ASSOCIATION OF VETERINARY TECHNICIAN EDUCATORS

Exploring Success:

An Evaluation VTNE Performance Drivers

RESEARCH REPORT

SPRING/SUMMER 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A MESSAGE FROM AVTE PRESIDENT, TRICIA GORHAM, MA, FVTE, CVT

The Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE) is more than a test. It's a gateway to a new career, a marker of professional readiness, and a reflection of the public trust placed in veterinary technicians. That trust doesn't sustain itself; instead, we must steward it with care, transparency, and shared responsibility.

This report marks a significant milestone in that collective stewardship.

Over the past year, AVTE undertook a closer look at the VTNE — not to judge or simplify, but to understand. With support from AAVSB and the AVMA, and in conversation with educators, students, and program leaders, we explored the data, experiences, and support systems that shape exam outcomes. What emerged is not only informative — it's actionable.

Our intent is clear: to offer insights that programs can use locally, and to create space for continued conversation across our community. Because the VTNE isn't just an exam — it is one of the foundational pillars of our profession. Rooted in public trust, we must steward it together: educators, institutions, and professional partners working together with clarity and purpose.

This effort reflects AVTE's "One Community" philosophy. It is a reminder that when we collaborate with integrity, we all move forward.

We invite you to use this report. Reflect on it. Share it. Let it inform the questions you ask and the support you shape. The insights here are a step forward — and a foundation for what comes next.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This report draws on a multi-method research effort designed to better understand the factors influencing graduate success on the Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE) and to identify actionable strategies for improving outcomes. Two complementary surveys were fielded: one targeting recent graduates of AVMA-CVTEA–accredited veterinary technology programs, and one targeting faculty and program directors from these same institutions. Together, these instruments capture both the student perspective and the institutional context in which students prepare for the VTNE.

The graduate survey was distributed between May 5, 2025 and May 30, 2025 to alumni who completed their program within the past three years. A total of n=526 graduates are included in this analysis, representing 37 accredited programs. The faculty/program director survey was conducted immediately after (May 30, 2025 to June 13, 2025), yielding n=108 responses, each representing one institution.

Graduate surveys were distributed by their respective programs. Each participating school had the opportunity to add up to two institution-specific questions to the graduate survey.

For analysis, both surveys were segmented. Graduate survey respondents were grouped into three VTNE status segments:

FIRSTS
Graduates who passed on their first attempt
n=421; 80% of sample

SUBSEQUENTS
Graduates who passed after 2+ attempts
n=48; 9% of sample

PENDINGS
Graduates who have tested but not yet passed
n=57; 11% of sample

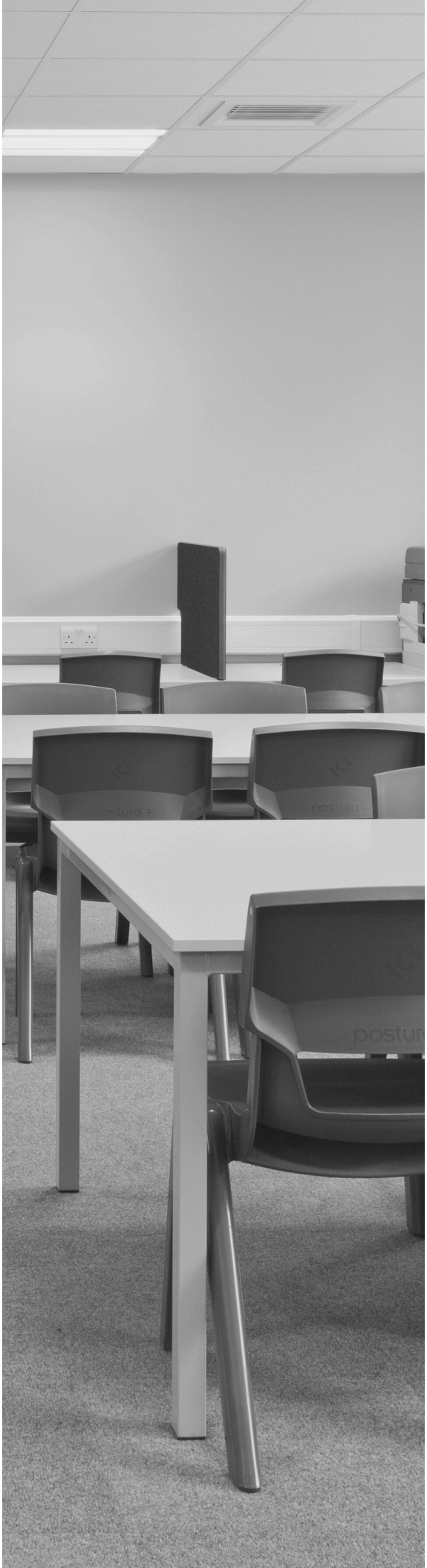
The program/faculty survey was segmented by the institution's 3-year rolling pass rate for first-time test takers:

50% or lower	51% to 80%	81% or higher
n=23; 21% of sample	*n=60; 56% of sample*	*n=25; 23% of sample*

The purpose of the segmentation was to assess which factors were associated with first-time test-taking success, as well as achieving a 3-year pass rate above 80%, and which factors were associated with lower performance—at both the student level and the program level. Results are reported both in aggregate and by these segments to highlight differences in experience, preparation, and perceived barriers.

The surveys were supplemented by interviews with leadership from the American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB) and the Association for Veterinary Technician Educators (AVTE), as well as targeted desktop research to gather programmatic details, contextualize survey findings, and identify broader trends affecting VTNE performance.

See the appendix for a demographic breakdown of graduates and a full list of their respective programs, as well as programmatic details for the institutions participating in the program survey.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study set out to explore the factors that contribute to student success on the Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE). Through two national surveys – one of recent graduates (n=526 from 37 different programs) and another of program directors from AVMA-CVTEA accredited institutions (n=108) – this research captures both the student experience and the institutional practices that shape VTNE outcomes. The results reveal no silver bullet, but instead a constellation of academic, behavioral, structural, and emotional factors that, together, influence preparedness and performance

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

1. **Academic prerequisites alone don't predict VTNE performance**, but stronger entry GPAs are associated with higher odds of passing. Programs with higher pass rates are more likely to require college-level math, English, and biology, though many GPA requirements appear set below the GPA of students who ultimately pass.

2. **Prior veterinary experience matters**. Programs with higher pass rates are more likely to require some experience for admission. Students who had active roles (vs. only observing) in clinical settings prior to testing were more likely to report feeling prepared and to pass on their first attempt.

3. **What happens inside the program counts more than how it's structured.** There were no meaningful differences in teaching methods, evaluation formats, or remediation offerings between high- and low-performing programs. This suggests that instructional quality and faculty capacity – not format – drive better outcomes.

4. **Prior veterinary experience matters**. Programs with higher pass rates are more likely to require some experience for admission. Students who had active roles (vs. only observing) in clinical settings prior to testing were more likely to report feeling prepared and to pass on their first attempt.

5. **Student behaviors make a difference.** Graduates who passed on their first attempt were more likely to:
   - Use school-provided study guides, review sessions, or study groups
   - Study consistently (10–20 hours per week)
   - Rely on a small number of highly effective resources
   - Take the VTNE while still enrolled in their program

6. **Students need strong support systems.** Prepared students were significantly more likely to report support from professors, academic counselors, and family. Those who lacked this support – particularly academic advising – were more likely to experience delayed passing.

7. **Test anxiety is a powerful and under-addressed barrier.** Highly (inversely) correlated with initial success, severe test anxiety affects over 8 in 10 students who have not yet passed the exam.

8. **Programs recognize a growing need for accommodations and support.** Over 75% of programs reported an increase in students requiring accommodations, yet very few students actually received them.

