Veterinary medicine can be a very enjoyable and professionally rewarding career. The following information is provided for your use in planning your undergraduate program. Since admission requirements vary among schools and from one year to the next, the Office of Academic Advising cannot be responsible for errors or omissions.

At present, the minimum requirements for acceptance into a veterinary program leading to the DVM (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine) are more demanding than for any other type of advanced degree program. This is mostly because there are few/no weak programs to which a student with a weaker record can gain admission. As a result, pre-veterinary students need to plan their program and undergraduate experience carefully. It is easier to get into the veterinary program for your region (which is sometimes actually at a school in a neighboring state), and most students go through the vet program for their region of residency. Virginia Tech (officially the "Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine") is the vet school for both Virginia and Maryland, and so most of our pre-veterinary students apply there. (NOTE: if you might want to attend Virginia Tech’s vet school, please see the Appendix to this advising document.)

Two useful books provide important information for students interested in becoming veterinarians. The Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges publishes an annually updated book, *Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements* (also known as the VMSAR), that gives an overview of the veterinary school admissions process and includes information on the requirements of every veterinary school in the United States and Canada. *Get Into Veterinary School: Insights by an Admissions Expert*, by Joseph M. Piekunka, who served for ten years as the Cornell University School of Veterinary Medicine’s Director of Admissions, is a useful guide to every step of the pre-vet process. Both books are available from online booksellers such as amazon.com. In addition, the website of the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges, www.aavmc.org, provides useful information for prospective veterinary students.

The Pre-Vet Club is the College’s organization for students interested in veterinary medicine. Members discuss course selection, trade information on opportunities to gain experience in working with animals, go on field trips to vet schools and zoos, and provide mutual support.

The College’s pre-vet advisor is Dr. Beverly Sher. To schedule an advising meeting, email Dr. Sher at btsher@wm.edu.

I. The Importance of GPA, Experience, and Recommendations

Many beginning students in vet school have taken a year or more doing something else after college, often vet related, before gaining admission. The average student at Virginia Tech has a 3.5 undergraduate GPA, and very few students gain admission with lower than a 3.0 average GPA. Virginia Tech pre-vet advisors have told us that those admitted with a 3.0 overall average
almost certainly had a high GPA in their last 3 or 4 semesters (a 3.5 or above). Some other schools, including Tufts, interview and occasionally accept students with GPAs under 3.0 even if their GPA was fairly constant for their entire 4 years, but the rest of the record needs to be excellent. Students with an overall GPA of 3.5 and above are in a strong position, and should have a good chance of gaining admission. Our experience with William and Mary students is that students with a GPA of 3.5 and above with the necessary course experience and veterinary experience have almost all gained admission to at least one veterinary medical program on their first try. Students with a 3.2 – 3.4 usually have gained admission on their first or second try. Students with a 3.0 or 3.1 have had to gain much more experience, and may have had to do well in additional classes after graduation, in order to gain admission. A few students with an undergraduate GPA below 3.0 have gained admission to veterinary school, but such students often need considerable additional coursework first. Some post-baccalaureate programs accept pre-vets and can provide the GPA boost needed to produce a more competitive application.

Note that experience and a background in veterinary work are very important for gaining admission! At most schools, good letters of recommendation from at least one veterinarian and at least one professor who know you fairly well are also quite important.

Vet schools expect applicants to have hundreds of hours of documented experience with live animals, both inside and outside of a veterinary clinic. For example, Virginia Tech would like applicants to have approximately 400-600 hours of experience in a veterinary clinic, but prefers applicants to also have acquired experience with a diversity of animals, such as horses, goats, pigs, birds, reptiles, etc. Pre-vet students have volunteered at wildlife rehabilitation centers, humane societies, the Virginia Living Museum, Busch Gardens, Colonial Williamsburg’s stables, zoos and petting zoos, and farms and ranches. Conducting research that involves hands-on experience with live animals is another activity that can be included. Look for positions that allow you to interact directly with live animals and help maintain them (e.g., shoveling manure in horse stalls counts!). Keeping a journal of your experiences, with dates and hours, is an excellent way to keep track of your activities. Many vet schools require such a summary from applicants, and some vet schools even require a letter of documentation from the supervisor of each experience.

