

Applying to Veterinary Medical Colleges as a University of Massachusetts Amherst student

Pre-Veterinary major

All students intending to major in Pre-Veterinary enter as Animal Science majors. If they maintain a 2.7 or better GPA in ten selected science classes, they have the option to change their major officially to Pre-Veterinary. The courses required to graduate with a Pre-veterinary major are specifically tailored to fulfill the course requirements of most veterinary medical, graduate, and medical schools and to prepare our majors for success in these programs. (see <http://www.vasci.umass.edu/undergraduate/pre-veterinary-major>).

However, students can major in any subject, as long as they fulfill the science-heavy slate of prerequisite courses. Some veterinary schools have specific requirements, such as a year of business or a course in public speaking.

Early Admissions Program with Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine

The University of Massachusetts Amherst has an early admissions program with Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine (http://www.tufts.edu/vet/admissions/dvm_early_acceptance.html). Competitive applicants will have excelled in at least two science sequences (2 semesters each of introductory chemistry and biology) and demonstrated high levels of maturity and motivation in their veterinary medical-related and extracurricular activities by the March first deadline for application in their sophomore year. SAT scores are used instead of GRE scores. Successful applicants in the past have had SAT scores of at least 2000. Students admitted under this program are required to maintain a minimum 3.4 GPA and complete the Tufts prerequisite classes. The admissions process is highly selective, but if you are not accepted under the Early Admissions Program, you can make an appointment with a Tufts admissions counselor the following summer to go over how to improve your application for the next round of applications in the fall of your senior year.

Components of a successful veterinary college application in the fall of senior year:

1) Excellent grades. Aim for a GPA of 3.5 or better. An "A" in a higher level science course (i.e. 400 and above) counts for more than an "A" in a lower level course. Veterinary college admissions counselors look very carefully at your overall GPA and your grades in biology, inorganic and organic chemistry, biochemistry and advanced science courses as an indicator of whether you can pass the demanding veterinary school curriculum. Your grades will largely determine whether you can get into the veterinary school of your choice or get into any veterinary school straight out of college, since grades and GRE scores make up 60-70% of the decision. You can take a few classes during the summer session or at a community college, but not so many that it appears that you won't be capable of doing well in the many demanding courses taken at once in veterinary school. If you have a very low GPA, you can rehabilitate your application portfolio by performing well on higher-level science courses that you take after graduation. Earning a Master's or Ph.D. degree also helps.

2) Excellent Graduate Record Exam (GRE) test scores. This test is similar to the SAT, with verbal, quantitative, and written components. You should plan on preparing to take the GRE no later than the fall of your junior year by going to the Educational Test Service website (<http://www.ets.org/gre/>), downloading the free Powerprep II software for Windows, working through a test preparation book or taking a course. You should start taking the GRE in the spring of your junior year and the following summer, so that you can take them more than once before the veterinary school application deadlines in October and November of your senior year. Taking the GRE twice is sufficient; taking the test three or more times looks suspicious. Do not take the test before you have prepared-- a low score will hurt your chances, even if you have a higher score later. A very high GRE could compensate for a lower than average GPA. It takes a high GPA to make up for a low GRE.

3) Veterinary medical related experiences. You need three experiences of at least 200 hours each, chosen from the following four areas:

- a) Large animal
- b) Small animal
- c) Wildlife/conservation
- d) Laboratory research

Veterinary medical colleges prefer applicants with an open mind about animal species since their mission is to teach the material that you will be tested on the Veterinary Licensing Exam in your fourth year of veterinary school. Thus, it is a mistake to have two or three out of the three experiences centered on small animals or horses, even if you think that's what you will specialize in as a veterinarian. Conversely, if you are interested in

a veterinary specialty (e.g. zoo medicine), make sure you gain experience in that area. These experiences can be pursued during the school year or in the summer, but keep in mind that it might be easier to find an opening in a veterinary clinic near home than near Amherst, where you'll be competing with all the other pre-vet students. Summer experiences may also be more exotic (i.e. internship at an aquarium). These experiences are required so that the veterinary colleges are assured that you have a comprehensive grasp of the veterinary medical profession and so that you can cultivate contacts who will write superlative letters of recommendation for you. Document your experiences so that you can fill in details on your applications years later.

4) Superlative recommendation letters (minimum 3). One to two will be from contacts from your veterinary medical related experiences, and one to two will be from an academic advisor or a professor from a science class. At least one of the recommendation letters should be from a veterinarian. Once you've identified candidate references, ask them if they feel that they could write you a strong letter of recommendation for veterinary school. You don't want a lukewarm letter of recommendation and it's no fun to write one, so both of you will benefit from this.

