

# **An Internship...**

## **Can, Should or Must it Be Part of My Future?**

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James F. Wilson, DVM, JD received his degree in Veterinary Medicine from Iowa State University in 1967 and a law degree from UCLA in 1973. During the next 13 years in California, Dr. Wilson practiced emergency medicine, became a full partner in a small animal practice in Concord, CA, and served as a visiting lecturer at UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine where he taught veterinary law, ethics, and business management.

In 1986, Dr. Wilson relocated to Pennsylvania where he spent two years serving as Medical Director for the University of Pennsylvania's small animal hospital. Today, he is responsible for teaching veterinary law, ethics, and/or practice management at 18-0 veterinary schools across the US and the Caribbean and at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Wilson has authored six books and over 130 articles in various veterinary journals on the subjects of veterinary law, practice management, pet health insurance, and quality ear care. His published books are *The Business Guide for Veterinary Practices* 1982, *Law and Ethics of the Veterinary Profession*, 1988, *Veterinary Receptionist's Training Manual* 1996, the 430-page *Contracts, Benefits, and Practice Management for the Veterinary Profession*, 2000, updated in 2006, *Job Descriptions and Training Schedules for the Veterinary Team* in 2005, and the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Legal Consents for Veterinary Practices* in 2006.

Since 1988, Dr. Wilson has been performing practice valuations and consulting with dozens of veterinary practitioners and local attorneys around the U.S. on such issues as employment contracts, personnel management and motivation, developing business plans, expert witness review of professional negligence cases and restrictive covenants, and mission/vision/core value plans for pairs or groups of potential co-owners.

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# **IS AN INTERNSHIP GOING TO BE PART OF MY FUTURE?**

By James F. Wilson, DVM, JD

## **1. How is an internship different than a year in private practice?**

- a. Internships usually have supervised, daily, in-depth rounds with interactive discussions. Most private practices do not.
- b. Most internships have rigorous inquiry of the intern's case management plans by residents, boarded specialists, or faculty. To be included in the AAVC matching intern program, internships must have two or more specialists on staff at the practice and a significant case-load. (See [www.virmp.org](http://www.virmp.org) for the criteria.)
- c. Education for the intern, rather than income for the practice, is or should be a primary objective – except in some private practice internships where the object is to employ “**slave labor**” so the practice can make ends meet or make money for the practice with limited teaching responsibilities and mentorship. Most non-internship, private practices have no or only limited inquiry into case management or supervision by supervising veterinarians. Owners often feel this type of discussion and time commitment does not generate income and, therefore, is a luxury the practice cannot afford. Thus, the learning experience in most private practices is inferior to that of an internship.
- d. Please keep in mind that the first practice at which you work usually will have a bigger impact on the type of medicine you practice and quality of veterinarian you become than any other job you accept. If you learn to “get by” and develop the habit of practicing “semi-accurate or empirical veterinary medicine” during your first year in the real world, that will tend to be the kind of doctor you become. Internships help prevent that from happening.

## **2. What are the key ingredients that lead to acceptance into the leading internship programs?**

- a. Fortunately, during 2005, someone finally published some research regarding the criteria used to determine the primary characteristics for which intern application committees are searching as they select their interns. This information can be found in the July 1, 2005 *JAVMA* article found at the end of this hand out.
- b. In addition to these criteria, remember that veterinary medicine is a small network of people. Just because you ask 3 clinicians to write you letters of recommendation does not mean phone calls and e-mails regarding your performance will be absent – and they most likely will mean more than the letters.

## **3. How important is spending time as an extern prior to applying for an internship?**

- a. During a PVMA sponsored panel discussion of this issue at the University of Pennsylvania in November 2010, all of the participants felt that one to two days was long enough to make an impression on the intern selection parties sufficient for them to remember you. Any questions you have that aren't asked during this initial visit usually can be answered by contacting existing interns at the site subsequent to your visit.
- b. The general consensus was that when this was logistically possible and affordable, short visits of this nature could be superior to spending two weeks doing just one externship.
- c. However, both externs and practices can hide just about anything for two days so this idea isn't without flaws, All doctors and staff can be on their best behavior for a short period of time, however, it's much harder for either side to hide their flaws for two weeks.
- d. Some students tend to be quiet and reserved the first few days they are in a new setting to “get a feel for the lay of the land” before stepping out with questions or answers. Once they have tested the waters, they become outgoing, talkative, and sometimes, loud.

In some environments, that personality type just would not fit. The problem is that if you are like this, you would have no way of knowing that after just two days.

- e. This pertains not only to landing the right internship, it could be part of the reason that many new grads find themselves starting the job search all over again after the first year. Neither they, nor the practice, spent enough time getting to know one another prior to commencement of the internship/job.

4. **Will you be able to command a higher salary in year two of your veterinary career if you have completed an internship?** It depends.

- a. If you go in into private practices, in most circumstances, the answers include “yes,” “maybe,” and “no,” depending on the notoriety of the internship and quality of references you have from your internship. However, most salaries for interns are around \$25,000-\$35,000/yr. vs. a low of \$38,000 to a high of \$71,000/yr. for 2010 new grads in private practice depending on whether one is in food, equine, mixed, large, or small animal practice and where you are in the country. (East Coast, Chicago, and California are the highest). See page 795 of the October 1, 2010 issue of *JAVMA* for further information. After completing an internship you may or may not command a few thousand dollars more than your recent grad counterparts who worked a year in a general practice. However, it is unlikely that you will be able to make up the large deficit in first-year earning power by having completed an internship.

Moreover, if the employer provides a base salary or production-based compensation, whichever amount is higher, new grads who have not completed internships often out-produce those who have during their first year post-internship because they already have a year in the trenches focusing more on income generation than medical outcomes of their work.

Additionally, revenue production depends more on the inherent time management, delegation, negotiation and “sales” skills and abilities of individual doctors than it does on the diagnostic, therapeutic and surgical skills acquired during a highly mentored internship. In fact, most new graduates pursue internships to build their clinical confidence rather than to increase their efficiencies and productivity in the exam room or surgery setting. Experiences in academic internships with generally lower caseloads vs. those in private practice with more emergency room coverage and much higher caseloads affect the skills of interns as well. All (or at least nearly all) interns will have far more confidence as doctors after completing an internship but they may be inherently less productive or concerned about revenue production. And, as much as veterinarians do not like to accept it, revenue production drives salaries more than slow, methodical diagnoses and treatments.

The exception with respect to salaries following internships occurs most in the equine sector. *JAVMA*'s mean first year salaries for new equine grads is \$38,468 while first year salaries fresh out of internships in this equine sector are more likely to be in the \$50,000-\$70,000 range. Thus, the net loss from an equine internship may not be as large as it is in small animal practice, where recent grads are likely to obtain salaries in the \$65,000 to \$75,000 range without doing an internship instead of the lowly \$38,000 for those in equine medicine.

5. **How many of each residency type are in the VIRMP match and what are their salary ranges?**

The information in the table below reflects over ten hours of work by Steve Kellner, who works for Dr. Wilson at PVMC and Rob Proietto, an extern who spent time at PVMC. The numbers are for matching residencies for the academic year 2010-11. Unfortunately, no one has information for unmatched residencies at privately owned veterinary practices, which have been growing in recent years.

