

Equine-Specific Skills in Veterinary Technician

Education: Bridging Competency Gaps and Enhancing CVT Retention in a Changing Industry



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AVTE National Convention
Louisville KY
August 2nd, 2025

Overview & Session Goals

About Me & key points about the mysterious Horse Doctor

Equine specific skills and your students

Community Partnerships & Immersive Experiences

Equine Practice Hurdles & Supporting Practice & Students

But First..... Let's do something fun

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Ice Breaker Time!

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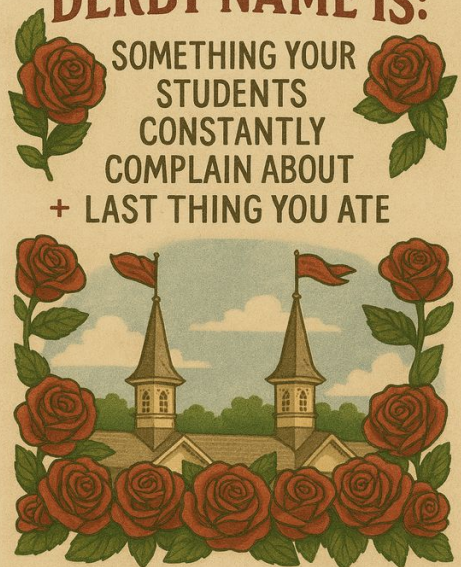


Example: Wifi Failing Spaghetti

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**YOUR KENTUCKY
DERBY NAME IS:**

SOMETHING YOUR
STUDENTS
CONSTANTLY
COMPLAIN ABOUT
+ LAST THING YOU ATE



About Me



Moderate to Severe Horse Addiction Cerca 1989

Results included huge financial instability, fierce independence and head trauma



Vet school @ CSU
Faced my equine addiction, sadly, relapsed and pursued a career as a horse doctor.



Horse Doctor! Shoulder deep, Crazy Calls, Poor and irregular dietary patterns... and Vests... so many vests



Transition to mixed animal practice in 2017 and then to an educational role as Academic Director in 2020

Horse doctors are different....

Work itself is different

- Wide variety of procedures are expected
- Variety is even more than many companion animal DVMs
- Variety of circumstances and environments
- Even specialists (Surgeons or IM specialists) see general apts and vice versa

Client Relationships

- Expectation of doctor doing all the work
- More 1:1 interactions with clients
 - Especially after hours
- Heightened vulnerability on farm vs in a clinic
 - Can't take the horse to the back or run the case by a colleague
- Forced confidence

Independent

- Fierce independence
- Some areas have fierce competition vs. cooperation
- Many become skeptical or guarded
 - Particularly of new people
- Truck time is sacred time
- Reluctant to have new people in the truck
- Space can be limited

Every equine doctor develops very personal styles and preferences

Horse doctors are dwindling

- According to the AVMA less than 6% of Vet School grads end move into equine practice
- Of those about half are likely to leave within 5 years
 - Equine focused students (personal observation)
 - Driven
 - Competitive
 - Precise
 - Detail Oriented
- Very individualized styles and preferences can be hard to teach to



Work directly with specific equine clinics & DVMs

Let's talk about students!!



Student Interest & Career Intentions

What percentage of your students are interested in equine practice?

Slido Poll

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Quick Student & Survey

1

AVTE Facebook group

Asked for anyone interested and then crafted a survey specific for their program. 5 total programs participate!

