

Suggestions for Application to Internships and Residencies

Carefully read the instructions for application to the Veterinary Internship and Residency Matching Program www.VIRMP.org Read the instructions again. Follow all instructions. Fulfill all requirements on the application form. Take the time to sign your application. Incomplete applications are discarded.

Completed applications are due at each institution early in December. Be sure your completed application arrives before this date. Call the institution prior to the deadline to check the status of your application. Do not wait too long to request transcripts or letters of recommendation (see below for more details).

Rank lists are confidential. Do not ask faculty or contact people at various institutions where you might be ranked by their institution.

Be certain to highlight activities that distinguish you from other candidates vying for your internship slot. Include research experience, extra-curricular activities, leadership roles, and professional experiences that have provided or required unique skill sets that other students might lack. Veterinary work experiences are particularly important for most internship committees.

Be certain to review the article by Dr. Harriet Davidson: Selection methods and criteria for choosing veterinary interns. JAVMA 227:55-60; 2005.

Factors which negatively impact your application:

- Letters of recommendation stating the candidate is “below average” or even “average”
- Failure to include a letter from a professor at your University
- Failure to include a letter from a Diplomate of a specialty college
- Poorly written letter of intent
- Low GPA.

Factors judged to hold high importance for evaluation of your application:

- Favorable letters of recommendation (most important factor!)
- Class rank, CV, and GPA.

Letter of Intent – This portion of your application will be evaluated to determine if you can construct a well-written and well-structured, professional letter. This is not a creative writing exercise. Do not include a metaphor; you are not a flower or a seed. This is not the time to share inspirational lyrics from your favorite alternative rock band, nor should you catalogue your expertise as a dog/horse/cattle rider, trainer, breeder. Be succinct. Your letter should fit on a single sheet of paper. Ask at least one (or more) other people to read your letter to provide feedback and recommendations for revision.

Three paragraphs are often sufficient:

1) Who you are: You may wonder whether it is wise to state your career goals in your letter of intent (ie. general practice, residency training, specialty practice, advanced degree program (MS or PhD), public practice, or academic medicine). It is in everyone's best interest for you to state your goals from the onset to determine whether the program of interest is a good fit to meet your goals. If you intend to use the first 5 months of the program to determine your career goals, it is okay to state that too.

2) Your skills and interests: Use this paragraph to outline unique and formative experiences that have prepared you for advanced training. Be sure to highlight experiences that separate you from other applicants (leadership, communication, business management). Consider including a statement indicating that your experiences have given you the opportunity to recognize the demands of internship (or residency) training, and that you are dedicated/prepared/eager to fulfill these requirements.

3) Why this institution uniquely meets your goals: Be sure to demonstrate that you know something specific about the particular institution to which you have applied, and that you would be happy (thrilled) to work at this location. Nonspecific statements (you have a top program) and stretching the truth (your program is internationally recognized for xxx) tend to backfire. Specific statements that are accurate, with some reference to the source are the most effective: "Dr. Roush, one of my references', recommended your orthopedic surgery program based on the exceptional rehabilitation facilities."

Feel free to reorganize topics from this suggested format, but limit the length to one page.

Letters of Recommendation - Letters of recommendation are the single most important component of your application. Do not be afraid to ask the potential reference whether they feel sufficiently comfortable with your performance and abilities to write a good (excellent) letter of recommendation that strongly supports your application.

Letters of recommendation which include statements that the candidate has had difficulties working with technicians, classmates, colleagues or staff are often cause for a "low rank" or "no rank" decision. Interpersonal skills will be the single most important factor that prospective mentors are interested in learning about when they have a conversation with references from your institution.

Be certain to give your references at least 1 month to construct your letter – late requests for letters of recommendation may be interpreted as poor planning by the applicant and might negatively impact letter quality. Some references may have committed to other students, and may not be able to provide late requests for letters of recommendation. Provide your references with an electronic copy of an address list for the target institutions including the contact name and program name (ie. large animal, equine, rotating, surgical). Give your references your CV, letter of intent, GPA, and class rank, and any additional supplemental information. This will allow your references to add detail to the letter, which will strengthen letter quality. Letters of recommendation are submitted directly to the institution; pre-addressed envelopes will be greatly appreciated by your references. Recognize your references may be submitting letters for 20 individual applicants to 5-15 different institutions.

The strength of the letter is almost as important as who writes the letter. Ideal letter writers are well-known, well-respected faculty members, active in the specialty of interest, and known by selection committee members. A junior faculty member with less name recognition can be a good choice, but letters from faculty members who are board-certified generally carry greater strength than letters from individuals who have not yet attained board certification. Letters from residents, interns, and veterinarians in general practice may be strong letters on paper; however intern/residency selection committees generally attribute less weight to these letters. Individuals who have ties to the institution may carry greater strength – for example, a letter from a resident who excelled during their internship at XYZ institution may be looked upon favorably in your application to XYZ institution, but will carry less weight at other institutions. Therefore, you may want to use specific references for particular institutions. Three letters of recommendation are required at each institution. There is no advantage to submitting more than 3 letters per institution, and more than 4 letters may have a negative impact.