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Pre-Veterinary Medicine Advising Tips

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PRE-VETERINARY MEDICINE ADVISING TIPS

The purpose of this document is to provide advisors with more knowledge of the path to veterinary school in order to better assist pre-veterinary students. This information is based on pre-veterinary students' experiences and desires for specific areas of knowledge and advice from their advisors.

THE ROAD TO VETERINARY SCHOOL

Many pre-vet students are unaware of the path to veterinary school. They know to start with undergraduate course work, but other than that, they seek out more direction. In a survey of Grand Valley Pre-Veterinary students, many students were unaware of when they should apply to schools (apply in the year prior to their final year if they want to go directly from undergrad to vet school; application opens in January), what requirements vet schools have, and how to gain experience. As a pre-vet advisor, students have high expectations for you and indicated in the same survey that they want your help to find experiences, advise them on

TOPICS

The Road to
Veterinary
School

Gaining
Experiences

Symposiums

Application
Considerations

Advising "Middle
Ground" Students

Useful Websites

Fact:
*There are 32
veterinary
schools in the
USA.*

application requirements, and guide them on what to do if they struggle in science classes. On the road to veterinary school, students are looking to you for advice on what classes to take, where to find an internship or gain animal experience, and how to build a competitive application. Throughout their undergraduate studies, I encourage you to explore veterinary schools with your advisees, help them find ways to stand out in their experiences, and provide any support you can; it is my aim to provide more resources of the road to veterinary school in this document.

GAINING EXPERIENCES

Types of Experiences

Experience is broken down into several categories, veterinary, animal, and other. Veterinary experiences are anytime a student does something that is supervised by a veterinarian. This includes shadowing and employment at a veterinary clinic. Animal experiences are every other experience pertaining to animals such as volunteering at a shelter or farm or working at a kennel. Other experiences include research, community service, non-veterinary related employment, and extracurriculars. Being well-rounded in all areas of experience is critical for making a stronger applicant; it is important to encourage your advisees to find a variety of these experiences and encourage them to do things outside of veterinary medicine too as some schools require community service hours to be considered as an applicant. Contrary to belief, you will want to encourage your advisee to have a record of and include experiences from high school including employment, extracurriculars, and animal and even veterinary experiences on their application to veterinary schools.

Helping Your Students Obtain Experiences

As mentioned above, remind your students to gain a variety of experiences, but encourage them to make each experience meaningful. A student should be able to write down something that they learned from each experience and do each activity because they want to, not to check a box for the application.

Documentation:
Remind your students to record the hours, supervisor, and what they learned at each experience to have a log when applying to schools.

Veterinary Experiences:

1) Apply to clinics near school or for a summer job at home. Encourage your advisees to apply in person rather than online if possible. Encourage your advisees to utilize CLAS advising's list of shadowing opportunities or to drive around to find a clinic or hospital to apply to.

2) Advise students to reach out to their family members or family friends about veterinarians. Networking is a very easy way to find a veterinarian or hospital to apply to work or shadow at.

3) For students interested in wildlife, John Ball Zoo will accept shadows on Monday mornings. Students can contact the volunteers@jbz.org to inquire about the process for shadowing.

If a student is looking to work in a veterinary hospital, encourage them to look for a hospital that is willing to work to train them in multiple positions including reception, kennel assistant, and veterinary assistant (hands on in the back treatment space).

Animal Experiences:

1) The Pre-Vet Club is a great place to start to get exposure to various animal experiences. The Pre-Vet Club meets weekly and typically has volunteer events throughout the semester.

2) Shelters and rescues are a great place to get consistent animal volunteer experiences.