9. **Faculty need better tools and clearer guidance.** Program directors called for:
   - Financial support to provide access to quality VTNE prep tools
   - Curriculum-aligned resources for review and practice
   - Stronger, more consistent guidance from AAVSB, CVTEA, and CVMA on what students need to know for entry-level success

BOTTOM LINE

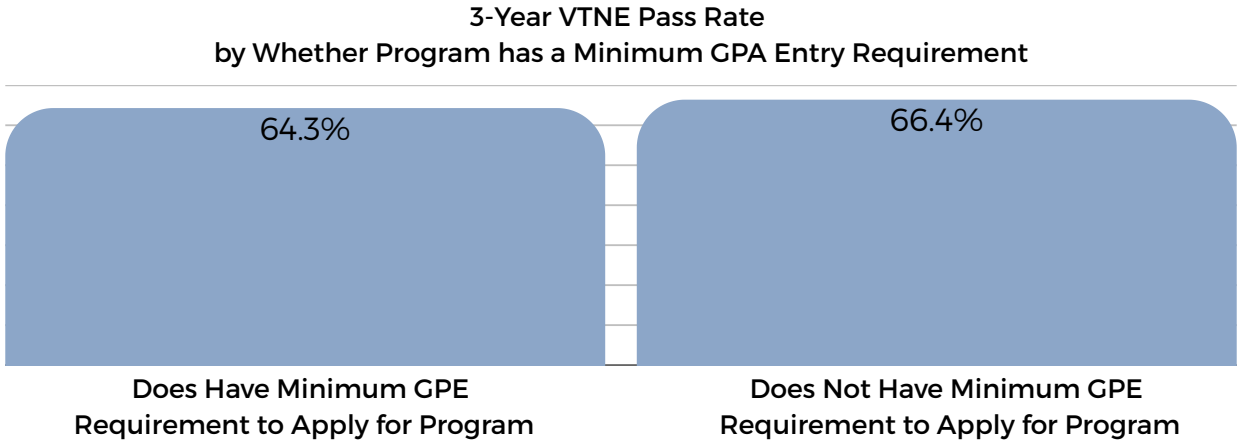
The path to VTNE success is shaped long before exam day. It begins with admissions policies that set students up for academic rigor, continues through program design that prioritizes meaningful instruction and experiential learning, and is reinforced by behavioral habits, emotional resilience, and strong support systems. While no single factor guarantees success, the clearest outcomes emerge when academic expectations, hands-on learning, exam preparation, and emotional support are aligned, and when programs are resourced and empowered to meet students where they are.

SECTION 1: PREREQUISITES AND ADMISSIONS STANDARDS

The pathway to VTNE success begins well before students enter a veterinary technology program. Admissions criteria — including academic prerequisites, required coursework, and prior experience — help set the tone for a student's journey. Across programs, these entry points vary widely. While some programs cast a wide net, others require a more rigorous academic foundation. The data suggest that while strong admissions standards don't guarantee success, they are a consistent feature of higher-performing programs.

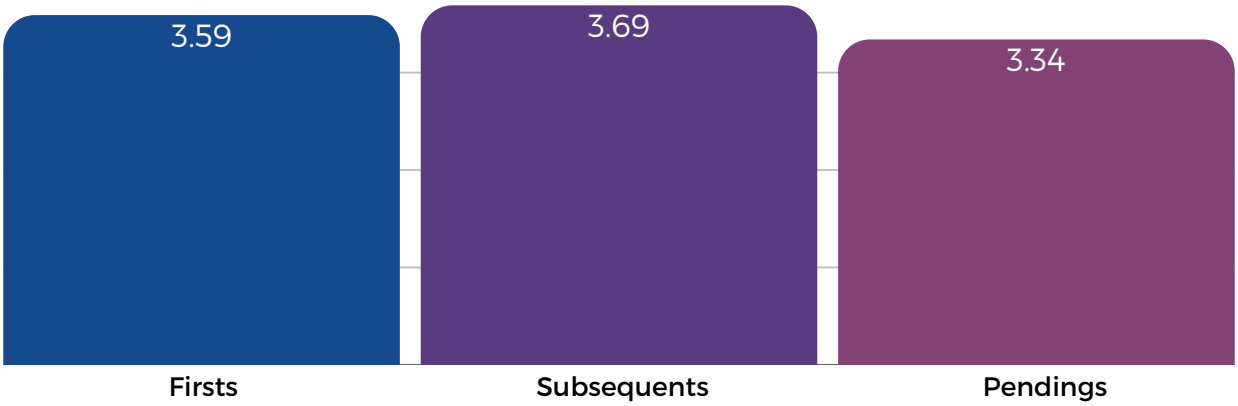
GPA AT ENTRY

The majority – 75% – of institutions in this study require students to have earned a minimum GPA to qualify for entry into their program; however, this requirement did not appear to have an impact on 3-year rolling average VTNE pass percentages for first-time test takers.



That said, students who have passed the VTNE ("Firsts" and "Subsequents") entered their programs with a statistically higher GPA than those who have not yet passed ("Pendings").

Average Graduate GPA Upon Entering Vet Tech Program
By Current Pass Status



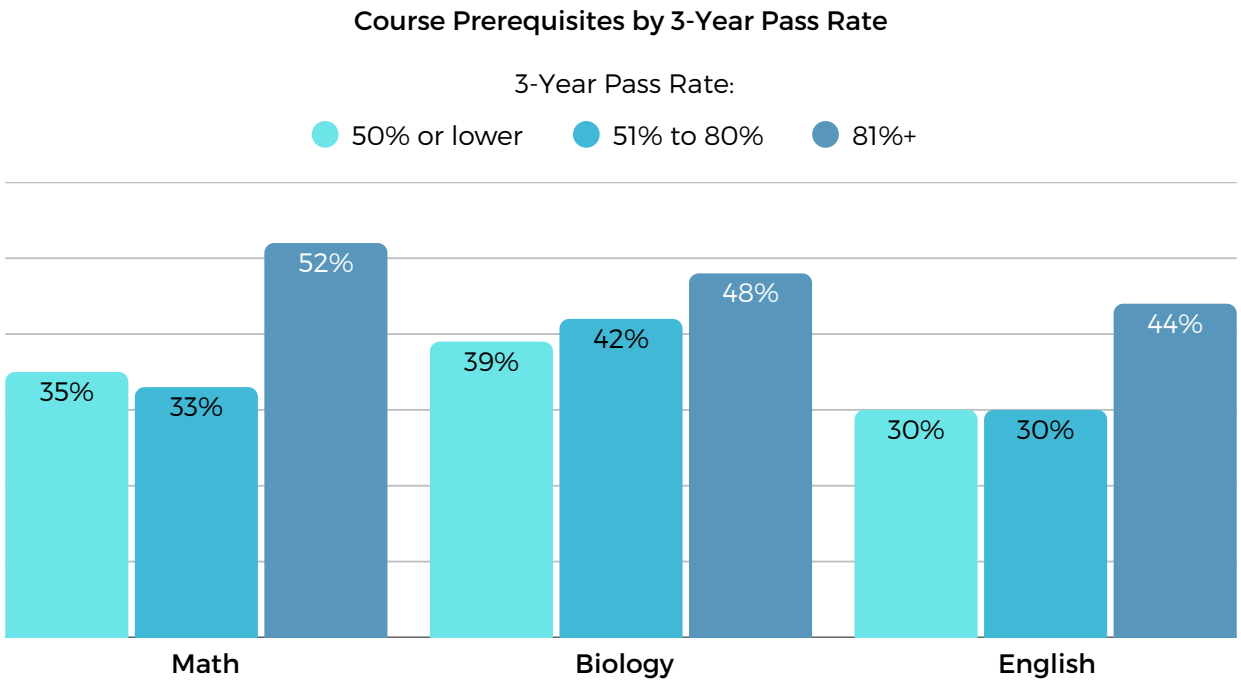
Q33 – Graduate Survey. Please provide your GPA coming into, and then graduating from the veterinary technology/technician or nursing program. Entering the Program (Firsts n=237; Subsequents n=19; Pendings n=26); Graduating from Program (Firsts n=267; Subsequents n=20; Pendings n=27). This question was optional in case respondents could not recall, which is why response counts are a bit lower.

These differences are meaningful: while GPA doesn't predict every aspect of student success, students who begin the program with a stronger academic foundation are more likely to end it with better outcomes. This suggests that a GPA requirement does have the potential to recruit students with higher likelihoods of success on the VTNE, but that current GPA requirements may be too relaxed to have an impact on institutional-level outcomes. Based on the institutions that participated in this study, the average GPA requirement among the 75% that have one is 2.40, where, as you can see in the chart above, the average entry GPA among graduates who have passed the VTNE is above a 3.50.

COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS

Among programs with the highest VTNE pass rates (3-year rolling average of 81%+), 60% require some college-level coursework to qualify as a candidate. In comparison, only 44% of programs with pass rates 50% or lower require such coursework.

Programs with higher pass rates were also more likely to require specific subjects, particularly math, biology, and English.



Q10 – Program Survey. Which of the following college level courses are required prerequisites to qualify for your program? Total n=108

These foundational skills may not only support success in early coursework, but also promote stronger performance in critical-thinking areas emphasized on the VTNE.

