

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Writing a Better Essay for Your Veterinary College Application

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

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The October VMCAS deadline for veterinary college applications for the Class of 2018 is rapidly approaching.¹ In a previous blog, I addressed some key features of recommendation letters from veterinarians and others whom you have asked to support your application.²

I now turn to the personal statement or essay. That most important document becomes the central point for evaluators as they ascertain your understanding of the breadth and scope of veterinary medicine, and your ability and commitment to become a contributing member of the profession.

The personal statement should be—well—personal. As a former dean, and also former chair of the committee that selects students for admission at the institution where I work, I have read about 5,000 essays over the past decade. Ones that are heavily edited by friends, family and teachers sometimes look like they've been written by committee. Worse, they don't look like YOU. Certainly have your essay reviewed by one or two very capable people who provide thoughtful and detailed critique, but make your personal statement your own. After all, it is *you* who aspires to matriculate next fall. It's also a more responsible and ethical way to do it.

Here are some other key issues to consider:

- Will your essay convince the review committee that you have a broad and balanced perspective on contemporary veterinary medicine, including economic, societal and workforce issues?
- If you have a specific interest in one species or group of species (like cats, horses, wildlife), or in one professional field (like public health, surgery, biomedical research), have you provided a compelling argument that you are flexible enough to be willing to explore other academic or clinical interests? The likelihood that your chosen interest or specialty will change either in veterinary college or within the first five years after graduation may be as high as 50%.
- Did you provide an overview of your life experiences leading to your desire to become a veterinarian? Did you articulate an interest in, and aptitude for, science as well as an understanding and respect for animals?

- Have you shown that you are interested in promoting human health as well as animal health? At its core, our profession is about the health and wellbeing of both animals and people and that common thread is what unites both professions now more than ever before.
- Have you described your ability to work effectively with people from different backgrounds and with varying personalities both within and outside the profession?

Avoid phrases that are as reverberant as they are clichéd; for example, “I have always wanted to be a veterinarian,” or “I want to help animals.” Also, don’t use buzz words or phrases such as one health, zoonotic disease and ecosystem health, unless you have an informed perspective on the field that can be articulated in a future interview or other interaction at the college that expresses interest in your application.

Avoid hyperbole and make sure the essay is clear, concise, and free of errors.

Best wishes as you submit your final application and as you await those calls, letters and e-mails that will be coming your way in a few months.

¹ [VMCAS, Veterinary Medical College Application Service](#), Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges.

² Letters of Recommendation for Application to Veterinary College. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. August 22, 2013.

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TOPICS

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Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.