Veterinary Medicine

(D.V.M.)

Veterinary medicine is an attractive specialty in the Health sciences. Veterinarians work in a variety of environments (industry, private practice, zoos, etc…) and the quality of life is often considered to be more flexible and family-friendly than others professions in the Health sciences; part-time Veterinarians are common. Students interested in a career in Veterinary medicine need to be aware than admission to post-graduate programs can be as, and sometimes *more*, competitive than the stereotype for Medical programs. Much of this can be attributable to an inherent difficulty in the curriculum and more to a simple lack of seats in post-graduate programs. Relative to traditional Medical programs, there is are few program awarding a D.V.M. (30 in the U.S. vs. 200). The keys to success are preparation, experience in the work environment (which can be fulfilled in a variety of ways), and persistence.

In the U.S., 30 programs enroll approximately 3,300 students from a pool of about 6,700 applicants; 80% of which are female. In 2010 women became the majority of practitioners. In recent years, minority enrollment began an upward trend that continues to this day; forming about 20% of enrollees by 2015.

Not all states have a Veterinary school (though GA does; the University of Georgia in Athens). For those states that do not have a program, the state legislature often contracts for guaranteed seats offered by programs in nearby states. This, like a general lack of programs nationally, further reduces the availability of seats.

The employments and salary outlook for those fortunate to graduate from a Veterinary program is quite good. Recent statistics suggest that average graduate debt is a comparatively low $150,000. 2012 reported average income for all professionals was in the range of $96,000; forming part of the $65 Billion spent annually on pets in the U.S.

**Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.):** There are about 50 schools internationally awarding the D.V.M. credential. Most (30) are in the U.S., 5 in Canada and 14 elsewhere internationally (England, Ireland, the Caribbean, Poland). Unlike other post-graduate professional programs, graduates of international programs find little-no-difficulty in practicing in the U.S. as a consequence of gaining their education outside the U.S.

**Veterinary School costs**: Cost for attending Veterinary school range widely. For the purposes of charging tuition, students enrolled in an out-of-state program coming from a state without a program of its own will usually be charged in-state tuition (as long as there is a contract, as described above). The latest information for Georgia’s Veterinary program cites a total cost of $45,000 per year, with UGA being on the low end of scale that reaches up to $75,000 per year. Like any post-graduate professional program, loans and scholarships are readily available, greatly reducing the stress associated with the necessity of “making ends meet” over the course of the 4-year program.

**Veterinary Programs in Georgia**:

D.V.M.- University of Georgia School of Veterinary Medicine (Public; Athens).

**Admissions**: Applicants are most likely to be admitted to Veterinary school in their state of residence. Gaining residency in another state for the purposes of Veterinary school admission and to receive in-state tuition can be very difficult.

Acceptance rates for Veterinary programs hovers around 50%, with many gaining admittance after one or two application cycles.

Successful admission to a Veterinary program requires demonstrated ability and experience in multiple areas. Excellence in one (e.g. grades), but the omission of another (e.g. experience) will almost certainly result in disappointment; *all* are important.

1. **Grades (and major)**: As is the case with many other healthcare professional schools, a very high G.P.A. is important, but not as vital as most believe. Admissions counselors often use the word “holistic” in how they approach the evaluation of candidates. For the Veterinary program at UGA, recent admissions number indicate that applicants averaged a GPA of 3.55 for those accepted and enrolled. Naturally, acceptance rates for students with lower G.P.A.s (3.0) are low; but they are not negligible. In short, strong grades are important (3.4+ GPA); stellar grades (3.8+ GPA) will not make up for deficiencies seen elsewhere in the application.

As with other healthcare professional programs, schools are looking for intelligent, motivated and compassionate students. They are looking for students with the basic background knowledge (i.e. “pre-requisites”) and are expecting to “teach the rest”. That is, the selection is major is not as important as most would assume. So long as a student has the pre-requisite courses (regardless of whether they are part of their major or not), dental programs are satisfied. In other words, a “Pre-Vet” major is *not* required (and is a determent in some circles) and there are stories of Philosophy, History, Chemistry, Business majors being accepted to Veterinary schools. They merely took the additional coursework and performed the other requirements to successfully apply to a program.

