AA/AS	Inexpensive, can transfer to a university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less options for upper-level science courses • Less opportunities for extracurricular activities
Bachelor's Degree *RECOMMENDED*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn a 4-year college degree • Opportunities for upper-level course and extracurricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take courses you don't need to get into vet school • Not required for vet school • **Note: some international schools waive prerequisite requirements if an applicant has a bachelor's degree**
Master's Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research experience • Mentoring • Boost GPA • Hold Master's status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes more time and money • Not required for vet school
PhD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research experience • Mentoring • Boost GPA Publications • Hold doctoral status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes considerably more time and money • Not required for vet school

V. EXPERIENTIAL PREPARATION AND CORE COMPETENCIES

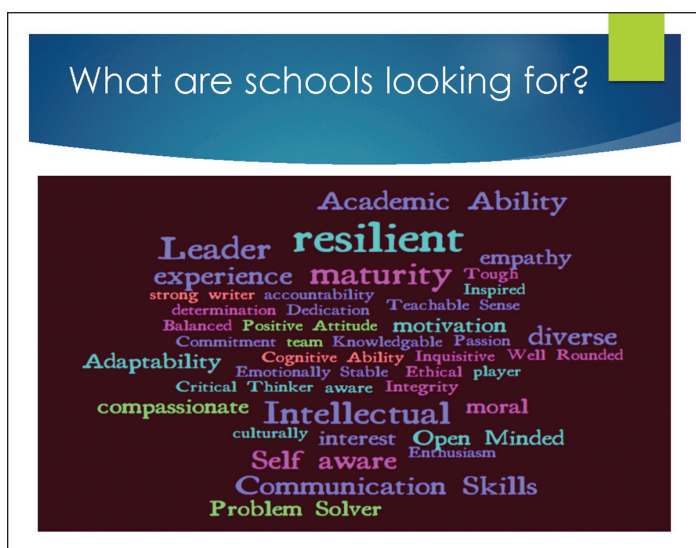
Experiential preparation is one of the key areas of preparation for any professional school, especially veterinary school. Similar to many other health profession preparations, students need veterinary experience hours where they shadow a veterinary and obtain clinical exposure. These types of experiences can be volunteer or paid, either is acceptable. The key concept is that the students are able to articulate how the experience helped shaped their understanding of the profession by description of experience and level of duties and what they will bring to the profession from this experience. This is where the idea of **Core Competencies/Veterinary Attributes** concepts come into play (see Figure 4).

It is important to demonstrate how the experience helped shaped the student's understanding of the profession by description of experience and level of duties and incorporate how they developed veterinary attributes/competencies (See Figure 4) through the experience.

TIP: Quality experiences & mentorship is key

Note: Advisors may be familiar with AAMC Core Competencies, <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/med-schools-looking-for-15-competencies/>. Veterinary Attributes were developed along the same lines, but not yet as formalized.

Figure 4. Veterinary Attributes



It is important to encourage students to think about the core competencies/veterinary attributes when they are reflecting on their experiences and incorporate them in what they write regarding their experiences.

Students need to obtain both veterinary hours/veterinary experience, where they shadow and work under the supervision of a veterinarian (DVM), and animal hours/experience where they learn about animal care/husbandry. Animal hours/experience can include animal showing, volunteering in an animal shelter or with animal rescue group, caring for production animals but not pet ownership. Both types of experience are important parts of the application process, but veterinary hours/experience should be the student's top priority. Generally, students only need about 100 animal experience hours vs. 200+ veterinary experience hours. Table 3 highlights examples of different types of experiences a student can obtain.

Table 3: Veterinary School Preparation

Veterinary Experience
DVM Shadowing/Volunteer/Intern/paid Clinical exposure (3 species)
Community service not required but an added plus (e.g., equine therapy for the mentally or physically disabled)
Not required but definitely an added plus. Animal-based research not required; any form of research is important
Number of veterinary hours varies among schools from an average of 200 hours or more (check each schools requirement).
Other: Animal experience (100 hrs.)

VMCAS Experiential Categories

The VMCAS has students categorize each of their experiences as follows:

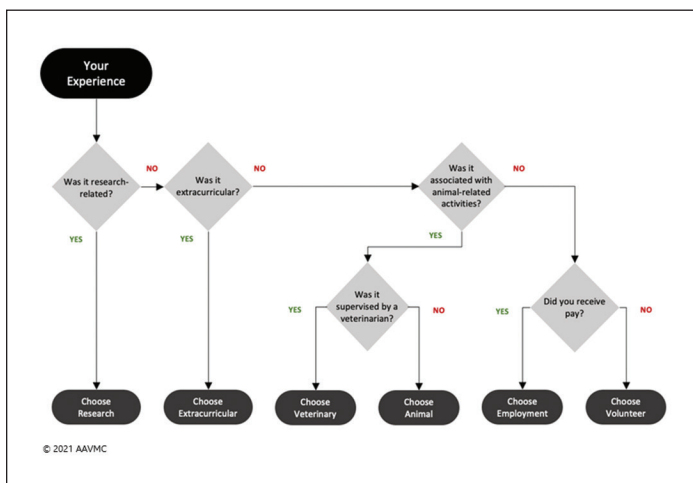
- Veterinary Experience – supervised/with a veterinarian
- Animal Experience – no veterinarian involved
- Employment – not animal related work
- Extracurricular Activities
- Research – supervised by MD or PhD (or DVM).
- Volunteer – not animal related