Internships:

Some students are looking to improve their application and gain experience by doing summer internships. Internships are different from working at a veterinary hospital or shelter; internships for pre-veterinary students are similar to any other major's internships, but specifically help students gain animal and even vet experience that is much harder to get at just any veterinary clinic. The best advice to give students looking for internships is to start searching on google. The Balance Careers also has an article listing several internship opportunities (<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/pre-veterinary-internships-125694>). Another place for your pre-veterinary students to find internships is at zoos and wildlife centers; a good place to look is on Duke's Pre-Veterinary Society summer resources page (<https://sites.duke.edu/dukeprevetsociety/summer-opportunities/>). While advisees may be looking for a specific place to start their research for internships, encourage them to explore any internships that may fit their interests or even look into study abroad programs.

Extracurriculars

A great way to stand out among other applicants is to find extracurriculars that your student is passionate about. This can include research at Grand Valley, playing sports, joining a club, or having a hobby. Some hobbies, if explained properly, can show how an applicant is a unique individual; for example, if an advisee is an avid yoga practitioner, including that on their application could allow themselves to describe how they relax and take time for themselves, which is very important and stressed in veterinary school. Encourage your advisees to get involved in the Grand Valley community, to obtain leadership positions (whether the role has a name or not), to volunteer in the community, and work a job outside of veterinary medicine. In order not to stress out an advisee about all their options for gaining experiences, remind them to break things up throughout the school

year or to focus experiences for over the summer. It is important to remind your advisee to be uniquely themselves and to also gain an appropriate amount of experience for an application to veterinary school.

SYMPOSIUMS

West Michigan Regional APVMA Symposium

This is a smaller symposium in November put together by Grand Valley's Pre-Veterinary Medicine Club and Hope College's Club Animalia. As of 2020, the West Michigan Regional APVMA Symposium has been running for five years. This is a full day event where students have the opportunity to attend a lecture and a lab, hear from current veterinary students, listen to speakers in veterinary medicine, and network with veterinary schools. This is a great opportunity for students to gain exposure to veterinary medicine and get excited about their future career.

APVMA National Symposium

The national symposium is hosted at a new location each year, typically at a school with a veterinary school or a veterinary school nearby. This is a weekend long event where students have the opportunity to meet other pre-veterinary students from around the country, attend a full day of lectures and one lab, network with veterinary schools (nearly all attend), and obtain even more exposure to veterinary medicine and the paths that they could take in their career. This symposium is unique for two reasons. First, it provides an opportunity for Pre-Veterinary Club members to bond on the trip. Second, advisors are encouraged to attend and can attend seminars for them. Having advisors present can also allow a student to run for the APVMA executive board should their advisor endorse them. If you have an advisee interested in higher leadership as a pre-veterinary student, this is a great opportunity for them to try for.

APPLICATION CONSIDERATIONS

Prerequisite Classes

Many schools require similar prerequisite courses of general biology, general and organic chemistry, upper level biology courses, and general education courses. However, some have specific prerequisites such as animal nutrition or communication. Some schools, like Ohio State University and Purdue University, require biochemistry I and II to complete their biochemistry requirement. When planning future classes with an advisee, be sure to consider school specific requirements (if they have an idea of schools they are interested in) along with the major and pre-vet requirements for Grand Valley. Another important note is that many schools require a C or C- in prerequisite and science courses; these requirements can be found on the VMSAR comparison website. Be sure to advise your student on these requirements to work in any classes that may need to be retaken.

Tests for Application

Many schools still require the GRE to be taken for acceptance into veterinary school. Each year, more schools drop this requirement. However, according to the survey taken by Grand Valley Pre-Vet Students, many students were looking for advice on how to prepare and when to take the GRE. Most often, the GRE must be taken prior to the application deadline, but it can be taken anytime prior to then. Many students take it the summer of application, but a student could take it sooner if they would prefer to prepare for the chance that they may want to retake it to improve scores. For preparation advice, the best that I have heard is to practice the vocabulary and learn the math formulas. I also recommend finding a practice book or using an online source, especially to practice for the written portion of the exam.

Fact:
15* US Vet Schools
require the GRE for
admission.

