

Pre-veterinary Advising Guide

UMD Dept of Animal and Avian Sciences

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A guide for students in all four years of their undergraduate education who are considering applying to veterinary school. This guide considers the education, commitment, and financial resources a student needs to succeed in veterinary school and veterinary medicine.

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Introduction

A doctor of veterinary medicine (DVM or VMD) degree can be a passport into a wonderful array of professional opportunities in the medical sciences. Veterinarians are able to work with a large variety of species in a diverse array of jobs ranging from clinical practice to research to wildlife conservation to academia to government and regulatory medicine, to name just a few. That said, veterinary medicine is not for everyone who is interested in working with animals. It is the aim of this guide to prompt you to consider what is involved in becoming a veterinarian, consider if a veterinary medical education is right for you, and to help you be successful in your application if it is. What follows is not meant to be an all-inclusive guide; rather, it is a starting point for further exploration and planning your undergraduate education and extra-curricular experiences in preparation for admission to North American veterinary schools.

The profession

Veterinary medicine is a [broad discipline](#) whose practitioners work in a wide array of clinical and corporate fields. Veterinarians in clinical practice provide medical care to a large range of animals in a variety of settings to diagnose animal health problems, create preventative medicine programs, manage the treatment of a variety of diseases, perform surgery, and advise owners about the care of their animals. According to the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#), which researches and publishes [data on US Veterinarians](#) annually, more than half of licensed veterinarians in this country work in private clinical practice. Of those, around 75% treat pets ([cats](#), [dogs](#), [small mammals](#), [birds](#), [reptiles and amphibians](#)), approximately 13% work in [food animal practice](#), and about 6% treat [horses](#) exclusively. Clinical veterinarians can be general practitioners or choose to specialize into traditional [surgical](#) or [medical specialties](#) (cardiology, neurology, internal medicine, dermatology, and the like), or address special populations medicine such as [animal shelter medicine](#) or [sports medicine](#). A current area of need in clinical veterinary medicine is for large animal practitioners in rural settings. There is currently a federal program called the [Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment program](#) available to veterinarians who agree to practice in underserved rural areas. Clinical veterinarians can also work in the arenas of [lab animal medicine](#), [zoo medicine](#), [aquarium animal medicine](#), and [wildlife medicine](#). A growing and much-needed sector of veterinary medicine exists within the field of [public health](#). Veterinarians working in this capacity may work in a research capacity to better understand important [zoonotic diseases](#). They may also work “in the field” as [food safety inspectors](#), compliance specialists, and industry consultants to help control and prevent diseases on the farm, in the research lab, in a pet store or zoo, or in other animal settings. Government veterinary jobs can be at the [federal](#) level working for agencies such as the US Army, FDA, USDA, EPA, and NIH, or at the state level in departments of agriculture, public health, and natural resources, to name a few. Additionally, some veterinarians obtain additional graduate training to prepare them for careers in [biomedical research](#) as investigators and [laboratory animal clinicians](#). Furthermore, veterinarians work as educators, teaching undergraduate, graduate, and veterinary students; sometimes, teaching is paired with research or clinical duties, although it can be a full-time job in and of itself. Finally, veterinarians can be medical librarians, drug or product support veterinarians, toxicologists for a pet poison hotline, authors, inventors, veterinary conference coordinators, and [much more](#).

The job outlook for veterinarians has been challenged by the decline in the general economy from 2008 to 2012 and its slow recovery. In private practice and research, the demand for high-quality medicine for all animals has led to an increase in demand for veterinary services and research to develop new drugs, products, and techniques. On the other hand, stagnant household incomes and high unemployment have limited the amount of money that many owners have to spend on their animals, affecting many segments of veterinary practice. While the market for veterinary services is starting to improve, it still represents a significant challenge to the profession which [struggles with compensation and student loan debt issues](#). The recognition of the interrelationship between human, animal and environmental health (“One Health”) has expanded roles for veterinarians in the areas of conservation, public health and regulatory medicine, although this is still a relatively small areas of veterinary practice. The importance of veterinarians in the production of a safe and humane food supply underlines a strong need for more veterinarians working in food animal medicine and regulatory agencies. Recently, the number of veterinarians graduating from veterinary school in the US each year has increased as US schools increase their enrollments. As of this writing, there are 30 colleges of veterinary medicine in the US, all of which are accredited or have accreditation pending. According to [statistics from the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges](#) (AAVMC), US schools graduate about 3,000 veterinary students per year. Additionally, there are five veterinary schools in Canada and two in the Caribbean which routinely graduate US students.

Regardless of the species or the setting, veterinarians work with people and animals, and should enjoy doing both. Veterinarians are often confronted with health issues that are further influenced by the needs of animal owners and society at large. Furthermore, while a veterinarian may one day choose to specialize in the care of one or a few species of animals, the training requires knowledge of many species and settings of animals.

Does it sound like a career in veterinary medicine is right for you? Do you want to know more? Talk to veterinarians who practice in the areas that interest you. Ask them about their pre-veterinary experiences, what school they attended, what experiences they had during school and after that have helped them, and what advice they have for those trying to enter the profession. Everyone will have a different point of view and different advice to give, so talk to many veterinarians (they'll be a great network for you once you have graduated and need a job). Additionally, check out the websites of the various specialties listed above, as many of them have student sections geared towards pre-veterinary and veterinary students.

Why do you want to go to veterinary school?