Select Your Most Important Experience

Applicants can select up to 5 experiences to highlight as their most important. Once they have added all of their experiences, they can click the star icon next to an experience in the My Experiences list to mark it as their most important. It helps the admissions committee understand what is important to the student. Encourage the student not to “overthink” their choices or “think from an admissions officer’s perspective.” Students should pick experiences that nurtured and supported them and express who they are and what is important to them.

Figure 5 provides a diagrammatic guide on how to classify experiences.

Figure 5. **VMCAS Experiences Classification Guide**



AAVMC Statement on Veterinary Experience Hours

Most U.S. veterinary schools require applicants to gain veterinary experience before applying for admission. These experiences will help you learn about the profession you wish to enter and will inform your decision to apply to veterinary school. There are many types of opportunities available, both paid and volunteer. Whatever you decide to pursue, your duties should be at an appropriate level that matches your skills and certifications. Each state/jurisdiction/country has its own regulations regarding the practice of veterinary medicine. You should review and discuss these with your supervisor to ensure that what you are expected to do falls within the appropriate scope of practice. If at any time, you are uncomfortable with what you are being asked to do, you should talk to your supervisor, as it is illegal for individuals to practice veterinary medicine without a license. More information, including legal consequences, can be found at the American Veterinary Medical Association website and "[Sanctions for unauthorized practice of veterinary medicine.](#)" Please be aware that this applies not only to experiences within the U.S. but also to other countries and includes abroad programs organized for people who would like international experiences.

TIP: Remember applicants will be evaluated on the ability to demonstrate how the experience helped shaped his or her understanding of the profession by description of experience and level of duties.

VI. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION (eLORS)

Electronic Letters of recommendation (eLORs) can be equally as important as grades and experiential preparation. For example, if the student has a very high GPA, lots of veterinary experiences, but only average/mediocre letters then there is a “disconnect” and can raise a “red flag” for the admission committee. On the flip side, if a student has average or below average GPA, good solid veterinary experiences, then stellar letters can give the student a boost with their overall application. The point is for applicants to not to take the eLORs lightly but consider them just as seriously as coursework grades and experiential preparation.

Most veterinary schools require at least 3 eLORs. VMCAS will allow for a maximum of 6 eLORs to be submitted. If a student elects to have more than 3 eLORs submitted, they need to check with each school if they will read more than 3 letters. VMCAS does not allow applicants to designate which letters go to which school, that is why it is important to check how many letters each school wants and is willing to read. Remember, students must request at least 3 eLORs in VMCAS in order to initiate transcript verification.

Most veterinary schools want a letter from at least 1 veterinarian, occasionally they may want 2 letters from veterinarians. Students need to be sure to check the recommendation letter instructions for each school where they are applying. Some schools may also ask for a letter from a dean, faculty member or an advisor. Besides veterinarians, other people to consider asking for letters are faculty (field of study does not matter), research PI, coaches, academic advisors, or other mentors. The critical concept for letter writers is they know the applicant well and are comfortable writing the letter.

TIP: It is important for students to “guide” their letter writings so that the all the letters create a full picture of the student.

One strategy is to have students look through the core competencies/veterinary attributes and ask each letter writer to address specific competencies/attributes. This avoids overlapping information between letter writings and enables the admissions committee to get a full picture of the applicant.

When recommenders submit their eLOR they are asked to complete an evaluation form to rate the student from “excellent” to “poor” on qualities like reaction to criticism, time management, self-awareness, emotional stability, personal maturity, and social

maturity. Therefore, it is important to select recommenders who both support the student going to veterinary school, but who have also seen the student behave in a professional and ethical manner. Recommenders are also asked how well they know the applicant: very well, moderately well or minimally well. Make sure students are asking professionals who know them at least moderately well.

Students will have the option of waiving their right to access the evaluation. It is advised that students waive their right to access the evaluation.

Committee Letters – Yes, or No?

Committee letters are not required by veterinary schools. If a student submits a committee letter, it will count only as one of their letters. If the student chooses to submit a committee letter, it is important they check with the school before having it submitted. Overall, advise applicants to request letters from people who know them well.

VII. VMCAS

What is VMCAS?

The Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS) is the centralized application service for Colleges of Veterinary Medicine. Applicants complete one application and send all their required materials through this service to multiple schools. The application is processed, verified for accuracy, and transmitted to the veterinary medical colleges designated by the applicant. It is important to understand that VMCAS does not play any role in the admissions process. While most veterinary medical colleges and schools participate in VMCAS, some do not. Knowing if a school participates in VMCAS or not is important.

