Diversity and Inclusion in Veterinary Medical College Accreditation
White Paper
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The purpose of this position paper is to provide leaders in academic veterinary medicine with meaningful accreditation recommendations which recognize diversity and inclusion as integral components of a quality veterinary medical education.

History of Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

The Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) has a long history of promoting diversity among its member institutions. With an initial emphasis on increasing the numbers of racial and ethnic minorities among the student and faculty populations, the work of the AAVMC colleges has expanded to include efforts designed to improve not only the numbers but the quality of the academic experience for all persons in the college community. Recent efforts have included climate studies, the creation of diversity centers of excellence, curriculum and co-curriculum enhancements to include diversity content and the support of student organizations with missions to promote diversity and inclusion throughout academic veterinary medicine.

These efforts are supported by a series of AAVMC Position Statements. In *Diversity and Inclusion in Academic Veterinary Medical Education*, AAVMC affirms the principles of diversity and inclusiveness as drivers of institutional excellence. In the *Definition of Underrepresented in Veterinary Medicine (URVM)*, the AAVMC creates a special designation for individuals who have historically been underrepresented in the veterinary medical profession due to legal, cultural or social climate impediments. Because this definition is not inclusive of other communities of difference, the *Principles of Inclusion* statement affirms the value of diversity and articulates our commitment to creating inclusive academic spaces where our members can thrive.

In 2011, the AAVMC Board of Directors approved the North American Veterinary Medical Education Consortium (NAVMEC) *Roadmap for Veterinary Medical Education in the 21st Century—Responsive, Collaborative, Flexible* for distribution and dissemination.[1] The report included a recommendation that diversity and multicultural awareness be included as a professional competency for new veterinary medical school graduates. The Council on Education responded to the recommendations by including language in Standard 9: Curriculum. The language specifies that the colleges shall provide "opportunities throughout the curriculum for students to gain an understanding of … influences of different cultures on the delivery of veterinary medical services…"[2]. Additionally, veterinary medical colleges are expected to describe the available curriculum opportunities in the self-study.[3] A framework for assessing multicultural awareness among DVM students was offered by Hodgson, Pelzer and Inzana in 2013[4].

The Diversity Standard Gap

In recognizing diversity as a driver of institutional excellence, it is notable that the Standards of Accreditation used by the Council on Education (COE) fail to specifically include efforts to promote diversity and inclusion throughout the standards and the site visit rubric. Diversity references are included in Standard 7, Admission, and in Standard 9, Curriculum. Institutions are expected to describe efforts in the admissions process that are designed to enhance diversity and opportunities for students to learn how diversity issues impact the provision of veterinary medical services. While the language appears in the COE Policies and Procedures Manual, the corresponding evaluation rubric does not include a formal means of evaluating the presence and use of the efforts among accredited institutions.

The lack of cohesive inclusion relegates these efforts to an ongoing project status, rather than acknowledging that diversity and inclusion are key to building institutional capacity[4, 5].

Accreditation as a Tool of Change
Accreditation is about institutional assessment and the promotion of continuous improvement; as such, the accreditation process is deliberately a tool of change and improvement. The very process of preparing the institutional self-study—the heart of the accreditation process—has been shown, by itself, to improve the rigor of an academic program[4] and to inspire the development of new forms of quality assessment[6].

A concerted effort to promote diversity and inclusion has been advanced by AAVMC for a decade resulting in the development of a variety of activities at the colleges of veterinary medicine. The inclusion of accreditation assessments of diversity efforts will invariably nurture a deeper commitment to improving student and faculty recruitment, admissions policies and practices, retention and promotion of faculty and staff, curriculum development and the quality of student life on the campuses of accredited institutions.

Current Trends in Programmatic Accreditation and Diversity
The inclusion of diversity in accreditation standards is not new. Nearly 15 years ago, the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME) adopted an accreditation standard requiring both faculty and students to demonstrate an understanding of cultural competence. In the current accreditation standards, medical schools are expected to provide evidence of diversity activities, policies and content in standards related to academic and learning environments and curriculum content.[7]

Similarly the standards of accreditation for dental programs prominently features the inclusion of expected diversity activities. Specific expectations are outlined in standards related to institutional effectiveness and the educational program.[8] The standards of accreditation for pharmacy programs also include the assessment of certain diversity activities with the institutional assessment. [9]

Notably, the standards of accreditation for the law schools in the United States includes a specific substandard devoted to diversity and inclusion. The language directs institutions to demonstrate its commitment to diversity in its student admissions and academic hiring policies and practices as well as its ability to accommodate individuals with disabilities.[11]

These efforts highlight the recognition by many other professions that formally identifying diversity as a core element of educational quality is paramount to advancing the preparation of students for societal needs.

Challenges
There are challenges associated with the inclusion of specific language within the standards of accreditation. Literature is equivocal on the effects of certain diversity initiatives in education, and political climates can make the inclusion of language controversial. Limited institutional resources may also pose challenges to diversity program development, and thus demonstration of meeting the accreditation standard. Faculty and staff support and development are essential, especially for those members of the academic community who are more ambivalent about this subject's inclusion in the curriculum and in institutional assessments. Finally, how diversity is defined and whether it is flexible and broad enough, particularly when used globally, to still maintain meaningful integrity can create institutional challenges.

Diversity Recommendations to the Council on Education

At this time, members of the AAVMC believe that integrating language into the existing accreditation standards will acknowledge the important role that institutional efforts to improve diversity and inclusion play in improving the quality of professional DVM programs. Seven standards of accreditation lend themselves to including specific language that require institutions to demonstrate their activities related to diversity and inclusion efforts. Diversity is defined broadly in the recommendations below to include but not be limited to gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexuality and/or socio-economic background.

Standard 1: Organization

> The college should (must) demonstrate how their mission serves societal needs and the unique diversity issues of its region.

Standard 2: Finances

> The college should take measures to ensure access to the DVM education for students and faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds.

Standard 6: Students

> The college should take measures to foster a climate that provides access and inclusion for all professional degree students in order to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn to their fullest potential in a non-threatening environment.

Standard 7: Admission

> The college should demonstrate its commitment to diversity in its veterinary medical student admissions policies and practices.

Standard 8: Faculty

> The college should demonstrate its commitment to diversity in its academic hiring policies and practices.

> The college should take measures to foster an inclusive climate in order to facilitate success for all academic personnel and staff.

Standard 9: Curriculum

> The college should provide opportunities throughout the curriculum for students to gain an understanding of influences of diversity and inclusion, as well as the ability to demonstrate cultural competence in their professional practice.

Standard 11: Outcomes Assessment

> The college shall provide evidence of assessment of diversity and inclusion efforts on carrying out the College's mission and goals as well as the impact of these initiatives specifically on student learning.

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