| <b>Residency Type</b>          | <b>Number of Positions</b> | <b>Overall Mean Salary Range</b> | <b>University</b> | <b>Mean Salary</b> | <b>Private Practice</b> | <b>Mean Salary</b> |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Neurology                      | 14                         | \$24,315-40,000                  | 11                | \$24,315-37,308    | 3                       | \$29,260-40,000    |
| Small Animal Internal Medicine | 34                         | \$24,315-40,000                  | 29                | \$24,315-40,000    | 5                       | \$26,500-38,000    |
| Small Animal Surgery           | 35                         | \$25,250-40,000                  | 23                | \$25,250-35,200    | 12                      | \$27,000-40,000    |
| Small Animal Emergency/CC      | 39                         | \$24,315-42,000                  | 22                | \$24,315-37,308    | 17                      | \$27,000-42,000    |
| Oncology                       | 19                         | \$24,315-42,500                  | 17                | \$24,315-37,308    | 2                       | \$42,500           |
| Cardiology                     | 8                          | \$28,500-38,000                  | 6                 | \$28,500-37,308    | 2                       | \$35,000-38,000    |
| Ophthalmology                  | 2                          | \$25,250-30,500                  | 2                 | \$25,250-30,500    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Radiology                      | 19                         | \$24,315-31,260                  | 18                | \$24,315-30,000    | 1                       | \$31,260           |
| Dermatology                    | 3                          | \$27,700-35,200                  | 3                 | \$27,700-35,200    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Dentistry/Oral Surgery         | 2                          | \$27,000-37,308                  | 2                 | \$27,000-37,308    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Anesthesiology                 | 9                          | \$25,250-35,200                  | 9                 | \$25,250-35,200    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Nutrition                      | 1                          | \$37,308                         | 1                 | \$37,308           | 0                       | 0                  |
| Exotic/Wildlife/Zoo            | 7                          | \$25,250-37,308                  | 6                 | \$25,250-37,308    | 1                       | \$35,000           |
| Transfusion medicine           | 1                          | \$27,000                         | 1                 | \$27,000           | 0                       | 0                  |
| Equine Ambulatory              | 3                          | \$27,000-29,832                  | 3                 | \$27,000-29,832    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Equine Internal Medicine       | 6                          | \$25,320-34,608                  | 6                 | \$25,320-34,608    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Equine Surgery                 | 8                          | \$26,772-37,308                  | 7                 | \$26,772-37,308    | 1                       | \$31,000           |
| Large Animal Surgery           | 9                          | \$25,320-37,308                  | 9                 | \$25,320-37,308    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Large Animal Internal Medicine | 14                         | \$26,364-37,308                  | 14                | \$26,364-37,308    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Food Animal Surgery            | 2                          | \$24,315-28,037                  | 2                 | \$24,315-28,037    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Theriogenology                 | 9                          | \$24,315-37,308                  | 9                 | \$24,315-37,308    | 0                       | 0                  |
| Radiation/Oncology/Radiology   | 1                          | \$24,315                         | 1                 | \$24,315           | 0                       | 0                  |
| Small Animal Genetic Diseases  | 1                          | \$27,000                         | 1                 | \$27,000           | 0                       | 0                  |

6. **Will you be able to command a high enough salary to make a residency worth the effort? If you have completed an internship?** Probably yes.
- a. In the 2004-2010 period, it appears that even with the loss of earning power during internships and residency training programs, the high salaries now paid to boarded specialists allow them to come out well ahead of where they had been without their board certification. Of course, it requires a working career of eight to ten years as a specialist before the lost earnings are overcome, longer for some boarded specialists who while balancing work and family are not working full-time.
  - b. Based on a limited number of specialists in Dr. Wilson's contract consultation data base from 2006 - 2010, full-time board eligible and boarded specialists are entering the market place with base salaries somewhere around numbers inserted below. During the robust veterinary economy from 2000 until 2008, many also received \$5,000 to \$10,000 in signing bonuses or moving expenses. Information from 2010 indicates that compensation, signing bonuses and benefits for specialists leaving residencies since the start of the current recession are dropping as a result of the lousy economy and fears or the reality of persistently high unemployment rates, home foreclosures and little revenue growth in the veterinary profession. In fact, many general and specialty practices had revenues that were either flat or down 5% to 20% at the end of 2009 and 2010.
    - i. Surgeons (Be aware that compensation problems arise when neurologist/neurosurgery specialists are added and compete for many similar cases.)
      - (1) Board eligible - \$110,000 to \$120,000 and dropping because of market near-saturation.
      - (2) Boarded - \$140,000 to \$180,000 with some highly efficient, busy, boarded surgeons earning \$450,000 to \$1 million per year. Note: a few of Dr. Wilson's boarded surgeons are doing more than \$2M of surgery/year themselves.
    - ii. Internal medicine
      - (1) Board eligible - \$110,000 to \$135,000
      - (2) Boarded - \$130,000 to \$180,000
    - iii. Emergency medicine and critical care
      - (1) Understand here that there are significant differences between salaries for emergency medicine clinicians and the boarded people who work mostly days and supervise them.
      - (2) Board eligible - \$110,000 to \$140,000
      - (3) Boarded - \$150,000 & up (although several employers have found it difficult to justify these high salaries for their criticalists unless they fulfill major management duties as well. In fact, in 2010 Dr. Wilson is aware of at least two criticalists who were forced to take \$20,000 to and in one case \$80,000 salary reductions.)
    - iv. Oncology and Neurology (major struggles are occurring when practices add radiologists, oncologists and neurologists because of the competition between them for cases, particularly with respect to MRI interpretations as well as the huge overhead costs for the MRI scanners and service contracts on them)
      - (1) Board eligible - \$145,000 - \$150,000
      - (2) Boarded - ???
    - v. Dermatology
      - (1) Board eligible - \$85,000 to \$130,000
      - (2) Boarded ?? - 30% to 50% of production once boarded – depending on negotiation skills
    - vi. Radiology
      - (1) Board eligible \$110,000 to \$140,000
      - (2) Boarded - \$180,000 & up (with some earning in the \$400,000 category)
    - vii. Oncology
      - (1) Board Eligible \$125,000
      - (2) Boarded - \$150,000 (depends on whether boarded in medicine or radiation oncology)
    - viii. Dentistry
      - (1) Board eligible - \$85,000 base salaries or 27% of prod plus benefits vs. flat 25% of production with no benefits

- (2) Boarded ??
- ix. Avian medicine
  - (1) Board eligible - \$85,000
  - (2) Boarded ??

Note: where you see question marks, it is because there are no such specialists in this data base.

- 7. What are some key questions, other than salary and fringe benefits, to ask as you select an internship?**
- a. How many boarded specialists are available at the practice where you are seeking an internship, which specialties are represented, and how long has each of the boarded people been there?
  - b. What is the likelihood that the group of specialists who are currently at the practice will still be there next year when you start your internships?
  - c. Will the interns in the program have daily rounds with boarded specialists? With residents? If so, at what time of day and for how long a time period do rounds last?
  - d. What are the typical week day and week end hours for your interns? Do they have any scheduled days off? What is the practice's vacation policy for its externs?
  - e. Can you describe to me what is included in your compensation and benefits package in the form of salary and other benefits (housing, CE, licensure, health and professional liability insurance, dues)?
  - f. Are your interns required to sign non-compete agreements? If yes, for how long and what distance?
  - g. What is the emergency shift schedule for the interns and how long are the shifts?
  - h. How many emergency cases/shift is an intern likely to see? What are the variations in case numbers from week nights to week ends?
  - i. Which, if any, staff doctors, will be available for emergency phone or in-person back-up to help interns handle tough cases?
  - j. Does this internship program provide compensation for emergency cases above and beyond the base internship salary? If so, how much money can one earn from this source in a year? Is supplemental compensation paid on a per case basis or as a percentage of the revenue generated during each intern's emergency shift?
  - k. What is the track record for this internship's program with respect to admittance into residency programs, i.e., what percentage of interns matriculate into residencies?
  - l. What is the track record, if any, for deferment of educational loans during the program's year-long private practice internship?
  - m. Have prior interns at the practice been able to obtain economic hardship loan deferments during their year as interns? A question you must ask yourself is, "If my loans are not deferred, how much interest will cumulate during my internship and/or potential residency program and how much more deeply will I be in debt by the time I complete this process?"
  - n. If you don't gain entry into a residency program, will the program at which you have completed your internship contemplate the creation of a residency program for you?

- o. Do the interns at this location receive time off to pursue interviews for residencies and/or jobs after completing them? To attend national conferences?
  - p. Which services in the internship are considered core rotations and which are considered elective?
  - q. Do your interns have the opportunity to work with all clinicians or are they assigned to work with one specific clinician?
  - r. Does the practice at which the internship is located have digital radiology? It makes all the difference in the world to this phase of your education.
  - s. Are the interns assigned a mentor? If so, how is that mentor chosen and does the institution have any mechanism for accountability?
  - t. For what key tasks or duties are interns responsible within the practice? What kinds of tasks are they not allowed to do?
  - u. Do you have a document outlining the goals that the practice would like its interns to fulfill by the end of the year? How does the practice assess each intern's progress toward those goals?
  - v. Can you provide me with contact information for two prior interns so I can ask them about their experiences during their internships?
  - w. Does your practice have any application requirements such as visiting the practice, letters of reference, letters of intent and the submission of a resume?
  - x. What is your deadline for applications? Do your interns need to be licensed in your state prior to starting their internship?
  - y. **For Large Animal Internships (especially equine):** Does your practice offer ambulatory vs. in-hospital internships?
  - z. Are your **large animal** internships based in a specific discipline such as reproduction, sports medicine, surgery and medicine or are do your interns rotate through all disciplines?
8. **If you won't be able to earn more money after working hard in an internship, why should you pursue one?**
- a. For the education - to make private veterinary practice more challenging and fun after you've enhanced your confidence and technical skills.
  - b. **Because you want to pursue a residency.** After all, most residencies require the completion of an internship to qualify for residencies in these specialties. The author's experience has been that some residencies, e.g., cardiology, dermatology, ophthalmology, neurology, oncology, dentistry, and behavior, are filled by mature veterinarians who have spent multiple years in a private practice setting without completing an internship immediately after graduation.
  - c. To rub elbows with the "academically oriented people" who select residents for their programs. Your chances of obtaining a residency are enhanced by impressing the resident selection committee while you are an intern.

