

Facts & Figures

Employment, starting salaries, and educational indebtedness of year-2002 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges

In cooperation with the US colleges of veterinary medicine, the AVMA conducted their annual survey of veterinary medical graduates in spring 2002. Information on veterinary graduates' employment choices, salaries, and educational indebtedness was collected from 1,772 survey respondents, representing 79% of the 2,243 graduates from 27 colleges.

Employment of New Graduates

At the time of the survey, 97% (1,715) of the respondents indicated that they were actively seeking employment or advanced education in veterinary medicine. Among those seeking employment, 90.8% (1,558) had received an employment or advanced education offer. Among those who had received offers, 35.3% had 1 offer, 25.2% had 2 offers, 18.1% had 3 offers, and 21.5% had 4 offers or more.

The distribution of graduating veterinarians who accepted positions of various types was determined (Table 1). Among those who had received an offer, 87.7% (1,366) had accepted an offer. More than two-thirds (70.2%) accepted an offer in private practice, 2.9% accepted an offer of public or corporate employment, 24.7% accepted a position in an advanced study program, 1.8% accepted employment in some other setting, and 0.3% did not indicate the type of employment offer they had accepted. Among all graduates who accepted a position, 98.2% expected to work full-time (≥ 30 h/wk, ≥ 48 wk/y), and 1.5% expected to be self-employed. Among graduates who accepted private practice employment, 98.3% expected to work full-time, and 1.6% expected to be self-employed. Among graduates who accepted public or corporate employment, 90.0% expected to work full-time. All but 1.0% of graduates who accepted advanced study positions expected to work full-time.

Small animal exclusive practices offered the greatest opportunity for employment in 2002. A plurality of graduates (38.1%) who accepted an offer accepted an offer from this practice type. Small animal predominant and mixed animal practices were, respectively, the second and third largest employers of new graduates. Among graduates who accepted positions, 11.7% accepted an offer from small animal predominant practices, and 10.7% accepted an offer from mixed animal practices. Large animal predominant, equine, and large animal exclusive practices employed the fewest graduates in the private sector. Among those who accepted offers, 2.9% accepted an offer from large animal pre-

dominant practices, 2.9% from large animal exclusive practices, and 4.0% from equine practices.

In the public or corporate setting, the uniformed services was the largest single employer of veterinarians who graduated in 2002 and provided almost half of the positions that were accepted. Among graduates who accepted offers, 1.4% accepted an offer from the uniformed services. Colleges and universities provided one-fourth of the positions that were accepted in public or corporate settings.

Base Starting Salary

Graduates who accepted an offer of employment in 2002 were asked to indicate the base starting salary they expected to receive from their employment (Table 1). All but 3.8% of those who had accepted a position provided a starting salary figure. Mean starting salary among all employer types (private, public or corporate, and advanced study programs) increased 2.5% from 2001 values.¹ Mean starting salary across all employment types was \$40,364 in 2002, compared with \$39,389 in 2001. Mean starting salary for new employees in public or corporate settings was 6.3% higher in 2002 than in 2001. Public or corporate mean starting salary was \$44,985 in 2002, increased from \$42,316 in 2001. Mean starting salary in an advanced study program increased 1.0%. Advanced study programs offered a mean starting salary of \$22,178 in 2002, increased from \$21,966 in 2001.

Among private practice employment types, mean starting salary increased 4.0%. Mean starting salary among graduates who accepted employment in private practice was \$46,339 for private practice in 2002, compared with \$44,547 in 2001. Excluding equine practices, mean starting salaries ranged from \$43,948 for mixed animal practices to \$48,303 for large animal exclusive practices. Equine practices offered a mean starting salary of \$34,273 in 2002. Graduates entering equine practice continued to earn less than their counterparts in other private practice types, and their mean starting salary only increased 0.9% from 2001 values. Among the other private practice types, the annual percentage change in mean starting salary ranged from 1.4% for mixed animal practices to 10.8% for large animal exclusive practices.