Throughout the application cycle, the AAVMC hosts numerous webinars for students and advisors that walk through VMCAS and review the components of the application. The best way to explore the application and guide your students is by creating a VMCAS test application (i.e., First Name_Test Last Name). Additionally, consider requesting access to the [Universal Advisor Portal](#) so you can track your students' applications. Advisors and students should understand the VMCAS application schedule, components of the application, and the process leading to a verified application.

The VMCAS Schedule

- VMCAS opens to applicants in January. (e.g., 1/20/2022)
- Applicants can enter personal information, grades, experiences, eLORs and work on the main VMCAS essay.

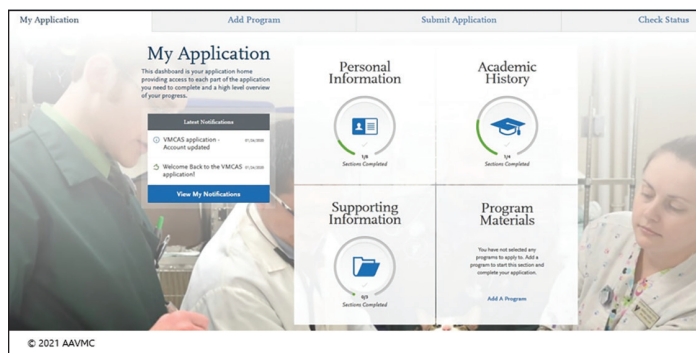
- In mid-May Veterinary School programs become available in VMCAS, and applicants can submit applications.
- VMCAS Application Deadline: September 15 at 11:59 PM, Eastern Time
 - There is only one deadline for VMCAS
- Veterinary Schools may have an additional supplemental application that may be included in VMCAS or handled outside of VMCAS. Due dates will vary with each school. It is important for applicants to be aware of all deadlines.

VMCAS Application Sections (Quadrants)

There are 4 sections of the application in VMCAS (See Figure 6). Applicants are alerted to the completeness of each section and are not able to submit their application until all sections are fully complete. The four quadrants of the VMCAS application are:

- **Personal Information** - This section is for biographical and contact information, as well as citizenship status, race/ethnicity, and other family information.
- **Academic History** – This section is used to gather high schools and colleges attended, as well as any coursework completed. Additionally, applicants can provide information about tests they have taken or plan to take, such as the GRE.
- **Supporting Information** – This section is for the VMCAS essay, recommendations, experiences, and achievements.
- **Program Materials** – This section contains veterinary school program specific questions and any additional application requirements. Important information about each program is included here along with any other deadline requirements.

Figure 6. VMCAS Landing Page



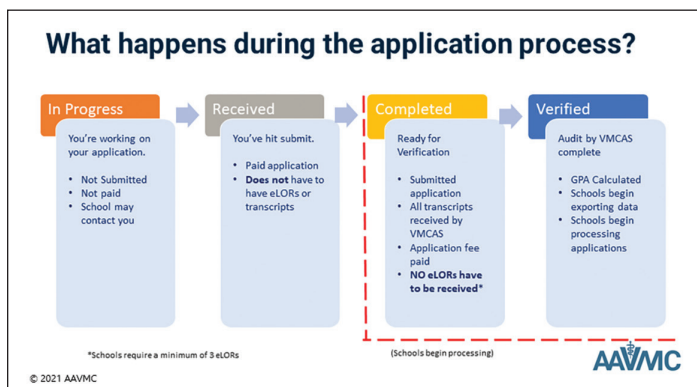
TIP: Create a VMCAS test application (i.e., First Name_Test Last Name) so you can explore the application and guide your students. Consider requesting access to the Universal Advisor Portal so you can track your students' applications.

Understanding the VMCAS Process

Applicants progress through various application statuses, and advisors need to understand the process for a verified application. Figure 7 illustrates the VMCAS process to a verified application. Once an applicant creates an account in VMCAS, they are considered an In Progress applicant until they have paid the application fee(s) and submitted their application. Once the applicant submits, they are in the Received status until all required transcripts are received, and the applicant moves to the Complete status. How quickly applicants progress through the statuses depends on how quickly their transcripts are received. Applicants should request their transcripts as early as possible, even if they are not ready to click “Submit.” Transcripts are added to the applicant’s account as they come in. Please see the key terms at the end of this chapter for more detailed information regarding application status definitions.

TIP: It is important that students enter in their academic coursework exactly how it appears on their school transcript. Abbreviate exactly the way their college/university abbreviates a course on the transcript. This will help facilitate the verification process.

Figure 7. VMCAS process to verified



TIP: Applicants progress through various application statuses and it is important to understand the process to a verified application. Please see the glossary for more detailed definitions of each of the statuses.

VMCAS Essay

While VMCAS has one main essay question, veterinary medical schools may ask additional essay questions in their program-specific section of the application. Applicants need to be prepared to answer supplemental essay questions in addition to the main VMCAS essay question. It is essential to encourage applicants to select programs as soon as possible to see

what additional questions they may need to complete for each program. Counsel students to have their essay reviewed and consider what resources for this are available at your school (e.g., the school career center, writing center, faculty, etc.).

