



An Overview- Philosophy of the Veterinary Admissions Committee

The “Foresight Report: Envisioning the Future of Veterinary Medical Education” (www.aavmc.org) articulates, “The need is eminently clear. The global societal environment is shifting, and the environment of veterinary medicine is one of profound change. To remain relevant, academic veterinary medicine must prepare veterinarians for what may come in the future, not for what can be seen now. In order to be recognized and remunerated for their knowledge, compassion, integrity, and judgment, veterinarians must first demonstrate their relevance to new societal trends.”

The members of the Veterinary Admissions Committee (VAC) have the task of reading applicant files and making predictive judgments of potential scholastic and professional success. In order to evaluate each candidate based on his/her total potential to contribute to the profession, the VAC has utilized, since 1999, a holistic approach to the selection of candidates. The goal is to evaluate an applicant’s file in the context of the entirety of the candidate’s experiences, academic history, and potential to contribute to the profession. Unique and diverse characteristics perceived to address the needs of the profession are considered on an individual basis and relative to a candidate’s collective attributes. Prior to reading applications each year, the members of the committee thoroughly discuss and debate criteria and read sample applications for discussion as a group. This is a dynamic process reflecting constant changes in the profession. While some criteria may change over time, several core components will remain constant. These fundamental criteria for admission include:

- *Quality of the Academic Program*
Academic history is considered in the context of non-cognitive variables. Although academic achievement is very important, the evaluation of academic success includes a broader assessment than just GPA or GRE scores. In fact, the cumulative GPA of candidates is not reported to members of the VAC until after final admissions decisions are made. A broad range of academic presentations are deemed acceptable for admission. However, without question, the academic demands of the veterinary program require an ability to handle a rigorous biomedical sciences curriculum. It is expected that all admitted candidates demonstrate adequate to outstanding ability to handle the academic challenges of the program. Evaluators carefully assess the quality of an applicant’s academic history in terms of relative academic strengths and promise, including the number and quality of upper division science courses. Required courses are important, but they represent part of the minimum academic requirements, and additional upper division biomedical science courses are valued, especially if academic performance is good to excellent and the courses have been taken recently. Evaluators also take credit load, work demands, and special circumstances into consideration and use these factors when assessing

an applicant's grades. The cumulative GPA often does not present the entire academic picture; a careful analysis of an applicant's entire academic history may reveal positive or negative academic trends or short term declines. Evaluators attempt to determine if the academic history was stable, erratic, inconsistent, or improved over time. Applicants are encouraged to use the Special Circumstances section of the application to explain short term declines resulting from major life events, i.e. major illness, injury, etc. Recent declines in academic performance are generally viewed negatively, especially without additional information to explain the extenuating circumstances and without evidence that the decline is not continuing.

GRE scores are also part of the assessment of an applicant's academic potential. Verbal scores in the 500's and quantitative scores in the 600's are in the 'normal' applicant range. These scores are generally acknowledged as "competitive," but often do not distinguish one candidate from another. An overall low GRE score or an individual low score on one or more of the sections of the exam, in combination with an unremarkable academic history, however, can contribute to a negative assessment of academic potential. "Exceptionally high" overall or individual scores (usually over 700 in one or more of the tests) may contribute positively to the assessment of academic potential.

Other attributes taken into consideration by Committee members when evaluating the academic history of a candidate include degrees held by the candidate and any special circumstances. Applicants with non-science degrees may be valued for the diverse contributions they might make to the profession; however, these candidates must still take an adequate number of upper division biomedical science courses to provide evidence they can handle a challenging science curriculum. Special circumstances, disadvantages, and adverse situations encountered by an applicant during his/her lifetime are taken into consideration in the overall evaluation process. Although many life experiences fall into these categories, an example might be a learning disability that has been recently diagnosed. If an applicant can adequately demonstrate that s/he can currently, with accommodation, perform on an academic level comparable to admitted candidates, the influence of a past poor academic performance on his/her evaluation may be minimized.

If an evaluator believes a candidate is unlikely to successfully handle the rigorous veterinary curriculum, regardless of other factors, s/he may choose to not assess an application beyond the academic history. On the other hand, an applicant with lower than the average academic performance of admitted candidates may have unique attributes/potential contributions or may have overcome obstacles that might warrant special consideration. A subjective admissions system permits stronger consideration of such applicants. Rather than simply assigning a number to "academic achievement," the subjective evaluation provides an opportunity to assess the entirety of an applicant's academic history in combination with other factors in the application.

