



JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
VETERINARY TECHNICIAN EDUCATORS

SUMMER 2026

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Journal of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (JAVTE)

The Journal of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (JAVTE), a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal, is the official publication of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (AVTE). Its purpose is to act as a publication for disseminating evidence-based research to people working as educators in the field of veterinary technology. The journal's emphasis is on encouraging collaboration among veterinary technology educators through scholarly inquiry relating to the understanding and/or improvement of educational processes and outcomes, organizational issues in education, concepts of teaching and learning, and student engagement based upon research, observations, and experience relevant to the field.

Submission Process and Deadlines

Papers will be reviewed using the JAVTE double-blind peer-review process and should be prepared using the JAVTE author guidelines (see Editorial Policies and Peer Review Process). Submission of papers is the author's acknowledgment of and agreement to JAVTE's ethical duties of the author policy.

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Cover Photo Submitted By:
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St. Petersburg College

Letter from the Outgoing President of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators

Tricia Gorham, FVTE, MA, CVT
AVTE Outgoing President

Dear AVTE Members,

As we continue to advance our mission of supporting excellence in veterinary technology education, I want to take a moment to share my gratitude for your dedication, engagement, and commitment to our profession. Because of members like you, AVTE is growing as a strong and innovative community of educators and leaders.



This year, we are excited to expand opportunities that support both current and future educators. Our new Leadership Academy is being developed to cultivate and strengthen leadership skills within our profession, helping prepare members to guide programs, institutions, and the future of veterinary technology education.

We are also launching a New Faculty Cohort designed to support educators who are transitioning into teaching roles. This initiative will provide mentorship, resources, and a collaborative network to help new faculty thrive as they begin their academic journeys.

AVTE is proud to continue its international expansion as we welcome and engage colleagues from around the world. Veterinary technology and veterinary nursing education are global professions, and we are excited to broaden our reach, share perspectives, and strengthen our collective impact worldwide.

Your participation is helping to build our Resource Exchange Library, offering valuable tools, teaching materials, best

practices, and shared expertise created by members for members. I encourage each of you to explore the platform, contribute your own resources, and take full advantage of this outstanding benefit of membership.

My time serving as President of AVTE has been among the most rewarding experiences of my academic career. Having the opportunity to engage with our members, volunteers, and stakeholders has been both inspiring and deeply meaningful. I am grateful for the trust you have placed in me. I am extremely blessed for the many individuals who have supported and encouraged me throughout this journey. My AVTE Board members, my faculty at SPC who held down the fort while I traveled and to TVD (Todd, Michele and staff) who always kept me grounded.

As I prepare to transition into the role of Past President, I look forward to continuing this work and helping grow our mission of One Community even broader. Together, we will build our momentum towards a stronger, more connected future for veterinary technology/ nursing students.

Finally, I hope to see all of you at our upcoming conference in Portland. It promises to be an inspiring opportunity to learn, connect, and celebrate the incredible work being done across our profession.

Thank you for all you do to support students, colleagues, and the future of veterinary technology education.

Warm regards,

Trish

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Letter from the Incoming President of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators

Tara Groves, BA LVT FVTE
AVTE Incoming President

I am so excited and very honored to step into the role of AVTE President, and I wanted my first words in this role to go directly to you. At heart, I am an educator who loves innovative teaching and believes learning should be engaging for every kind of learner in the room. That belief is what drew me to this profession in the first place, and it's what I bring with me into this new role.

I want to start by thanking Tricia Gorham for her leadership this past year. She led AVTE through real challenges with clarity and calm, and I am so lucky that I will have such an inspirational mentor as she steps into the role of Immediate Past President. This community owes her real gratitude.

I am passionate about my role as both a veterinary technician and educator, and love nurturing the future of this profession, one student, one classroom, one "aha" moment at a time. That shared commitment is what One Community means to me. It is not a tagline. It is the reason a room full of busy program directors and faculty will still show up for each other, year after year.