- d. You do it to join the “elite” group of people out there in private practice who have completed one of the well-known internships in the country. It's a “feather in your cap” and probably will influence you to practice medicine at a higher standard of care for the rest of your career.
- e. Why else? Because if you complete an internship and hone your clinical diagnostic and therapeutic skills during that year, you may be ready to purchase a practice or become a co-owner in an existing one several years before you would if you were simply working in a mediocre general practice after graduation.

**9. Should I choose a private practice or an academic internship?**

- a. Ask yourself if you learn better by “hands-on” or “hands-on and by the book”. Private practices generally see much higher caseloads than academic institutions. This means you will be attending more cases with a wider variety of problems but there most likely will be less time to discuss those cases with other clinicians. In academia, cases are also seen by 4<sup>th</sup> year veterinary students, which allows interns the opportunity for learning experiences with the students but to round out the case with a senior faculty member. For some, learning is facilitated by teaching others. If so, an academic internship is for you.
- b. If you enjoy research, or are considering entering a residency or PhD where research is a large part of the program, you may want to consider an internship where research is possible for interns, if not a requirement. Several internships strongly encourage research (Texas A&M University, Colorado State University, University of Missouri) and will provide mentors to help facilitate projects suitable for your year-long stay.
- c. Although it should not be the entire basis for your decision, private practice internships tend to offer higher salaries and, in many cases supplemental compensation for emergency duty.

**10. How do you know which practices or institutions offer internships, which programs are the famous ones, and which are the obscure ones?**

- a. In general, the veterinary school internship programs are well thought of, though some have better reputations than others. Some also have much higher case loads than others, with the small animal hospitals at University of Pennsylvania, Tufts Cummings, and Colorado State having among the highest case loads per intern. University internships tend to be important to gain recognition among the academic community for applications to residency programs and careers in academia. Some, such as the U of Georgia, Auburn and Tuskegee, provide interns with much more hands on experience, but less oversight, than others. However, private practice internships generally will provide students with higher volumes of cases than any of the academic internships. This will give you more-hands on opportunities, the opportunity to develop better time management skills, and a better overall “real world” experience. Thus, these tend to be better choices for candidates who will be pursuing jobs in private practice or the pursuit of practice ownership after completing their internships.
- b. Private practice internships at the Animal Medical Center in New York City; Dallas Veterinary Surgery Center in Dallas, TX; Oradell Animal Hospital in Northeastern New Jersey (they take 12 interns who earn \$32,000); Red Bank Veterinary Hospital in Red Bank, NJ (19 interns/year in new, 2004, 58,000 square foot facility); Coral Springs Animal Hospital, Coral Springs, FL (moved into new 40,000 sq ft. facility in 2009); Michigan Veterinary Specialists in Southeastern Michigan (which as of 2005 had a new 36,000 square foot facility (12 people paid \$25,000/yr. plus emergency case bonus); Florida Veterinary Specialists and Cancer Treatment Center in Tampa, FL, (great track record of placing interns in residencies); Ocean States Veterinary Specialists in East Greenwich, RI, and California Animal Hospital Veterinary Specialty Group in Los Angeles have been consistently well thought of. VCA also has a number of well-organized internships, starting with their premier location in West Los Angeles.

Many others of which Dr. Wilson is unaware may be exceptional experiences but this requires questioning interns in the prior year's class to gain good insight. Some programs vary from year to year depending on who is on staff at the practice and the skills of the current practice manager. Because the numbers of private practice internships have doubled in the past few years, it is important that candidates research the quality of the new ones carefully by asking questions of doctors currently employed at the site or those who have completed their internships at these locations within the past year.

- c. As a result of the mobility of specialists these days, the quality of many internship programs can vary considerably from year-to-year. Thus, it may be important to seek out the interns and residents at your veterinary school and ask them what they learned about "the good, the bad, and the ugly" ones when they were deciding on their internship choices last year.

### **11. When should you pursue an internship - immediately after graduating or after a year of private practice?**

- a. Two trains of thought.
  - i. Immediately, because you already are accustomed to living at the poverty level and, thus, one more year of hard work and no money is easier to tolerate right out of school.
  - ii. After a year in private practice, because by then you will have developed some level of clinical judgment, have an easier and more effective and enjoyable time teaching 4th year veterinary students, and be more comfortable communicating with clients. Your year in private practice before starting an internship also will allow you more time to learn during the internship because you will not have to put in as much effort developing your routine technical skills. Moreover, your bank of cases will allow you to have many more "ahaaahhh... moments," whereby you say, "So this is what that case was I saw last year."

### **12. What is a MATCHING INTERNSHIP and how does it differ from a non-matching internship?**

- a. The American Association of Veterinary Clinicians (AAVC) is an organization of people from each American and Canadian veterinary school and several private institutions. It sponsors the Veterinary Internship and Residency Matching Program (VIRMP) to expedite and bring fairness to the selection of interns and residents for participating veterinary schools, colleges, and private hospitals. It has a committee that reviews and determines whether an internship program meets the required standards regarding appropriate types and numbers of faculty, specialist, and resident participation in and oversight of the program. However, in spite of that effort, the AAVC makes no assurances as to the quality of any matching program – it merely confirms that the internship program meets the AAVC guidelines.
- b. The data below reflects internships inside the VIRMP for the upcoming 2010-2011 academic year. Calculations for the upcoming year reflect all 822 (down from 871 in 2010) of the VIRMP available matching internships. These data, calculated via over ten hours of work by Steve Kellner who works for Dr. Wilson at PVMC, show the following:
  - i. A mean salary for all 2011 VIRMP internships of \$28,441, up from \$28,354 in 2010;
  - ii. A mean salary of \$29,611 for private practice internships only in 2010, down from \$29,651 in 2010; and
  - iii. A mean for university internships only of \$25,261 up from \$24,630 in 2010.
  - iv. The salary range for all VIRMP internships was between \$0 and \$50,000.
- c. The VIRMP Directory is now available only via the AAVC's online web site at [www.virmp.org](http://www.virmp.org).

- d. The AAVC's computer matches the ranking applicants submit for specific institutions with the rankings submitted by each institution. When your request for an internship matches that of an institution's decision to offer you a position, you are said to have “matched”, and the next year of your life is decided. When you match – you have a contract to accept that internship! You can read lots more about this on the website.
- e. An **unmatched internship** is one that is offered without submission to the AAVC process. These internships may be better or worse than some of the “matching” internships and may or may not meet the AAVC criteria for resident and faculty supervision. Because of all this, these are “Buyer Beware” programs that require considerable research on your part into their quality before you accept such a position. Always talk with previous interns before accepting one of these.
- f. Students interested in **equine internships** are urged to contact the AAEP for information. They have a program called Avenues, found on the internet at [http://www.aaep.org/avenues\\_students.htm](http://www.aaep.org/avenues_students.htm), which is designed to allow AAEP National Student Members to search for equine internships and externships by state and application deadline. In addition, their website includes an internship orientation manual and outlines the minimum standards practices must follow to host an internship via AAEP. The application deadlines are variable with some accepting applications year round. AAEP National Student Members can find descriptions of internships and externships at [www.aaep.org/avenues\\_database.htm](http://www.aaep.org/avenues_database.htm).

As of 2010, there are 16 equine internships at university-based teaching hospitals, down from 29. For creative souls who would like to see academically-based equine internships grow into the most practical type possible, i.e., by allying with a private practice equine hospital, read the July 1, 2009 *JAVMA* (Vol. 235, No. 1 p. 38-40) article entitled “A description of the Tufts-Cummings School of Vet Med – Massachusetts Equine Clinic combined equine internship program.”