ENTRANCE EXAMS

While some allied health fields rely heavily on entrance exams as a screening tool, most veterinary technology programs do not. Just 24% of programs (primarily 2-year degrees) reported requiring an admissions test such as the TEAS (Test of Essential Academic Skills) or Wonderlic Scholastic Level Exam (SLE) as part of their application process.

This requirement is evenly distributed across programs, with no meaningful differences between those with high, middle, or low VTNE pass rates. That consistency suggests that entrance exams are not currently associated with

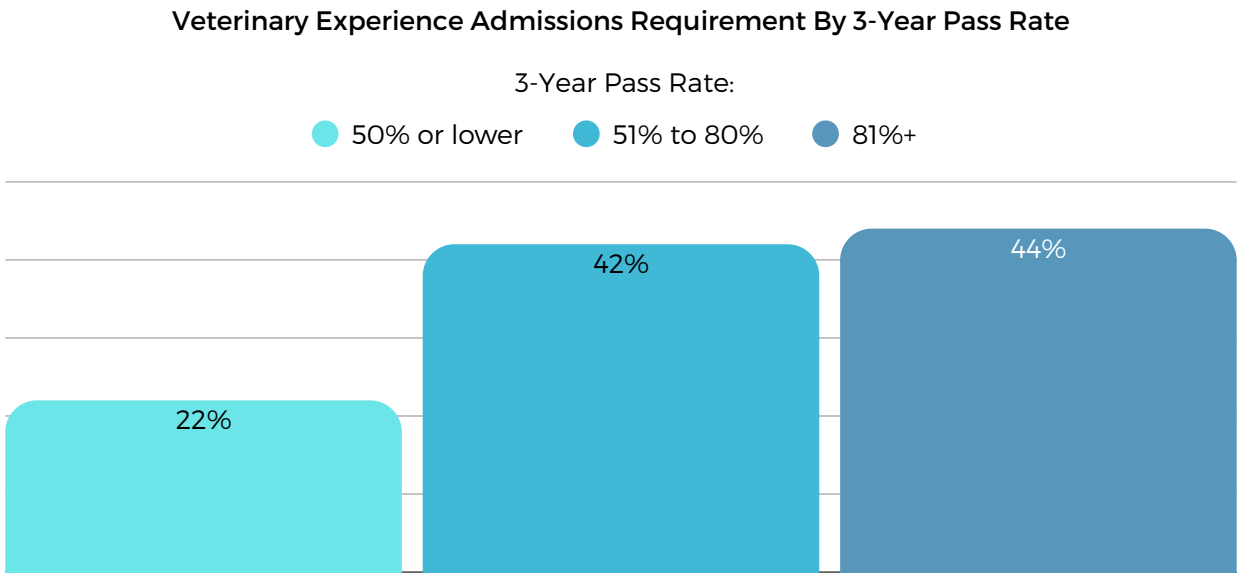
stronger program outcomes, and may serve other purposes, such as general benchmarking or placement.

For programs considering whether to implement such a requirement, the data offer limited evidence that performance on these exams are associated with VTNE performance.

VETERINARY EXPERIENCE

In addition to academic prerequisites, some veterinary technology programs require applicants to have prior experience in a veterinary setting before they are eligible to enroll. This might include shadowing, volunteering, or working in a veterinary environment – experiences that offer exposure to the demands and realities of the profession. While not universal, this admissions requirement appears more common among programs with stronger VTNE outcomes.

Among programs with a three-year VTNE pass rate over 81%, nearly half require veterinary work experience as part of the application process. In contrast, only one-in-five programs with pass rates 50% or lower have this requirement. The number of hours required fell into a wide range, from 5 hours to 120 hours; the average requirement based on programs in this study was 35 hours.



Q12 – Program Survey. Does your program require students to gain veterinary work experience prior to admission? Total n=108

The trend suggests that programs with stronger outcomes are more likely to expect incoming students to have already spent time in a clinical setting – whether as a volunteer, assistant, or shadow.

Advice from graduates to prospective students reveal that this kind of gatekeeping may serve several purposes:

- It encourages self-selection: Students unsure about the demands of the field may opt out after firsthand exposure.
- It helps anchor the academic content in lived experience: Students enter the program better able to connect concepts to real-world practice.
- It builds baseline familiarity with clinic environments, patient handling, and the role of veterinary technicians.

Respondents in the graduate survey were asked what advice they'd offer to someone considering enrolling in a vet tech program. By far, the most frequent piece of advice had to do with gaining hands-on experience before making the decision to apply. Sample quotes include;

"I would shadow or work as an assistant at an animal hospital first to get a good glimpse at what veterinary medicine really is before looking to enroll as [it] would be upsetting if it is not something in your best interest."

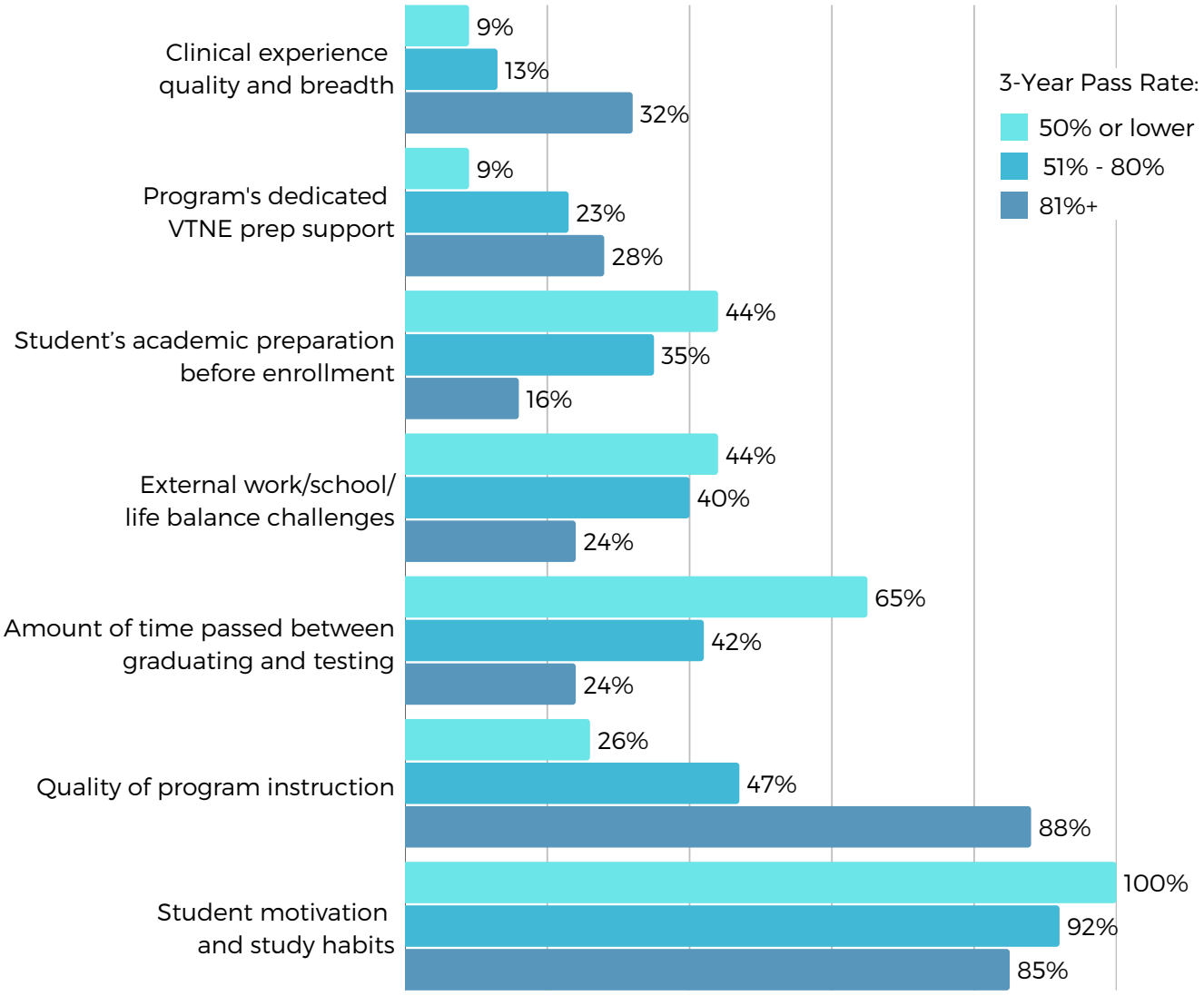
"Shadow at a clinic or hospital to get a feel for the type of work you want to do. I know a lot of people who started technician school, only to discover that they were much happier in an administrative or husbandry role that required a much different set of skills."