The year ahead brings real work. We are continuing to advocate for structured educator voice in credentialing decisions that affect our programs. We are building out resources, like the new Vet Tech Fall Faculty Academy, that meet educators where they are, especially those who arrive in the classroom straight from clinical practice without formal training in how to teach. I want to keep pushing on this front in particular: helping educators find creative, engaging ways to reach every kind of learner, not just the ones who already learn well from a lecture. We are growing the Fellows program and the Resource Exchange, because the best ideas in this profession usually come from someone already doing the work.

None of this happens because of one office or one person. It happens because this community keeps choosing to walk together, even when the path isn't fully mapped out. That is the trail we are blazing, and I am honored to help lead it for the next year.

Thank you for trusting me with this role. I am looking forward to the work ahead, together.

Warm regards,

Tara Groves



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Teaching Tips & Tricks

Practical Teaching Tips:

Low-Cost Intravenous Catheter Placement Models

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A low-cost intravenous (IV) catheter model was created to aid in veterinary technology nursing courses improving student confidence and skill competency before placing on live patients. The models were designed with readily available materials including: Redi-Roll padding, IV lines, rubber tubing, vet wrap, and a fluid bag with red food coloring to simulate the “flash” during catheter placement.

The Redi-Roll serves as the limb of the model, while the rubber tubing simulates the vein. The IV line was split and connected to the rubber tubing at each end and secured with tape. Then the IV line was connected to the LRS bag via the injection port with a 20g needle and via the “spike,” allowing realistic fluid flow when students placed the catheter. Vet wrap serves as the “skin” over the tubing. Note: 22g IV catheters work best.

This model has been incorporated into laboratory instruction for skills practice before students perform venipuncture and IV catheters on live patients. Students were able to attempt multiple times learning hand positioning, threading, and troubleshooting in a low-stress environment while instructors evaluate student technique and provide feedback.

The realistic, low-cost model has positively impacted student confidence and preparedness before using live patients for essential skill evaluation of placing the IV catheter. Compared with commercial models, the design is inexpensive, durable, and easy to recreate using common veterinary teaching supplies.

Reflection logs as trauma-informed assessments of euthanasia education

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Euthanasia education requires a trauma-informed pedagogical approach due to the emotional exposure

and moral conflict inherent to this aspect of veterinary medicine.^{1,2} Students enter the classroom with previous experiences and perspectives on euthanasia, which may include past trauma as veterinary staff and/or companion animal caregivers.¹ Trauma is a barrier to accessible, effective learning and educators have a duty to attend to the emotional and psychological well-being of students and avoid re-traumatization while teaching about euthanasia.³

Reflective writing can be a grounded way to access euthanasia discussions with space and privacy to process difficult experiences.² Reflecting on the impacts of euthanasia-related trauma on clients and veterinary professionals is key to informing discussion of euthanasia best practices which reduce trauma for both parties and promote technician job satisfaction. In addition, reflection and collegial support after difficult euthanasia experiences are occupational coping resources that may mitigate burnout and compassion fatigue¹ and are beneficial to introduce during technician training.

Instructor provided prompts should not ask students to share their trauma but rather pose open-ended questions that allow students to connect course content to their own feelings or experiences.² Examples include:

- What were your initial thoughts and feelings about euthanasia best practices before this unit? How have your perspectives shifted?
- Reflecting on your prior experience and current learning, what does providing a “good death” mean to you?
- Discuss one or more euthanasia best practices that feel most impactful to you and relate this to the impact on companion animal caregivers and veterinary staff.

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Using AI to Refresh Your Existing Lectures

Brooke Malley, LVT
Baker College of Cadillac

I think a lot of us have looked back at old PowerPoints and realized we accidentally made walls of text instead of lecture slides. I know I definitely did. At one point I realized my students were spending more time trying to read every word on the slide than actually listening to me teach. The problem is that most of us do not have time to completely redesign every lecture we have ever made. That is where AI tools have honestly been really helpful for me.

Instead of rebuilding lectures from scratch, I started using AI to simplify lectures I already had. Usually I will paste in a slide and ask AI to reorganize the information, shorten wording, and make the key points easier to identify while keeping the academic rigor the same.

One prompt that has worked really well for me is:

“Help me redesign lecture slides for college-age veterinary technician students. Keep the academic rigor and medical terminology appropriate for a veterinary technology program, but reorganize the information to reduce cognitive overload and improve student engagement.