- g. Although I do not believe the AABP has any type of matching intern program, students interested in bovine practice externships should review those available on their web site at <http://aabp.org/jobs/mentor/selectstate.asp>.
- h. For students interested in **zoo and wildlife medicine internships**, contact the AAZP in Yulee, FL at (904) 225-3275, <http://www.aazv.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=337>.

### 13. “I do not have top notch grades. What are my chances of landing the internship I want?”

- a. Interestingly enough, grades are a serious concern when internship application committees select internships but not the final word! They are important but, according to Dr. Ken Drobotz, the director of the University of Pennsylvania’s internship program for many years and recent residents at the University of Pennsylvania and Colorado State’s teaching hospital, your references, emotional intelligence (personality), and letter of intent are also very important. Here are some of the words of wisdom offered by these references.
  - i. More important than grades are references who can address your personality, work ethic, punctuality, enthusiasm, attitude about life, aptitude for clinical medicine, desire to learn, ability to work as a “giving” team member, and emotional stability. Thus, read some of the books on Dr. Wilson’s “life skills reading list” and develop and select references who can comment on these characteristics, not just your academic prowess. When possible, it helps to have these letters come from respected faculty who know you well enough to write them. However, they could also come from residents who have spent enough time with you during rotations to formulate strong impressions of your personality, clinical aptitude, and work ethic.

- ii. Your letter of intent represents your attention to detail and the amount of effort focused on your application process. A poorly written, non-spell checked, grammatically incorrect letter of intent will result in your application's demise much sooner than will your mediocre grades.
- iii. Low grades in some of the veterinary school basic sciences can be offset nicely by higher grades in clinics.
- iv. Letters from private practitioners who have known you well and for whom you have worked during veterinary school also are valuable. However, they must be well written and include comments on all of the above attributes.
- v. The most authoritative publication on the subject of grades as a key ingredient of internship acceptances vs. other attributes can be found in the *JAVMA* article on this subject found at the end of this hand out.

#### **14. Should I plan to visit a practice or school where I am interested in applying?**

- a. When applying for internships, be sure to ask each institution if its application committee requires interviews. Most universities do not, however, some will tell you they prefer to meet all their applicants in person e.g., University of Tennessee and Cornell. Many more private practices require interviews than do universities. They may offer a block of dates available to you to choose for a visit or they may leave it up to you to schedule an interview or externship and make time to visit with their internship coordinator.
- b. Have questions ready at this interview, it is a great time to get the real "scoop" on the internship. If you have time, sit down and talk with some of the current interns. Many interns are so busy they do not always answer e-mails as thoroughly as if you were to ask the same questions in person.
- c. While it is important for you to make a good impression on the internship committee, remember, they are there to make a good impression on you as well. If you don't get a good feeling during your visit or interview, remember, this may be a preview for what your next year may be like. Get a feel for how the current interns are treated. Are they encouraged to ask questions? Are the clinicians happy to be there each day? Do they feel overwhelmed part of the time, most of the time or all the time?
- d. Visiting may help a private practice internship decide whether or not you would be a good match for their program. But just as a good impression can help you, a bad impression can definitely hurt you. If your top choices do not require interviews, think carefully about choosing to visit or not. Even one bad day on an externship may be enough for a selection committee to decide against choosing you.
- e. Externships can be a wonderful way to get a feel for a school or practice you are interested in. Remember, it is still a chance for you to learn, even if you aren't interested in an internship at that particular location.
- f. Before scheduling interviews and externships, remember it can be costly to purchase flight tickets, gas, food, and lodging during these stays. If finances are a concern, try applying for funds from your local SCAVMA chapter.

#### **15. How many and which institutions should you specify on your "matching list?"**

- a. As many institutions as you would like BUT only the ones that you are willing to attend. List only those that you clearly wish to fulfill because if you match with one you aren't "nuts about," you must accept that position and complete the contract.

- b. If because of geographic or family reasons you would accept only one internship, then list only that one on your application.
- c. Know your resources! The best way to get information about certain programs is talking to people who have been through the program. Find out where students in the class above you matched the year before and talk to them. Also, talk to faculty who have spent time at other schools or private practices. They may be your best resources when it comes to generating your “A” vs. “B” list.
- d. Be realistic about your choices. Internships are much more competitive today than they were only a few years ago. If you are set on doing an internship apply to as many as you would be happy to accept. Nothing is ever a guarantee with the MATCH!

**16. How many people apply for these matching internships and how many match?**

- a. For 2010, the AAVC processed 1260 applications (up a whopping 361 from 2009) for the 881 matching internship positions (up 31 from 2009). Of that group, 725 students (up 58 from 2009) matched their choices with those selected by the various intern program administrators.
- b. In 2010, the AAVC also processed 870 applications (up a whopping 265 from 2009) for the 267 matching residency positions (up 20 from 2009). Of that group, 239 students (up 20 from 2009) matched their choices with those selected by the various intern program administrators.

**17. Are there any other important dates? Note that the 2012 VIRMP Matching Program will begin accepting applicants in October 2011.**

- a. Applicants should be contemplating the “rank order” for their applications as they are preparing to submit them.
- b. Applications on Form S6 must be received by the appropriate institutions or practices by December 5, 2011 for the year 2012.
- c. Students also must submit the signed Applicant Agreement (Form S3) and a Confidential Rank Order List of Institutions (Form S4) along with a check of money order for \$80 (10 or fewer applications), \$250 (11 to 20 applications) or \$350 (21 or more applications) by January 13, 2012 for the upcoming year. This also is the last day applicants can withdraw from the program.
- d. Institutions must submit their decisions to withdraw from the program and their “rank order” lists to the Program Office by January 20, 2012
- e. The big computer in the sky cranks through all this information and the AAVC releases the matching notices on February 6, 2012.
- f. **There is one more important date!** That is the **morning, afternoon and day following the release of the matching notices.** It is on this day that all intern programs receive information as to whether they filled all of their vacancies. If they did not, they can access the AAVC list of applicants who also failed to match. At this time, you may well receive a call advising you of an invitation to fill one of these vacancies. **If you are not available, you may miss this chance to fulfill your dream so be aware of these times and check your message machine or cell phone voice mail often!**

The following table came from the VIRMP website at <http://www.virmp.org> (Dates are subject to change annually)

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Sept. 1, 2011           | <b>Program Entry.</b> Institutions begin entering program information   |
| October 1, 2011         | <b>End of program entry. Last day for institutions to enter program information</b>   |
| <b>October 15, 2011</b> | <b>Applicants able to access website.</b> Applicants will be able to review programs, register and enter rank order list  |
| December 5, 2011        | <b>Application deadline.</b> Last date for applicant to complete Application Packet online. Transcripts and Letters of Reference due to the VIRMP – <b>11:59 p.m. EST</b>   |
| January 13, 2012        | <b>Applicant rank order lists due/End of withdrawal period.</b> Last date for applicant rank order lists to be submitted. Last date for applicants to withdraw from the VIRMP – <b>11:59 p.m. EST</b>   |
| January 20, 2012        | <b>Program rank order lists due/End program withdrawal period.</b> Last date for institution rank order list to be submitted. Last date for institutions to withdraw programs – <b>11:59 p.m. EST</b>   |
| February 6, 2012        | <b>Match Results Date.</b> Results will be posted to the VIRMP website. Institutions may print matched lists, unmatched applicants list and open positions list. Matched applicants may access matched program information. Unmatched applicants may search open positions - <b>8:00 a.m. EST</b> |

#### 18. What's the deal on the unpaid internships?

- a. That's just what they are, opportunities to develop your clinical skills within the confines of an internship but without compensation. Some of these are at prestigious institutions that have limited budgets with which to pay interns. Some programs offer housing, others offer only medical coverage, parking, and basic benefits. These are often offered to students who did not match any of their choices.

#### 19. Since I'm being paid peanuts, will my educational loans be deferred if I accept an internship and/or do a residency?