Below is the main VMCAS Essay question (personal statement) along with the instructional text that accompanies the question.

VMCAS Essay Question

Your personal statement is a one-page essay (not to exceed 3,000 characters) that gives veterinary admissions committees a clear picture of who you are and, most importantly, **why you want to pursue a career in veterinary medicine.**

Consider these additional items when writing your personal statement:

- Be yourself.
- Ask a friend, relative, or faculty advisor to read your essay and provide constructive criticism.
- Be sure to avoid these when writing your personal statement:
 - Don't use jargon, clichés, or big phrases that you normally don't use in normal conversation. Remember, veterinary admissions committees want to know about the real you.
- Don't write what you think the admissions committee wants to hear.
- Don't use a gimmicky style or format.
- Don't wait until the last minute to work on your statement.

TIP: Recommend to students to have their essay reviewed by the school writing center or other method.

Explanation Statement

Within the VMCAS application Other Information section there is a space for an “Explanation Statement.” This optional section can be used to record information that cannot be listed elsewhere within the application, such as missing parental information or disciplinary actions that require detailed explanation. Applicants can also use this section to provide other additional information that is considered vital to the application, such as COVID-19 impact, explanations of interruptions in studies or experiences, unique circumstances faced, or reasons for decisions made. This space can also be used to list future coursework and gap year plans. This section is limited to 3,000 characters (including spaces and it should not be used to continue an essay that exceeded the essay question character limit). While not required, consider if your student may benefit from including information in this section.

Supplemental Essays

While most schools have supplemental essay questions, they vary in terms of how many they require and where they are asked (within the VMCAS application or through a separate school web link. Below are a few examples of supplemental essay questions; in no way is this a complete list.

- Examples:
 - Reflect on barriers to access to care that some members of your local community may experience.
 - Describe ways in which you will seek to enhance accessibility of veterinary care to marginalized populations. If you have previously engaged in such activities, please share what you learned about the importance of inclusion during the experience.
 - Veterinary school will be an intense experience. Describe your strategies for managing stress and maintaining personal wellness.
 - Describe an ethical dilemma that you faced and how you responded to it.
 - Please explain opportunities or factors about our program that influenced your decision to apply (i.e., what does our program offer you?).
 - Describe a situation in your past when you felt you had failed. How did you recover from this experience, and what did you learn from it?
 - If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be? What would you hope to learn from the conversation?

TIP: Attend advisor specific webinars and trainings that walk through VMCAS and review the components of the application.

VIII. ADMISSIONS PROCESS

It is critical for a pre-health advisor to ensure an applicant understands the veterinary school admissions process. There are two basic types of admissions processes: traditional and holistic. Traditional means they generally do everything by the numbers - GPA, GRE scores, and may assign scores to eLORs but may not use experiences or essays in the review process. An authentic holistic admissions process is defined as consideration of both the mission of the college and the holistic review of an applicant (grades, GPA, experiences, eLORs, essay, and explanatory statements). The holistic review of an applicant entails the admissions committee balancing academic requirements with an assessment of the unique life experiences of an applicant and how that person will contribute to the program and the profession. There is no requirement that veterinary programs employ holistic admissions, and the way in which a veterinary program applies holistic review may vary.

Some will start with the GPA and if the student has the minimum required GPA, then they will look at the rest of the application materials. Some schools will look at the whole application no matter what the GPA. Some schools look at the whole application but assign a scoring system to each part of the application and then add up the score for each part to come up with total score for the applicant. So, in this case they have converted the holistic review to a numeric scoring system. Many of the veterinary schools now have some flavor of holistic admissions process while still using a traditional approach. It's important that students understand how they are evaluated by each school where they are applying. If they cannot find the information on the school website, then ask the admissions office about the review process.

The application review process can be broken down into two categories of criteria: academic and nonacademic. These criteria are listed in Table 4.

Academic Criteria

Grades do matter! Academic performance may predict future academic success, so grades may be a large portion of the application review process. Some veterinary programs may have a GPA cutoff, and others may not.

Nonacademic Criteria

There are many skills and attributes that are important to a candidate's contribution to the student community while in veterinary school and to the practice of veterinary medicine after graduation. Many of these skills and attributes can be assessed during the application review process using the different categories found on the VMCAS application and by interviewing the candidate.

Table 4. Academic and nonacademic application review criteria

Categories	Criteria
Academic	Overall GPA
	Prerequisite or science GPA
	Last 45-hour GPA
	Standardized test scores (GRE)
Nonacademic	Experiences (veterinary, animal, employment, research, honors and awards, community service)
	Letters of recommendation
	Essays (VMCAS essay and supplemental essays)
	Situational judgment tests (Casper)
	Interviews

Interviews

Veterinary schools use different interview formats to interact with their candidates and to assess nonacademic skills and attributes. While there is variation, all of these formats are used to learn more about the candidate's perspective and personality. Candidates can prepare for any of these interview formats through practice!

Panel or traditional: The panel consists of a group of people, typically faculty of the veterinary college, who may or may not have full access to a candidate's application. Based on their knowledge of the candidate, they may ask questions to get further clarification or detail on what was presented in the application. These interviews may or may not be structured (e.g., applicants may not all be asked the same questions).