Shorten overly wordy explanations, break complex information into easier-to-read bullet points, and prioritize the most important teaching concepts. Do not remove important medical content or oversimplify the material. Move any supporting details or expanded explanations that may overwhelm the slide itself into detailed speaker notes so students still have access to the information later if they need additional clarification.

After reorganizing the slide, suggest one interactive classroom activity, discussion question, or case study idea that students could complete immediately after the lecture to apply the information they just learned.”

The biggest improvement came from what I started doing with the information I removed from the slides. Instead of cramming every detail directly into the lecture, I started turning some of that material into class activities. I have used AI to help make case studies, discussion questions,

patient scenarios, review games, and even ridiculous things like “dating profiles” for advanced concepts. I noticed pretty quickly that students were participating more and asking better questions because they were interacting with the material instead of just copying notes for an hour straight.

AI is obviously not replacing educators anytime soon, and I would never use anything without reviewing it first. But using it as a support tool has helped me spend less time fighting with PowerPoint slides late at night and more time focusing on actually teaching.

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Bringing Behavior Home: An Assessment Strategy to Encourage Student Engagement

Dr. Rea Marcelissen FVTE, DVM, MSc, BScH
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In lecture courses, engaging students can often be a challenge, even in a topic as fundamentally important as behavior. Assessments that model this quality can be difficult, especially when faculty are dealing with large class sizes, limited instructional hours and large amounts of content. Grading assessments for which there is poor effort on the part of the student, often a result of lack of engagement, can become tedious. To encourage student interest in an introductory behavior course, the author created a semester long, multi-stepped assessment strategy in a first year, first semester Veterinary Behavior course, detailed below.

The assessment starts with a Prior Knowledge Survey (PKS) that is done through our online learning management system (LMS) within the first two weeks of the course. The PKS includes questions aimed at assessing individual students’ knowledge of normal and abnormal behavior, as well as behavioral modification theory. Students document a situation where they participated in or witnessed behavioral modification occurring and whether or not they felt it was effective and acceptable. For those students that do not have direct animal experience or access, students are encouraged to share a case they saw in the media. It concludes with questions about their beliefs on low stress handling, dominance theory and punishment-based teaching practices. This information is kept private and secured in the LMS. Completion of this survey is worth a small percent

of their final mark in the course, to encourage completion. The author reviews the results of the PKS to understand what knowledge the students are entering the course with and allows them to tailor the course content to better meet the needs of the students.

In the course, the fundamentals of normal dog and cat behavior, including learning theory, behavioral modification and abnormalities are covered. The role of the Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT) in this process is emphasized. The students complete their certification in a low stress handling program; this is also a course assessment, reinforcing the knowledge gained in the classroom. The assignment details are then reintroduced as we enter the behavioral abnormalities module, in the last third of the course. Students are instructed to go back to the results of the PKS and use that as a tool to help them choose a topic. They are provided a list of approved behavioral abnormalities in dogs or cats, ensuring students pick topics and species for which there is sufficient peer reviewed resources. The most popular topics chosen by students are separation anxiety and resource guarding in dogs, and destructive behavior

and inappropriate urination in cats. Students are currently steered away from topics like separation anxiety in cats, as unfortunately there are not a lot of resources available.

The students work individually to create an infographic geared towards clients. Multiple formats are acceptable, including a slide show, pamphlet, webpage, blog/vlog post, or video presentation. A detailed set of assignment instructions are provided, including a rubric (Table 1). The instructions allow students to be creative in their formatting, including allowing the incorporation of a case. All text submissions are to be in APA (7th Edition) formatting and include citations from reputable sources only. Videos and VLOGs are still required to submit a citations list. The instructions include the requirement for citations from multiple different formats, encouraging engagement with available library resources on campus, not just online. It also introduces them to sourcing peer-reviewed journal articles. In class, there is lengthy discussion on what constitutes a reputable source of information and who is a veterinary behavioral expert. Finally, examples of past assessments are displayed in class, with permission from the authors.