- a. “Yes,” the subsidized Stafford Loans will have the interest paid by the government during advanced study training at a post-secondary institution (university). However, because of the federal budget deficits, be aware that subsidies for any Stafford Loans look pretty “iffy” in the future. Additionally, most new grads are discovering that Income Based Repayment Plans, where loan repayments are based on each prior year's Adjusted Gross Income from one's tax return, is rapidly wiping out the value of deferments. As of mid-year 2011, government subsidies on Subsidized Stafford loans during the initial four years of veterinary school has led to a savings of 6.8% on the \$34,000 of borrowed money where the government has been paying the during the pursuit of a graduate degree and advanced study as an intern or resident at a university. However, with respect to all of the unsubsidized Stafford Loans, i.e., up to \$34,000 per year of veterinary school, interest is cumulating on this money while in school and during advanced study. The same is true of Grad Plus Loans (some at 7.9% others at 8.5% interest) where the interest is cumulating until borrowers start paying it back. See Dr. Wilson's **Student Loans 101** document for far more detailed information on subsidized vs. unsubsidized loans and the options for loan deferments.
- b. Yes, it is possible to get an education related loan deferrals. See caveats above! However, neither the interest on the subsidized Stafford Loans nor the unsubsidized Staffords will be subsidized by the government if the borrower is not at a university. See also **Student Loans 101** or contact Graduate Leverage at [www.gladvisor.com](http://www.gladvisor.com) and purchase some advice on this matter.

- c. Because of the financial hardship for students whose loans are from sources or whose internships are with private practices where the interest on them is not subsidized or deferred, many students may be precluded from pursuing valuable internship and residencies training. Alternatively, they may have to pursue “couch surfing” style living opportunities with friends or mooch off their parents, siblings or relatives in order to be able to make ends meet. Moreover, students facing this dilemma may very well have to plan ahead by borrowing extra money during their junior and senior years **and saving enough** (living like paupers) during this time period so their savings can carry them through during the second six months of their private practice internships when their loans start coming due and they are not earning enough to pay them. Alternatively, they may have to moonlight or work extra emergency shifts during their internship to earn the money needed to pay off these loans while they are still working for a pittance in non-university internship programs. Whenever possible, at least the interest on the unsubsidized loans should be paid so the total interest is not compounding you into future bankruptcy. And, remember, declaring bankruptcy does not relieve you of these loans.

## 20. Will you need a state veterinary license if you are accepted to an internship program?

- a. Probably not if it's a university program (usually exempt from state licensure though this could change); **yes**, if the program is in the **private sector**.
- b. Who issues state veterinary licenses? The State Board of Examiners in each state. This Board is appointed by the Governor as a consumer protection agency and has nothing to do with the State VMAs, the AVMA or any other veterinary association.
- c. Where can you find out about where, when, and who handles the licensing process in various states and when exams are given? The Practice Acts section of the voluminous AVMA Directory is one source. Even better, however, go to [www.aavsb.org](http://www.aavsb.org) and click the Boards and Agencies button to locate the state board that will issue your license. Select the state, submit your entry and click the veterinarian requirements button to review that state's licensing process and whether or not it grants temporary licenses.
- d. Plan ahead to get your state board application materials in well before the deadlines. If you miss the deadline (must be in their hand, not postmarked) by a certain date you are out of luck. The same [www.aavsb.org](http://www.aavsb.org) website can be used to access the state board requirements for those states in which you are seeking internships and you can determine the application due dates in this manner. Alternatively, email or call the state board that will ultimately control your destiny. Do this early, though, because missing a deadline by a day is as bad as a month.

## 21. Speaking of licenses - how many state board examinations should you take immediately after graduation?

- a. It used to be important to take the exams in all states in which you thought you were likely to practice.
- b. For information regarding the National Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (NBVME) computer generated NAVLE test, visit their website at [www.nbvme.org](http://www.nbvme.org)
- c. Licensing in multiple states immediately after graduation is becoming less important because of the fact that only California gives its own state practical exam. This is because licensure by endorsement has become common.

- You simply meet the criteria of the state in question by having 1) passed the “NAVLE (and ECFVG requirements or PAVE exam if from a non-AVMA accredited school), 2) practiced at least 4-5 years in another state, 3) had no disciplinary actions taken or pending in the state or states in which you are licensed and, then 4) pass a test on the state's laws and regulations.
- d. Board certified specialists now can be licensed by endorsement in some states simply by submitting proof that they have passed the NAVLE and supply a copy of their board certification.
  - e. How about the availability of temporary licenses in various states? Some states offer temporary licenses until their state board exam is next administered. See the veterinarian requirements of the state in question after locating it on the [www.aavsb.org](http://www.aavsb.org) website and the subsequent state board site to which that reference refers you.
  - f. Can you get more than one temporary license in a given state? Be careful - maybe not; it depends on the state. You must take the next state board exam offered by that state and, in some cases, the temporary licenses are valid only until the results of that state's next exam come out. If you fail the exam, your temporary license is revoked.

## **22. What's the tax deductibility of taking state board examinations?**

- a. You can't deduct costs of taking the first examination because that is your entry ticket into the new trade or business for which your veterinary education has prepared you.
- b. You can deduct costs of taking additional examination – yes, if you are filing a Schedule “A,” i.e., itemized miscellaneous deductions as part of your tax return. Why? Having passed your first state board exam, you now are a member of this new trade or business called a “veterinary associate” and any future employer would require that you have a license before he or she would offer you a job. That makes the costs for registration, transportation, lodging, and meals deductible. (Note here that most people who do not own homes, however, do not file Schedule A's and will not receive tax deductions for second or more state board expenses.)

## **23. What is ABVP certification and what are the benefits of being certified?**

- a. The mission of the ABVP is to advance the quality of veterinary practice through certification of veterinarians who demonstrate excellence in species-oriented clinical practice.
- b. With ABVP certification, “Diplomate” status is granted under the approval of the American Board of Veterinary Specialties, an official committee of the AVMA. It is intended as a professional and public recognition of advanced knowledge, skills, and competency. Unlike other veterinary specialties that are narrowly focused (e.g. ophthalmology, cardiology, pathology), ABVP Diplomates demonstrate excellence in the care of the total patient. Note that referrals are not the goal of the ABVP, although many Diplomates have earned the trust and respect of colleagues.
- c. ABVP Diplomates can be certified in Canine and Feline, Feline, Equine, Food Animal, Dairy, Beef Cattle, Swine Health Management, and/or Avian disciplines.
- d. The certification process has four steps including (1) Application – due January 15<sup>th</sup>, (2) Credentials Review – completed by April 15<sup>th</sup>, (3) Notification Letters sent out June 1<sup>st</sup>, (4) Studying, and (5) Examination – register by September 1<sup>st</sup> and take the exam in Chicago, IL on the first or second weekend in November. More information can be found at [www.abvp.com](http://www.abvp.com).

**24. Using the “My Master Internship Search and Application Tracking Document” spreadsheet to assist in the selection of an internship –**

- a. Sheet 1 of the spreadsheet, entitled “My Master Internship Search Tracking Document” is to be used to enter and track the information on internships that you are researching and may or may not apply for.
- b. Sheet 2 of the spreadsheet, entitled “My Master Internship Application Tracking Document” is to be used to enter and track the information on internships that you have or will apply for.
- c. Sheet 3 of the spreadsheet is to be used to create mailing labels for the internship programs that you wish to communicate with by mail. An electronic version of an Excel spreadsheet entitled “Internship Search” will be provided by Dr. Wilson to your course coordinator for placement on your course website or sent to you by email. This will allow you to keep track of all prospective internships as discussed above. Equally important, with a little computer saviness, you can merge the spreadsheet you created into mailing labels by integrating it with a Word document as described below. (This guide has been created for use with Microsoft Word 2007. If the steps do not match up with your version of word, check Microsoft Office’s website at <http://office.microsoft.com> for appropriate instructions.) This process can be used to create labels for postcards or envelopes containing your job seeking materials. Learn a valuable new skill by following the steps below.
  - i. First print this page of instructions for use while you create the merged mailing labels.
  - ii. Open a new blank document in Microsoft Word.
  - iii. Click the Mailings tab.
  - iv. Click the Start Mail Merge button; then click Step by Step Mail Merge Wizard from the drop down menu.
  - v. In the wizard on the right select Labels from the list and click Next: Starting Document.
  - vi. Click Label Options, select the type of labels you will be printing (this is always located on the box of labels if you don’t know off the top of your head), click OK, then click Next: Select Recipients.
  - vii. Make sure Use an Existing List is checked and click Browse.
  - viii. Find the place where you have the “Internship Search” spreadsheet stored on your computer, highlight it, and click Open. Then, make sure Sheet 3-Mail Merge is highlighted and First Row of Data Contains Column Headers is checked in the bottom of the newly opened window, then click OK.
  - ix. Make sure that all of the people you will be printing labels for are checked and click OK. Then click Next: Arrange Your Labels in the wizard.
  - x. Lay out the labels by placing your cursor in the top line of the first label and click More Items from the wizard on the right.
  - xi. Highlight Dr#/Mr#/Ms# from the list, click Insert, then, click Close.
  - xii. Make a space after DrMrMs in the first label, click More Items, highlight First Name, click Insert, then click Close.
  - xiii. Make a space after First Name in the label, click More Items, highlight Last Name, click Insert, then click Close.
  - xiv. Press the down arrow on your keyboard to move down one line, click More Items, highlight Name of Practice, click Insert, then click Close.
  - xv. Click Enter in the label, click More Items, highlight Street Address, click Insert, then click Close.
  - xvi. Click Enter in the label, click More Items, highlight City, click Insert, then click Close.
  - xvii. Type a comma and a space in the label, click More Items, highlight State, click Insert, then click Close.
  - xviii. Make two spaces in the label, click More Items, highlight Zip Code, click Insert, then click Close.
  - xix. Click the Update All Labels button under the Replicate Labels heading, then click Next: Preview Your Labels.
  - xx. The last contact on your list should appear in the first label box. To make the rest appear, click the << button under the Preview Your Labels heading until you see Recipient: 1 between the << and >> buttons