Multiple mini-interview: The multiple mini-interview is a series of timed scenarios that candidates will respond to in either a virtual or in-person format. The interviews are structured in that the rater has a script they must adhere to, which provides each candidate with a very similar rater interaction and ensures that every candidate participates in the same scenarios.

Behavioral interview: Behavioral interviews consist of questions that are designed to discover how candidates will react in future situations based on past experiences. These may be done in a panel format, a small group, or one on one.

Interviews

There are two basic formats to interviews: traditional 1:1 or 1:2 or 1:3 for 30 minutes vs multi mini interviews (MMI). MMI is set up as 6-10 stations, each has something different (e.g., ethical dilemmas, writing prompt, team activity) for the student to do or discuss.

Interview Preparation

- Applicants need to stay current about what's going on in veterinary medicine
 - AVMA publishes a twice monthly journal that includes news articles. See AVMA News archive: <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/javma-news-archives>
 - Interviewers, especially in MMI, may ask applicants about their opinion on ethical issues or hot topics in veterinary medicine.
- Remind applicants that the interview is about them and not how they look. Things to discuss with applicants:
 - Professional Dress
 - Avoiding flashy jewelry
 - Avoiding perfume or cologne
 - Tattoos, piercings, and other body modifications – recommend the applicant contact each school and get their opinion.
 - Consider if clothing or body choices (e.g., tattoos) are distracting, and advise on adjustments
- Examples of Ethical/Current events topics:
 - Animal rights vs animal welfare
 - Opinion about trap-neuter-return programs
 - How is veal harvested?
- Applicants need to be able to evaluate and articulate experiences
 - "Tell us about a time you made a mistake?" – helps evaluate an applicant's self-awareness as well as their lived experiences.
- Resources:
 - <https://www.dvm360.com/view/8-must-ask-questions-veterinary-hospital-hires>
 - <https://www.colorado.edu/career/2021/10/06/6-tips-help-you-prepare-interview>
 - Personality test: <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>
 - [APVMA Facebook group](#)

Situational Judgement Tests

Some schools are dropping interviews and switching to Casper. It is an on-line situational judgement test. Test-takers are presented with a series of realistic, hypothetical scenarios and are asked what they would do if they were in each situation. It takes 60-90 minutes to complete with an optional 15-minute break halfway through. There are 12 sections, each with a scenario and corresponding set of questions. For each section there is a 60-90 second video-based scenario or a text-based scenario, then 3 open-ended questions and 5 minutes to respond. A sample test with 3 sections is available at: <https://takecasper.com/test-prep/>.

IX. HOW TO APPROACH SENSITIVE TOPICS

Students may come to their advisor to discuss sensitive issues that could affect their application. Three common sensitive topics are: low GPA, “Does this look bad?” and “Should I talk about this?”

Low GPA

The first thing to ask a student with a low GPA is “Why?” Do they have a reason why their grades were lower? For example, they may have a learning disability for which they have not received support; they may be experiencing mental or physical illness; a family member or close friend might have died or may be gravely ill; or they may have been the victim of a sexual assault.

School selection is a critical factor when the student has a low GPA. It’s important for the student to choose schools that practice holistic admissions and understand the holistic review process. Will the schools hear and understand their story that explains the low GPA? Students need to contact each school’s admissions professionals to discuss their situation. Students can ask schools if they should repeat any classes and how that school handles repeat classes in the review process.

Another option is to consider enrolling in a post-baccalaureate program to improve their GPA, such as the programs below:

- Postbaccalaureate Research Education Program at the University of Georgia (<https://prep.uga.edu/>)

- Nonthesis master’s degree in comparative biomedical sciences at the University of Georgia (<https://vet.uga.edu/education/phd-and-masters-degree-programs/comparative-biomedical-sciences-graduate-program/>)
- Prehealth postbaccalaureate programs at the University of Pennsylvania (<https://www.lps.upenn.edu/non-degree-programs/pre-health>)

Does this Look Bad?

Below are questions a student might present along these lines, followed by a potential advisor’s response:

- **Red flags on transcripts:** repeated courses, withdrawals, low grades, low course loads. Response: The student has had academic ups and downs but has made significant improvement in their grades over time.
- **Not enough veterinary hours.** Response: The student managed their time between veterinary hours and extracurricular activities.
- **Missing certain types of hours/experiences,** e.g., no large-animal experience. Response: The student lives in a big city, so they did not have access to large-animal experience; however, they have diversity in their hours from different styles of small-animal clinics (e.g., spay-neuter clinic vs. standard exams and vaccinations vs. working with a specialist).
- **Missing a type of eLOR,** such as one from a professor. Response: Even though the student doesn’t have an eLOR from a professor, they have made strong bonds with other professionals (e.g., clergy, coaches, high school mentor, employment supervisors, student club advisors, etc.).

Should I talk about this?