If you are considering veterinary school, the very first question you need to ask yourself is “Why do I want to go to veterinary school?” In formulating your answer, ask yourself the following questions:

- What drew you to the profession in the first place? What draws you to it now?
- What career path do you envision for yourself? How does having a DVM degree help you to achieve that goal? Is there a particular discipline within veterinary medicine that interests you?
- What makes you want a professional degree in animal medicine rather than an advanced degree in another field such as biology, animal sciences, behavior, ecology, biochemistry, or another scientific discipline?
- Have you considered other careers working with animals such as farm manager, veterinary technician, wildlife manager, researcher, ecologist, educator, or behaviorist, for example?

In considering veterinary school, understand that you should enjoy working with many different species, and that you should also enjoy working with people. While you may only work with a few species once you have graduated from vet school, you will be asked to work with a large range of species that will include cats, dogs, rabbits, ferrets, rodents, horses, cows, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, and wildlife of all kinds. You should also enjoy working with people and possess strong interpersonal and communication skills. While veterinarians treat animals, they work with and for other people, so “people skills” are a must.

Many students want to go to veterinary school because they like animals and they enjoy science and medicine. While this is an admirable start, the commitment to become a veterinarian must be made because there is simply no other profession out there that would satisfy your personal and professional interests. Being a veterinarian is fun, intellectually invigorating, and personally rewarding; however, the profession also has its drawbacks. In school and once you are out in practice, you should expect to work long hours with duties on nights, weekends and holidays. You should expect to have many demands on both your time and talents, and you should expect that each day will pose sometimes difficult clinical, professional, and personal challenges. Finally, you should know that the cost of a veterinary medical education has the potential to put a significant financial burden on you and your future family. For the veterinarian who truly loves the profession, these challenges are offset by the satisfaction they get from their jobs. It is important to make sure that you will be happy with the benefits and the drawbacks of your choice to pursue a career in the profession.

The successful applicant

Once you have decided that veterinary school is right for you, you must find out if you possess the right qualifications to be accepted. Admissions standards are high, and there is a very qualified pool of applicants each year competing for seats. That said, about [half of all applicants will be accepted to at least one program](#). Below is a summary of what veterinary admissions committees are evaluating in their applicants.

Pre-requisite courses

Each veterinary school has its own set of requirements, although in general, the core requirements for admission include:

- One or two semesters of English
- One to three semesters of courses in the social sciences and humanities
- Two semesters of Biology with a laboratory component
- Two semesters of General Chemistry with a laboratory component
- Two semesters of Organic Chemistry with a laboratory component.
- Two semesters of Physics with a laboratory component
- One or two semesters of Biochemistry
- One or two semesters of Mathematics

Schools vary in their admissions requirements and may have additional required courses such as public speaking, statistics, or other biology electives. For school specific, up-to-date information, consult the [U.S. Veterinary Medical Colleges required courses listing](#) to learn more about requirements at the schools that interest you.

You should start taking your pre-requisite courses as soon as you decide to apply for veterinary school. Some of the upper level classes require that the 100- and 200- level courses be completed as pre-requisites. Normally, it will take you at least six semesters to finish the sequence of science classes you will need. Make sure to get the list of required courses for each school where you think you might apply, so you can work all of your requirements into your graduation plan while it is still feasible to do so. Some careful planning at the beginning of your four years of college will help to ensure that you are able to finish your pre-veterinary coursework in a timely manner and take other courses that are of interest to you. Note that you do not need to pursue an undergraduate degree in a particular discipline to be a successful veterinary school applicant. While it is easier to be a science major given all of the pre-requisite courses, a quick look at the class profiles of any of the veterinary schools will show you that students from a broad range of disciplines successfully apply.

Grades

A strong candidate for veterinary school has an overall GPA of 3.6 or higher with at least that GPA in the pre-requisite coursework. Some schools will not accept pre-requisite coursework in which the grade is lower than a C-. There is a lot of student angst concerning GPAs and admissions standards. While it is true that grades do not tell the entire story about an applicant, they are an important tool for admissions committees to assess your potential success in veterinary school. Aim for high grades, especially in your veterinary pre-requisite courses. If you are having trouble in a particular class, get help as soon as you realize you need it from tutors, study groups, academic success centers, and your faculty. While a single poor grade can be explained, a trend of low grades signals to an admissions committee that you may not have the academic perseverance or skill needed to succeed in veterinary school.

Extracurricular activities and pre-veterinary animal experience

During your four years of undergraduate education, you should accumulate at least 400-600 hours of pre-professional veterinary medical experience through employment, volunteering, paid or unpaid internships, and participation in research. Schools vary in their requirements for the numbers of hours you must have, but it is wise to have at least 400 hours to fully investigate your career choice. Veterinary schools will evaluate not only the amount of time you have spent, but the depth, breadth, and quality of the experiences you have had. Vary your experiences by working with a range of animals including companion animals, livestock, lab

animals, zoo animals and wildlife. To the extent you are able, try to work directly with veterinarians to learn more about the field and to cultivate potential references for your application. Additionally, try to attain high quality experiences that allow you to participate in a research project or work on a project semi-independently to be able to demonstrate your skills, scientific knowledge, maturity and responsibility. It might be useful to keep a journal of the different experiences you have, what you have learned and your mentors to keep as a reference when you prepare your application. [Spread sheets](#) listing the dates, hours worked, and significant experiences for each pre-veterinary position you hold can significantly shorten the amount of time it will take you to report these experiences on your veterinary school applications. Finally, in selecting extracurricular activities, note that it is better to show a long-term commitment to a few endeavors rather than short-term participation in many activities.

References

All veterinary schools will require two or three people to write letters of reference on your behalf. Typically, these references are professors, veterinarians for whom you have worked, and sometimes academic deans or other administrators. Veterinary schools want to know:

- Have you carefully considered why you want to go to veterinary school?
- Are you likely to do well in veterinary school?
- Do you possess the qualities of a good veterinarian?
- Do you have something to contribute to the veterinary school?
- Do you have something to contribute to the veterinary profession and society in general?