"I would recommend working in a clinic before starting the program. I didn't (aside from kennel assistant for a summer) and several things did not "click" until I was in a clinic, then things started to make sense. However I had forgotten so much, because I couldn't connect the information to the hands on in a clinic setting."

PERSPECTIVES ON PREREQUISITES

Interestingly, the perceived impact of prerequisites on a student's VTNE outcomes vary dramatically based on a program's average pass rates. Those representing programs with higher average pass rates are substantially less likely to consider a student's academic preparation before enrollment to be a factor compared to programs with lower pass rates.

Faculty Perceptions of Factors Influencing First Attempt VTNE Outcomes By Program's 3-Year Rolling Pass Rate



Q19 – Program Survey. What do you believe are the top three factors influencing whether a student passes the VTNE on their first attempt? Total n=108

Conversely, higher-performing institutions credit student outcomes to instruction quality.

This divergence in perspective is notable, but it doesn't necessarily mean one group is right and the other is wrong. It may reflect real differences in student populations — or differences in how programs define or support preparedness. It's also possible that this dynamic is influenced by self-fulfilling expectations: programs that assume students are underprepared may inadvertently invest less in strategies that foster confidence and resilience. Importantly, this study didn't measure every aspect of readiness, such as grit, learning styles, or non-academic supports, so we caution against drawing hard conclusions. What the data do suggest is that institutional mindsets about student readiness may shape program responses, regardless of whether they reflect actual differences in student capability.

The quote below illustrates the tension that some programs feel these requirements create.

> We are above the national average on our VTNE scores but have a very high attrition rate. We are attracting less students due to the rigorous program requirements which we do not want to decrease but are struggling to find quality students that want to be challenged.
>
> -Program Director Respondent

SECTION 2: PROGRAM DESIGN AND ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

Once enrolled, the structure and quality of a veterinary technology program play a key role in shaping how students absorb knowledge, build skills, and prepare for the VTNE. While there is no single formula for success, this research found several patterns among higher-performing programs, particularly when it comes to curriculum content, how VTNE preparation is embedded, and the longevity and stability of the academic environment.

INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND FACULTY ENVIRONMENT

Some program-level differences emerged around the age of the institution, faculty demands, and system-level constraints:

- Programs that have been in operation longer (20+ year) are more likely to have higher VTNE pass rates, suggesting a link between institutional maturity and student success.
- Lower-pass rate programs more frequently cited difficulty attracting qualified faculty and navigating conflicting guidance from oversight bodies (such as AAVSB and AVMA) as barriers to improving outcomes.
- In contrast, higher-performing programs more often noted faculty workload and staffing constraints as their primary limiting factors, suggesting that once programs are successful, capacity becomes the bottleneck.

In that same vein, the survey also asked about faculty development and interestingly found that programs with lower pass rates are more likely to operate in institutions that require the maintenance of clinical competency through continuing education, licensure, or clinical practice for vet tech faculty.

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES, EVALUATION, AND REMEDIATION

When it comes to how programs teach and evaluate students, there was little meaningful difference between programs of varying pass rate performance. For example, programs at all VTNE pass rate levels had the same likelihood to use the following forms of instruction and evaluation:

Instructional Techniques Used in Core Curriculum	
Skills labs with live animals	99%
Simulation (e.g., models, VR)	94%
Case-based learning	93%
Standardized assessments/exams	92%
Peer instruction/collaborative	77%

Student Performance Evaluation Techniques	
Written exams	99%
Practical or hands-on exams	91%
Clinical performance evaluations	69%
Case studies or simulations	44%
Group projects or presentations	39%

And if students begin to fall behind, most institutions offer some form of remediation and support, which, again, does not differ much based on VTNE pass rates.

Remediation Support for Students Falling Behind	
Academic advising or coaching	82%
Faculty-led review sessions	69%
Mental health/wellness counseling	63%
Peer tutoring	57%

The lack of differentiation in these results might mean that differences in VTNE outcomes may not stem from broad instructional formats, but rather from how

well those approaches are implemented, or how effectively they're supported by advising, faculty capacity, and hands-on reinforcement.

In fact, as you may recall from a prior chart: among the programs with the highest pass rates, "quality of program instruction" is considered the most impactful factor on a student's likelihood to pass the VTNE on their first attempt while those programs with lower average pass rates are less likely to consider this a factor at all, much less a dominant one.

COURSEWORK

Graduates were asked which required courses they found most and least helpful in preparing for the VTNE. The *most consistently helpful courses*, ranked by frequency of mention, were:

MOST HELPFUL CLASSES
PHARMACOLOGY
CLINICAL LABS
SURGERY & ANESTHESIOLOGY
ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY
NURSING

These courses directly reflect core VTNE domains, suggesting strong alignment between curriculum and exam content — at least when instruction is well-executed.

In contrast, the *least helpful courses* were more varied and often tied to perceived exam relevance rather than instructional quality. Frequently cited examples included:

LEAST HELPFUL CLASSES
EXOTICS & LARGE ANIMAL
VETERINARY OFFICE MANAGEMENT
LAB ANIMAL
CHEMISTRY
ANIMAL HANDLING & BEHAVIOR

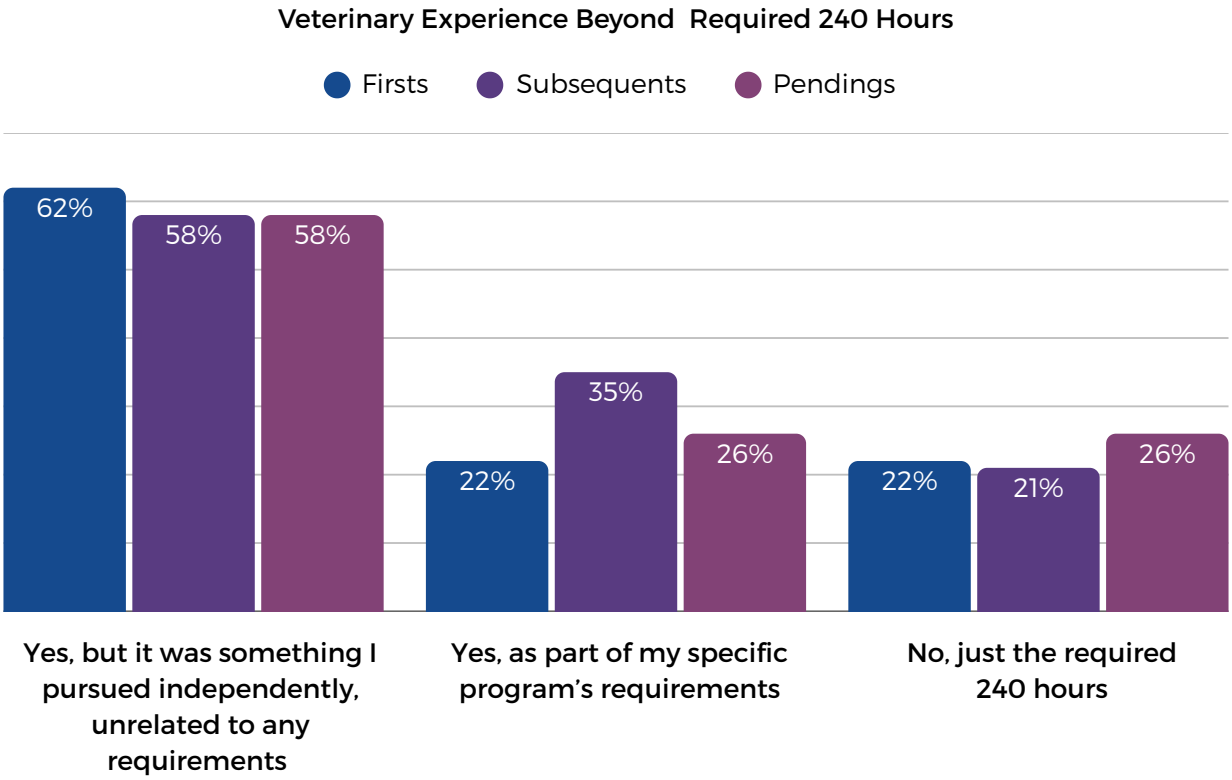
Many respondents declined to list a least-helpful class, saying that they considered all classes to be helpful.

CONTACT HOURS

All accredited veterinary technology programs are required to ensure that students complete at least 240 hours of hands-on clinical experience, as set by the CVTEA. These hours are a critical component of training, providing opportunities for students to build confidence, reinforce academic concepts, and develop practical skills in real-world settings.