2

Students & Alumni

Quick survey that was anonymous. Total of 215 participant data summated today

3

Blend of Participants

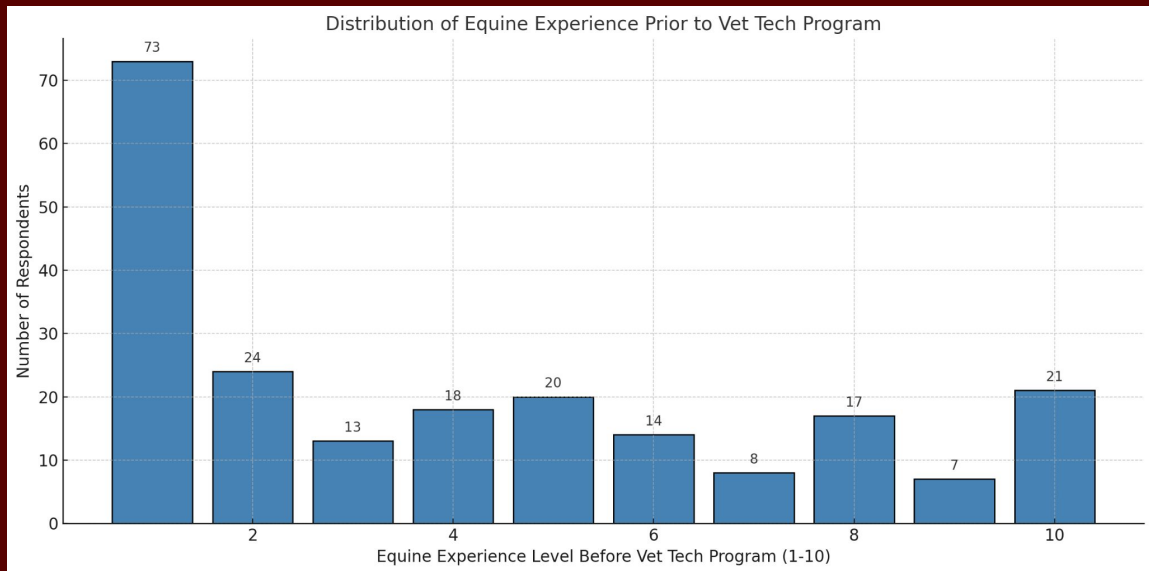
1st year students - 28.8%
2nd year students - 37.2%
Recent Grads - 18.6%
Program Alumni -15.3%