It is up to the student if they want to share a sensitive topic as part of the application process. If the student is comfortable talking about such topics, they can. Being honest and forthcoming can help the admissions committee get to know the applicant better. In the long run it will ultimately benefit the profession. Students with these experiences may be able to reach clients and other peers that others cannot. Students who are aware of the complexity of mental health challenges and current racial and social justice issues show maturity, professionalism, and empathy. These are qualities admissions committees are looking for in veterinary medicine applicants.

X. UNDERSTANDING THE ODDS

As a pre-health advisor, you are an integral part of a student's application to veterinary school. While it's essential to help your students understand veterinary school's competitiveness and navigate this process, above all, advise with compassion and empathy.

Below are things to consider discussing with your students (encourage honest conversations):

- Do you think you will get in?
- Is it OK to apply more than once?
 - Consider watching this:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhkBURj8_aY
- Admissions processes are incredibly complex, and every applicant cycle and pool is different.
- There are about twice as many students applying as there are seats available.
- It is important to show why experiences matter – no matter what type of experience they are.
 - Remember: Applicants will be evaluated on the ability to demonstrate how the experience helped shaped their understanding of the profession and what they learned from the experience that they can bring to the profession.
- Encourage your students to: Keep Going. Show Resilience. Don't give up!
 - Some schools host post-application workshops - advise applicants to consider attending if the school offers one.
 - Applicants may also reach out to schools for a file review to gain insight on how to improve their application for the future.

Advising Students with Hardships

- Know your influence and support your students in their pursuit of this career path even through barriers they may be facing.
- Understand how a holistic approach to admissions provides schools with a broader set of applicants.
 - Many veterinary schools practice holistic admissions and take into consideration the unique situations of each applicant.
- Offer guidance on how they may improve their GPA (i.e., repeating courses)
- Don't forget the unique situations of non-traditional students, whether they are making a career change or not.

- Nontraditional students can include underrepresented minorities and any first-generation student. They may not be first generation for college, but perhaps they are first generation for graduate/professional school.
 - These students may need extra encouragement and resources.
 - Don't assume; always ask the student how you can help them.
 - Offer ways to help them, and don't let them say "no thank you."
 - Remember to reach out to these students often. Simple check-ins can be very helpful.
 - Remember:
 - What unique challenges do they face?
 - What resources do they need?
- Take an active role in the students' college life. Reach out.
- Encourage your students to develop a plan of study.
- Take an active role in helping them plan their courses.
- Provide and encourage the use of school resources for students who may be struggling academically.
- Consider presenting or organizing workshops on the application process early so when applicants are ready to apply, they feel more confident.
 - The AAVMC also offers webinars for students that are free for them to participate in.
- Provide resources on writing or offer to review personal statements and other essay questions.

XI. FINANCING YOUR EDUCATION

Financial Decisions associated with the pursuit of a career in Veterinary Medicine

Talk to prospective students about the financial decisions associated with pursuing this career path. Planning for specific expenses leads to better financial decisions. Testing costs, application fees, and travel for interviews are examples of things that need to be considered when planning for how an applicant will fund their application and beyond. Below are some associated costs with preparing for and applying to veterinary school. Applicants should be encouraged to plan for these expenses.

Preparing to Apply

- Undergraduate and prerequisite tuition (course costs)
 - Cost to take prerequisite courses at a community college or another university
- Paid vs. unpaid experiences
 - Help an applicant understand and embrace the value of their time and work.
- Optional summer program costs
- Optional test preparation programs
 - Costs associated with test preparation and re-testing should be discussed. While only 6 schools require the GRE and 1 school is GRE optional, it's important for applicants to be aware of these additional costs.
 - Does your school offer test-taking resources?

Applying to Veterinary School

- Testing fees and score submission fees
 - GRE fees or Casper fees
- Transcript submission fee
- VMCAS Fee (for the main application)
- Supplemental application fees (school dependent and fees vary)
- Interview costs (travel)
- Enrollment deposits and relocation fees (school dependent and fees vary)

Veterinary Debt Initiative

To address the challenges associated with graduate school education, the AAVMC is a partner in the [Veterinary Debt Initiative](#). The mission of the Veterinary Debt Initiative is to facilitate strategies that reduce the impact of the cost of education on the pursuit of a personally and professionally rewarding veterinary career.

Student Tuition, Debt, & Scholarship Data

The AAVMC provides access to certain data sets to the public via the organization's website (<https://www.aavmc.org/about-aavmc/public-data/>). The information reported includes data on faculty, students, applicants, and tuition from U.S. schools and colleges of veterinary medicine. Some data sets also include information from the AAVMC's Canadian and international members. Consult the AAVMC's public data to find the median tuition for residents/nonresidents, median student debt, institutional scholarship aid data, and much more.

AAVMC Cost Comparison Tool

The AAVMC [Cost Comparison Tool \(CCT\)](#) was created to help prospective students further develop a financial plan for veterinary school. It is imperative that prospective students take time to consider and plan for the costs associated with becoming a veterinarian. The Cost Comparison Tool presents several key pieces of financial data that should be considered when applying to veterinary school. The map tab provides data for all 33 colleges in the United States, as well as 11 international colleges.