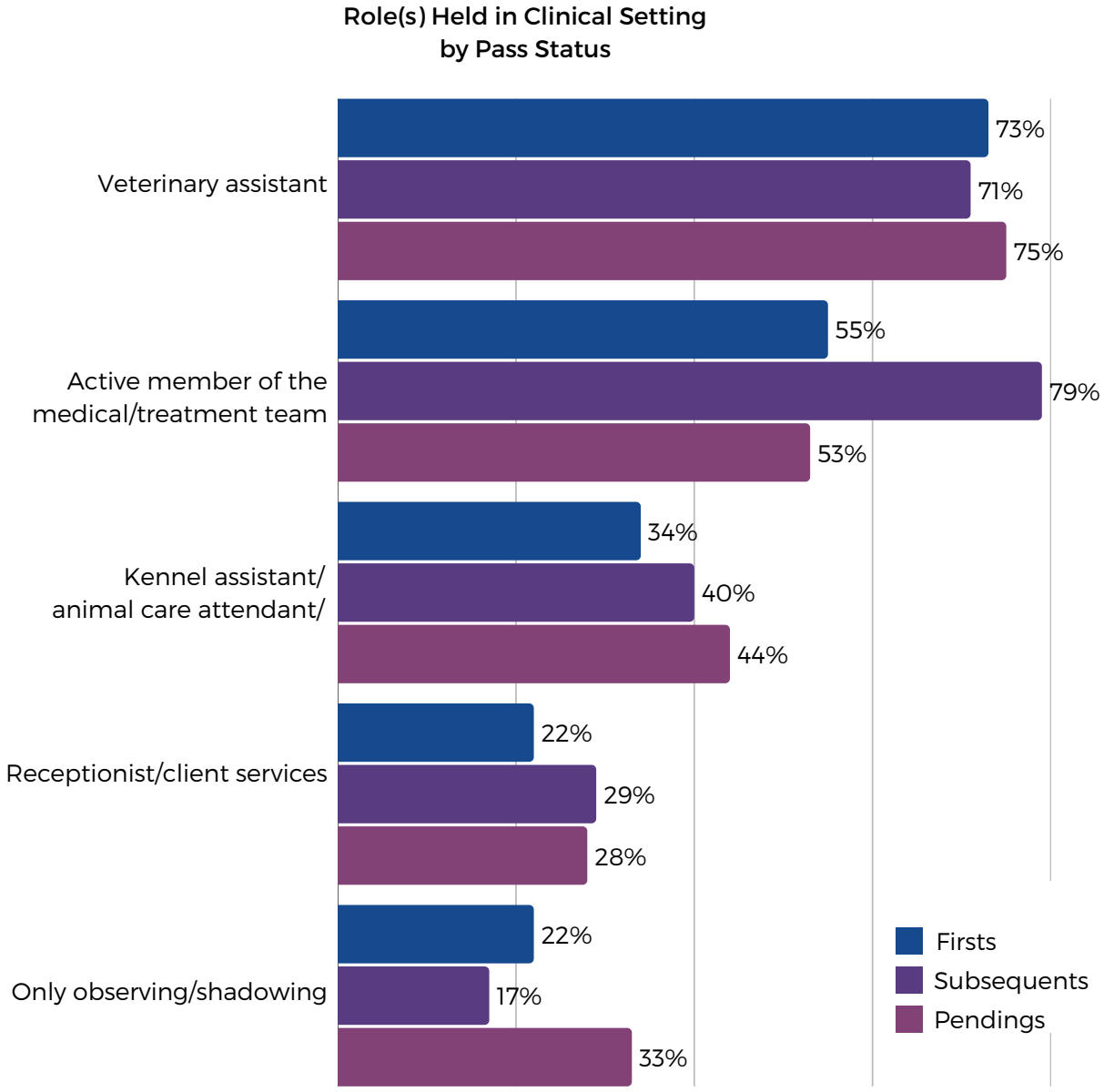
While this baseline is universally required, 40% of programs choose to go further. Those programs that required additional hours did not see systematically higher VTNE pass rates. In other words, requiring more than 240 hours, by itself, does not appear to distinguish higher- from lower-pass rate programs.

What does appear to make a difference is how those hours are used. All graduates were about equally likely to have gained experience beyond the required 240 hours, regardless of whether they'd passed the exam yet or not.



Q17 – Graduate Survey. Prior to your most recent VTNE attempt, did you have any work experience OTHER THAN the required 240 hours? Multiple choice question. Firsts n=421; Subsequents n=48; Pendings n=57

However, Subsequents – those graduates who passed the VTNE after multiple attempts – were more likely than Firsts and Pendings to have had experience as an active member of the medical/treatment team prior to the test attempt that ultimately saw them pass the exam. This suggests that perhaps these students did not receive the same level of exposure within their program, and it was that hands-on experience in the workforce after graduating that gave them the extra knowledge (and, perhaps, confidence) they needed to pass the exam.



Q18 – Graduate Survey. Taking into consideration all the work experience you gained prior to taking the VTNE, which of the following best describes the role(s) you held? Multiple choice question. Firsts n=421; Subsequents n=48; Pendings n=57

SECTION 3: STUDENT BEHAVIORS AND PREPARATION PRACTICES

What students do in the months leading up to their exam date – how much they study, what resources they use, and how they prepare mentally – can have a significant impact on how confident and successful they feel on exam day as well as on their outcomes. This section explores differences in preparation practices between those who passed on their first attempt and those who required additional attempts or have not yet passed.

STUDY RESOURCES

Across all groups, online VTNE prep platforms (like VetTechPrep and VTNE Prep) were the most widely used resource. Flashcards and mobile apps (such as Quizlet and Pocket Prep) were also popular across the board.

Some important differences emerged when it came to other study resources:

- Firsts were significantly more likely to have used school-provided study guides or voluntary review sessions and study groups. Pendings were least likely to have used these more structured or collaborative supports.

- Subsequents were statistically more likely to have used hands-on clinical review – perhaps due to gaining work experience between exam attempts, as discussed previously.

When asked what resources they found most helpful, graduates pointed to:

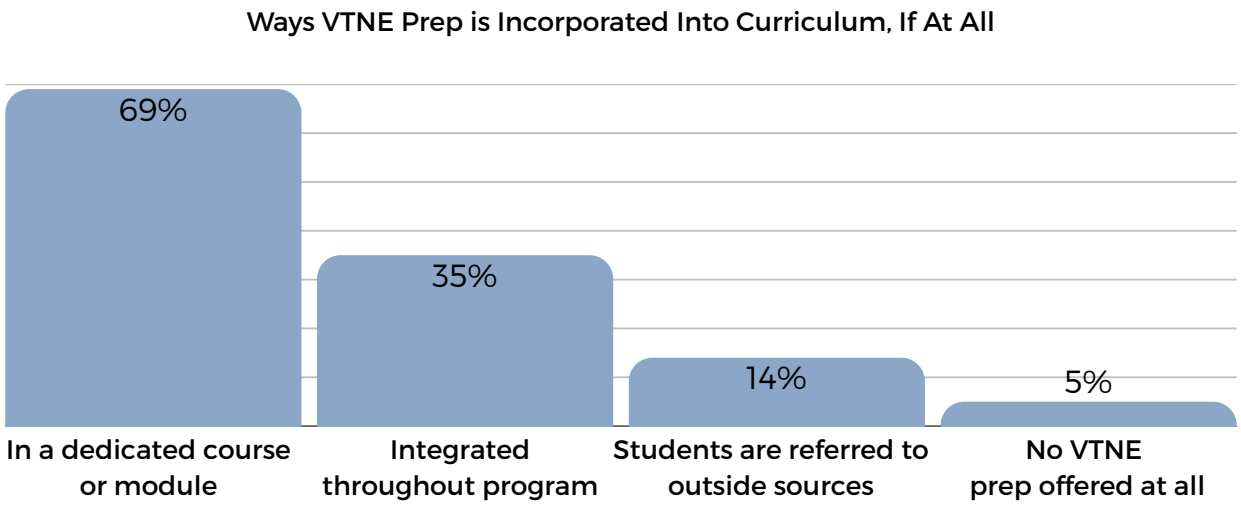
- ONLINE VTNE PREP COURSES
- ONE-ON-ONE TUTORING
- HANDS-ON CLINICAL REVIEW
- AAVSB PRACTICE EXAMS

By contrast, podcasts and YouTube videos were considered far less effective – with only about a quarter of users rating them as "very helpful."

