

Veterinary Educational Opportunities for New Mexico Resident Students

by John C. Wenzel¹

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Veterinarian checks an identification microchip implanted in a horse.

Many New Mexico resident students consider a college education with the goal of attending a veterinary medical college or veterinary medical school. Since New Mexico does not have a veterinary medical education institution, interested students must prepare for out of state educational opportunities to obtain a doctorate degree in veterinary medicine. Several options are available for New Mexico resident students. This paper will explain some of the opportunities available for those who want to pursue a veterinary degree. Prior to applying to the Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS) for admission to a veterinary medical college or school, it is advised that the applicant become certified as a New Mexico resident through the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and their Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP). The deadline for submitting the application for WICHE Certification usually precedes the VMCAS application deadline. These deadlines (WICHE and VMCAS) are set and if an applicant misses a deadline, they will not be allowed to submit until the following year.

The WICHE Professional Student Exchange Program has assisted New Mexico students with their quest to obtain a veterinary medical degree for several decades. The first veterinarians to graduate from a veterinary medical college as a WICHE PSEP student were in 1957 from Colorado State University. To date, the WICHE PSEP has graduated 631 New Mexico residents as veterinarians. To participate in this tuition assistance program, students must be a WICHE certi-



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fied New Mexico resident. This means the student must be a resident graduating from a New Mexico high school or have been a resident continually for 3 years prior to applying for WICHE certification. To apply, applicants must be a New Mexico resident and submit high school transcripts to show their graduation or submit state's tax return information to prove their three years of continual residence prior to application submission. If a New Mexico student attends an out of state higher education institution, they can still be certified as a New Mexico resident if their state's residency has been maintained. Documents to support their claim of maintaining their New Mexico residency will be required.

It is important to understand that WICHE certification is not required for eligibility to apply to the veterinary medical college or school of your choice. But to be considered by the PSEP participating institutions for inclusion in the WICHE PSEP applicant pool, and receive the corresponding tuition support, WICHE certification is required. Once a New Mexico resident student has received this certification, they are eligible to apply to any veterinary medical college or school they wish along with the participating WICHE PSEP institutions. Currently, the WICHE PSEP institutions are Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO; Midwestern University in Glendale, AZ; Oregon State University in Corvallis, OR; and Washington State University in Pullman, WA. When applying to a PSEP institution, their application goes into a WICHE applicant pool, separate from the "at large" or "out of state" applicant pool, where they undergo a preferential selection process. The WICHE pool is much smaller, as most veterinary medical college or school's "at large" pools contain 1000-2000 applicants. Several states, including New Mexico, have the opportunity to be involved in the admissions process of their own state's WICHE applicant pool. This allows sending states to negotiate the selection of students to fill their state's particular veterinary shortages. The number of applicants that may receive WICHE tuition support is determined each year by the New Mexico Legislature, so it may vary from one year to the next. Currently, 10 students per year are eligible for tuition support. The sending state sends a support fee each year for each student to the receiving veterinary medical college or school. This support fee is mostly applied to the student tuition debt with a small fee going to the school. The support fee makes the WICHE students' tuition debt somewhat comparable to an in-state student, depending on the receiving school and the WICHE Commission negotiated support fee. New Mexico students receiving tuition support through the WICHE PSEP must return to the state and be employed in a veterinary practice, currently for a period of three years of service, or be subject to tuition repayment and substantial penalties.

New Mexico resident students also have the opportunity to apply to the Texas Tech University School of Veterinary

Medicine located in Amarillo, TX. This institution has an agreement with New Mexico to accept up to 10% of each incoming student class from New Mexico resident applications. The current class size is 100 veterinary students, so up to 10 may be from New Mexico. TTU has a very narrow scope of students they select each year as their mission is to educate rural/regional veterinary practitioners to serve smaller communities in the areas of small animal, equine, production animal, and community (mixed) practice (along with a few students for industry and regulatory medicine). Their selection process is focused on finding qualified students that meet their mission. Students from New Mexico selected to attend their program are eligible to receive a competitive scholarship from TTU that will facilitate them paying in-state tuition. This scholarship program is currently funded by the New Mexico Legislature. This program accepts students desiring to practice in a variety of veterinary fields, not just "large animal".



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Veterinarian tests a bull for bovine high altitude disease.

Applying to a veterinary medical educational program is a highly competitive process. Students must have a cumulative GPA of at least a 3.0, a science GPA of 3.0, a wide variety of animal experience, and at least 300-500 hours of veterinary supervised experience, with veterinary employment experience given preference and stronger consideration than volunteer experience. Veterinary supervised experience is a firm requirement, so prospective students need to search out and take advantage of opportunities to gain experience in a veterinary clinic. The choice of the undergraduate degree and the institution the degree is received

from can influence the selection process. Students must exhibit leadership qualities, a willingness to provide community service, the ability to work with others, a wide variety of life experiences, and demonstrate moderate knowledge of the veterinary profession to be considered for admission. The agreements in place with the WICHE schools and TTU greatly increase the chances for a New Mexico student to be accepted into a school or college of veterinary medicine. Students interested in a career in veterinary medicine need to prepare themselves for a rigorous academic and experiential journey, and begin preparing this background as soon as possible, ideally in high school or early in their undergraduate years. The VMCAS application itself is evaluated for grammar and completeness, with noted deficiencies in filling out the application decreasing the chances for selection. While the admissions process for veterinary medical colleges or schools is highly competitive and requires a rigorous educational career, WICHE certified New Mexico resident students who meet all the prerequisite requirements both in undergraduate school and life experiences have a greater chance of being selected compared to New Mexico students who are included in the “at large” applicant pools. Interested students need to do all they can to take advantage of opportunities that will provide unique experiences that “set them apart” from the many other similarly qualified students. The existing veterinary medical educational programs and agreements available to New Mexico resident students greatly benefit those wishing to receive a doctorate in veterinary medicine.



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