- xxi. You should now see up to 30 labels, click Next: Complete the Merge in the wizard and you're almost done!
- xxii. Finally, click the File menu, click Save As, and save the labels to your computer's hard drive in the same place you have saved the "Internship Search" spreadsheet saved. Name the newly created labels "Internship Search Labels." Proof them for accuracy and you should be ready to print them and begin mailing!





# Perspectives in Professional Education

## Selection methods and criteria for choosing veterinary interns

Harriet J. Davidson, MS, DVM, DACVO

Interns in all areas of medicine are a common and valuable component of the veterinary workforce in academic and private practice situations. Internship programs are meant to provide the intern with valuable experiences in 1 area of medicine, such as small animal, equine, exotic animal, or large animal practice. Internship programs generally encompass both medicine and surgery. Specialty internships are available that offer 1 year of training in a specialty such as surgery or ophthalmology. The general requirements for an internship call for a DVM and the ability to legally practice medicine at the practice or institution. In general, interns are recent graduates, usually in their first year of practice.

The selection process has traditionally been competitive on the part of candidates as well as institutions. Initially, application guidelines and deadlines were variable among institutions. Institutions that made early offers to candidates often had an advantage, but many times they were put off by candidates who were waiting for offers from competing institutions. The competition for qualified applicants became increasingly more difficult as the number of private practices offering internships increased. Initially, the American Association of Veterinary Clinicians (AAVC) organized a specific date on which internship offers would be made to candidates. However, this led to aggressive telephone campaigns by hospital directors and department heads on that particular day, giving east coast persons the advantage. Presently, the AAVC maintains a computerized matching program<sup>1</sup> that allows all candidates and institutions to submit their choices and a computerized ranking system matches the candidate to the practice or institution. Other matching programs exist such as that of the American Association of Equine Practitioners, which organizes a matching program for equine internships. There are also internship programs that select candidates on an individual-applicant basis. Associations that maintain matching programs such as the AAVC and American Association of Equine Practitioners set

goals and recommendations for successful internship programs. However, no organization, association, or college is empowered with overseeing, evaluating, or, in any way, controlling internship programs.

Candidates for internships have information on the mechanics of the matching process, but they often do not know what constitutes a good application. Hard data on the personal characteristics or academic achievements that are considered valuable in a potential intern are rare. Candidates often seek the advice of veterinary school faculty and other veterinary mentors. Although several articles have been published on veterinary school admissions requirements, only anecdotal information is available for the intern selection process.<sup>2-4</sup> There are no published data on what criteria veterinarians apply to candidate applications when making selections. This lack of factual information makes it difficult to provide candidates with accurate and helpful information.

This study was undertaken to determine the primary characteristics for which veterinarians are searching with regard to interns and what emphasis is given to the various portions of the candidate's application.

### Methods

Practices and institutions that participate in the AAVC matching program were surveyed. The criteria used for selection by internship programs that do not participate in the AAVC program were not evaluated. A nonstatistical survey form was used to assess the methods of selection used and the desirable characteristics of interns. The data that were derived were intended to be numerical and descriptive rather than used to determine a statistical relationship. Five veterinary clinical specialists from the author's institution evaluated the survey form to refine the questions; each specialist represented a different academic specialty. The survey form was approved by the University Research Compliance Office. Survey forms were mailed or e-mailed to the person identified as the contact for internships listed in the AAVC matching program for the year 2003. Several copies of the survey were supplied through the mail, along with several self-addressed stamped envelopes. A letter was included that stated the reason for the survey and a Web site address for persons who chose to answer electronically. Electronic communications included the same reason for the survey, a Web address, and an attached copy of the survey. Contact persons were encouraged to forward the surveys to all personnel involved in the selection process. Respondents could complete the survey on the Web, by returning the e-mail attached

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Table 1—Proportions of respondents who listed criteria that would cause removal of a candidate's file from further consideration during application for an internship in a veterinary practice or academic institution.

| Criteria   | All respondents (%) | Small animal respondents (%) |
|--|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Letter of recommendation states that applicant is below average            | 90.3                | 87.1                         |
| Grade point average  | < 2.91 (87.9)       | < 2.93 (86.1)                |
| Candidate's letter of intent is poorly written                             | 61.4                | 62.3                         |
| Letter of recommendation states that applicant is average                  | 51.8                | 48.5                         |
| Candidate's stated goal does not match the practice                        | 40.9                | 44.5                         |
| No letter of recommendation from a professor of the candidate's university | 42.1                | 39.6                         |
| No experience working with your species of interest                        | 37.3                | 40.6                         |
| No letter of recommendation from a diplomate of a specialty college        | 38.5                | 34.6                         |
| Letter of recommendation that does not contain superlative descriptions    | 12.0                | 10.8                         |
| Poor grade in particular course(s)   | 8.4                 | 10.9                         |
| No letter of recommendation from a private practitioner                    | 1.2                 | 0.99                         |

form, or in writing. No attempt was made to match respondents with their practice or institution.

Questions were of 3 types. The first type of question asked the respondent to fill in the blank with a number or mark yes or no. The next type allowed respondents to mark all the answers that applied to them; the data were tabulated and reported as a percentage of those who selected that particular answer. Not all respondents answered all questions. The last type of question asked respondents to rank the choices, with rank number 1 being the most important. Each question allowed respondents to fill in an answer or make a comment if the choices did not match their process or the characteristics they desired. The numbers assigned to each answer were added and divided by the total number of respondents for that question to arrive at a numerical mean value for the answer selected. Question choices that had a numerical assignment were evaluated in order of most important or most frequently selected to least important or least frequently selected. In the data that follows, the written choices are followed by either a percentage or a number. These values are provided to allow the reader to view the relative importance each answer received within the context of the individual question. No statistical comparisons were made for these data.

## Results

There were 101 respondents, including 83 small animal, 3 food animal, 5 equine, 2 exotic animal, and 8 that described a different type of internship. Because of the large number of small animal internships, compared with all other types of internships, the data for small animal internships were evaluated separately as well as within the total set of data. Results are presented for all respondents and for small animal respondents alone. Overall, among the types of practice sites represented, 53% were academic and 47% were private practice. For small animal, only 46% were academic and 54% were private practices.