As an advisor, become familiar with the AAVMC Cost Comparison Tool, and encourage students to consult it. The tool presents information in the following key areas:

- Resident vs. nonresident status; ability to change residency status (check with institution on details) vs. international
- Scholarship data: averages, not guarantees; institutional aid only
- Percentage of tuition change over previous four years
- Comparison of total cost with indebtedness of grads: students are able to minimize costs and employ strategies to keep under predicted cost of attendance
- Historical data; no ability to predict the future

TIP: As an advisor become familiar with the AAVMC Cost Comparison Tool and encourage to look through this information.

Funding – Scholarships, Loans, and Repayment Programs

There are many avenues to fund a veterinary education including scholarships, federal student loans, private and personal loans, and career-specific loan repayment programs. While not every veterinarian will qualify for these programs, applicants should be aware of what is available. Financial aid officers at colleges of veterinary medicine are also able to provide more information. Visit <https://www.aavmc.org/becoming-a-veterinarian/funding-your-degree/> for more information about how to fund your degree. Another resource is Explore Health Careers (<https://explorehealthcareers.org/your-education/paying-for-college/>). Applicants can search for articles and information about financing their education on this website.

XII. CAREERS IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

Having an understanding of the many opportunities and careers in veterinary medicine is helpful as you work with Pre-Veterinary students. Below you will find general information about veterinary medicine careers, job outlook, and veterinary specialties.

Every community needs veterinary professionals to provide animal health care, but veterinarians also do many other kinds of jobs. They make sure the nation's food supply is safe; they work to control the spread of diseases; and they conduct research that helps both animals and humans. Veterinarians are at the forefront of protecting the public's health and welfare. Besides medical skills, veterinarians often take a holistic approach to human well-being and animal welfare that, combined with communication and problem-solving skills, makes veterinarians uniquely qualified to fulfill a variety of roles.

Many veterinarians, of course, provide care for companion animals through private veterinary practices, but veterinarians are also involved in promoting the health and welfare of farm animals, exotic animals, working animals (like those in the equine industry), and those that need a healthy environment in which to thrive, whether that environment is a rain forest, a desert, or even the ocean. Many veterinarians are engaged in work at the intersection of both human and animal health. Veterinarians are often on the front lines of surveillance, where their extensive medical training can help them detect and treat the outbreak of diseases that have the potential to make the jump from animals to humans.

Outside of companion animal practice, the largest employer of veterinarians in the United States is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Specific Types of Veterinary Careers

Most often when you think of veterinarians you think of them as clinicians in private practice, working with small companion animals such as cats and dogs, or out in rural areas working with production animals or horses. However, veterinarians have careers in many other sectors as well. Below we list some of the areas where you will find career opportunities as a veterinarian:

- **Private practice**, where about two thirds of veterinarians in the United States work. There are many types of private practices, ranging from small-animal exclusive, exotics, equine exclusive, and food-animal exclusive to mixed-animal practices that would work with all species.
- **Corporate veterinary medicine**, such as working with corporations that provide veterinary care, test human drugs for safety, or produce animal-related products.

- **The federal government** employs veterinarians through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. These veterinarians work on biosecurity, environmental quality, public health, meat inspection, regulatory medicine, agricultural animal health, or the investigation of disease outbreaks.
- **The U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force** offer career opportunities in areas such food safety and military working dog veterinary medicine. The military also provides advanced training in specialty areas for those who commit to service.
- **Research**, either in a university setting or with companies that produce animal-related products or pharmaceuticals.
- **Teaching**, either in academia or in nonprofessional schools. With 40% of aging faculty in academia eligible for retirement over the next 10 years, projections indicate an increasing need for qualified academics to teach in all disciplines of veterinary medicine.
- **Public health**, particularly with governmental agencies such as the U.S. Public Health Service, which works to control the transmission of animal-to-human (zoonotic) diseases.
- **Food supply medicine**, with either the government or a food animal company.
- **Global veterinary medicine**, in private practice or with international agencies working in areas such as food production and safety or emerging diseases.
- **Public policy**, working for governments on animal and zoonotic diseases, animal welfare, public health issues, or as consultants to nongovernmental agencies.
- **Shelter medicine**, working with communities and private or public agencies to ensure the health and well-being of animal populations housed in shelters.

Job Outlook

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), the job market for veterinarians is predicted to grow 16% from 2019 to 2029. This is much higher than the growth rate for all occupations, which is 4% for the same period. Also, there are always new career opportunities for veterinarians as veterinary medicine continues to expand into areas such as cancer treatment, radiation therapy, physical therapy, and other specialty areas that are present in human medicine.