Getting a good recommendation is not just a question of asking someone for a reference. Recommenders will need time to get to know you so that they can write a personalized letter that comments favorably about your intellectual abilities, creativity, motivation to become a veterinarian, and the possible impacts you will have once you are in practice. Cultivating relationships with potential references should start as soon as you know that you want to go to veterinary school. While you should strive to do your best at any endeavor, you should go out of your way to excel in courses, internships, and jobs that may lead to a reference.

Standardized Test Scores

Applicants to veterinary school take the [Graduate Record Exam](#) (GRE), a standardized admissions test common for graduate school and some professional schools. It is best to sit the exam for the first time in your junior year so that you have the opportunity to take it again if your scores are not satisfactory. Given the amount of weight standardized test scores have on your application, it may be wise to study for the GRE and take several practice exams prior to sitting the actual exam. There are many good quality test-prep books on the market. You will find that students in the year above you may also have books to sell second-hand (make sure they are not out-of-date!) If you are returning to school or have taken the GRE several years ago for another program, be careful to note the cut-off date for accepting “old” GRE scores. The general guideline is that schools will not accept scores that are more than five years old by October 1st of the year of application. Be sure to check this requirement with the schools that are of interest to you. Finally, be aware that the GRE has changed format several times in recent years. Make sure you have taken the right “version” of the GRE for the schools to which you wish to apply. Finally, note that a few schools will accept the MCAT exam. For more information, see <http://www.aavmc.org/data/files/vmcas/geninfo.pdf>.

Personal Statement and application essays

The personal essays are a chance for you to stand out from the hundreds of other applicants being considered. In addition to the personal statement on the common veterinary school application form, many schools require supplemental applications that will require further essay writing. If your GRE scores or grades are borderline, your essays may be your chance to interest the admissions committee enough to earn you an interview. Additionally, you may find that you are asked interview questions based on the content of your essays. Your essays are your chance to address any problem areas in your application; demonstrate that you will be a successful student and a good doctor; and have something unique to add to the student body and the profession. Craft your personal statement to address the following questions:

Who are you and what makes you special?

What is your background? What have you done in life so far? Is there anything that makes you unique? What accomplishments do you have? What challenges have you overcome to get where you are? What are your values and how have you demonstrated them in the past? Are you a leader? An innovator? A teacher? A counselor? Do you have experience with people from different social, economic and religious backgrounds? What has that taught you?

Why do you want to be a veterinarian?

Even if you have wanted to be a veterinarian since early childhood, avoid using phrases such as “I have known all of my life that I have wanted to be a veterinarian.” Instead, talk about specific experiences that drew you to the profession, what you have done to learn more about it, and the specific goals you have once you have graduated. Discuss other careers you have considered and why veterinary medicine is the best career for you. Demonstrate a passion for animals, people, science, medicine, and society. Show the admissions committees that you have something to add to their schools, the veterinary profession, and society. Be sincere and specific in your response.

What have you done to prepare yourself for veterinary school and the veterinary profession?

In this part of your essay, discuss the formal and informal experiences (working, volunteering, internships and the like) that have shaped your views and driven you to go to veterinary school. Share with the committee the ways in which your experiences have broadened your understanding of the practice of veterinary medicine and the challenges in the profession. Talk about specific skills you have acquired and how they will help you to reach the goals you laid out for yourself.

Why this veterinary school?

Somewhere in your supplemental application essays, take some time to consider the particular strengths and programs at each school where you apply. Make it a point to personalize your application by showing the admissions committee that you have done your research and you can point out why you want to go to their school. Comment on why you would fit in with that school’s student body, teaching styles, and overall mission and programs.

What makes you stand out from other applicants?

This may be a separate section of your essay or a theme that you weave throughout the entire piece. Make sure that your readers come away from your essay knowing that you are not just another applicant, you are somebody special who should be recruited to the school. Your essay is your biggest marketing tool, so use it as such.

Other important considerations

All veterinarians, regardless of where they work, benefit from strong written and verbal communication skills; knowledge and skills are useless unless the need for them and their worth can be communicated to others. Furthermore, anyone wishing to go into private clinical practice would benefit from business training. An animal hospital is a small business, and like all businesses, must be well-managed to succeed. Increasingly, the veterinary schools are looking for applicants with business skills in addition to strong communication skills. Veterinary schools have realized the benefit of communication and business training for pre-veterinary and veterinary students, and will value such knowledge in your application.

Beyond the academic potential of prospective students, veterinary schools are looking for students who demonstrate leadership, compassion, a commitment to community service, effective interpersonal skills, a strong sense of personal and professional ethics, and maturity. These are qualities that you should cultivate throughout your education regardless of your major, and that you should convey through your personal statement, references, personal interview (if invited) and whenever you interact with representatives from the school. Ultimately, there are many qualified applicants for veterinary school each year, and it is those students who distinguish themselves above their academic qualifications who are selected for admission.

Choosing a veterinary school

Factors to consider

Regardless of which of the accredited US veterinary schools you attend, you will get an excellent education. That being said, different schools may have particular programs or core strengths that are appealing to you. It is a good idea to apply to your in-state school, as you will (likely) have the most chance for success in getting accepted there and the tuition will be the most affordable for you. As you look to fill out your list of other potential schools, consider the following questions:

Are there particular programs (such as wildlife conservation, lab animal research, large animal nutrition) at the school that interest you? These could be either joint degree programs or areas with special classes or certificate tracts you could take.

Is there a particular area of the country that appeals to you? Is there a city where your spouse or significant other is more likely to find a job while you are in school? Is there a particular area of veterinary medicine that is more suited to a particular region of the world (e.g. marine mammal medicine in a coastal state, food animal medicine in a mid-western state.)