The distribution of graduates who accepted a position by base salary category was determined (Table 2). A majority of graduates (53.3%) expected to receive a base salary of \$39,000 to \$54,999. Most graduates who

Table 1—Mean starting salaries of year-2002 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges, by type of employment

Employment type	No. respondents accepting positions (%)	Mean starting salary (\$)	No. reporting starting salary	Mean additional compensation (\$)	No. reporting additional compensation
Private practice					
Large animal exclusive	39 (2.9)	48,303	33	6,355	15
Large animal predominant	40 (2.9)	45,087	39	9,725	16
Mixed animal	146 (10.7)	43,948	142	6,080	90
Small animal exclusive	520 (38.1)	48,178	510	6,315	239
Small animal predominant	160 (11.7)	46,582	156	5,620	82
Equine	54 (4.0)	34,273	54	7,385	26
All private practice	959 (70.2)	46,339	934	6,325	468
Public and corporate					
College or university	10 (0.7)	24,909	9	3,500	2
Federal government	7 (0.5)	52,169	7	6,500	2
State/local government	0 (0.0)	—	0	—	0
Industry/commercial	3 (0.2)	58,867	3	3,000	1
Uniformed services	19 (1.4)	50,844	16	8,400	3
Not-for-profit	1 (0.1)	40,000	1	—	0
All public and corporate	40 (2.9)	44,985	36	6,025	8
Advanced study	338 (24.7)	22,178	321	4,400	79
Other	25 (1.8)	45,366	22	6,125	8
Unknown*	4 (0.3)	20,000	1	—	0
All employment types	1,366 (100.0)	40,364	1,314	6,048	563

*Includes respondents who accepted a position but did not indicate their employment type. — No observations in this category.

Table 2—Distribution of starting salaries of year-2002 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges, by type of employment

Salary range (\$)	LAE (33)	LAP (39)	MIX (142)	SAE (510)	SAP (156)	EQU (54)	UNI (9)	FED (7)	SLG (0)	IND (3)	USV (16)	NFP (1)	OTH (22)	AST (321)	Unknown (1)	Overall (1,314)
< 23,000	3.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	1.9	25.9	66.7	0.0	—	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.2	64.5	100.0	18.8
23,000 to 26,999	3.0	2.6	0.7	1.2	0.6	14.8	11.1	0.0	—	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	19.9	0.0	6.4
27,000 to 30,999	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.4	0.6	3.7	0.0	14.3	—	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.1	0.0	3.9
31,000 to 34,999	0.0	0.0	0.7	1.0	3.2	1.9	11.1	0.0	—	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	1.9	0.0	1.5
35,000 to 38,999	3.0	10.3	9.9	2.4	6.4	14.8	0.0	0.0	—	0.0	6.3	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	4.0
39,000 to 42,999	12.1	23.1	30.3	11.0	11.5	13.0	0.0	0.0	—	33.3	12.5	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.7
43,000 to 46,999	18.2	25.6	26.1	20.2	19.9	7.4	0.0	14.3	—	0.0	12.5	0.0	13.6	0.0	0.0	15.0
47,000 to 50,999	27.3	30.8	21.8	32.0	28.9	11.1	0.0	14.3	—	0.0	6.3	0.0	31.8	0.0	0.0	20.9
51,000 to 54,999	3.0	2.6	3.5	9.8	14.7	0.0	11.1	14.3	—	0.0	37.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7
55,000 to 58,999	9.1	0.0	2.1	10.8	5.8	3.7	0.0	0.0	—	0.0	12.5	0.0	4.6	0.0	0.0	5.7
≥ 59,000	21.2	5.1	2.8	9.2	6.4	3.7	0.0	42.9	—	66.7	12.5	0.0	22.7	0.0	0.0	6.4

For each type of employment, values indicate percentage of respondents. Numbers in parentheses indicate No. of respondents.
 LAE = Large animal exclusive. LAP = Large animal predominant. MIX = Mixed animal. SAE = Small animal exclusive. SAP = Small animal predominant. EQU = Equine.
 UNI = College or university. FED = Federal government. SLG = State or local government. IND = Industry. USV = Uniformed services. NFP = Not-for-profit. OTH = Other public/corporate. AST = Advanced study.
 — No observations in this category.

accepted a position in the private sector expected a base salary in this range (Fig 1). Almost a fifth of all graduates expected to earn < \$23,000. Nearly two-thirds of graduates who accepted an advanced study position expected to earn < \$23,000.