Recommendations consist of two parts. In the first part, the recommender is asked to rate you on your emotional stability, initiative/originality, motivation, personal and social maturity, dependability, communication skills, integrity, intellectual capacity, leadership and ability to work with others. Your goal in your veterinary medical related experiences and in your interactions with your professors is to convince the recommender that you deserve the highest rating in all of these categories. There is a question about whether you can handle large and/or small animals adequately, but the choices are "yes", "no" or "not able to judge". The veterinary schools are interested in your psychological profile and how you interact with other people, who will be your classmates, professors, and clients. The assumption is that you can interact satisfactorily with animals, or you wouldn't be applying to veterinary medical college. The second part of the recommendation is a letter. When you ask someone to write a letter of recommendation, send them your resume/CV to make writing a strong letter as easy as possible. List all your work, veterinary medical related, and extracurricular activities, with phrases underneath each activity pointing out how this activity proved you have the character traits listed above (e.g. "Cashier at a supermarket for five years--demonstrated dependability and integrity in handling large sums of money"). Your letter writers will use this information in their ratings and their letter. If there's a weakness in your application (i.e. low grade in Chemistry 111 because of a death in the family), discuss it with your letter writers so that they can help you make your best case.

5) Personal statement/ essay questions. Start working on your personal statement early (June after junior year); have other people read it and make suggestions. Think about it from the perspective of the admissions counselor, who has to read thousands of these personal statements. Don't put the admissions counselor to sleep. Don't make the mistake of using platitudes ("Helping animals is very rewarding"), dwelling on how long you've wanted to be a veterinarian ("...since I was *in utero*."), and how much you love animals ("I love my cat/dog/horse/iguana."). Describe specifically what you've learned from your veterinary medicine related and other experiences, especially about yourself and other people. Emphasize those experiences that make you different from all the other applicants. Tell a gripping story, using evocative details and humor. The admissions counselors are trying to get to know you from these essays.

6) Good choices of veterinary schools to apply to. You will have to decide whether you only want to go to one veterinary school (maybe the one in your state of residence), or whether it's more important to you to start veterinary college the fall after you graduate with a B.S. The highest ranked veterinary schools are very selective. Most students apply to a range of schools, from their dream school to their safety schools. Consult with members of the Pre-Veterinary advisory committee on your choices. Your odds of getting into a veterinary school are affected by whether a veterinary school has reserved spots for residents of your state. You may want to establish residency in another state by working there after you graduate (attending school there doesn't count). If you want to go to a specific school, go ahead and apply even if your odds are low. UMass Amherst has an early admission program with Tufts, and is putting agreements in place with the University of Edinburgh and Ross University.

7) Excellent interview. Make the most of a vet school interview opportunity by practicing. The Pre-Veterinary advisory committee offers mock interview sessions in the spring. Prepare for the interview by reading American Veterinary Medical Association discussions on current veterinary medical controversies. Find out about the job opportunities and starting pay for D.V.M.s. Research the veterinary school so that you're prepared with

questions about their program, financial aid, etc. Make sure you know your own application inside and out—it looks very bad if you can't tell your interviewer about your own record and experiences. Check out what other interviewees have written about their experience (e.g. feedback on Tufts at <http://www.studentdoctor.net/schools/school/tufts-vet/survey/33>).

Timeline:

High school and Freshman year

- Veterinary medical related experiences in small or large animal, wildlife, or laboratory research.
- Investigate veterinary colleges and career choices on the AAVMC website and the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Sophomore year

- Veterinary medical related experiences in small or large animal, wildlife, or laboratory research.
- Investigate veterinary college programs. Make sure you will have all necessary prerequisite classes for the veterinary colleges you are considering applying to.
- *January*: Decide whether you will apply to the early admissions program at Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. Work on applications during the January break. Ask evaluators if they would be willing to write a supportive evaluation and letter for you, as described below for a senior.
- *March*: Early admissions deadline for Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. If you are not accepted, schedule an appointment with an admissions counselor from March-August to go over how to improve your application for the next round of applications in the fall of your senior year.