Is there a particular approach to education that appeals to you, such as: tracking, non-tracking, problem based learning, traditional course work, distance or on-line classes, or experiential learning?

Are there particular animal use standards that you consider important? What are the policies at the schools where you are applying? For example, would you be willing to participate in terminal-surgery labs as part of your education?

Do any of the schools have scholarship or fellowship programs that they offer? Would you qualify? You will not know for sure if you will get scholarship money until after you are accepted to school, so this will be a point to be revisited.

Can you realistically afford a veterinary education at that school? For more on planning your veterinary school expenses, please see the [budget planning worksheet](#) at the end of this guide.

The American Veterinary Medical Association maintains a listing of all [accredited veterinary schools](#), including their mailing addresses and websites, for your reference. At the University of Maryland, we have a strong veterinary alumni network and we encourage our veterinary school applicants to contact current veterinary students at the schools to which they are applying. As an applicant, doing so will give you some first-hand perspective on the schools and their application process, and can often result in you finding a place to stay when you schedule your school visits!

Foreign Colleges of Veterinary Medicine

Many countries have colleges of veterinary medicine, but that does not ensure that the degree they grant will be recognized in the United States when you apply to take the national licensure exam, known as the [North American Veterinary Licensure Exam \(NAVLE\)](#). In choosing to attend a veterinary school abroad, it is important to know if that school is accredited by the [AVMA's Council on Education \(AVMA COE\)](#), an affiliate of the AVMA COE, or not recognized. The AVMA's COE accreditation program is a voluntary, non-governmental review of a school to ensure that the education and facilities are of equivalent quality to US schools. If you obtain a DVM degree from a fully-accredited school abroad, it will be recognized in the US and allow you to obtain a veterinary license in the same manner as graduates from US schools. If, on the other hand, you graduate from a non-accredited veterinary school, you will have to first obtain a certificate of eligibility to take the NAVLE exam and obtain licensure in this country. Currently, there are two routes for US citizens trained at non-accredited schools abroad to obtain a certificate of eligibility for the NAVLE exam:

-In all states, the AVMA's program is recognized: <http://www.avma.org/education/ecfvg/default.asp>

-In 43 states, the alternative PAVE program is also recognized: <http://www.aavsb.org/PAVE>

If you plan to apply to a foreign veterinary school, make sure to fully understand the additional training and licensure requirements you will have once you return to the US to practice.

Applying to Veterinary Schools

The VMCAS common application

The [American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges](#) (AAVMC) sponsors the [Veterinary Medical College Application Service](#) (VMCAS), which provides a common application for 29 of the 30 US veterinary medical colleges¹ in addition to two of the five Canadian schools and seven other international colleges of veterinary medicine. In 2015, the [VMCAS portal was updated](#) to better help students complete and track their applications. Typically, applications through VMCAS open in early June and close on September 15th, giving pre-veterinary students approximately three months to complete their applications. Additional information about fall and spring semester grades and any deficiencies noted in the applications will require students to update their completed applications after the application deadline. VMCAS maintains a [listing of the colleges of veterinary medicine that it supervises](#) with links to information about each.

The VMCAS application is lengthy as it requires a fair amount of background information including: a manual entry of all of your college level transcript information; annotations about any honors, study abroad, or other special educational experiences you have had; information about your high school education; a listing of all veterinary, research, and employment experiences; a listing of your achievements; and a personal essay that explains your interest, aptitudes, experience in, and future contributions to the profession. Through the VMCAS system you will also be able to have letters of recommendation submitted on your behalf. Finally, most schools will require a supplemental application to complement the VMCAS application. In short, this is an application that should be started as soon as possible to give you ample time to complete it, proofread it, and address any problems that might arise.

Once applications are submitted, each veterinary school starts its process of initial applicant evaluation and ranking. Every school is different, so it is wise to visit each school to which you will be applying to learn about how it evaluates applicants. Many schools will have a two step-admissions process consisting of an initial evaluation and ranking followed by an in-person interview. Those schools will typically notify successful applicants of their selection for an interview in December through February. Of those schools that require interviews, some will base their final admissions decision on the outcome of the interview(s), while others will rate performance on the interview as part of an applicant's total application. The number and format of the interview process also varies from school to school, so make sure to learn about each school's process. The UMD pre-veterinary society will often coordinate mock-interviews to help applicants prepare for their veterinary school interviews, typically during the early part of winter break when our vet students are off from school themselves. When you go to a school for an interview, make sure you can clearly articulate why you want to be a veterinarian, what specific programs at the school interest you, how you think you might fit in at that school, and what your goals are during veterinary school and in your professional career. Make sure you are up-to-date on the major issues facing the profession by reading [JAVMA news](#). Finally, make sure you are prepared to talk about any areas of weakness in your application and any areas in your application you wish to highlight further. Interviewers will ask you about your application as well questions designed to assess your ethics, communication skills, critical thinking, ability to handle difficult situations, creativity, and poise.

Some schools do not require interviews, making the quality of your application materials the sole basis on which you are evaluated. Regardless, schools will notify students of their final decisions sometime between February and April of the academic year in which they applied.

¹ Texas A&M does not use the VMCAS application.

The selection process for each school is outlined in the VMCAS portal. As many of our students apply to the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, its selection criteria are listed here (from the VMCAS website).

Pre-interview Evaluation:

60% based on Academic Background:

- Cumulative GPA
- Required Science GPA
- Last 45-hour GPA
- GRE score

40% based on Non-Academic Background:

- Veterinary Experience
- Related Animal Experience
- Biomedical and/or Research Experience
- References
- Holistic Review of Application Portfolio

Selection Stage, Interviews:

The top candidates ranked according to the evaluation above will be invited to interview here on the Blacksburg campus.