4

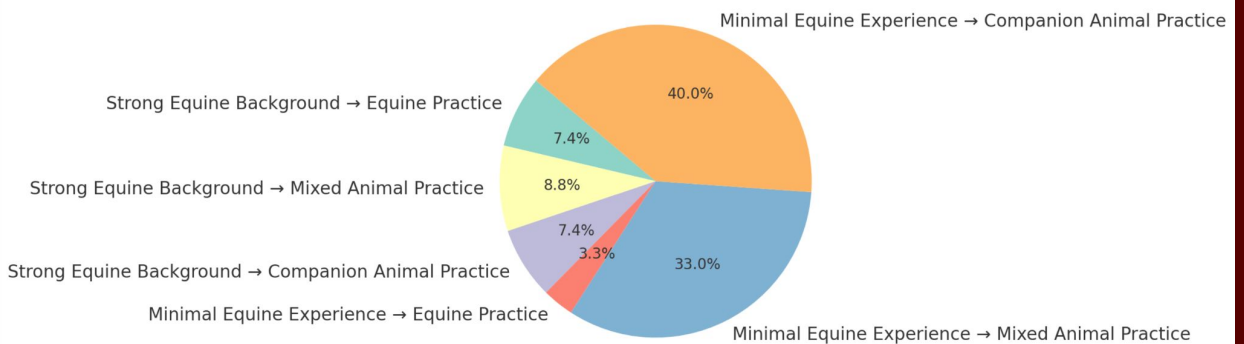
Pooled data today

Each program did receive their individual program results as well

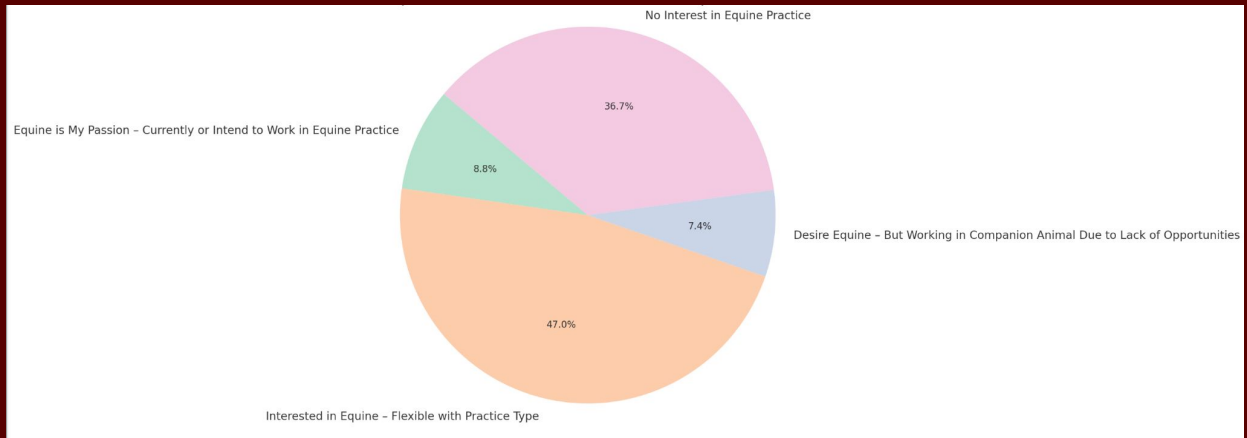
Equine Experience Prior to School



Background and Career Intent



Career Interests Related to Equine



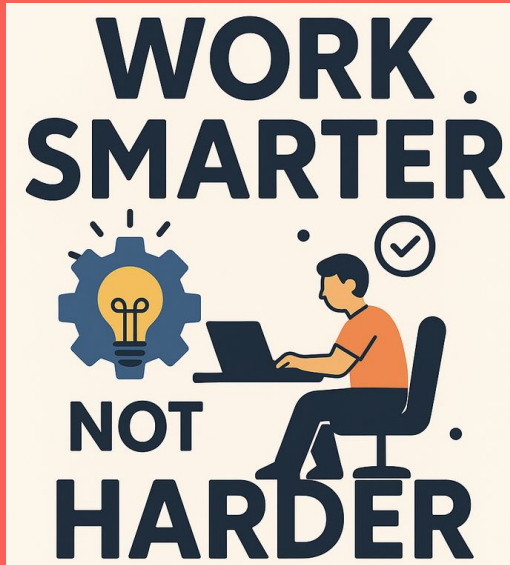
Student Data Conclusions



3.3% no equine experience and want to go into equine practice

- 36.7% No interest in equine practice
- 47% interest in equine but flexible with practice type
 - Horses are fun, but that they don't necessarily want to work in that industry
- 8.8% equine is their passion and their industry
 - Similar to the percentage of students who said they had "strong equine background"
- **7.4% Strong equine desire, but lack of opportunities**
 - Target sub sect of students we can really support and help

Recommendations



- Survey your students regularly
- Regional differences vary widely
- Figure out who needs the help individually and target them



Do NOT Rework your entire curriculum to support 3% of students

Essential Skills & Requirements – Curriculum Enhancement Ideas

Only roughly 10% of CVTEA essential skills are large animal focused

Be realistic about what you can achieve and what will benefit your whole cohort vs. the equine focused or equicurious

Make Essential Skills more Fun: Highlight and expand on the qualifications of your equine minded students

Communications assignments about horses in other courses as well

Additional Projects or “Extras” to help interested students stand out - particularly for employment

Curriculum Enhancement Suggestions

Make Essential Skills more Fun!