VTNE-SPECIFIC PREP

For many graduates, VTNE-specific study tools – particularly commercial prep platforms — play a central role in exam readiness. As noted above, these resources were among the most widely used and consistently valued supports across all pass outcome groups, yet program-level integration of such resources is inconsistent. Moreover, many faculty believe their ability to support students would be stronger with better institutional access to VTNE prep tools and clearer, more unified guidance from oversight bodies.

While fewer than half of graduates reporting leveraging voluntary study guides and review sessions offered by their school, it was far more likely among graduates who passed the exam on their first attempt. The availability of these types of resources varied by program.



Q18 – Program Survey. Does your program offer dedicated VTNE preparation as part of the curriculum? Total n=108

Nonetheless, program directors recognize the impact and importance of dedicated VTNE prep. When asked what would help them improve VTNE outcomes, program directors overwhelmingly pointed to two core needs: (1) Enhanced VTNE preparation resources for faculty administration, and (2) Financial support for students to leverage external resources.

Several program directors also find the guidance from oversight bodies to be inconsistent and insufficient, making it difficult for them to effectively prepare students for the exam and poorly preparing students for the realities of the job.

This didn't emerge as a dominant limiting factor in their program's ability to improve VTNE outcomes, as seen below. However, several open-ended comments in response to a question asking what programs need to improve highlighted this as an opportunity area for the affiliated organizations.

There's a plea for better collaboration and consistent guidance from the AAVSB, CVTEA, and CVMA regarding test content, learning outcomes, and "what is important for entry level exam" and program directors desire more clear guidance from the AAVSB on how students should prepare, beyond just a list of textbooks, and specific "levels" or content that needs to be addressed.

Further there are concerns around the alignment of the VTNE content with current veterinary medicine practices and entry-level technician roles. Program directors emphasize that the VTNE needs to be "more current" and updated to the "current clinical environment."

One program director summed it up this way: "Dedicated credit hours to VTNE Preparation, budgetary support to offer a review tool to all students (i.e., VetTechPrep), additional faculty workload or compensation to host VTNE review sessions, higher motivation by faculty to offer review outside of scheduled class time."

Another offered: "[We need] consistent guidance on VTNE topics/outcomes through CVTEA and AAVSB with fewer possible resources from which to pull information. The scope of the test (and profession) is already extremely broad...."

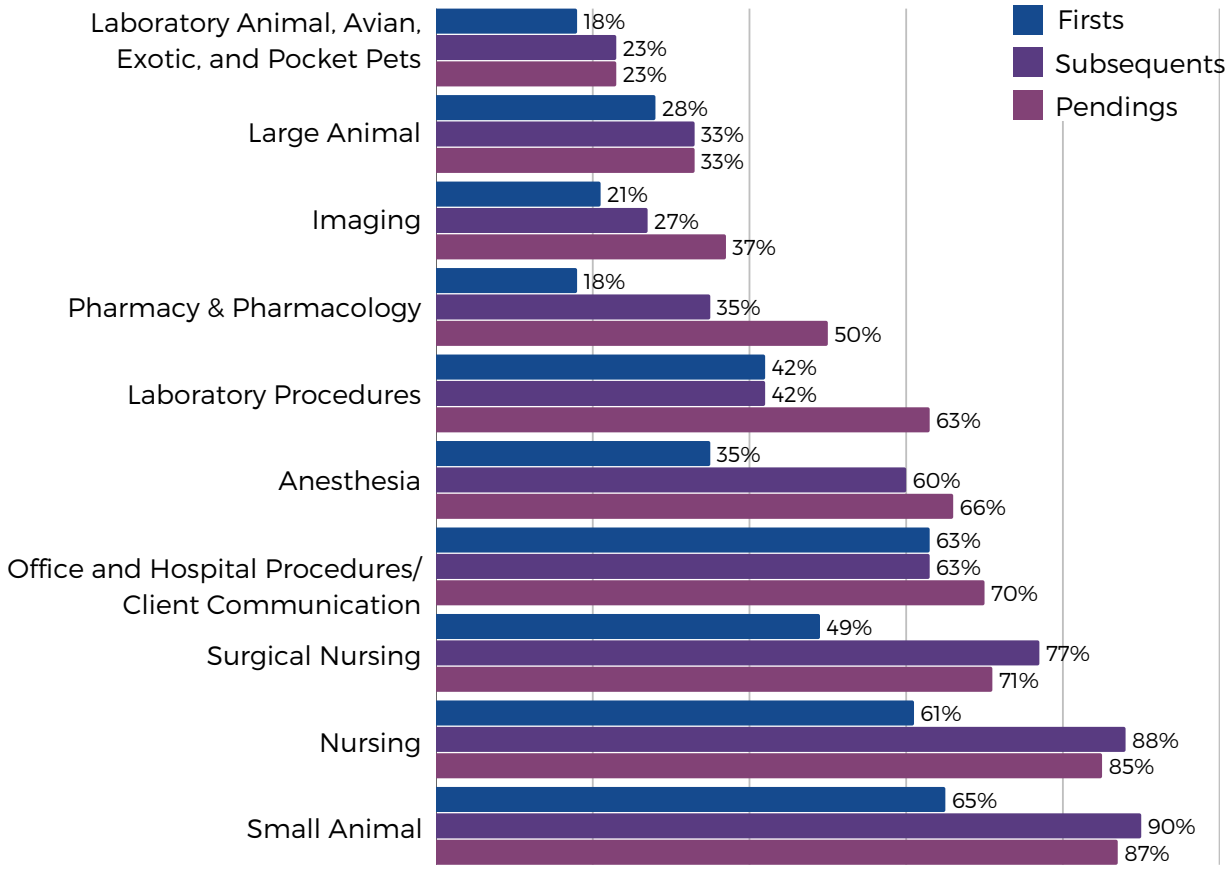
DOMAIN-LEVEL PREPAREDNESS

A somewhat intuitive finding, graduates who passed the VTNE on their first attempt were more likely to report a statistically significant feeling of preparedness greater – in nearly every domain – than those who have tested multiple times.

The exceptions include Small Animal, where most graduates felt fairly prepared, as well as the three domains where most graduates felt *under*-prepared:

- Imaging
- Large Animal
- Laboratory Animal, Avian, Exotic, and Pocket Pets

Domain-Level Preparedness
Chart Shows Share Who Felt Very//Completely Prepared

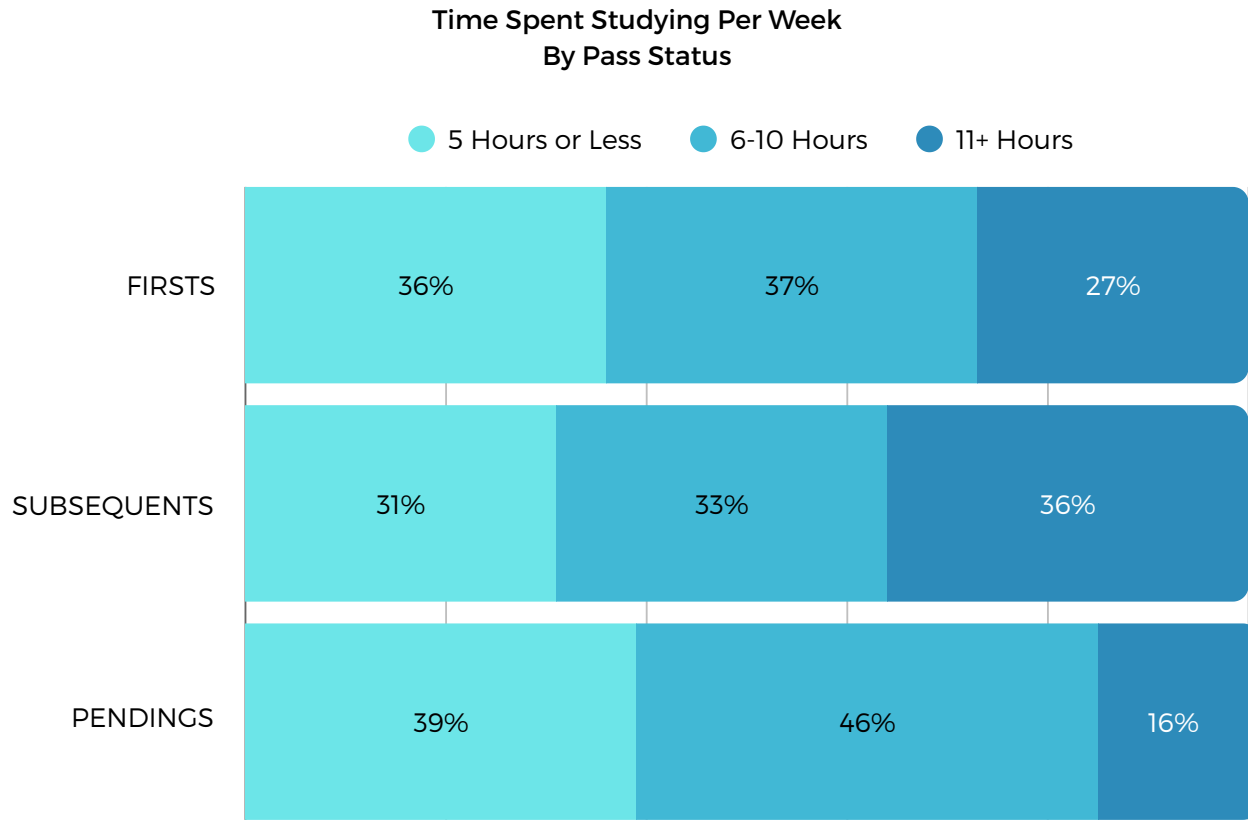


Q20 – Graduate Survey. Regardless of the outcome, how prepared did you feel when you sat down to take the exam the most recent time? Firsts n=421; Subsequents n=48; Pendings n=57