- Interview format: Multiple Mini-Interviews (MMIs)
- A series of eight timed scenarios, which assess attributes such as communication skills, ethical and moral judgment, management of team and self, problem solving and critical thinking abilities and entrepreneurship
- Admission offers will be based on interview results

Additional Information:

- It is not necessary to have an undergraduate degree to apply to the program. However, applicants must have completed 60 credit hours of undergraduate work prior to entering the program.
- There is no minimum GPA required to apply, we recognize there are many factors that may impact an applicant's academic progression. However, academic performance is a true predictor of a student's success within the professional program, and will always be a large part of the application review process.
- The GRE is valid for a period of 5 years. Our school code is 5946.
- Science courses taken seven or more years prior to the application deadline: they MAY be repeated (which is the choice of the applicant), or courses of a higher level substituted, with the written approval of the Admissions and Standards Committee. Please email requests for this to dvmadmit@vt.edu. The approved repeated or substituted courses will be used in the calculation of the Required Science Course GPA. ALL courses taken will be used in the calculation of the Cumulative GPA.

Canadian Schools

There are five [veterinary schools in Canada](#), two of which use the VMCAS application. Note that some of the schools will require fluency in French for you to apply. Canadian veterinary schools give preference to applicants from within the regions where they are located; US students are considered international students and their applications are part of the smaller pool of non-resident applications that are considered each year.

Choosing a major

Do you need to be an animal sciences major to be successful in applying to veterinary school? No! While all successful veterinary school applicants must complete the prescribed list of pre-requisite courses at the schools where they apply, there is no requirement or preference for biology or animal sciences majors. As you select your major, choose one that reflects your interests and strengths. Consider that if you do not get into veterinary school, your major will help you to find an alternative educational or job path. You will be a strong candidate for veterinary school if you have completed all of your pre-requisite coursework, maintained a high GPA, and demonstrated a sincere and well-informed interest in veterinary medicine. Schools are more interested in the scope and diversity of your curriculum than completion of a particular major area of study.

Why would an animal sciences major be right for you as a pre-veterinary student? In our curriculum, you will have the opportunity to take many classes that will help you in veterinary school such as animal anatomy, comparative physiology, animal care and management courses, animal population health, endocrinology, reproductive physiology, bioethics, animal behavior, and many more. In addition, there are many opportunities for ANSC majors to get hands-on animal experience on-campus through classes, volunteering, clubs, and internships. Furthermore, three of our faculty members and one of our graduate students currently holds a DVM degree, giving you several people in the department to talk to you about veterinary medicine. Finally, we have a strong network of Terp veterinarians who are happy to help pre-veterinary and veterinary students during their studies. Our ANSC [Veterinary school FAQ](#) has additional information.

Early admission

There is an option for early admissions for students enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Students in the third year may apply during the fall semester provided that by the end of that year, and before matriculating at a veterinary school, they will have completed 90 credits of undergraduate work, including all pre-requisites for veterinary school and UMD's CORE requirements, and any other university obligations. The first 30 hours of veterinary school credit will count toward the completion of the UMD undergraduate degree. [Additional information](#) about this option can be found in the undergraduate course catalogue and on the ANSC website.

Please note that very few students are successful in applying to veterinary school during the third year. You will be much more prepared for veterinary school, and have a better foundation for it if you complete your undergraduate degree prior to starting professional school. On the other hand, starting veterinary school after three years of undergraduate education will save you the tuition costs of a senior year, which can have a significant effect on your student load burden. The decision on when to apply is a personal one, and should be considered early and investigated carefully.

Veterinary school and your spouse and family

Veterinary school is an intense experience, and it will require you to spend long hours in class, studying, and on clinical rotations. You will be under a considerable amount of stress, and have very little free time to spend with your spouse and family. This can be a hard adjustment not only for you, but for the people who are close to you. Spend some time talking with your spouse (and children) about what veterinary school will be like and make the decision to attend as a family. Read some of the on-line forums and blogs about the spouse's perspective on veterinary school so that it is not a "shock to the system" for both of you when you get there. You should also be aware that veterinarians, as a profession, have high rates of mental health issues. A recent [study](#) documented that one in six veterinarians has contemplated suicide at some point in their careers and that nearly one in ten may "experience serious psychological distress." So, as you consider this career choice and its effects on your personal life, consider the significant additional emotional strain it may put on you.

Budget

According to the [2014 statistics published by the AVMA](#), the average student debt load for those students who took on debt to pay for school (about 89% of all students) at graduation was \$135,283 with nearly 20% of students graduating with over \$200,000 in debt. Payable over 10 years at a fixed annual rate of 6.8 percent (the current rate for federal Stafford loans), the repayment on a loan of that amount comes to \$1,557.14 per month. According to that same survey, the mean starting salary for a new graduate veterinarian not going on for further training in an internship or residency is about \$66,000 per year. After federal, state and local taxes, this typically amounts to a monthly net take-home pay of about \$3000. While this sounds like a lot, it really is not, especially when more than half of that \$3000 will be going to pay for student loan debt. At the end of this guide, there is a budget planning worksheet to help you assess how much debt you can afford to take to pay for veterinary school. You may find that you will need to work for a few years prior to attending to offset the costs of school. It is better to figure this out now than after you graduate and those loans come due! As of 2015, the most affordable veterinary schools, with a comparison to VMRCVM, are as follows:

School	# In-state students/ Total class size	Yearly in-state tuition	School	# Out-of-state students	Yearly out-of-state tuition
North Carolina State University	80/100	\$16,546	University of Wisconsin	17-27/ 77-97	\$25,900
Auburn University	40/118	\$17,858	Texas A&M	10/132	\$31,148
University of Georgia	80/114	\$18,000	Tuskegee	?/70	\$36,270
Va-Md Reg Coll. Of Vet Med	80/110	\$21,796	Va-Md Reg Coll. Of Vet Med	30/110	\$47,458
Source: https://web.stanford.edu/group/supvc/cgi-bin/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/USA-Veterinary-Schools-tuition-table.pdf					

For some schools, it is possible to move to the state of residency for the school and establish residency to become eligible for in-state tuition at that school. Other schools specifically prohibit this practice. Thus, it is incumbent upon students to inquire specifically at each school's financial aid office regarding their policies for establishing in-state residency prior to applying. Finally, if you do not have an in-state school it would be wise for you to work on establishing residency in a state that does have a veterinary school well in advance of applying so that you have an in-state option. While this may mean delaying your entrance to veterinary school by a couple of years, it could save you a significant amount of money after graduation. Again, please refer to specific school policies for more information on the requirements for being considered an in-state resident.

Options after veterinary school

After your four years of school, and upon passing the veterinary board exam (the NAVLE), you have the following options:

1. Go directly in to general practice. For those wishing to be general practitioners, the option is available to start practicing immediately upon graduation. It is best to find a clinic where there is a good mentoring program in place, and that practices high-quality medicine.
2. Complete a one-year internship program and then go into general practice. The additional year of clinical training will help solidify your skills as a clinician and give you additional exposure to challenging medicine and surgery cases with a certain subset of species.
3. Complete a one-year internship program and then go into a clinical residency program in areas such as internal medicine, surgery, cardiology, dermatology, neurology, nutrition, clinical or anatomic pathology, ophthalmology, dentistry, small animal exotics medicine, radiology, oncology or other specialty fields.
4. Complete an advanced degree in a related field such as an MPH, MS or PhD in areas such as comparative medicine, animals and public policy, pathology, immunology, conservation medicine, or any number of other related disciplines.
5. Complete a fellowship program or other short-term experience program towards your career goals.

Some thoughts on becoming a good doctor

We all know a good doctor when we meet one. She is devoted to her profession, caring, and up-to-date on the latest innovations in medicine. He is vigilant and genuinely interested in the health and well-being of his patients. Some of the qualities you should seek to cultivate in yourself to be a good doctor go far beyond academic ability. Veterinary medicine is a noble profession. Beyond courses, grades, and test scores, admissions committee members want to accept candidates who've demonstrated that they will be upstanding members of the veterinary community. Start thinking about how you demonstrate:

- Enthusiasm for the profession, tempered by realism of its limitations
- Honesty, integrity and sincerity in every aspect of work and life
- The ability to understand what your clients are trying to tell you, and to appreciate their interests, motivations, fears and misunderstandings
- Maturity and professionalism
- Empathy for clients, colleagues and staff
- Warmth and compassion towards people and animals alike
- An abundance of patience (and patients!)
- The ability to communicate a clear message that is appropriate to the receiver
- A sense of humor
- Lots of energy and the ability to persevere
- Creativity, innovation and problem solving skills
- Fascination with medicine and a desire to always learn more
- The ability to make hard decisions when needed
- Confidence tempered by humility
- A lack of cynicism or arrogance
- Awareness of the roles of animals in our society, and the many influences of science, society, politics, religion and education on our dealings with animals
- The ability to let go of challenging medical decisions and tough emotional cases at the end of the day
- A sense of social responsibility and a life-long commitment to serve others
- Dedication to getting the job done through hard work and perseverance, knowing that this will sometimes come at a cost to your free time, personal obligations and family.

Some advice from current veterinarians

While writing this guide, I polled veterinarians from my school and with whom I have worked in the region over the last 5 years. Here is the advice that they had for future veterinary students:

-“College is the place for you to take courses in a range of subjects to see what you really like and where you really excel. Don’t get locked into an all science curriculum only to discover in your senior year that you really love history or that you would like to consider a career in law. Especially in your first two years, broaden yourself and take a variety of classes. You will be a more interesting person for it, you will have a better perspective on life and you will be sure that you are making the right choice.”

-“Be prepared to be in debt, and be prepared to be overworked and underappreciated. If you can deal with all that and still find your profession awesome, then you are good to go. I also recommend working in every position in a practice (kennel, tech, receptionist) and get lots of experience. I personally think it is better to work for a couple of years before going to get a practical perspective.”

-“I may add underpaid to that list and don't say you don't care when you can't afford what life has to offer (because you are paying off your loans).”

-“Love what you do or do something else. Veterinary school is a long, hard, expensive road, so make sure you should be on it. If so, you will love the destination.”

-“If I had known how much my debt was going to be a burden to me and my family, I would not have gone to veterinary school.”

-“I love my job.”

-Almost every vet who responded to my query wrote back “Think carefully about the sacrifice you are about to make.” The gist of their comments was that vet school is tough stuff, and that the veterinary profession is not always as glamorous as it may seem from the outside. Know what you are getting into.