- Teams with one strong equine student and several non equine focused students
- Handling
 - Catch the yearling
 - Obstacle courses
- Bandage Races
- Truck Tetris
- Ambulatory Setup Game
 - Setup for a colic
 - Laceration

Equine Integration into other courses

- Parasitology - remember to talk about practical applications (not just life cycles)
- Communications
 - Set courses
 - Other general courses
- Anatomy (draw on horse)
- Discharge instructions
- Pharmacology
- Coggins/CVI/Vaccines

Special Projects or Honors Project

- Independent study/honors courses
- Equine clinics reference a strong preference for students passionate about equine
 - Ask the DVM
- Additional Project of Industry relevance
 - Lameness Tx
 - PPID/EMS
 - EGUS
 - Social Media/ AI

These can easily be integrated in one way or another

Essential Skills & Requirements – Curriculum Enhancement Ideas

What are some fun things you do in your large animal or equine course?

Slido Poll

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Teaching for Real World Practice Experience

Skill development and additional practice - beyond regular lab time

Partner with your equine professionals - clinics, farriers, vet schools



Open to all students - but gauge interest & be flexible



Seasonal - so opportunities may fall outside of your "large animal" courses



One of the single best things any equine focused or equi-curious student can do is join the AAEVT & participate!

Examples of successful events



Barn Vaccine Event



Dental Float Event



Lameness Exam



Joint Injections



Equine Repro



Castrations



Euthanasia & Necropsy



Foal/Neonate

Lots of other opportunities

- **ASK your Equine Clinical Partners**
- Horse Handling
 - Enough that they're trainable
 - not that they think they're trainers
- Equine Behavior
 - Work at equine barn part time
- Time management and organization
 - Especially with scheduling
- IV Catheter Placements
- NG tube workshops
- Farrier workshops, how to pull shoes
 - Referral hospitals where shoes must be pulled for distal limb MRI
- Truck Tetris
- Repro/Stallion Service



Remember....



- Students **MUST** **communicate** their skills, extra opportunities or special projects
- Clinics may want student presentations or "rounds"
- LinkedIn & Social Media
- Community outreach events
- Riding clubs, farrier groups



No one knows that students did extra work, projects or opportunities if they don't tell anyone

Building Clinical Partnerships with Equine Practitioners

Clinic needs vary and specific preferences vastly different

Meet with equine clinic leaders in person and regularly. If ambulatory, ask if you can go with them for a day or half day

Develop a relationship - help them utilize their CVTs more effectively as well

Send good and prepared students who will be a good match for the practice *and* the doctor

Externships: Checking in more frequently, especially if not an established site

Equine Doc Survey

1

Multiple Equine DVM Facebook Groups

Posted and cross posted to a variety of Equine DVM facebook groups, and set reminders

2

Equine Doctors Mostly

Was not really representative of hospital or clinic managers, only 18 total responses...

3

Blend of Participants

Equine Ambo only - 38.9%
Equine hospital/clinic - 33.3%
Mixed animal hospital - 16.7%
Other/Blend of above - 11.1 %

4

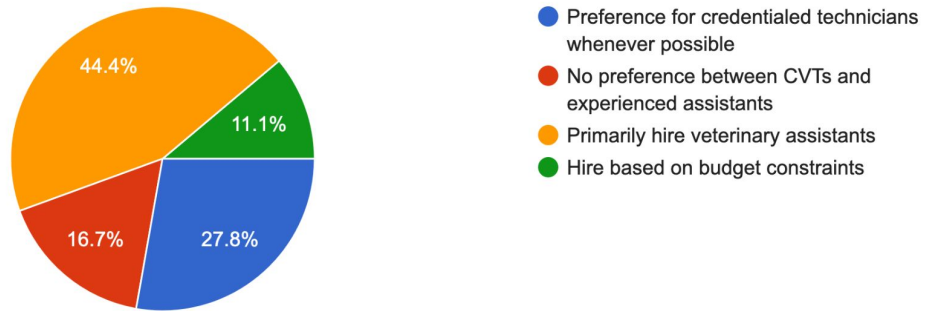
Blend of CVT Requirements

CVT required in their state - 55.6%
Not required - 38.9%

Current Hiring Practices

Which of the following best describes your approach to hiring veterinary technical staff?

