Advising for Students Interested in Veterinary Programs

(written by Dr. Paul Heideman, extensively edited by Dr. Beverly Sher; updated January 2020)

William & Mary Resources

The W&M 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 club has a listserv, preveterinaryclub@lists.wm.edu, and meeting announcements and other information of interest to pre-veterinary students are posted there.

William & Mary’s pre-vet advisor is Dr. Beverly Sher. To schedule an advising meeting, email Dr. Sher at btsher@wm.edu. See her website (http://wmpeople.wm.edu/site/page/btsher/home) for instructions on how to subscribe to the Health Professions Advising listserv, which provides information on events and resources of interest to students planning careers in the health professions.

The Cohen Career Center can be helpful to students who are trying to arrange internships or find part-time jobs in the community that are relevant to veterinary medicine. Talk with the nice people at the Career Center’s front desk about making an appointment with Don Snyder to discuss these possibilities.

Useful Books and Websites

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 an exceptionally useful guide to every step of the pre-vet process.

The AAVMC 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.

The website of the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges, available at www.aavmc.org, provides essential information for prospective veterinary students.

Animal Experience

All vet schools expect applicants to have documented experience with live animals, both in the veterinary clinic and outside the clinical setting. While VMCVM (the vet school at Virginia Tech) requires only 100 documented hours, and no extra points are given for additional hours by that school, other veterinary schools require considerably more. Applicants are encouraged to acquire experience with a diversity of animals, from small domestic pets such as dogs and cats to horses, goats, pigs, birds, reptiles, and so forth. Pre-vet students at William & Mary 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, and the Cohen Career Center has helped students arrange internships at some of these places. Conducting research that involves hands-on experience with live animals is another activity that can be included in the animal experience hours list. Look for positions that allow you to interact directly
with live animals and help maintain them (e.g., shoveling manure in horse stalls counts!). Maintaining a journal of your experiences, with dates, hours, and contact information for the people who supervised you, 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.

**Veterinary School Course Requirements**

Any student considering veterinary school should check the course requirements and recommendations of the particular veterinary schools to which the student might apply. These are available in the VMSAR and on individual veterinary schools’ websites.

In general, veterinary schools require two semesters each of introductory biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics, all with lab. Some veterinary schools also require a semester of biochemistry. Many veterinary schools require two semesters of English; COLL 150 seminars and English literature and composition courses can be used to fulfill this requirement. Mathematics requirements vary; some veterinary schools require or recommend taking calculus or statistics. In addition, many veterinary schools list useful/suggested electives, which often include such courses as cell biology, comparative anatomy, genetics, microbiology, nutrition, and animal physiology.

At William & Mary, the veterinary schools’ usual requirements can be met as follows, with lecture/lab combinations designated as lecture/lab: BIOL 203/203L and BIOL 204/204L; CHEM 103/103L, 206/206L, 207/253 (or 209/253), 208/254, and 314; and PHYS 101/101L plus PHYS 102/102L or PHYS 107/107L plus PHYS 108/108L. Students planning to major in Chemistry or Physics should take PHYS 101/101L and PHYS 102/102L. Appropriate calculus courses include MATH 111 and 112 or MATH 131 and 132. Appropriate statistics courses include MATH 106, PSYC 301, and Biostatistics, as well as KINE 394. COLL 150 courses count towards the veterinary schools’ English requirements.

**Suggested Course Plan for Freshmen**

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

(1) BIOL 203/203L (or BIOL 302: Integrative Biology: Animals, if AP/IB exemption or dual enrollment credit has been granted for BIOL 203/203L and Bio 204/204L. See http://www.wm.edu/as/biology/undergraduate/apbiology/index.php for advice to students who are deciding whether to use the AP exemption/credit or take the introductory courses.)

(2) CHEM 103/103L (lab) OR a mathematics course. Note that CHEM 103, which is offered only in the fall semester, is a prerequisite for the next course in the chemistry sequence. Therefore, students should take CHEM 103/103L in the fall of freshman year unless they plan to begin taking the chemistry sequence in the sophomore year. MATH 103: Precalculus is only offered in the fall; MATH 111, however, is offered in both the fall and the spring semesters.

While some students do take BIOL 203/203L, CHEM 103/103L, and a mathematics course in their first fall semester, this is a challenging course load that should be discussed with the student’s freshman advisor first.

(3) All students must take a COLL 100 course and a COLL 150 course by the end of freshman
year. Freshmen should plan to take one of these courses in the fall.

(4) If the student needs to complete the foreign language requirement by continuing a language begun in high school, freshman year can be a good time to do this, assuming that the high school language courses are still fresh in the student’s mind. Similar logic also applies for students who have entered W&M with college credit for MATH 111 and who are thus ready to take MATH 112.

**Other Hints on Course Planning**

Students should **not** feel obligated to take 15 or more credits in the first semester at the College, particularly if they arrived W&M with college credits or if they are considering taking summer school courses. Students must, however, take 12 credits to be enrolled full-time.

**Standardized Tests**

The GRE is now the usual standardized test for veterinary school admission. Commercially available GRE preparation books and practice tests have worked well for our students in the past; taking a formal (and expensive!) GRE course is not necessary.

**Interviews**

Interview procedures at different veterinary schools differ; see the websites of the individual schools for details. *Get Into Veterinary School* has excellent advice on the interview process. The Career Center’s Don Snyder does mock interviews for students applying to health professions schools.

Interviewers often 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 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?