

Suggestions on minimizing veterinary educational debt

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The debt that is accumulated while obtaining a degree in veterinary medicine can be daunting. This document presents recommendations for individuals who are considering or already embarking on the veterinary training process. To those familiar with the student debt problem, it is well known that many graduating veterinarians compile a financial obligation that is two to three times their starting salary. This significant monthly requirement can alter career decisions as well as lifestyles. No one program or entity will solve the problem, however, debt can be managed with an integrated approach. Debt, particularly debt accumulated while being trained for a professional career, should be approached with information, resources and planning. The student interested in veterinary medicine should begin this process early. To make a coherent set of recommendations, it is useful to break the student's veterinary career into three categories; undergraduate pre-veterinary experience, veterinary student, and graduate veterinarian.

I. As an undergraduate

- a. High school preparation for pre-veterinary studies
 - i. Take high school physics, chemistry, biology, trigonometry, algebra
 1. These are courses that are sometimes repeated as an undergraduate and cost additional money for students applying to veterinary school
 - ii. Where appropriate, college or AP credit coursework can be a way to minimize undergraduate debt
 1. Some survey courses completed this way allow semester schedules to be arranged in a manner that allows a student to be more successful
 - iii. Ask questions about debt during the family undergraduate visit
 - iv. Begin to work and save money for your veterinary training now
 - v. Become aware of any state/federal programs that will help with either the accumulation or elimination of debt
- b. Undergraduate experience
 - i. Stay current on the costs of veterinary training – talk to your undergraduate advisor
 - ii. Consider attending a smaller undergraduate college near or at your home for the first two years of your pre-vet studies
 1. This will minimize educational debt
 2. This will save on two years of room and board
 3. Make sure that your grades are strong and stay strong when you transfer to a larger school for your third and fourth (if you complete your degree) years of undergraduate work at a larger university
 - iii. Consider applying for veterinary school without an undergraduate degree
 1. Not all students want to do this, however, you can apply to veterinary college after completing your pre-

- veterinary requirements (typically can be done in three years). For some, this will save on a year of undergraduate expenses.
- iv. When visiting Colleges of Veterinary Medicine ask questions about the costs of education. Find out what the CVM is doing to help students with defraying debt.
 - v. Borrow as little as possible to pay for your education
 - vi. Where appropriate, work part-time and save
 - vii. Live within your means
 - viii. Spend time looking for grants, awards, scholarships, etc.
 1. State associations and commodity groups
 2. College and departmental scholarships
 3. Federal programs
 - ix. Have a plan B if you are unable to successfully obtain admission to veterinary school or if you change your mind about applying.
 - x. Get exposure to specialty areas that could translate into sources of income while in veterinary school as well as career choices later.
 1. NDSU example
 - a. Veterinary diagnostic laboratory
 - b. Equine and livestock facilities
 - c. Research laboratories

II. As a veterinary student

- i. Keep track of your debt and ways to help reduce it
 1. Awareness of state and federal programs that will potentially assist with debt
- ii. Career counseling
 1. Opportunities beyond practice
 2. Business
 3. Practice enhancement
- iii. Again, minimize the amount you borrow for your education
- iv. Where appropriate, work part-time and save
- v. Live within your means
- vi. Spend time looking for grants, awards, scholarships, etc.

Here are a few. This is not an inclusive list.

 1. AVMF Veterinary Scholarship Program
 - a. Awards to 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students
 2. Winn Feline Foundation
 - a. \$2500 to 3rd or 4th year student
 3. Amstutz Scholarship – AABP and Elanco Animal Health
 4. AABP/Pfizer Animal Health Veterinary Student Scholarship Fund
 5. AABP/Cargill scholarships
 6. AAEP/ The Winner's Circle
 7. AKC/Royal Canin/AKS Canine Health Foundation
 8. Canidae® Veterinary Medicine Scholarship Program
 9. Pfizer Animal Health Veterinary Student Scholarship Program (Pfizer and AVMF)

- a. \$2,000,000.00+ awarded over first three years (began 2009)
 - i. 1st year – 222 2nd and 3rd year students received \$555,000.00 (\$2500.00/scholarship)
 - ii. 2nd year – 300 students
 - iii. 3rd year – 331 students

10. North Dakota example – all of these can be accessed on the NDVMA website under “Veterinary student scholarships”

- a. Dr. Roger Meisner scholarship
 - b. NDVMA scholarship
 - c. Dr. William “Tim” Whalen scholarship
 - d. Association of Women Veterinarians Scholarship
- vii. For some veterinary students exposure to specialty areas could translate into enhanced experiences and sources of income.

III. As a veterinary graduate

- a. Non-governmental agencies
 - i. Food Animal Veterinary Recruitment and Retention Pilot Program (AVMA and AVMF)
 - 1. 5 veterinarians granted \$100,000.00 to work in food animal medicine for four years in a shortage area.
 - a. Funded by five veterinary pharmaceutical companies
- b. Loan consolidation
 - i. Longer periods for paying debt
 - ii. Comparable to a mortgage – repayment not tied to income
- c. Awareness of state programs that assist with loan repayment
 - i. North Dakota example
 - 1. Veterinarian Loan Repayment Program
 - a. Up to \$80,000 worth of loans repaid
 - b. 3 veterinarians a year
 - c. Contract with state for time served in identified community
 - i. 1st year - \$15,000
 - ii. 2nd year - \$15,000
 - iii. 3rd year - \$25,000
 - iv. 4th year - \$25,000
- d. Awareness of federal programs that assist with loan repayment
 - i. Income based repayment
 - 1. Payments capped at 15% of income and extend to 25 years. Balances forgiven, but taxed, after that.
 - ii. Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program
 - 1. Up to \$75,000 in veterinary debt paid for those who agree to serve for three years in a designated area
 - a. Payments are taxable but the government will cover the tax liability
 - 2. 2010 – 62 awardees received \$5,998,080.00

3. 2011 – 80 awardees
- iii.* Public Service Loan Forgiveness program
 1. Government-backed loans employed by government agencies or charitable non-profit organizations (including academic institutions) are forgiven loan balances after making payments for 10 years (beginning in 2007). Forgiven sum is not taxed.