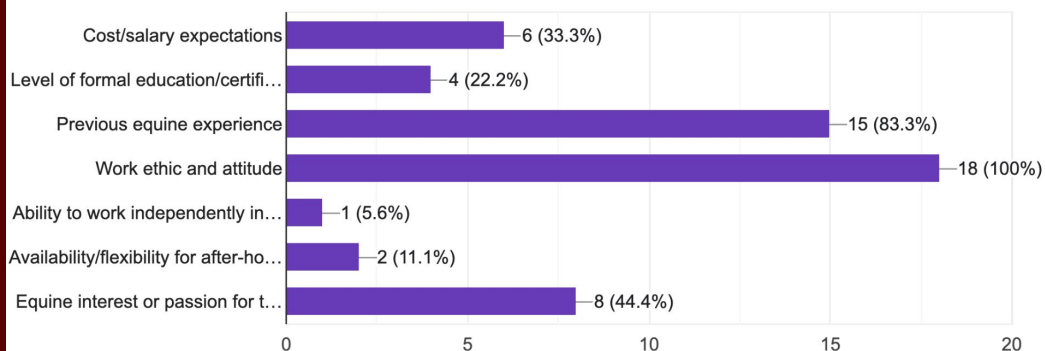
18 responses



Top Factors when hiring

What are the top factors you consider when hiring a veterinary technician or assistant? Select your top 3

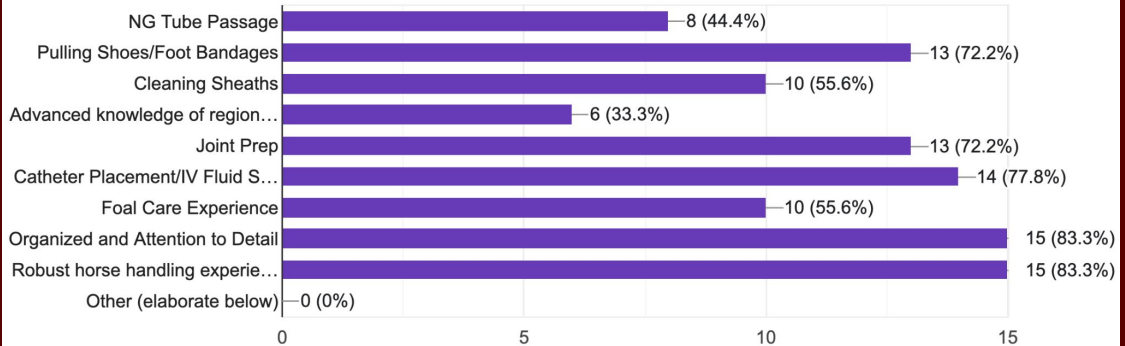
18 responses



Other skills desired

What other skills would make recent CVT graduates more desirable? (Select all that apply but also feel free to elaborate below)