II. General Veterinary School Course Requirements

Any student considering veterinary school should check the required and recommended courses for entry into the particular veterinary schools to which the student might apply. Check the admissions requirements for programs in which you might be interested (check the web, and e-mail or phone them if you have questions). In general, vet schools require at least 8 credits of introductory biology courses with lab, two semesters of general chemistry with lab, 8 credits of organic chemistry (with lab), 3 credits of biochemistry, 8 credits of physics with lab, 6 credits of English (including a composition or technical writing component; our Freshman and Biology writing requirements should generally meet the writing component), 6 credits of college math (statistics courses may not meet the requirements; Math 106 may not meet these requirements), and 6 credits of humanities/social sciences. In addition, many schools list useful/suggested
electives, which often include such courses as cell biology, comparative anatomy, genetics, microbiology, nutrition, and animal physiology, so you should consider taking some of these courses (nutrition and human anatomy can be taken from the Kinesiology and Health Sciences Department at William & Mary).

The Virginia Tech Vet Medicine Program can be contacted most easily through the web, or at (540) 231-4699 for information on admissions, questions about requirements, and applications. Virginia Tech mails interview notices around 2 February, schedules interviews with candidates near the end of February, and mails acceptance/rejection letters around the 2nd week of March.

III. Suggested Course Plan for Freshmen

Most freshman pre-vet students choose among the following courses in their first fall semester:

(1) BIOL 220/221 (or BIOL 302: Integrative Biology: Animals, if AP/IB exemption or dual enrollment credit has been granted for BIOL 220/221 and BIOL 225/226. See the Biology Department web page for advice for students who are deciding whether to accept the exemption/credit or take BIOL 220/221and BIOL 225/226.)

(2) CHEM 103 and CHEM 103L or MATH 103 or MATH 111. Note that CHEM 103, which is offered only in the fall semester (and in the first summer session), is a prerequisite for the next course in the chemistry sequence, CHEM 206. Therefore, you should take CHEM 103 in the fall of your freshman year unless you plan to begin your chemistry sequence in your sophomore year or take a year’s worth of chemistry in the summer after your freshman year. MATH 111, however, is offered in both the fall and the spring semesters.

While some students do take BIOL 220/221, CHEM 103/103L, and math in their first fall semester, this is a challenging course load that should be discussed with your freshman advisor first.

Note on math courses: Virginia Tech will accept MATH 103 and MATH 108 as the required two semesters of mathematics. However, this is not true for all vet schools and is not true in general for medical schools and graduate schools in biology. Therefore, if you want to have the greatest flexibility in selecting among possible career options, you should consider taking MATH 111/112 or MATH 131/132. MATH 131 (fall) and MATH 132 (spring) are calculus courses that are comparable to MATH 111 and MATH 112 but are designed specifically for the life sciences. MATH 131 and MATH 132 should satisfy veterinary schools and medical schools.

(3) In general, vet schools require two semesters of English. Most vet schools, including Virginia Tech, will accept a freshman seminar with a “W” writing component as one of the two required English courses. Virginia Tech will accept W&M’s two-credit Introduction to Creative Writing course (which meets GER 6) and a four-credit freshman seminar with a “W” to complete the 6 credits of required English. (You can take three-credit English courses if you prefer.) Virginia Tech requires that one of the two English courses must be taken at an accredited college rather
than being awarded as AP credit or credit based on standardized tests. Dual enrollment credit from an accredited college, however, is considered to satisfy this requirement.

Note that the English Department will not allow academic juniors and seniors to take 100 and 200-level English courses. Therefore, you should plan to complete the pre-vet English requirement before you have earned enough credits to become an academic junior. Some students who enter W&M with a large number of credits become academic juniors by the first or second semester of their sophomore year.

(4) If you need to complete your foreign language requirement by continuing a language begun in high school, your freshman year can be a wise time to do this if your high school language courses are fresh in your mind. However, this logic also applies if you have enter W&M with college credit for the first semester of calculus and are ready to take MATH 112.

**IV. Other Hints on Course Planning**

You should not feel obligated to take 15 or more credits in your first fall semester, particularly if you enter W&M with college credits or if you are considering taking summer school. You must, however, take 12 credits to be a full-time student.

Courses that are not required for your major and are not used to meet GER or proficiency requirements may be taken at schools other than W&M during the summer. Since the Department of Biology does not count the chemistry credits in the number of credits required for a biology major, biology majors may take the chemistry courses at schools other than W&M during the summer. However, before taking any summer school courses elsewhere, it is very important to complete the pre-approval form available from the Office of the Registrar’s web page to ensure that the credit will be transferable to W&M. Note that, since the grade is never transferable to your W&M transcript, you will be required to request a transcript from the other institution when you apply to vet school. Physics and math are often taken during the summer at W&M or elsewhere. However, students who have taken one semester of a two-semester sequence in summer school elsewhere and have then tried to take the other semester here at W&M (e.g., take the equivalent of MATH 111 elsewhere but MATH 112 here, or take the equivalent of Physics 107 here but Physics 108 elsewhere), often comment that this is difficult because the material covered at one institution doesn’t necessarily prepare you well for the material covered in the second course at a different institution.

