

## ***Is My Veterinary Education Up to Me?***

*By Amanda Chase*



The moment I was accepted into vet school was one rich in excitement, anticipation, and gratitude. Fast forward three years into the journey through the death of a parent, two veterinary mission trips, a change in career for my spouse, and substantial surgeries for two of my own pets – I'm still here and I can confidently say that my veterinary education is something I will always treasure. However, I discovered early on, it would be up to me to seek opportunities outside the curriculum to get the most out of my education. What amount of responsibility does the veterinary school share in the management of student time, money, and curriculum selection? Should it matter if the curriculum itself is ineffective, inefficient, or irrelevant to my future career goals?

I have heard it stated before that in life, we simply trade time for money. Both are precious commodities, and neither is guaranteed. When asked to consider if my time and money are being used wisely in vet school, my instinctual response is no. I have difficulty learning in a lecture style format with very little hands on application. I think the fees we are required to pay in addition to tuition, such as the recreation facility or healthcare center should not be mandated as part of a professional school experience. I can think of many ways in which hundreds of dollars each semester could directly benefit my education, such as purchase of recommended textbooks and preparation material for the national licensing exam.

If I take a step back, however, and consider whether these resources are being used wisely to best educate not just me but rather an entire league of future veterinarians, then surprisingly the answer might be yes. If one examines the composition of the average veterinary class, one would find a diverse group of individuals with an expansive list of accomplishments, setbacks, personalities, and backgrounds; the school has the unique responsibility for finding an educational method that somehow communicates modern veterinary medicine to us all. It is actually quite remarkable to see how such a large group of individuals taught in a collective setting emerge as competent professionals in just four short years. And that is the proof or at least the supporting evidence suggestive of an effective education. Is it wise to have student fees for services that most may never use but might be exactly what a few students need to thrive? Is it wise to provide lectures in an auditorium style setting so that consistency of information flow is emphasized over style? If I allow myself to consider the needs of my own classmates and the collection of fellow emerging professionals as one unit, then I have to offer a resounding yes. This does not mean that the school should not continue to optimize educational material delivery or work to become more efficient in its use of student money, but overall I see the value in how the school chooses to operate.

One of the requirements I appreciate most at our school is the directive to select a career area of emphasis. The core curriculum ensures each student has a good grasp on species needed to be a well-rounded veterinarian, and the area of emphasis allows focused education in the department which most aligns with a particular student's goals. For example, if a vision of one's career includes a wide variety of companion and exotic animals, Mixed Animal Medicine is a great option. However, if a student knows they want to practice in an exclusively equine practice, choosing the Equine Medicine area of emphasis will help provide direction to courses containing important diagnostic and clinically relevant material. Given the majority of electives specific to one's area of emphasis are offered in the last two years of school, the first two can sometimes feel a bit broad and irrelevant. I applaud the breadth of education currently offered in the second half of the current curriculum but do wish for more focus in the beginning to increase the effectiveness of the full four years in school.

I think our institution has enormous strength in its ability to reach a wide variety of students and provide very efficient teaching in the clinical year. The inadequacies that exist, however, in the pre-clinical setting force you to find opportunities outside the curriculum to help you become technically proficient. From one perspective, the need for interaction with nearby veterinary clinics or participation in clinical skills events allows you to foster relationships with future colleagues. On the other hand, with the high cost of tuition and strict mandates on their time, many students might expect to not have to look outside the school to obtain skills imperative to the success of their veterinary career.

The most crucial piece of advice I would give to our curriculum advisors would be to incorporate hands-on technical skills in the first year. The responsibility of teaching a veterinary student to pull blood from the



---

*We're here to help!*

jugular vein of a live animal for the first time should not fall to a summer employer. A practical solution could include trading time devoted to the anatomy laboratory for clinical skills instead. Given that the majority of students do not use the fully allotted time of two to three hours each day for anatomy lab, perhaps short thirty minute sessions could instead be spent in the clinic practicing venipuncture, hooking up fluids, and basic anesthesia monitoring. If this preparation occurred for two full semesters in the first-year curriculum, students would be significantly more prepared for external veterinary opportunities.

So, is my veterinary education up to me, the school, or both? I propose that optimal effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance is achieved when the student and institution partner together, take responsibility for their role, and strive to produce excellence. I look forward to pursuing my mixed animal career goals as I approach the final year of this wonderful adventure in veterinary education.