Program Directors are eager for more details on domain-level performance of their graduates. "[We need] more information from AAVSB regarding areas student struggle (deeper dive into each domain)."

STUDY TIME

Study time alone doesn't guarantee success, but among respondents, it's clear that the most underprepared students were often also the ones studying the least.

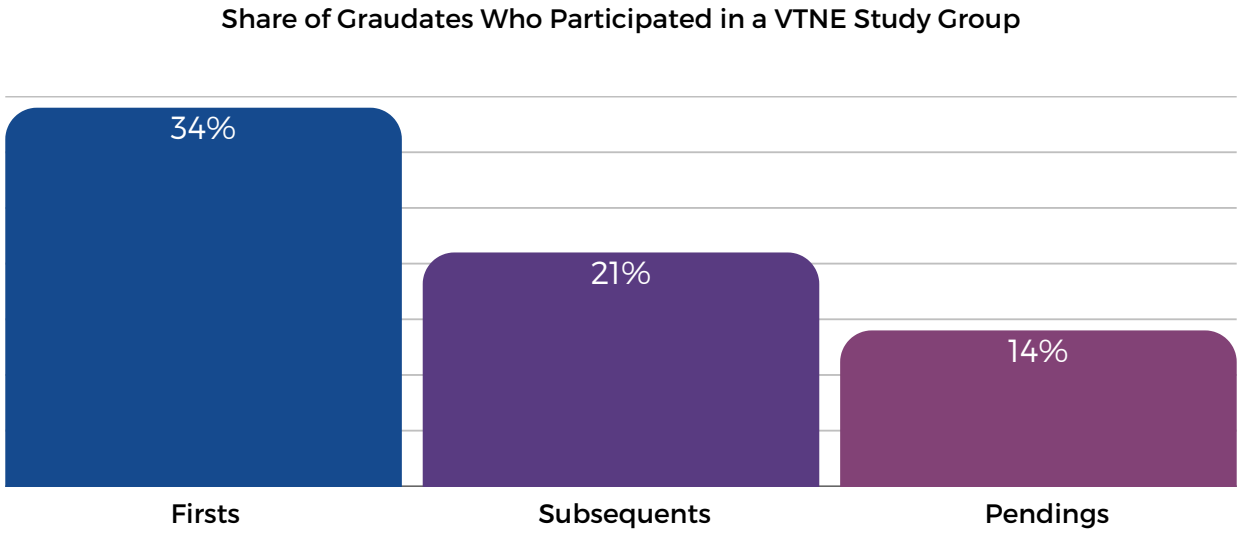


Q12 – Graduate Survey. Thinking about the most recent time you took the VTNE, about how many hours per week would you estimate you spent studying for the exam? Your best guess is fine. Firsts n=421; Subsequents n=48; Pendings n=57

This is a contentious topic among program directors. Nearly all (92%) consider student motivation and study habits to be a top factor influencing whether students pass on the first attempt. Frustratingly, 7 in 10 program directors report observing an increase in students with low academic commitment enrolled in their programs.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Students who participated in faculty- or peer-led study groups were more likely to report feeling prepared in several VTNE domains, including pharmacology, anesthesia, and lab procedures. Yet fewer than one-third of students in any group used this strategy. The incidence of this study method was statistically higher among graduates who passed the exam on their first attempt.



Q14 – Graduate Survey. Which of the following study methods and resources have you ever used while preparing for the VTNE? Firsts n=421; Subsequents n=48; Pendings n=57

This may represent an opportunity for programs to encourage or facilitate group-based learning, particularly in the final semesters. Given that many students are balancing external responsibilities and may not have peer networks, structured review groups could provide both academic and emotional support.

TIMING AND TESTING WHILE ENROLLED

Another notable finding: students who were still enrolled in school when they took the VTNE were more likely to feel very or completely prepared overall (51%) than those who had already graduated (39%). This suggests that the momentum and structure of being in an academic environment, including regular access to faculty, peer support, and review resources, may bolster readiness.

This may not necessarily translate to better testing outcomes, as recent analysis by the AAVSB found no relationship between pass rates and time passed since graduation. However, the impact on confidence is still compelling.

While not every student can test immediately post-graduation, programs might consider how to encourage early testing or provide post-graduation study support to help maintain that momentum.

SECTION 4: EXTERNAL FACTORS

No matter how well a curriculum is designed, or how motivated a student may be, success on the VTNE is rarely achieved in isolation. From academic advising and faculty relationships to personal stressors like finances, caregiving, and anxiety, a broad web of influences shapes whether students feel ready to take the exam and whether they pass. The data show that support systems matter, and their absence often parallels lower preparedness and weaker outcomes.

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Graduates who felt very or completely prepared for the VTNE were statistically more likely to report having the support they needed from faculty, peers, and personal relationships. The following support sources were positively associated with higher preparedness:

- ·Professors and academic counselors
- ·Spouses or partners
- ·Parents and family members
- ·Friends or peer networks

The most meaningful gap was access to academic counselors. Subsequents and those who felt less prepared were statistically more likely to say that they did not have access to a counselor.

Graduates who passed the exam on their first attempt were statistically more likely to say they had support from their professors (84%, vs 52% of those who have not yet passed) and Academic Counselors (42% vs 20%).

LIFE STRESSORS

Among all the non-academic factors measured, test anxiety emerged as the

strongest and most consistent predictor of self-reported unpreparedness and poor outcomes. Nearly 9 in 10 Pendings reported severe anxiety impacting their performance, almost three times the rate of Firsts (31%). Subsequents fell in the middle, with 60% reporting severe anxiety.

Similarly, fatigue and stress interfering with focus affected 59% of Pendings, compared to 22% of Firsts.

Graduates also cited financial hardship and competing responsibilities as major obstacles to preparation. While not all differences were statistically significant, a clear pattern emerged:

- ·42% of Pendings experienced major financial stress leading up to their exam, compared to 29% of Firsts
- ·Pendings were more likely to fall into the lowest income bracket (<$25,000 annually)

Financial insecurity can affect study time, resource access, and mental health. Nearly a quarter of program directors report observing an increase in low-income students enrolled in their programs, a trend that may suggest greater attention to this aspect of the academic experience is needed.

TESTING ENVIRONMENT

Even the best-prepared students can struggle if their testing environment undermines their focus. While the VTNE is typically administered in professional testing centers, experiences vary, and for some students, the environment itself becomes a barrier to success.

While most graduates took the VTNE at an in-person testing center, not all found the experience conducive to success. Among those who have not yet passed the exam, 21% of Pendings and 23% of Subsequents reported that their testing environment was distracting or disruptive, more than double the rate of Firsts (9%).

This disparity suggests that the setting in which the exam is taken may affect performance, particularly for students who are already feeling underprepared or

anxious. Though the VTNE is not currently widely available via live-remote proctoring, one in five Pendings said they would have preferred this format, compared to just 8% of Firsts and Subsequents.

In parallel, programs are seeing a notable shift in student needs. Three-quarters of program directors reported an increase in the number of students requiring accommodations over the past five years. This likely reflects a combination of greater need, increased diagnoses, and improved willingness to self-advocate. For programs and testing bodies alike, these findings suggest a growing need for more flexible testing options, better alignment between policy and practice, and stronger student support systems to ensure that environmental and procedural factors don't undercut the knowledge and preparation students bring to exam day.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study underscore a central truth: VTNE performance is influenced by a web of interconnected factors that extend far beyond the exam itself. Academic readiness, hands-on experience, program quality, study behaviors, emotional resilience, and the strength of student support networks all contribute to how prepared graduates feel — and how they perform.