**V. Standardized Tests**

All American veterinary schools now require or will accept GRE scores (VA Tech wants the general test, but no longer requires or accepts the Biology advanced test scores), and some schools will accept MCAT scores. Reviewing/studying is definitely helpful for these exams. There are good study guides (and even courses) available for study for the GRE and MCAT, and everyone should take at least one sample test, just to make sure that they understand all of the instructions and the types of questions to expect on the exam.
VI. Interviews

At Virginia Tech, the interview is weighted as 25% of the entry procedure. It is given in two parts, each of 20 minutes, with around 2-4 interviewers. In one interview (often first), the interviewers each have a copy of the candidate's application. The first interview often focuses on practical questions about vet school and practice, and also covers the candidate's motivation for vet school. In the second interview candidates may be asked more difficult questions, perhaps in part to put some pressure on the candidate (perhaps in part to see whether you have developed the skills to handle stressful situations in a professional manner as well as to see whether you have considered your career thoroughly and broadly). They ask questions which are often related in various ways to the practical and ethical aspects of successfully completing veterinary school and becoming a veterinarian. Some real sample questions include: Why do you want to be a vet? Veterinary school is intense and stressful; how do you deal with lots of pressure? How do you feel about the use of animals in vet school? Of your vet experience, what is the most difficult situation you have faced, and how did you deal with it? Of your vet experience, what do you enjoy the most? What kind of books do you like to read...and why? You have a pregnant mare. The foal is very valuable, but there are three months left before term. The mare has a tumor in her upper respiratory tract and can't breathe freely. The mother is in great distress now, and will inevitably be killed by the tumor eventually, but you want the foal. What do you do? How do you feel about the issue of livestock grazing vs. wildlife grazing on public lands? What will you do if you are not accepted?

Appendix

If you are a pre-vet student from Virginia or Maryland, or if you are from another state but might wish to attend The Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech (VA-MA RCVM), you need to be aware of their admission criteria. (Different veterinary programs have different admission criteria, but because it is easiest to gain admission in their home state's program and because it is cheapest to pay in-state tuition, most students choose to attend their home state's school.)

(1) In their initial (pre-interview) evaluation of your application, VA-MA RCVM does not consider any measure of quality of the college from which you earned your grades. They feel that measures of quality are too subjective, are not good predictors of success in their program, and are unfair to good students who attend a 'weaker' school. They remove the name of your school from your file when they make the initial evaluation of your application, so a GPA of 3.4 from a school that is considered 'easier' counts exactly the same as a GPA of 3.4 from William and Mary. (This is not true of all veterinary schools; some do consider the quality of the school a student attended.)

(2) VA-MA RCVM evaluates many criteria other than grades, but you must be careful about grades because, if they are too low, you will not gain admission. VA-MA RCVM uses three different calculations for the GPA.
(a) Overall GPA. This includes courses taken after graduation, and so this can be improved by
taking more classes here or elsewhere after you graduate. The average entering student at VA-MA RCVM has a cumulative GPA of 3.5; relatively few students with a GPA below 3.3 or 3.2 gain admission.

(b) Required Science GPA. This is the GPA from your first 8 credits of biology, your first 8 credits of organic chemistry [note that General Chemistry I, your first chemistry course at William and Mary, is not included], your first 8 credits of physics, and 3 credits of biochemistry; all but biochemistry must include laboratories. The average ReqSci GPA is approximately 3.4 for entering students to the VA-MA RCVM. If you receive a passing grade below a C- in any of these courses, you must either substitute the next appropriate course or retake the course at another institution. VA-MA RCVM will average the two grades.

As a pre-veterinary student, you should consider carefully when to take these courses. Unless you feel very confident, spread these classes out over a few years, so that you can take advantage of your improving study skills as you go.

(c) The GPA for your most recent 45 credits. This can include classes taken after graduation, and so this can be improved by taking more classes here or elsewhere after graduation. Typically, the average is around 3.6 for entering students at VA-MA RCVM.

One safe strategy for prevet students (our advice is different for premed students) is to take only one, or at most two, of the 'required science' courses in any semester. After the first one or two semesters, evaluate your grades. If your grades are not averaging in the B+ range or above, both in your required science courses and overall, consider whether you might better preserve your chances to attend VA-MA RCVM by transferring elsewhere.

(3) Please be aware that the VA-MA RCVM has some good reasons for their admissions policy. As long as all students are aware of the admissions policy in time to make educational decisions, it is a fair policy, and it does select incoming students at VA-MA RCVM that are very good.

Finally, realize that it is your responsibility to be fully aware of the current requirements for veterinary school admission! This information is given as a guide only.