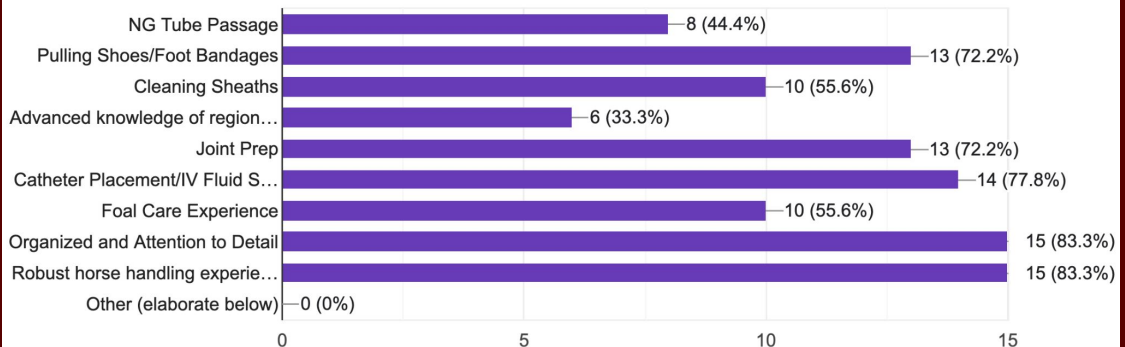
18 responses



Other skills desired

What other skills would make recent CVT graduates more desirable? (Select all that apply but also feel free to elaborate below)

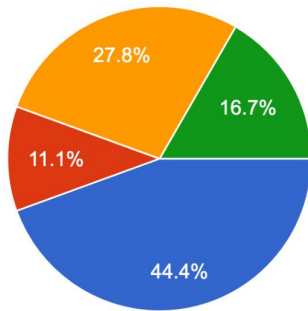
18 responses



Hiring into future

Over the next 5 years, do you anticipate your practice will:

18 responses



- Hire more credentialed technicians
- Hire more assistants
- Keep staffing levels the same
- Unsure

What support or resources would make it easier for your practice to employ CVTs?

- Availability
- Mobile practice guidelines and expectations
 - Legality of what can be done in specific states
- Horse handling
 - Lunging and foal handling
- *Programs to empower good assistants to become CVTs while employed*
- *Clear reference as to what CVTs are allowed to do in a specific state (5 of 11 responses)*
- More interest in equine



Plan to hire more CVTs, Want to know how to use them, Want to cultivate interest!

Preparing Students for Externships, Hiring & Retention

Externships

- Double edged sword
- Want CVTs but they have no truck space or time to train them
- Find ways to ensure students you send are more prepared
 - Extra DOCUMENTED opportunities
- Small community & word of mouth speaks volumes
- Farrier references
- Rescue references

Hiring

- Ask your equine practices what they want
 - Work ethic
 - Handling
- Clinical experience
- Externship experiences
- Promote student value
- Resume/LinkedIn & CL workshops
- AAEPV involvement
- Social media engagements

Retention

- Challenge across the board
- Wages - encourage your students to demand higher wages
- Remind students to be their own advocates
 - Not gloried hitching posts
- Equine techs must help convince their doctors to use them more
 - Medical records (AI tool use)
 - Solo appts

Going to vary practice to practice – so again – meet with the horse docs

Equine veterinary medicine is in trouble

- Data is troubling
- Unsustainable shortage of DVMs and CVTs
- Variety of factors identified in the Sustainability Initiative
- ***As CVT educators and mentors - how can we help?***

COMPENSATION



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STUDENTS



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[AAEP Equine Veterinary Sustainability Initiative](#)



American Association
of Equine Practitioners

Dr. Karla's Soapbox



- Lack of focus on tech utilization in Equine Practice
- Independent, do it all yourself, attitude of the industry is its own downfall
 - Partly personality of horse docs
 - Culture that has persisted
- Companion animal is not perfect, but they have found that tech utilization helps complete the puzzle
 - Decades now of discussion about tech utilization
 - Team based efficiency model used in SA can be modified for equine!



We MUST help bridge the gap and help our students advocate for themselves, and also, help our doctors utilize technicians more completely



Work directly with equine clinics and DVMs, asking them what they want or need



Target your curriculum enhancements - no overhauls



No one knows students did extra work if they don't communicate that



Horse docs want to hire more CVTs and are curious on how to use them



Horse docs are independent, stubborn but fiercely loyal, passionate about horses

Thank you for your attention!

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Key References

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). (2023). *2023 AVMA Report on the Veterinary Profession*.

American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP). (2023). *Equine Veterinary Sustainability Initiative*. Retrieved from: <https://aaep.org/sustainability>

