

Preparation for Applying to Veterinary Medical School

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Veterinary medicine is an attractive and rewarding career field. It is also very demanding - requiring high levels of dedication and professionalism. Admission to veterinary schools is highly competitive, and that is especially true here in the northeastern United States, where there are relatively few vet schools. It is often as difficult to get into veterinary school as it is to get into medical school. Most students apply more than once before they succeed in gaining admission. At the same time, the average salaries of veterinarians are much lower than those of physicians. In 1995, the average starting salary of vet was around \$35,000.

If you are considering a career in veterinary medicine, you should find out all you can about the field. A good place to begin is a publication called *Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements in the United States and Canada*. This compact book contains essential information on all U.S. and Canadian veterinary schools. The guides written by Crawford (1995) and Corder (1994) contain a wealth of useful information and suggestions. You may wish to visit the web site of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges at www.aavmc.org. Finally, take a look at "I want to be a veterinarian" at www.vet.futurescan.com. If you are convinced that veterinary medicine is for you, you should pursue it with your full effort and determination. The path you have chosen is a challenging one and requires your total commitment.

This introductory guide is divided into three parts. The first part describes the areas in which you will be judged when applying to veterinary schools and the best ways to prepare yourself in those areas. The second part is a timeline that will help you to plan your preparations. Finally, there is a list of information sources.

I Admission Criteria

This section describes the six main areas in which applicants are evaluated by the admissions committees of veterinary schools. It recommends ways to prepare yourself in these areas.

Academic achievement in college

Veterinary medical schools expect a high grade point average in your college coursework. In many of them, the mean GPA of admitted students is around 3.5. Most schools look at your average in science courses as well as your overall average. They do not require students to major in a particular discipline and accept applicants from a broad spectrum of majors. However, the majority of successful applicants majored in the one of the sciences. Humanities and social science majors are also admitted to veterinary school, although if you chose that route, you must be sure to get a strong foundation in the basic sciences as well.

Applicants are generally required to have taken the seven to nine science courses and two English courses listed in Table 1. Several additional courses from among those listed in Table 2 are also frequently required. See Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements to determine the requirements of specific schools. Many students decide to take additional advanced science courses beyond the required courses, in order to be better prepared for their veterinary studies.

Research experience in the sciences will enhance your application. Many students choose to carry out a laboratory research project during their undergraduate program. Opportunities for student research are available at D'Youville.

The Bachelor of Science in Biology at D'Youville is designed to meet the above needs fully. Another major will also serve, if care is taken to include all of the courses listed in Table 1, preferably with the addition of several advanced math, biology and/or chemistry courses.

Table 1. Courses generally required for admission to veterinary medical schools.

2	General chemistry, including lab
1-2	Organic chemistry, including lab
2	General biology or zoology, including lab
1	Biochemistry
1-2	General physics, including lab
2	English

Table 2. Other courses often required by veterinary medical schools.

Mathematics (such as: algebra, trigonometry, calculus, or statistics)
Genetics
Microbiology
Humanities and social sciences

Admission Test Scores

All U.S. veterinary medical schools require that applicants take a standardized admission test. Most require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test. Three southern schools use the Veterinary College Admission Test (VCAT) instead of the GRE. A few schools give you the choice of the GRE or VCAT, or MCAT (Medical College Admission Test).

It is very important that you do well on this admission test. Most schools give substantial weight to your scores on the test. Most schools expect scores above the 70th percentile. The median score of students admitted to Cornell University vet school is at the 84th percentile. To insure your best effort, you should undertake intensive test preparation prior to taking the exam. The GRE General Test is administered by computer, so, for it, it is also important that you become familiar with its style and format before you take it. D'Youville offers a non-credit GRE preparation course that will assist you with test preparation.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are generally required from faculty members and others knowledgeable of the applicant's academic promise, character and commitment to veterinary medicine. The schools use these letters for a fuller and richer portrait of a student that goes beyond transcripts and test scores. It is important to approach people to write these letters well in advance of the deadline, so that they will have adequate time to complete them.

The Preprofessional Advisory Committee at D'Youville has a policy of drafting a consensus letter that includes input from all members of the committee. Such consensus letters better reflect the combined judgment of the department and often carry more weight with admissions committees.

Knowledge of veterinary medicine / Animal experience

You should make it your business to get lots of experience with animals and veterinarians. You should work with different kinds of animals in a variety of settings. This experience benefits you by giving you a hands-on view of what the profession is all about. It will also give you insight into the appropriateness of the

field for you. And, it is an essential element of your application. Veterinary medical schools expect applicants to have substantial experience with animals and veterinary medicine. A typical applicant to Cornell University vet school has had about 1000 hours of such experience.

This work may be paid or volunteer. Not all of it needs to involve a veterinarian, provided you do have contact with animals. Examples of places you might work include: small animal clinics, SPCA shelters, zoos, aquariums, race tracks, large animal practices. Many students work in the summers between school years. Be sure to keep good records of the dates and number of hours you worked. Also, remember that schools may require a letter of reference from your supervisor at each place you work.