Additional Cash Compensation

Respondents to the survey who had accepted employment were asked whether they would be able to earn cash compensation in addition to their base salary in their first year of employment. Among all new graduates who accepted positions, 42.9% indicated they were able to earn additional cash compensation (Table 1). Mean cash compensation among these graduates was \$6,048 in 2002. Among those who accepted a position in a public or corporate practice, 22.2% were able to earn additional cash compensation (mean, \$6,025).

Among graduates who accepted a position in advanced study programs, 24.6% were able to earn additional compensation (mean, \$4,400).

More than half the graduates who accepted private practice employment indicated they were able to earn additional cash compensation in their first year of employment. Mean additional cash compensation for all private practices was \$6,325. Mean additional cash compensation ranged from \$5,620 for small animal predominant practices to \$9,725 for large animal predominant practices.

Educational Debt

Graduates were asked to indicate their total educational debt; 87.2% had debt at the time of their graduation from veterinary medical school (Table 3). Mean debt increased 7.2% from 2001 values. Mean educa-

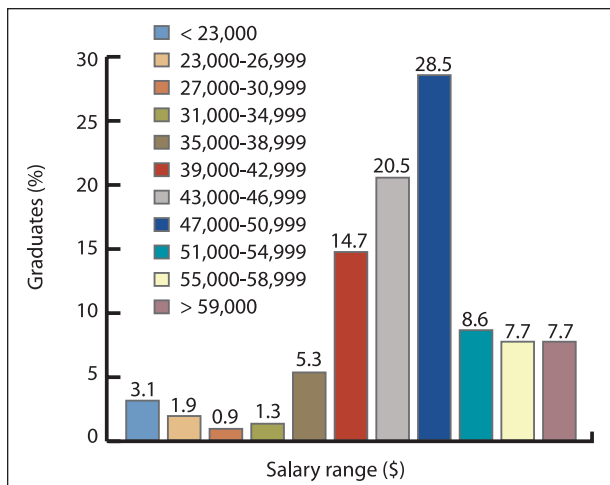


Figure 1—Relative frequency distribution of annual starting salaries of year-2002 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges who entered private practice.

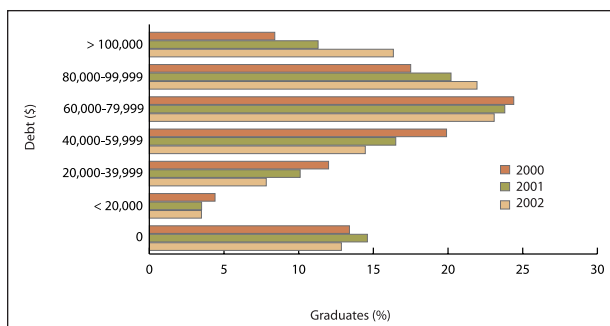


Figure 2—Mean educational debt of year-2000, -2001, and -2002 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges.

Table 3—Total educational debt of year-2002 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges

Educational debt	Percentage of respondents	Cumulative percentage
≥ 100,000	16.3	16.3
90,000–99,999	8.5	24.8
80,000–89,999	13.5	38.3
70,000–79,999	11.4	49.7
60,000–69,999	11.7	61.4
50,000–59,999	8.0	69.4
40,000–49,999	6.5	75.9
30,000–39,999	4.7	80.6
20,000–29,999	3.1	83.7
10,000–19,999	2.1	85.8
< 10,000	1.4	87.2
No debt	12.9	NA

*Total No. of respondents = 1,750.

Cumulative percentage represents the percentage of total respondents who had debt ≥ the specific range's lower limit (eg, 75.8% of respondents reported debt ≥ \$40,000). NA = Not applicable.

tional debt among those with debt was \$72,719 in 2002. In comparison, graduates in 2001 had mean debt of \$67,819 (Fig 2). Approximately 76% of year-2002 graduates incurred a debt of \$40,000 or more. All but 9.0% of the mean debt of graduating veterinarians was incurred while in veterinary medical college.

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1. Wise JK, Gonzalez ML. Employment, starting salaries, and educational indebtedness of year-2001 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2002;220:179–181.