TABLE 1: ASSESSMENT RUBRIC (/40)

Category	Distinguished (9-10 points)	Proficient (7-8 points)	Marginal (5-6 points)	Unacceptable (0-4 points)
Content	All aspects of the behavioural abnormality, recommendations and treatments are completed with excellence and preciseness.	Some aspects of the behavioural abnormality, recommendations and treatments are missed. Ideas could be clearer.	Most aspects of the behavioural abnormality, recommendations and treatments are not clearly defined. Ideas are unclear.	All aspects of the behavioural abnormality, recommendations and treatments are presented incorrectly and or are incomplete.
Knowledge	Clearly explains in a professional manner the behavioural abnormality and therapies the client can use. Content is in language the client can understand.	Ideas are not perfectly clear or are conveyed unprofessionally. Some problems with concepts evident. Language is not entirely suitable for the client to understand.	Ideas are unclear and unfocused. Majority of content is in language the client cannot understand or is conveyed unprofessionally.	The behavioural abnormality and therapies are presented poorly and incorrectly or even not at all. Ideas are unclear and or the content is in language a client cannot understand. Content is conveyed unprofessionally.
Presentation	Final product is attractive in terms of design and layout and neatness. There are no grammatical or spelling mistakes. Information flows clearly and is not confusing.	Final product is of good quality but could have been improved. There are occasional grammatical mistakes. Layout is unclear or information does not flow well.	Final product is not good quality in that it contains multiple grammatical and or spelling mistakes. Layout is unclear or information does not flow well.	Final product is of very poor quality. It contains numerous grammatical and or spelling mistakes. Layout is unclear and or information does not flow well.
References	Five references and multiple additional references are given. Reputable references used only.	Five references and one additional reference are given. Reputable references used only.	Five or fewer references are given. Non-reputable references used.	No references given or only unreputable references given.

TABLE 2: LIST OF QUESTIONS

1. Define the behavioral abnormality.
2. State what species it occurs in.
3. Environments or other triggers that can induce it to occur. (i.e. noise phobia only at grandma's house)
4. What is the underlying cause. (i.e. elevated FAS or other potential cause)
5. What clinical signs (i.e. abnormal/unwanted behaviours) are displayed. (make sure to detail species specific behaviours as well if pertinent)
6. Are there medical condition(s) the Veterinarian could potentially have to rule out that are similar to this behavioural disorder.
7. Are there non-drug therapies that the Veterinarian could recommend (i.e. supplements, pheromones, calming aids and etc)
8. Are there medical, surgical or drug therapies the Veterinarian could recommend?
9. What behavioural modification therapies could the Veterinarian recommend the owner start doing at home? (i.e. training)
10. What environmental enrichment or physical changes to the environment could the Veterinarian recommend for the owner to do at home.
11. What is the long-term prognosis. (i.e. will the behaviour problem ever resolve completely)

The information required in the assessment for each behavioral abnormality must be relevant to then providing behavioral modification to the animal. A list of questions is provided to guide their research, along with examples (Table 2). Students submit the final product through the LMS using the embedded rubric which allows for ease of viewing and grading the various formats. A numerical grade and feedback are given for each part of the rubric. The author has found that the allowance of student choice of delivery modality and topics has increased the quality of the submissions, making grading easier and more interesting. The PKS can then be used as a reference to compare student's evolving knowledge, for example seeing a student go from believing in punishment-based techniques to encouraging low stress handling methodologies and positive reinforcement techniques. Another example is many students go from having a historical foundation in dominance theory to dispelling it as a myth, and as potentially damaging to the animal.

In conclusion, this assessment has been designed as an opportunity to broaden student knowledge in behavior. It continuously evolves based on student interest, need, performance and feedback. Students have often relayed to the author how much they enjoyed an assessment of this nature, how they have implemented the knowledge gained, and how it has benefitted animals in their care. It has also been an instrumental tool in engaging first year, first semester students with library services on campus, which is a requirement of program accreditation. It also familiarizes them with what is expected of an assessment at the post-secondary level. Knowledge gained on sourcing reputable information is also a skill they can use indefinitely. For instructors, this assessment is easily modified and could be delivered as a group project with the addition of peer evaluation. In upper year courses, it could be used as a capstone project, allowing for more in-depth research

and presentation, further refining the expectations and intensity of the rubric. The topic could also be varied beyond behavior, with this assessment type being applied to many areas of veterinary medicine. Overall, the author has found this assessment strategy helpful in increasing engagement with the topic of behavior and is willing to share more detailed information with AVTE members upon request. If interested, email readvm@gmail.com.