Personal Attributes

A wide variety of personal attributes may play a role in the selection process. Certainly maturity and strong moral character are important. If you possess some distinctive abilities, experiences or accomplishments, they may help you to stand out from others with equal academic qualifications. Notable extracurricular activities and achievements during high school and college can be valuable. Make an effort to highlight any special attributes or experiences in your application essay or interviews. State of residence, age, gender, and minority status may also influence the admission committee's decision.

Veterinary School Interview

Most veterinary schools require an admission interview (although Cornell Veterinary College does not). The interview provides an opportunity for admissions representatives to meet you face to face and probe your ideas and attitudes. It is wise to prepare for your interviews so that you can present a lively, coherent and compelling discussion of your interests and views about veterinary medicine. A mock interview with your advisor can help to focus your preparations. See Zielinski (1986) for some hints.

II Suggested Timeline

This timeline is presented as a model schedule designed to give you the best opportunity to gain admission to veterinary school. It should not be seen as a rigid requirement. It may need to be modified in various ways to meet individual needs and circumstances.

Freshman Year

- > Make a tentative plan for your coursework over the next four years using the model schema and the advice of your advisor.
- > Develop good study habits and work hard at your courses to lay the foundation for a strong undergraduate academic record.
- > Improve your understanding of current events and general knowledge by getting into the habit of reading newspapers, news magazines and books on a regular basis.
- > Obtain several of the suggested reference works and begin to acquaint yourself with the process of applying to veterinary schools. Visit the web site of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges at www.aavmc.org. Also see “I want to be a veterinarian” at www.vet.futurescan.com.
- > Find an opportunity for volunteer or paid work with animals that you can engage in during the coming summer.

Sophomore Year

- > Familiarize yourself with the VMCAS application procedure. This central application service is used by nearly all U.S. veterinary schools and 2 out of four Canadian ones. It enables you to fill out one application that can then be forwarded to multiple schools. Information and an application can be accessed online at:
www.aavmc.org
- > Begin to investigate what veterinary schools you will apply to with the help of Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements. Visit vet school web sites on the internet and send for their catalogs.
- > Consider taking an additional writing course if you need to improve your writing skills.
- > Look for additional kinds of animal work in veterinary or non-veterinary settings.

- > Begin an intensive review for the entrance exam you will need to take (usually the GRE General Test) in the summer following your sophomore year or in your junior year.

Junior Year

- > Begin or continue your intensive review for the entrance exam, with the help of the D'Youville review course.
- > Request letters of recommendation.
- > Decide what veterinary schools you will apply to. Consider applying to several, but check carefully to see how many out-of-state students they accept.
- > Pick up a GRE application packet at the Career Services Center and register for a test time by mail or over the internet in June or July.
- > Get a current VMCAS application packet or review it on the internet in July. Get individual application packets from non-VMCAS schools and supplemental applications from VMCAS schools.
- > Take GRE General Test in July or August before your senior year. Most schools will not review scores earned after September 30.
- > Submit VMCAS and non-VMCAS applications in August or September. The VMCAS application may be submitted over the internet (www.aavmc.org/vmcas.htm). Be sure that your application is complete, including transcripts and letters of recommendation. You can check the status of your application at www.aavmc.org/question.htm#status.

Senior Year

- > The deadline for submitting a complete application is Oct 1 for most schools.
- > Practice for interviews with the help of your advisor.
- > Investigate financial aid possibilities and submit FAFSA and tax forms by January.

III Sources of Further Information

Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. Visit their web site at www.aavmc.org.

- * Crawford, J.D. 1995. The preveterinary planning guide. 3rd ed. Williams and Wilkins. Available at: 1-800-634-4365 or www.wwilkins.com/testprep
- * Corder, B.W., ed. 1994. Medical professions admissions guide: strategy for success. Third edition. National Assoc. of Advisors for the Health Professions, P.O. Box 1518, Champaign, IL 61824-1518. www.naahp.org/pubs.html

Cornell Univ. College of Veterinary Medicine www.vet.cornell.edu/admissions
(useful information under: Application Procedures and Newsletters)

FutureScan. "I want to be a veterinarian" www.vet.futurescan.com.

Graduate Record Examination (GRE).
(get information at www.gre.org or go to the Career Services Office on the third floor of HSB for a GRE information booklet)

Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS)
1101 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 710, Washington, DC 20005-3521
www.aavmc.org (877) 862-2740
(Web-based application service)

- * Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements in the United States and Canada. Purdue University Press. www.thepress.purdue.edu/books
(800) 933-9637
(also available from internet book sellers, such as www.amazon.com)
(this is an essential source of information for all prevets; covers admissions requirements of all U.S. and Canadian vet schools)

* = available at the D'Youville Library