



2020 VETERINARY SCHOOL BORROW BETTER CHECKLIST

You might be tempted to simply accept all the student loans offered to you. Before you do, review these steps to borrow less and reduce your stress. Your future Doctor-self will thank you!

STEP 1: Understand YOUR veterinary school cost of attendance (COA)

- ✓ Tuition & Fees – REQUIRED to obtain your degree
- ✓ Cost of living expenses – ESTIMATES provide by your school
- ✓ Your actual living expenses – what you NEED to sustain yourself during veterinary school
- ✓ The difference between your actual living expenses and the cost of living estimates is where you can reduce some of your total educational costs.
- ✓ School cost of living estimates often includes more than your budgeted needs – this is an opportunity to borrow less!

STEP 2: Figure out how you are paying for your veterinary education

- ✓ Student Loan Types
 - **Federal student loans:**
 - Direct Unsubsidized, Direct Grad Plus
 - Health Professions Student Loans (HPSL), Loans for Disadvantaged Students (LDS)
 - Private student loans
 - Family student loans
- ✓ Scholarships, grants, and institutional aid
 - FREE money – visit with your Dean's office to see opportunities
 - Best used to reduce required costs first, then to offset living expenses
- ✓ Personal funding – best used towards tuition as early in the program as possible
 - Savings
 - Income from work
 - Family gifts, spouse support
- ✓ Estimate your Debt to Income Ratio (DIR) to narrow your borrowing strategy
 - $DIR < 1$, use a combination of the least expensive and most flexible options available to you
 - $DIR > 2$, use Federal Student loans, personal funding only
 - DIR between 1 and 2, Federal Student loans recommended, personal funding if available

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STEP 3: Estimate costs, starting repayment balance(s), and DIR

- ✓ Download your **Student Aid data file** if you already have federal student loans
- ✓ Visit the VIN Foundation **Student Debt Center**:
 - My Student Loans - Upload your Student Aid data file
 - In-School Loan Estimator - Project your remaining education costs
- ✓ Estimate your income post-graduation
 - Income by school for new grads: AVMA **2019 Economic State of the Profession** report (Free for AVMA members)
 - AVMA **Veterinary Salary Estimator** for New Veterinarians
 - Bureau of Labor Statistics for **veterinarians**



STEP 4: Avoid common mistakes to set yourself up for repayment success

- ✓ Use Federal student loans; they are the most flexible in repayment
 - You can finance your entire veterinary education up to COA
 - Eligible for **Income-driven repayment (IDR) & Public Service Loan Forgiveness**
 - Favorable discharge provisions
 - No co-signers needed
- ✓ Resist the temptation to pay **interest on student loans** during school
 - Borrowing less, returning, or reducing financial aid awards will save you more money vs. paying interest while in school
 - Prioritize financial wellness before paying towards student loans. Focus on the following first:
Emergency fund > (Credit Card Debt) > Retirement funds > Tuition and fees > Living Expenses
- ✓ Borrow less, especially early in your veterinary program
 - Students commonly take all that is offered in the first couple of years because it's easy – the first-year loans are the most expensive. The biggest impacts are made by reducing early awards.
 - Apply for HPSL/ LDS, and scholarships to offset more expensive loans
 - Minimize use of Direct Grad Plus awards as much as possible
 - You have 120-days to return federal student loans: erases principal, interest & fees
- ✓ Pay close attention to financial aid awards in the 3rd/4th year of school
 - Some schools charge more tuition for your clinical year
 - Your living expense estimates are higher even though you may not need it



STEP 5: Take advantage of helpful resources

- ✓ **Borrow Better webinar recording**
- ✓ VIN Foundation **Student Debt Center**
 - My Student Loans - Upload your NSLDS file
 - In-School Loan Estimator - Project your costs and see if you can beat your estimates!
- ✓ **Federal Student Aid website**
- ✓ VIN Student Debt Folder (membership to VIN Is FREE while you are in school)
 - Personalized assistance
 - Option to post your “case” anonymously
 - Get help while helping your colleagues too!
- ✓ FREE **Drip.vet Personal Financial Success** course
- ✓ Veterinary Business Management Association (VBMA) **community**
- ✓ Student Doctor Network **veterinary forums**