Junior year

- Veterinary medical related experiences in small or large animal, wildlife, or laboratory research.
- Decide which veterinary colleges to apply to.
- *Fall*: start preparation for the Graduate Record Exam (GRE)
- *Spring to summer*: take the GRE one to two times. Check allowable frequency of test taking on GRE website-- minimum spacing could be no more frequent than once every 30 days. Check the individual veterinary schools' GRE deadline requirements on the VMCAS website to make sure that you start taking the GRE early enough. When you take the GRE, arrange for your scores to be sent directly to the veterinary schools to which you are applying.
- *Spring*: sneak peak at VMCAS site. This can be useful to start gathering all the details the application requires.
- *Early June between Junior and Senior year*: VMCAS site opens. Start working on your application now! Filling out the information will take a considerable amount of time, so do it now, when you are not busy with classes. Write the first draft of your personal statement and other essays. Plan to show it to multiple people and go through at least six drafts. Request copies of your official undergraduate transcripts from the registrar and from any other universities or colleges at which you took classes and send them to the veterinary schools to which you are applying. Use delivery confirmation and keep the receipts until every veterinary college confirms that your application is complete. Prepare and send supplemental applications to veterinary colleges that require them. Four US schools (Tufts, Texas A&M, Tuskegee, and Missouri for residents) use their own application process, so if you apply to one of these schools, you will have to ask your evaluators to submit their evaluations and letters through their websites in addition to the VMCAS.

Senior year

- *August-September*: Contact your evaluators to ask them to write a strong letter of recommendation for you. Supply them with an unofficial transcript and a resume that makes all the points you want to appear in evaluation and the letter. You can register up to six evaluators on VMCAS; a minimum of three evaluators is required. Follow up with your evaluators as to whether they have received an email from VMCAS or schools with their own applications giving them access to the evaluation website. Let them know the deadline-- VMCAS won't mail your application without three evaluations.
- *October/November*: VMCAS applications are due early October. Try to finish and submit your VMCAS application by the middle of September to avoid last-minute issues. Remind your evaluators of the deadline by sending them an email thanking them for completing the evaluation and letter by that date. The Tufts application is due in early November. Submit any required supplemental applications and follow up with the veterinary colleges to make sure your applications are complete.
- *December-Spring*: Prepare for interviews. If you are not successful this round, make an appointment to talk to a veterinary medical school admissions counselor in a school to which you have applied about the weaknesses in your application and consider what you should do to remedy them, whether you should change which

veterinary medical colleges you apply to the following fall, or whether you should implement "Plan B" and pursue a different career path. Many people who do not gain admittance to a veterinary school immediately after college will eventually do so.

Resources

-*Veterinary Medical School Admissions Requirements*, published yearly by Purdue University Press

-*Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*

<http://avmajournals.avma.org/loi/javma>

-Careers in veterinary medicine, vet school requirements, VMCAS link, scholarships and financial aid for veterinary students

<http://www.aavmc.org/Students-Applicants-and-Advisors.aspx>

- VMCAS updates

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Veterinary-Medical-College-Application-Service-VMCAS/119971444705528>

- AAVMC updates

<http://www.aavmc.org/Pre-Vet-Student-Resources/Newsletter.aspx>

-Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

<http://www.ets.org/gre/>

-UMass Pre-Veterinary Advisory Committee

Committee Chair:

Dr. Janice Telfer, Ph.D.

Ph.D.: Harvard University

Post-doctoral training: California Institute of Technology

Current Specialty & Area of Scholarship: Research scientist in immunology & developmental biology using rodent and large animal models;

Associate Professor at UMass Amherst, Undergraduate Program Director

Committee Members:

Dr. Rafael Fissore, D.V.M., Ph.D., Board Certified by the American College of Theriogenology

Veterinary College: Argentina

Veterinary Residency: University of California Davis College of Veterinary Medicine

Ph.D.: University of Massachusetts Amherst

Post-doctoral experience: Brigham & Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School

Veterinary Colleges most familiar with: University of California Davis

Current Specialty & Area of Scholarship: Research scientist in Animal Health (Reproduction & Developmental Biology);

Professor at UMass Amherst, Chair of the Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences.

Dr. Carlos Gradil, D.V.M., M.S., Ph.D., Board Certified by the American College of Theriogenology

Veterinary College: University of Lisbon, Portugal

Veterinary Residency: Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

M.S. & Ph.D.: University of Minnesota

Post-doctoral training: University of Ottawa

Veterinary Colleges taught at: University of Lisbon; Tufts; Cornell; North Carolina State

Veterinary Colleges most familiar with: University of Lisbon; Tufts; Cornell; North Carolina State

Current Specialty & Area of Scholarship: Academic veterinarian, reproduction specialist with clinics at UMass Amherst & Tufts Veterinary College; lectures in equine health and reproduction and diseases of livestock and horses;

Extension Professor at UMass Amherst.