**Your major at Oglethorpe**: Traditionally, students accepted to Veterinary school have majored in Biology, BioPsychology or Chemistry. This is largely out of convenience-- the pre-requisites for most Veterinary programs are largely covered by these majors. However, OU has had students with other majors have successfully applied.

1. **Pre-requisites/Coursework**: Academic preparation requires successful completion of several items. First and foremost is a bachelor’s degree. Veterinary school is a post-graduate (i.e. post- B.A. or B.S.) education.

The choice of major is not very important (see A), above). The UGA program requires the following:

General (Inorganic) Chemistry- 2 semesters/1 year

Biology- 2 semesters/1 year the introductory level

Physics- 1 semester/½ year at the introductory level (i.e. non-Calculus)

English- 1 year (e.g. Core 101/102)

Other humanities coursework

The reality is that the more coursework preparation, the better. It is often suggested that courses in Organic Chemistry, Biochemistry, Physiology, Cell Biology, Molecular Biology, and/or Genetics are a useful addition to the list of suggested courses.

In addition, many programs have specific and specialized pre-requisites, such as Animal Nutrition, Calculus I, or advanced Statistics. Whenever you are identifying a program to apply to, it is strongly suggested that you review and prepare for any and all specific program requirements.

1. **Standardized Testing**: Veterinary programs usually require the Graduate Record Exam (G.R.E.) with the Analytical Writing portion.

Sitting for the G.R.E. does not necessary require preparation. However the taking of a short course, such as Kaplan and Princeton Review, that provide reviews of test-taking strategies and banks of practice tests is strongly urged.

1. **Experience: Internship, Shadowing and/or Work**: A critical portion of the admissions process is the interview, often done on campus as part of an orientation and recruitment process. Interview conversations often center of the nature of Veterinary as a business and avocation. It is universally agreed that these critical conversations require a foundation in experience in the work environment of the professional. A brief shadowing experience, a longer volunteer internship (for academic credit or not) or a longer-term paid staff position are ways for future Veterinarians to gain invaluable experience in the working environment of modern animal care. In addition, it serves a goal of giving the future Veterinary student a taste for the work environment they will experience through their professional career.

Historically, students have worked (for pay) in local clinics or at home. This work often includes working in the pets being boarded or groomed. All these experience, whether for pay or not, are crucial steps in the development of a successful application.

1. **Letters of Reference (LORs)**: Internships, shadowing and/or work experience also provides the opportunity for a Healthcare practitioner to provide extensive and substantive comments of your professional initiative, demeanor and abilities in the form a “letter of reference” required for Veterinary school applications. The more in-depth their experience with you, the more in-depth and supportive of your desire to enter medical school will be their letter.

Typically, programs solicit up to 5 letters of reference that can include course instructors (such as professors), Veterinary professionals familiar with your interests and promise, work supervisors and character witnesses.

With respect to the former (Professors), students often ask Oglethorpe Professors for letters. Unlike larger Universities that formulate a consensus “Pre-Health Committee” letter, Oglethorpe University instructors write individual letters tailored for each applicant. The small class sizes and close and extensive interactions between instructors and students means letters can be honest, extensive and rich in detail and anecdotes- exactly what Veterinary school admissions committees are looking for. Students are encourage to cultivate a positive and productive relationship with each of their instructors in anticipation of asking for an honest (and confidential) evaluation of their academic abilities and promise for success in the Veterinary sciences.

1. **AADSAS (http://www.adea.org/GoDental/Future\_Dentists/ADEA\_AADSAS)**: The ADEA Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (ADEA AADSAS) is the centralized application service for most U.S. dental schools. ADEA AADSAS simplifies the applicationprocess by allowing applicants to complete one standardized application rather than fill out multiple applications. The service opens for the generation of applicant accounts and for the acceptance of data on July 1st of every application cycle. The site calculates applicant GPAs in a standardized format, organizes the acceptance and distribution of Letters of Recommendation (LORs), and the distribution of materials to programs.

**For Further Reading:**

The BEST place to start—“Explore Health Careers”: <https://explorehealthcareers.org/>

“Dental Admissions Test”: <http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>

“Assoicated American Dental Schools Application Service: AADSAS”: <http://www.adea.org/GoDental/The_application_to_dental_school__ADEA_AADSAS.aspx>

“ADEA Go Dental”: <http://www.adea.org/GoDental/>