Both sets of data revealed that the mean number of individuals involved in the selection process was 5 clinicians and 1 technician. Occasionally, practices or institutions included either a resident, current intern,

Table 2—Mean order of importance for written portions of an application for an internship, as ranked by personnel involved in the selection process (6 items ranked; the lower the number the more important the item).

| Portion                   | All respondents | Small animal respondents |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Letters of recommendation | 1.4             | 1.5                      |
| Class rank                | 2.7             | 2.7                      |
| Resume                    | 3.1             | 3.1                      |
| Grade point average       | 3.2             | 3.0                      |
| Letter of intent          | 3.4             | 3.4                      |
| University transcripts    | 3.8             | 3.8                      |

Table 3—Mean order of importance for items in a candidate's resume in an application for an internship, as ranked by personnel involved in the selection process (6 items ranked, the lower the number the more important the item).

| Item                                   | All respondents | Small animal respondents |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Work experience                        | 1.62            | 1.72                     |
| Leadership positions                   | 2.22            | 2.25                     |
| Awards, scholarships, and honors       | 2.30            | 2.25                     |
| Published papers                       | 2.38            | 2.33                     |
| Membership in veterinary organizations | 2.79            | 2.80                     |
| Continuing education attendance        | 2.75            | 2.80                     |

Table 4—Mean order of importance for items critically evaluated in a letter of intent in an application for an internship, as ranked by personnel involved in the selection process (5 items ranked; the lower the number the more important the item).

| Item  | All respondents | Small animal respondents |
|---|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Candidate's ability to write a well-structured letter | 1.79            | 1.67                     |
| Specific goal that matches the particular practice    | 2.12            | 2.29                     |
| Candidate's practical experience                      | 2.36            | 2.50                     |
| Letter is error free                                  | 2.54            | 2.56                     |
| Candidate's outside interests                         | 2.86            | 2.95                     |

or the hospital director in the selection process. In 1 response, the department administrative assistant was involved in the selection. Methods used in the evaluation of candidates were the same for the academic and private practice groups: evaluation of the candidate's written file (88% and 90%, respectively), conversations with persons familiar with the candidate (73% and 73%, respectively), personal interviews with the candidate (54% and 55%, respectively), and telephone interviews (48% and 48%, respectively).

All respondents used similar written criteria to easily eliminate candidates from further consideration (Table 1). The relative importance placed on each aspect of the application was similar (Table 2). The relative importance placed on items within the candidate's resume was similar (Table 3). Several comments were made that a student's resume is usually rather brief because of their lack of professional experience. It was also noted that most veterinary school awards are given at the end of the senior year, so most candidates have not had the opportunity to receive awards at the time of internship application.

The candidate's letter of intent was critically evaluated by all respondents in the same manner (Table 4). Other comments regarding the letter of intent included the ability to determine whether the candidate had an obtainable goal and whether that goal could be achieved at that individual internship. Several respondents noted they wanted verification that the candidate understood the demands of an internship. It was noted that the letter should indicate that the candidate knew something about the particular internship they had applied to and that they would be happy to work in that location. Several respondents stated that the letter indicates something about the candidate's personality and suggested the letter should be professional, well organized, and succinct. A few respondents stated that originality was a positive attribute for gaining attention. However, it was noted that special paper for the letter was not necessarily valuable because many people only read photocopies of the application.

Letters of recommendation were heavily emphasized by both groups for selecting an intern. Both groups placed similar emphasis on items in letters of recommendation (Table 5). Additional items evaluated were descriptions of the candidate's personality, ability to handle stress, drive, interpersonal skills, and predicted success as an intern. In instances in which more than 1 student from an institution had applied to the internship program, letter readers searched for some ranking or comparison of the students. In some instances, a form was maintained with points assigned for various items. It was also mentioned that a statement that the letter writer would willingly work with the candidate for a year would be considered positive. Any negative comments, such as difficulty working with technicians or questioning the candidate's motives or integrity, would disqualify the candidate.

Personal interviews are not always required for intern candidates. Of those persons who conducted personal interviews, 19% used structured interviews and 81% used unstructured interviews. In both sets of data, the information gained was similar (Table 6).

Many interviewers asked candidates to clearly articulate their goals. This information was used to determine whether the candidate knew how their personal goals would fit with that particular internship program. It was stated that this was also a good way to determine whether the candidate's personality would fit well into the individual internship. Lastly, it was stated that the interview was an opportunity for the candidate to ask questions about the position.

Information gained from conversations with the candidate's references was the same for both groups of respondents (Table 7). References could provide information about the candidate's ability to "adapt, overcome, and persevere" and provide information about the candidate's work ethic, patient care, and work efficiency. These conversations could also provide an opportunity to make comparisons between applicants and measure the candidate's level of interest in a particular program versus an internship in general.

Table 5—Mean order of importance for items in a letter of recommendation in an application for an internship, as ranked by personnel involved in the selection process (7 items ranked; the lower the number the more important the item).

| Item   | All respondents | Small animal respondents |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------|
| No. of superlatives used to describe the candidate                     | 2.42            | 2.6                      |
| How well you personally know the letter writer                         | 2.46            | 2.4                      |
| Description of how well the letter writer knows the candidate          | 2.55            | 2.5                      |
| Reputation of the letter writer  | 2.74            | 2.7                      |
| Description of the candidate's activities during senior year           | 2.86            | 2.8                      |
| Prediction of what the candidate is capable of achieving               | 2.98            | 3.0                      |
| Description of the candidate's activities throughout veterinary school | 3.11            | 3.2                      |

Table 6—Criteria evaluated during a personal interview during application for an internship, as reported by personnel involved in the selection process.

| Criterion                          | All respondents (%) | Small animal respondents (%) |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Social skill                       | 76.2                | 77.1                         |
| Conversation ability               | 73.3                | 72.2                         |
| Cognitive process                  | 64.3                | 65                           |
| Basic veterinary knowledge         | 50.5                | 46.9                         |
| Ability to function under pressure | 41.6                | 43.3                         |
| Knowledge of the profession        | 34.6                | 34.9                         |
| Knowledge of a specialty           | 15.8                | 9.6                          |

Table 7—Criteria evaluated during conversations with people familiar with a candidate for an internship, as reported by personnel involved in the selection process.

| Criterion                                      | All respondents (%) | Small animal respondents (%) |
|--|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Ability to work with others                    | 90.1                | 90.3                         |
| Potential clinical ability                     | 87.1                | 86.7                         |
| Personality fit with your practice/institution | 83.2                | 84.3                         |
| Honesty  | 73.2                | 74.6                         |
| Potential leadership ability                   | 30.6                | 30.1                         |
| Potential research capability                  | 19.8                | 19.2                         |

Table 8—Mean order of importance for skills needed by successful applicants for an internship, as ranked by personnel involved in the selection process (9 items ranked; the lower the number the more important the item).

| Skill                     | All respondents | Small animal respondents |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Interpersonal             | 1.96            | 2.03                     |
| Client communication      | 2.69            | 2.73                     |
| Physical examination      | 2.73            | 2.67                     |
| Multitasking              | 3.13            | 3.31                     |
| Animal restraint          | 3.31            | 3.38                     |
| Surgical                  | 3.45            | 3.75                     |
| Compassion for the animal | 3.49            | 3.49                     |
| Record keeping            | 3.67            | 3.66                     |
| Written communications    | 3.69            | 3.72                     |

Table 9—Mean order of importance for attitudes needed by successful applicants for an internship, as ranked by personnel involved in the selection process (8 items ranked; the lower the number the more important the item).

| Attitude           | All respondents | Small animal respondents |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Positive           | 2.12            | 2.27                     |
| Strong work ethic  | 2.19            | 2.12                     |
| Team player        | 2.76            | 2.86                     |
| High moral caliber | 3.48            | 3.66                     |
| Dedicated          | 3.61            | 3.77                     |
| Flexible           | 4.01            | 4.42                     |
| Sense of humor     | 4.27            | 4.44                     |
| Self-confidence    | 4.30            | 4.39                     |

Table 10—Mean order of importance for knowledge needed by successful applicants for an internship, as ranked by personnel involved in the selection process (4 items ranked; the lower the number the more important the item).

| Knowledge     | All respondents | Small animal respondents |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Medical       | 1.04            | 1.06                     |
| Financial     | 1.51            | 1.71                     |
| Pharmacologic | 1.82            | 1.91                     |
| Surgical      | 2.07            | 2.19                     |

Conversations with references provided information on how well the candidate might fit into their particular work environment. Of those respondents that had conversations with references, 91% of both groups placed more emphasis on information from a friend versus someone they did not know. It was stated that it was easier to interpret information from a friend rather than a stranger. The skills, abilities, knowledge, and attitudes that candidates were selected for were similar in both groups of respondents (Tables 8–10).