Some of these factors are within an institution's direct control, such as setting admissions expectations, integrating targeted VTNE preparation, fostering accessible faculty and advising relationships, and ensuring clinical experiences are immersive and skill-building. Others, such as test anxiety, financial hardship, or life circumstances, may be harder to address directly but can be mitigated through intentional program design, expanded support services, and greater flexibility in testing environments.

For many programs, the most actionable opportunities lie in aligning resources and expectations across the student lifecycle:

- **Before enrollment** – admitting students with a realistic understanding of the profession and the academic rigor required.
- **During the program** – delivering high-quality, clinically relevant instruction supported by meaningful VTNE-aligned practice.
- **Leading up to the exam** – providing structured preparation, accessible review resources, and strategies for managing test-day challenges.

At the same time, program directors' feedback reveals a broader need for collaboration and clarity at the system level. Stronger alignment between the AAVSB, CVTEA, CVMA, and academic programs on exam content, expectations for entry-level competency, and the role of VTNE preparation resources could help ensure that students graduate not only ready to pass an exam, but prepared to step confidently into the profession.

Ultimately, improving VTNE outcomes will require a balanced approach — one that combines evidence-based academic practices with an awareness of the personal, logistical, and systemic challenges students face. By addressing these factors in concert, veterinary technology programs can create the conditions in which more graduates succeed on their first attempt and are better equipped for long-term professional success.

APENDIX: THANK YOU

AVTE would like to thank the following institutions for participating in this important study. The programs below undertook a significant commitment by agreeing to distribute the graduate survey to their roster of students from the past 3 academic years. These programs are diverse in terms of geography, student makeup, and program design, and their participation in this study unlocked the critical perspective of students in understanding VTNE success factors.

Blue Ridge Community College
Carrington College Pleasant Hill
College of Southern Idaho
CO Academy of Veterinary Technology
Columbus State Community College
CT State CC Middlesex Campus
Delgado Community College
Genesee Community College
Great Bay Community College
Harcum College
Holyoke Community College
Iowa Lakes Community College
Jefferson College
Lancaster County Career & Tech Center
Lone Star College - Tomball
Madison College
MCC Maple Woods
McLennan Community College
MedQuest College
Mercy University
Michigan State University
Midwest Institute for Medical Assistants
Morehead State University
Murray State University
Northeast Community College
Pierce College Ft. Steilacoom
Pima Medical Institute Houston
Platt College Los Angeles
San Diego Mesa College
San Juan College
Sinclair College
Southern Regional Technical College
St Petersburg College
Tulsa Community College
University of New Hampshire
University of Tennessee at Martin
Yakima Valley College

APENDIX: GRADUATE SURVEY GRADUATE RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Aggreagate demographics for the 526 individuals who responded to the graduate survey are below.

Gender	%
Female	92%
Male	6%
Non-Binary	1%
No response	1%

Race	%
White	77%
Hispanic	12%
Black	2%
Other	9%

Household Income	%
<$25,000	9%
$25,000 - $49,999	29%
$50,000 - $99,999	27%
$100,000+	16%
No response	19%

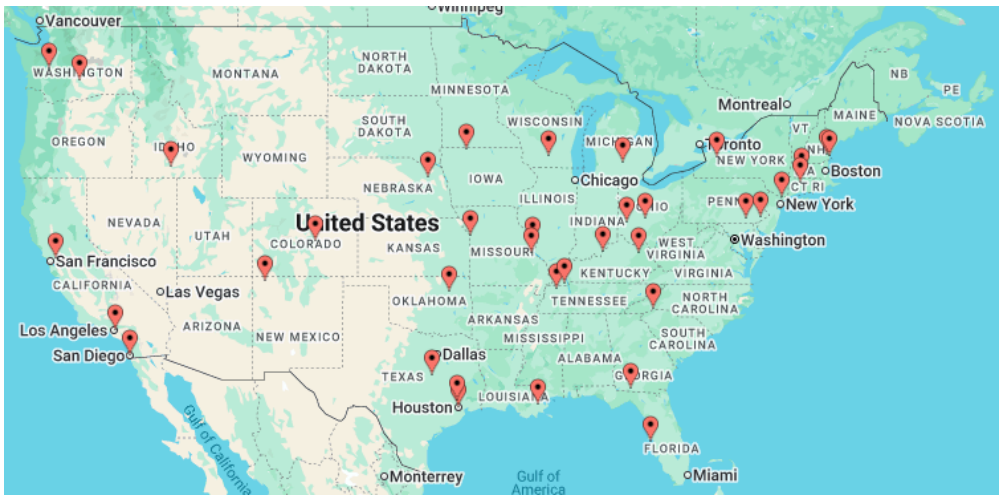
First In Family to Attend College	%
Yes	27%
No	70%
No response	3%

Disability	%
Yes	18%
No	76%
No response	7%

APENDIX: GRADUATE SURVEY PROGRAM DETAILS

The data below represent the programs that administered the graduate survey to their students from the past three academic years. Data are sourced from Department of Education, College Scorecard about the 2022-2023 academic year. Campus-specific data used where possible.

Geographic Distribution of Programs



Locale	Count
City	17
Suburb	9
Town/Rural	11

Type	Count
Community College	22
Technical College	6
4-Year Institution	9

Tuition	Count
<$10,000	19
$10,000 - $20,000	11
>$20,000	7

Enrollment	Count
<5,000	23
5,000 - 20,000	11
>20,000	3

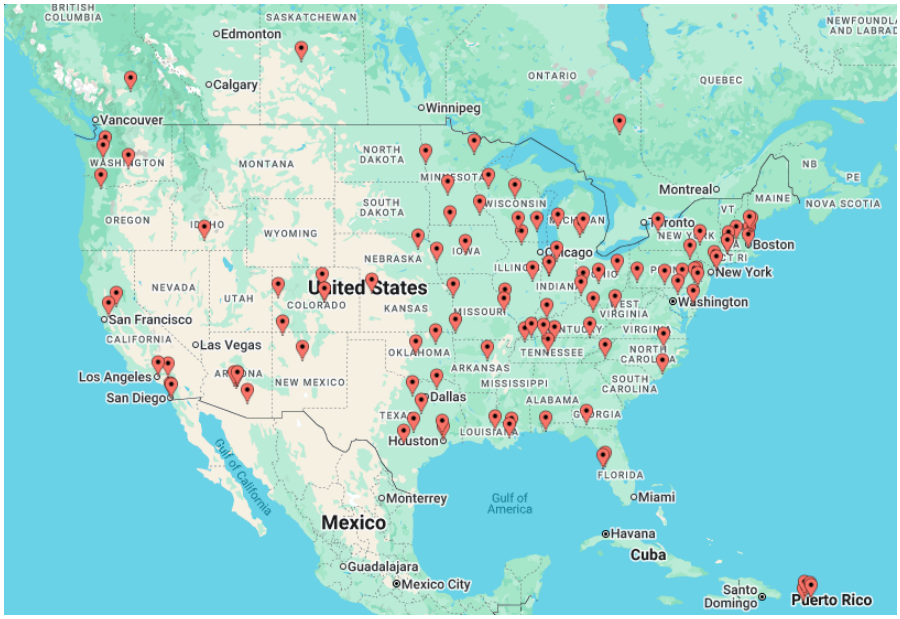
Public/Private	Count
Public	29
Private Non-Profit	2
Private For-Profit	6

Faculty Ratio	Count
1 : 15 or less	20
1 : 15 or more	17

APENDIX: PROGRAM SURVEY PROGRAM DETAILS

The data below represent the 108 programs that responded to the program survey. Data are sourced from Department of Education, College Scorecard about the 2022-2023 academic year. Campus-specific data used where possible. Data not available for all programs (i.e., non-US and non-FAFSA participating).

Geographic Distribution of Programs



Locale	Count
City	48
Suburb	23
Town/Rural	29

Type	Count
Community College	49
Technical College	19
4-Year Institution	34

Tuition	Count
<$10,000	45
$10,000 - $20,000	42
>$20,000	14

Enrollment	Count
<5,000	61
5,000 - 20,000	32
>20,000	7

Public/Private	Count
Public	78
Private Non-Profit	10
Private For-Profit	14

Faculty Ratio	Count
1 : 15 or less	41
1 : 15 or more	59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