Specialties

The AVMA recognizes many specialties within veterinary medicine. These include anesthesia, animal welfare, behavior, dentistry, dermatology, emergency and critical care, internal medicine cardiology, internal medicine neurology, internal medicine oncology, laboratory animal medicine, microbiology, nutrition, ophthalmology, pathology, pharmacology, poultry veterinarians, preventive medicine, radiology, sports medicine and rehabilitation, surgery orthopedics, surgery soft tissue, theriogenology, toxicology, veterinary practitioners (including avian, equine, beef cattle, feline, canine/feline, exotic companion mammal, food animal, dairy, reptile and amphibian, and swine health management), and zoological medicine. You can find out more about these specialties at the AVMA website (<https://www.avma.org/education/veterinary-specialties>). To become a specialist, additional training is required beyond that of the veterinary medicine degree, and additional examinations must be passed to confirm skills in the specialty area.

XIII. DO YOU STILL WANT TO GO TO VETERINARY SCHOOL?

Ask the student these reflective questions to get them thinking:

1. Do you love animals?
2. More importantly, do you love science?
 - a. Have you taken two or more lab courses at the same time?
3. Do you like interacting with people?
4. Are you prepared for the academic, emotional, and mental challenges of veterinary school?
5. Do you have a support system in place?
 - a. What support systems are available at the veterinary schools you are interested in?
6. How do you handle stress?

The reality is that more and more veterinary students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, have needed mental health support. Many veterinary schools have added psychological support systems for students. This is handled in different ways, with faculty mentors as well as trained professionals (e.g., psychologists) now on staff.

Veterinary school classes and labs extend throughout the day. They often start at 8 a.m., with labs ending at 5 p.m. Just like college, the first year tends to be the most difficult for adjusting to the academic and mental challenges, but the rigor of the coursework holds throughout all the didactic years (usually the first three years).

Depending on the veterinary school, students sometimes get hands-on exposure early in the curriculum. This could be helping to care for school farm animals, volunteering to help with sick foals overnight, and other similar hands-on experiences. This type of hands-on exposure is often very beneficial emotionally. It helps keep the student's interest focused on the end goal of clinical practice.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Animal Groups in Veterinary Medicine

Companion Animal: Typically refers to dogs and cats but can also include other animals that owners keep as pets.

Equine: Usually referred to separately outside of Large Animal and Farm Animal, and only includes horses.

Exotics: Any animal that is not categorized in small, large, or farm animal groups. This can include pocket pets, zoo animals, aquatic animals, and wildlife.

Food Animal: Animals, such as cattle, that humans use for food or food products.

Large Animal: Typically refers to animals that would be found on a farm, including sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs. This can sometimes include exotic animals that are not kept as pets or farm animals.

Mixed Animal: Includes both small and large animal groups.

Small Animal: Primarily refers to cats and dogs.

Wildlife: Any animal that is found in the wild and does not have an owning person or organization. Wildlife support is typically run through nonprofit organizations or government entities.

Types of Veterinary Employment Experiences

Clinical Practice: The most common type of practice, including both private and corporate hospitals. In clinical practices, veterinarians see animal patients that clients bring in for treatment or wellness.

Corporate Practice: Typically refers to clinical practices owned by a company or organization.

Industry: Typically refers to food, medical, and pharmaceutical organizations that do not focus on clinical practice. These organizations may focus on sales, recruitment, education, research, or another area.

Private Practice: Has a veterinarian that treats and/or diagnoses animal patients owned by an individual or a group of individuals.

Public Practice: Entails a veterinarian that treats and/or diagnoses animal patients that typically do not have an owning person or organization. Typically, these are managed by a nonprofit organization or government entity (e.g., Humane Society).

Research: The systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions in veterinary medicine.

Additional Terms

Animal Welfare: The state of the animal. The treatment an animal receives is covered by other terms, such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.

Diversity: Understanding and appreciating the interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.

Euthanasia: The act of putting an animal to death or allowing it to die by withholding extreme medical measures.

First-Generation College Student: Any student who is the first in their immediate family to go to college.

Holistic Admissions: A university admissions strategy that assesses an applicant's unique experiences alongside traditional measures of academic achievement, such as grades and test scores.

Mutual respect: Practicing respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own. This involves recognizing that personal, cultural, and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some, while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others. Mutual respect entails building alliances across differences so we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

Nontraditional student: Any student who has not applied to vet school during their junior year of college to begin vet school right after college ends.

One Health: The principle that the health of people is connected to the health of animals and the environment. It is a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach.

Prerequisite course: A required course to be eligible for vet school.

Zoonosis: A disease that can be transmitted to humans from animals.

VMCAS Application Statuses

Complete: All required materials were received, and the application is in line for verification and is considered complete. Note that programs may require additional materials for the application to be considered complete. Applicants should check with each program for more details. Once the application enters this status, it takes two weeks (on average) to move to the Verified status.

In Progress: Application has not yet been submitted, or applicant has not paid the application fee.

Received: Application has been submitted but is missing required documents. If the applicant used the Professional Transcript Entry service, they must review and approve their coursework.

Undelivered: This status indicates that an error was found, and the application was returned to the applicant for corrections.

Verified: Your application was processed, and your GPA was calculated and made available to your programs. You will receive a notification confirming that your application was verified. Once your application is verified, you should direct any questions about its status to the program(s) you applied to.

Questions? Please contact Diana Dabdub, Director for Admissions & Recruitment Affairs at ddabdub@aavmc.org.

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