- *Non-Cognitive Factors*

A fundamental responsibility of the VAC is to admit a population of students who have the greatest potential to contribute in a positive fashion to the veterinary profession. The Committee has defined a list of basic criteria used to assess an applicant's collective and/or unique potential to become an "outstanding

veterinarian.” Although there are many qualities that may collectively define an outstanding veterinarian (and thus a candidate for admission to veterinary school), some qualities that Committee members emphasize are listed below.

Outstanding veterinarians...

- 1) have developed insights about the veterinary profession, animals and their owners and understand the pros and cons of the profession. They understand the evolving role of veterinarians in society and have some sense of the relevance of veterinary medicine to new societal (national and global) trends.
- 2) understand the importance of and participate in socially relevant community service.
- 3) are good leaders. They may serve the community as role models and leaders (i.e. have leadership roles in organizations, clubs, etc.) and/or demonstrate management skills in jobs or other roles.
- 4) possess good interpersonal skills. They have a history of relating professionally, empathetically, tactfully, and collegially with groups of people and with individuals in a variety of stressful and demanding situations. They are tolerant of others and maintain an open, non-judgmental attitude. They may have multicultural or international experiences and/or have worked with less fortunate, disabled, elderly and/or young individuals resulting in an ability to extend their interpersonal skills to a broad range of people.
- 5) have excellent communication skills. In addition to being able to relate to people via good social skills, outstanding veterinarians are able to successfully relay their intention(s) and information by means of effective written and oral communication skills. They may extend their ability to communicate with others by possessing bi- or multi-lingual skills.
- 6) have a strong work ethic. Outstanding veterinarians are reliable, responsible, and dedicated to excellence.
- 7) are problem-solvers and actively seek to be life-long learners.
- 8) possess the basic qualities of integrity and honesty.
- 9) can demonstrate good judgment and reasoning in professional and personal situations.

In order to select candidates who have some or all of these qualities, VAC members evaluate an applicant's record and note listings in various categories such as "Veterinary and Animal Experience," "Community Service," and "Extracurricular Activities." The Committee evaluates an applicant's involvement with veterinarians and animals as well as the content of his/her essay to help assess the level of understanding of the profession. Typical applicants have a history of 1000 hours of working with veterinarians and separately have 1000 hours of working with animals in a professional or semiprofessional environment (i.e. not in association with a veterinarian). Letters of recommendation may also provide valuable information. Experiences which may increase a candidate's understanding of the profession may be obtained in traditional

practice situations and in non-traditional formats, such as research or public health. Candidates who have unique and varied experiences, who have worked with veterinarians in different types of careers, and/or who have worked with a variety of species of animals, will likely demonstrate a greater depth of understanding of the profession than candidates who have a narrower range of veterinary and animal experiences. Consideration is also given to diverse life and cultural experiences that may enhance the veterinary program and profession. Additionally, jobs unrelated to veterinary medicine and animals may contribute to an applicant's ability to become an outstanding veterinarian. For example, a background in business management, research, public service, etc. may all be valued. The essay is used by the VAC not only to gain insights about an applicant's motivation and understanding of the profession, but also to assess his/her writing and communication skills. The potential of an applicant to contribute in a unique or diverse fashion to the profession may also be considered. The level of commitment (total hours), social relevance, and variety of community services in which the applicant has participated are taken into consideration. Leadership experiences included as a part of extracurricular activities and/or job-related leadership roles are viewed favorably by the Committee.

In addition, the three letters of recommendation provide the Committee with opinions from three individuals who presumably know the applicant on a professional level.

While strengths in one area of the application may balance weaknesses in another, each applicant must provide evidence to the VAC that s/he can handle a rigorous science program and that s/he possesses qualities the Committee associates with being an outstanding veterinarian. In addition, candidates whose applications also convince the VAC they may be qualified and interested in seeking veterinary careers in which there are current or predicted shortages, whose applications show dedication to serving underserved regions and/or populations of the U.S., or whose applications demonstrate unique and special backgrounds or skills which may propel the profession into the future, might be given special consideration. Although superior academic performance and/or exceptional veterinary experience may help the committee members decide between two otherwise similar candidates, these attributes may not mean that one candidate is more "qualified" than a candidate who has a less distinguished academic history or fewer hours of veterinary experience. The final composition of each new freshman veterinary class is a carefully selected group of candidates who are offered admission based on a variety of attributes. Some may have academic strengths and/or significant veterinary experiences but may not have yet demonstrated significant potential to contribute to the future needs of veterinary medicine. Others may have experiences and career goals that correlate well with a potential to steer the profession into the future; however, their academic histories may be less exceptional, and/or their veterinary experiences may be more limited. Each year, the class of admitted students will have a wide range of academic, veterinary and life experiences and a diverse and evolving set of career goals. All are "qualified" to be members of the freshman veterinary class at Colorado State University.

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