## Discussion

The form used in this study was designed with guidance from Dr. Ron Downey, Assistant Provost/Director of Planning and Analysis, Kansas State University. Dr. Downey holds a PhD in Quantitative Psychology and has completed extensive research in numerous areas of personnel selection. Data from this study were not analyzed to determine the return rate because multiple persons from an institution or practice may have completed the survey. Data represented a larger number of small animal internships versus all others combined. This was expected because there are more small animal programs offered

through the AAVC internship matching program.<sup>1</sup> Non-small animal internships were not analyzed individually because of small samples. The general ranking or selection of answers did not differ greatly between small animal respondents and total respondents, which suggested that methods used in the selection of interns and the characteristics selected for are similar for all types of programs. The respondents were fairly evenly distributed between academic institutions and private practices. The data were not analyzed to determine differences in the responses between these 2 groups because the goal was to determine general trends, not specific needs for individual internship programs.

In general, information about candidates was gathered in a similar manner by all respondents (ie, review of written applications, interviews, and conversations with references). The candidate's class rank was valued slightly higher than their **grade point average (GPA)**. Grade scales vary among institutions, so a class rank provides a frame of reference for the GPA. Candidates who do not provide a class rank make their written information more difficult to evaluate. The veterinary school of the candidate and their individual transcripts were ranked last in the evaluation process. It is worth noting that although no respondents indicated that they would refuse a candidate from a veterinary school outside North America, such schools have different methods of grading and ranking students. Graduates of foreign veterinary schools might improve their applications by providing an explanation of their school's grading methodology. Finally, although transcripts were ranked as least important to the selection process, transcripts do verify GPA.

Items used to eliminate candidates from further consideration fell into 4 general categories with regard to frequency of their use. The first 2 items were from a letter of recommendation—that the candidate was below average or the candidate had a GPA < 2.9 on a 4.0 scale. The survey did not specifically ask whether there was a class rank that must be obtained to be a viable candidate, and no respondent indicated a hard minimum threshold. A minimum GPA of 2.9 is an easy discriminator if the intern selection process is intended to avoid less than average students. However, it may not be as helpful as veterinarians believe. North American veterinary schools were surveyed via e-mail to determine the mean GPA and percentage of students with a GPA < 3.0 in 2004.<sup>3</sup> Of the colleges that responded and use a 4.0 grading scale, the mean GPA was 3.34 and 84% of students had a GPA ≥ 3.0.

The second criterion used for elimination was a poorly written letter of intent or a letter of recommendation that stated the candidate was simply an average student or candidate. The next most frequently stated reason for eliminating a candidate from further consideration was that the candidate's goals did not match the particular internship or the candidate did not have necessary work experience with a particular species. Some veterinary students may have the misconception that the more programs they apply to the higher their chances of being accepted. This study did not address the probabilities involved in intern selection. However, persons who reviewed applicants screened the written

applications and removed those that did not fulfill their needs with regard to goals and experience. For this reason, candidates should consider whether their goals and experience truly match the program to which they are applying. Another reason for eliminating a candidate from further consideration was the lack of a letter of recommendation from a faculty member of the candidate's alma mater or lack of a letter of recommendation from a diplomate of a specialty college. As previously stated, most intern candidates are veterinary students or recent graduates, so a faculty member would be best suited to evaluate their student's clinical competence and promise.

A resume provides the candidate with the opportunity to describe what they have accomplished, whereas a letter of intent provides an opportunity to describe what they might accomplish. The type of work experience was the most important aspect of the resume. Candidates should be aware that persons evaluate their resume to determine whether they have the qualifications needed to work in the particular internship. This could include special or elective rotations taken during the senior year, volunteer veterinary experience, or other animal-related experiences. Although leadership positions, awards, scholarships, and honors were evaluated as less important, they are without a doubt valuable. These provide evidence of the candidate's ability to achieve. In many instances, the items that set the various candidates apart are small, such as serving as class president. Many of the respondents commented that they were searching for a person with a strong work ethic who was a team player. Items in the resume that document the candidate has done this in the past would have positive effects. The letter of intent can provide a great deal of information regarding the candidate and their potential. Respondents were particularly interested in a letter that was well written and professional. Although writing skills appeared last in the list of skills a candidate should possess, the letter of intent was used to determine the candidate's personality, goals, and abilities. The letter should be professional, succinct, and interesting.

By far the most important aspect of the application package was the letters of recommendation. In most instances, a minimum of 3 letters of recommendation is requested. Although candidates may request additional letters, they should realize that persons reading such letters have limited time. If no new information is provided by additional letters, they are not necessary. Candidates should judiciously select whom they ask for letters of recommendation. It is possible that a candidate may request 1 person for a letter of recommendation for some programs and a different person for other programs. In doing so, they not only maximize the possible professional connections of the letter writer, but they can also hope that their own characteristics would be described in the best detail for each individual program. The various aspects of the recommendation letters were all closely used in evaluation of the candidate. How well the reviewer knew the author of the letter was important. It is common that information gained from a friend or colleague is valued higher

than information received from a stranger. Although the number of superlatives used to describe the candidate may seem unreliable, it is 1 method of quickly comparing candidates. This is combined with the level of familiarity the reader has with the writer. This allows the reader to discern the writer's style and possible meaning of the descriptive terms. The absence of superlatives can be a substantial detriment to candidates. Candidates from foreign countries where the use of superlatives is not the cultural norm may be at an unfair disadvantage.

Candidate interviews are not required by many internship programs. However, candidates may request an interview. The primary items evaluated during the interview are generally social rather than professional. Respondents felt that they could gain valuable information regarding how well the candidate would fit into their particular work environment. Respondents desired a candidate who was honest and of high moral character. Interviews provide reviewers with an opportunity to compare the candidate's written information with information they provide directly and in person. This can be used as a means to evaluate the candidate's honesty. Two of the 3 most important skills that were sought in interns were interpersonal and client communications; both of these items were usually evaluated during the interview process. Although 1 respondent commented that the interview was an opportunity for the candidate to learn more about their practice, most respondents expected candidates to have a good understanding of their program prior to the interview. Most respondents conduct unstructured interviews.

Interviews have been used for many years in the admission process for professional schools. In a review of the interview process, it was concluded that interviews were helpful in the selection process.<sup>3</sup> However, it was recommended that the process could be improved by conducting structured interviews by a panel, training the interviewers, and asking questions obtained from a job task analysis.<sup>3</sup> Because the mean number of persons involved in selection of candidates was 5, it is possible that structured candidate interviews could be arranged. Information gained from an unstructured interview is generally subjective. Subjective evaluations have been successfully applied to selection of veterinary students.<sup>4</sup>

Candidates for internships must realize that the persons they ask to supply letters of recommendation are frequently telephoned for further information. In this author's experience, it is also common for institutions or practices to solicit information from other individuals who might be familiar with the candidate.

The last portion of the survey attempted to determine some of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that were sought in potential interns. Because the rankings were so tightly clustered with regard to the knowledge areas, it is not appropriate to state that 1 aspect was more valuable than another. It may have been that because respondents were seeking above average students as determined by their screening methods, they were making the assumption that candidates have adequate knowledge of all the areas described (medical, financial, pharmacologic, and surgical). There have

been several reports<sup>5-7</sup> on the desirable attributes in new veterinarians, and these would be expected to apply to interns as well.

Skills that were highly valued were also tightly clustered. It is interesting that interpersonal skills and client communications were listed at the top of desirable skills. These are aspects of a person's affective domain.<sup>8</sup> Veterinary students are given ample opportunities to observe various means of personal interaction that could increase their affective domain. However, there is little evidence that this is information that can be taught easily in a classroom.

The attitudes that were optimal for intern selection were also tightly clustered, making it difficult to identify any 1 aspect that was of greater importance. A common theme throughout the survey was that respondents were searching for an intern who would be easy to work with and would fit well into their practice or institution. An intern is an employee who must work within a unique environment. Each practice or institution has its own institutional attitudes and environment, so different candidates might be better suited to different institutions. Again, the more the candidate knows about the practice or institution they are applying to, the better their chances of being selected.

Information gained from a survey is only as good as the questions asked.<sup>9</sup> Responses to the questions might have been different if the wording of a question had been altered. Most questions provided the option of a write-in answer. However, < 10% of respondents provided write-in answers that were different from any of the supplied choices. This low level of alternative answers suggests that the survey contained the appropriate choices.

This survey was designed to gather information regarding the methods employed in the selection of interns. This may be important to intern candidates when making their application and proceeding

through the selection process. This information might also be important for academicians when designing curricula. As the field of veterinary medicine expands, there is constant need to increase the skills and knowledge base of veterinary students. Knowing what is in demand by future employers may help formulate the future curricula.

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a. Dean's Office, Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine, 2004.

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