Tips for a successful four years of college study (no matter where you go next)

1. Start your courses off right. Prior to the first day of class, get a copy of your course syllabus (usually on-line at ELMS) and read your first few chapters’ worth of material. Look for any scheduling problems on the syllabus and address them early.
2. Maintain your health by eating well, exercising and spending time with your friends. Learn how to avoid the seasonal colds and flu that go around school through proper hand-washing, good sanitation, and some common sense. Get a full night of sleep every night, especially before a test.
3. Prepare for each class by reading the relevant material in its entirety prior to the lecture. Professors expect students to be prepared for class and teach to that level. Furthermore, the lectures will make more sense and you will be able to ask good questions if you come prepared.
4. Go to class! This is your opportunity to see the material again, ask questions, get to know your professors and classmates and learn something. Don’t waste your money sleeping through your education.
5. Make the most out of class sessions by taking good notes, asking questions and talking to fellow students. Review and organize your notes each night while the material is fresh in your head.
6. Learn how to learn. It is not up to your professors to spoon feed you every piece of information or fill-in the big picture for you. Rather, a good professor presents a significant body of information and guides students toward more sophisticated comprehension of the subject as more than a collection of facts. A significant part of your success in any discipline will come from your ability to evaluate information, make conclusions about it, draw analogies between what you are learning and other coursework, and to apply what you have learned to novel situations. Look up questions that you don’t know. Challenge yourself to relate what you are learning to other chapters, other courses in and beyond the department, and to life in general. This is the difference between an A student and a B student.
7. Use office hours, TAs, academic success centers and other supplemental resources. Seek out help as soon as you know you need it. Most courses build on themselves, so a lack of understanding only becomes compounded as the semester progresses.
8. Plan on devoting an average of at least two hours of good study time outside of class for each hour spent in class.
9. Break up your study of a particular subject into 1-2 hour sessions rather than long runs of studying. Studies have shown that you learn and retain more when you encounter the material in several small sessions rather than cramming all at once.
10. Additionally, break down large assignments such as term papers and projects into smaller tasks. The assignments will seem less daunting, you will have time to research useful articles, books, and digital resources. This practice will also give you insulation against unexpected illnesses or family emergencies. Finally, it is far less stressful at the end of term to have a little bit of work to do on several projects, than cramming to get them all finished simultaneously.
11. Stay organized. Keep your notes in a single place in chronological order along with any hand-outs, articles or other supplemental materials from the course. Keep a paper or on-line planner to help you keep all of your tests, due dates, extra-curricular commitments and personal dates in order.

12. When you are preparing for a test, ask yourself what questions you would ask if you were writing the test. Try to identify key concepts and overarching themes as a means of organizing your studying efforts. It is important to see the big picture and the relationships in what you are learning as a framework for the details you have to memorize.
13. Study with a study group! Often, other students will key in on different areas than you. A good study group can be a great place of learning and support. That said, always do your own homework and make sure that you fully understand everything the group is learning. Don't stay in groups that waste a lot of time chatting or goofing around. A little bit of humor helps studying go smoothly, but a lot of goofing around is just a waste of study time.
14. Learn from your failures and do better next time. Don't dwell on a low test score or a bad paper grade. Talk to the professor or course TA about your performance, develop a plan to improve and move on. On a similar note, don't let one disappointing test score undermine your performance in an entire class, and don't let a disappointing grade in one course undermine your performance in other classes. If you are not doing well in a class, it is better to have a W on your transcript than an F, so pay attention to the add/drop and withdrawal deadlines.
15. Don't forget to have some fun. Balance your academic work with recreation, community service and maintaining your close friendships. Talk to your parents often- they will give you the best advice and support, even if they nag a little.
16. It's great to work, but limit your work hours to no more than 15 hours per week. Try to find a position with flexible work hours and a short commute. Typically, on-campus jobs are more accommodating to student needs than jobs off campus.

Plan for your four years at UMD and your veterinary school application

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Academics	*Outline a four year graduation plan and review it during your advising sessions.	*Wrap up general education courses. *Review your graduation plan, major requirements and pre-requisites to make sure you are on track to graduate on time.	*Review your graduation plan, major requirements and pre-requisites to make sure you are on track to graduate on time.	*Make sure that all course work for your major is complete and that you are set to graduate on-time.
Experiences	*Join the pre-veterinary club. *Research a volunteer opportunity and take part in it. *Find a job or internship working with animals. *Start a journal of your animal related experiences.	*Continue in the pre-vet club. *Continue volunteering. *Find a job or internship that allows you to work with animals. Remember to have a variety of animal experiences on your resume. *Continue to update your journal of your animal related experiences.	*Continue in the pre-vet club. *Continue volunteering. *Find a job or internship that allows you to work with animals. Remember to have a variety of animal experiences on your resume. *Continue to update your journal of your animal related experiences.	*Continue in the pre-vet club. *Continue volunteering, interning and working with animals. *Continue to update your journal of your animal related experiences.
Preparation	*Read this guide in its entirety! *Evaluate your professional interests, personal strengths and career choices. *Do some veterinary career information searching to understand the range of careers for vets.	*Start to research the veterinary schools to which you wish to apply. Narrow down your list to 5 schools so that you can focus on them. Make sure you are on-track to meet all of their admission requirements.	*Re-evaluate your professional interests, personal strengths and career choices. *Consider a GRE prep course or study book. *Visit the veterinary schools to which you want to apply.	*Attend a session on interviewing; Practice mock-interviews. *Create a tracking spreadsheet to make sure that all of your applications and their supporting materials are submitted on-time.
Application	*Make a list of 10 schools where you think you might want to apply and list all of the coursework requirements for each school in one place.	*Get to know at least two professors who could serve as good references for you. This involves more than just taking their courses.	*Solidify relationships with at least two professors who will serve as references for you. *Begin writing your personal statement.	*Apply to schools starting in June after your junior year! *Make sure that transcripts, reference letters and supporting materials are sent.
Advising	*Discuss your career goals with your professors, family, and advisors. Start talking to veterinarians working in areas that interest you about their experiences.	*Check in with your advisor to make sure you are on-track.	*Make sure you are working carefully to solidify you application and set in place your schedule for applying to schools and graduating on-time. Talk to Dr. Nathaniel Tablante at the College Park campus of VMRCVM.	
Life	*Take a class that interests you outside of the sciences. *Exercise regularly. *Sleep 8 hours per day. *Try something new each week. *Build a network of close friends. *Volunteer *Learn a new skill *Get to know your parents as adults. *Smile and relax			