*as of Fall 2020

Another test that is becoming more popular to use is the CASPer exam, which is similar to an MMI interview. In this test, students are presented with 9 scenarios (video and written) and have only a few minutes to answer three questions. The test scores are given only to the veterinary schools and does not require much preparation; I found it useful to try a practice exam to get a feel for the format of the test only. Some schools that require CASPer include Lincoln Memorial University, Purdue University, and Virginia-Maryland University, and some schools used these in place of interviews for the 2021 matriculation cycle due to COVID-19; this test system could remain a vital part of some schools' applications.

Bridge Years

More and more often, due to personal choice and a need for improving their own application, students are electing to take a year or so to strengthen their application in regard to improving grades or, more commonly, increasing meaningful experiences. Encourage your students who take any time off to continue to work to improve grades or improve experiences by retaking classes as needed, gaining a variety of experiences, improving relationships with veterinarians for letters of recommendation, and overall bettering their application.

For a student in the process of applying

When a student is ready to apply and the application open, encourage your advisee to start the application, ask for letters of recommendation, and start framing essays early on in the process. Encourage you advisee to submit the application a few weeks prior to the deadline as well. Submitting prior to the deadline does not increase the chances of getting in, but it can speed up the process of getting the application verified and correcting any errors that were found between the application and the students transcripts. Once they have submitted, I expect many students will not be seeking out

a meeting, but they could present questions or express nerves about waiting to hear back or about any interviews they have coming up. Remind them of the CLAS advising practice MMI sessions and the Career Center's interview practice opportunities.

ADVISING "MIDDLE GROUND" STUDENTS

What is a "middle ground" student?

Middle ground students are not the students who clearly need to improve their GPA or have very few experiences. Middle ground students are those who are not as easy to advise; these are students with decent grades and a decent experiences. These are the students I would encourage to be involved in some experiences for a longer period of time such volunteering at a shelter for several years. It is important to show that experiences are not ticking a box, but rather that the applicant is passionate about their experiences. I would also encourage these students to diversify their experiences. If they have primarily worked with small animal veterinarians, I would encourage your advisee to shadow veterinarians in other fields of medicine such as zoo or large animal, even if they are not very interested in working with other species (they will have to in veterinary school). In addition to adding new experiences, I would also encourage you to encourage these students to seek out new roles in their current experiences such as taking a club executive board position or adding on more responsibilities at their work or the farm they volunteer at. Leadership roles do no need to have an exact position, but it is important to demonstrate that ability on an application. There could be a situation in which a middle ground student may actually need to increase their GPA to meet a school's requirement (some schools have hard cut offs, ex. 3.39 does not equal 3.4); these students should focus on retaking a science class in which they received a C- minus or lower. Some schools do

require a C in prerequisite classes and do calculate a separate science GPA from overall GPA. In order for these and any students to get accepted to veterinary school, it is important for them to convey their uniqueness and readiness to take on the challenges of veterinary school; having meaningful, diverse experiences, forming good connections with veterinarians, and being able to express their preparedness in words is essential.

USEFUL WEBSITES

VMCAS application

You are able to create a test account on VMCAS to look at the format for the current cycle with your advisees when it is open (mid-January through mid-September).

<https://vmcas.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#!/login>

School Comparison

VMSAR is new site launched by AAVMC in Fall 2020 that allows students to look at individual school requirements all in one place and has a cost comparison tool.

https://applytovetschool.org/#school_list_container

Student Doctor Net

This website is more useful for students who are applying. It is a thread chain that students post information about schools in, especially when they hear from schools about interview.

<https://forums.studentdoctor.net/categories/veterinary-forums-dvm.163/>

For any students who seem to need a more detailed undergraduate plan

"A Guide Through the Years for a Pre-Veterinary Student" is a presentation on the APVMA website under "Resources". It provides a detailed plan of things to be doing each year and summer of undergrad leading up to veterinary school.

<https://www.apvma.org/local-club-executive-board-helpful-documents.html>

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I hope you find this information useful in your future advising. I enjoyed putting this information together throughout the semester. It was my goal to give back to GVSU's pre-veterinary community, and I plan on continuing to giving back to the veterinary and pre-veterinary communities throughout my future career.