Sample Veterinary Experiences log

119		fx											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
5	Date	Hours spent	Brief description of memorable experiences/insights/questions.										
6	3-Jun-16	4	Parvo puppies in isolation - learned about quarantines and disinfection.										
7	5-Jun-16	9	Rough day - 3 euthanasias can be hard on you emotionally. Work-life balance.										
8	6-Jun-16	7	Learned to place an IV Cath! Worked as Sx tech with senior tech. Watched 3 spays, 2 neuters, and a cystotomy.										
9	8-Jun-16	9.5	Helped w/ appts today - recheck of HBC from last week = doing well. Fracture repair/Sx is interesting: Career choice?										
10	9-Jun-16	8.5	Staff member bitten by a cat after handling the animal roughly -- had to get abx. Better handling procedures?										
11	13-Jun-16	8	Assisted with spays and neuters today. Cat declawing came up - look into this.										
12	14-Jun-16	12	Really busy today. When do you get to eat? Fun doing puppy appts, sad old dog bone cancer case.										
13	16-Jun-16	11	Saw e-tube placement for a cat who has not been eating. Why is cat yellow?										
14	21-Jun-16	9	Yellow cat doing better. Learned about hepatic lipidosis. Working on tech checkoff list.										
15	22-Jun-16	8.5	Blocked cat, 3 dogs with anal masses, and 2 dogs who ate too much chocolate. Yikes.										
16	23-Jun-16	8	Dentistry day. Who knew teeth could be so dirty! Helped take dental x-rays. 5 extractions.										
17													
18													
19													
20													
21	TOTAL	94.5 Hours											
22													
23													
24													
25													
26													
27													
28													
29													

Budget planning worksheet²

Table 1: What debts do I currently have?	Current amount	Interest rate?	Debt anticipated at graduation
Federal student loans (deferred while in school)			
Subsidized			
Unsubsidized			
Private student loans (payable while in vet school)			
Car Loan			
Mortgage			
Credit card debt			
Other private loan or outstanding debts			
TOTAL DEBTS			

Table 2: How much will veterinary school cost per year?	Yearly amount	Total for the 4 years
Tuition (tends to increase each year)		
Fees/Books/Supplies		
Board exams, special programs, other fees		
TOTAL COST OF VETERINARY EDUCATION		

Table 3: What will my other expenses be during veterinary school?	Monthly amount	Yearly amount	Total for the 4 years
Private Student loan repayment (undergrad)			
Car payment, parking, gas, tolls, repairs			
Credit card debt (outstanding debt to pay off)			
Other private loan payments			
Travel (plane/train/bus to and from home, other)			
Housing (rent or mortgage, insurance, repairs, etc)			
Utilities			
Food			
Dental insurance and dental care			
Health insurance and health care			
Rx and OTC medications			
Pet Care			
Cell phone and internet			
Clothing/shoes/haircuts/etc.			
Entertainment			
Other:			
TOTAL LIVING EXPENSES			

Table 4: What will be my total financial burden for the 4 years of veterinary school?	Yearly amount	Total for the 4 years
Total cost of veterinary education (from table 2)		
Total living expenses (from table 3)		
TOTAL FINANCIAL BURDEN DURING VET SCHOOL		

² For a much more detailed analysis and “what-if” scenarios, check out the excellent veterinary student loan repayment simulator at <http://vinfoundation.org/demoloansim/>

Table 5: What resources do I have to pay for veterinary school, my other debts, and the cost of living?	Yearly amount	Total for the 4 years
Personal savings		
Expected contributions from parents, family		
Scholarships		
Part-time job during the year (no more than 10hr/wk)		
Summer job (after 1 st and 2 nd year only)		
TOTAL RESOURCES		

Table 6: How much in loans and other repayable grants will I need to pay for veterinary school?	Yearly amount	Interest rate?	Total for the 4 years
Total Financial Burden for Vet School (table 4)		-----	
Total Resources to pay for Vet School (table 5)		-----	
Difference (i.e. Amount that will be needed in loans)		-----	
Federal Subsidized			
Unsubsidized (will increase during school)			
Private			
Other (family loan, etc)			

Table 7: What will my debt-load be when I graduate from veterinary school?	Total amount anticipated	Interest rate?	Monthly debt payments once out of school
Total Federal student loans (undergrad):	-----	-----	-----
Subsidized			
Unsubsidized (will increase during school)			
Private student loans (undergrad)			
Car Loan (if not paid off)			
Mortgage			
Credit card debt (if not paid off)			
Other remaining private loans or outstanding debts (undergrad)			
Total federal students loans (vet school)			
Total private loans (vet school)			
Total other debts (vet school)			
TOTAL DEBTS TO REPAY AFTER VET SCHOOL			

New graduates in private practice can expect to make about \$65-67,000 per year. After federal, state and local taxes, this typically amounts to a monthly net take-home pay of about \$3500. The monthly payment for a student loan debt of \$120,000 paid over 10 years at 6.8 percent annual interest is about \$1380. Can you afford it?

Calculate your monthly take-home pay for different salary levels

<http://www.payroll-taxes.com/calculators.htm>

Calculate your monthly student loan payment

<http://www.finaid.org/calculators/loanpayments.phtml>

A final note

Preparing for and applying to veterinary school is a big commitment that starts with your first semester here. Pay attention to your course work, make the most of your interactions with faculty and staff, get a lot of good experience, and start thinking about the financial piece of your educational goals. Be sure to join the pre-veterinary society, and talk to your family about your interests and how they evolve during your time here.

Good luck to you as you pursue your dreams!

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