Interested in Expanding Your Veterinary Teaching Credentials?

Tara Groves BS, LVT, FVTE, Owensboro Community and Technical College

Peg Wheeler MS, LVT, VTES, FVTE, CVBP, Career Coach, Rarebreed Veterinary Partners

INTERESTED IN EXPANDING YOUR VETERINARY TECHNOLOGY TEACHING CREDENTIALS?

AVTE offers two options for you to consider to support growing your list of credentials as you consider your career growth journey. One of those options is the Veterinary Technician Education Specialty (VTES) and the other is the Fellows in Veterinary Technician Education (FVTE). While they have some similarities, they are not the same and which one (or both!) may be of interest to you depends on the direction your career is taking you. Below you will find a brief description of each credential as well as information for reaching out to get more information.

VETERINARY TECHNICIAN EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Where to Find Info

This credential is governed by the Academy of Veterinary Technician Specialists in Education (AVTSE) and hosted through the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators. You can find information about this specialty at www.avte.net/vtes. Note that this specialty is meant to support veterinary technicians who are educators in a variety of programs such as Veterinary Assistant programs, Accredited Veterinary Technology programs, Veterinary programs, High School Veterinary Medicine programs, as well as industry educational programming.

Mission

This credential is meant to provide veterinary technicians with clear proof of their commitment to and excellence in their knowledge and abilities as educators. The mission of the AVTSE is to Empower Veterinary Technician Educators, work to Raise Standards in veterinary technician education, provide impetus and support as veterinary technician education Evolves and Adapts, and to Support Career Growth for veterinary technician educators.

What the VTES Means for You

Achieving a VTES can be of use to you in your journey as a veterinary technician educator in the following ways:

- If you are currently an adjunct instructor looking to build your resume to work towards a full-time faculty position

- If you are a full-time faculty member applying for a program director's position
- If you currently work in the support of educational programming in an industry position and are seeking to grow your program or elevate your position
- If you have worked in educating veterinary medical professionals and are looking to grow your resume to support a transition into conference presentation opportunities
- If you have worked in educating veterinary medical professionals and are looking to grow your resume to support a transition into writing for article or book publication
- If you are looking for a community of others who are committed to excellence in the art of teaching for veterinary medical professionals

Want More Information?

If you would like to learn more, please visit www.avte.net/vtes or email the AVTSE Governing Body Chair at pwheelerlvt@gmail.com.

FELLOWS IN VETERINARY TECHNICIAN EDUCATION (FVTE)

Where to Find Info

The Fellows in Veterinary Technician Education program is an AVTE credential that recognizes educators who have demonstrated sustained commitment to the field — not just in the classroom, but through leadership, mentorship, and professional engagement. You can find information about the program at www.avte.net.

What the FVTE Recognizes

The VTES is about building and documenting your credentials as an educator. The FVTE is about what you've done with them. This credential is designed for veterinary technician educators who have been actively contributing to the profession over time — serving in leadership roles, mentoring others, driving innovation in veterinary technician education, advancing their own professional development, and showing up for the broader community of vet tech education.

Think of it as the profession's way of saying: your body of work matters, and it deserves to be recognized.

What It Takes

The application process is point-based and looks back over the past three years of your professional activity. It draws from three areas:

- Leadership — program director roles, committee service, task forces, and mentorship of credentialed vet techs
- Student and community engagement — advising, student mentorship, career awareness, and student success initiatives
- Professional Development, Scholarship, and Innovation — advanced degrees, certifications, conference presentations, and authored work

You'll also submit two professional references as part of the process.

Two Tiers: FVTE and Senior Fellow

The Fellows program has two levels. The FVTE credential recognizes educators who meet the established threshold for contributions across the three areas above. For those with a more extensive body of work, a Senior Fellow designation is on the horizon — launching in fall 2026. More details on the Senior Fellow pathway will be available at the conference and through AVTE communications this fall.

Want More Information?

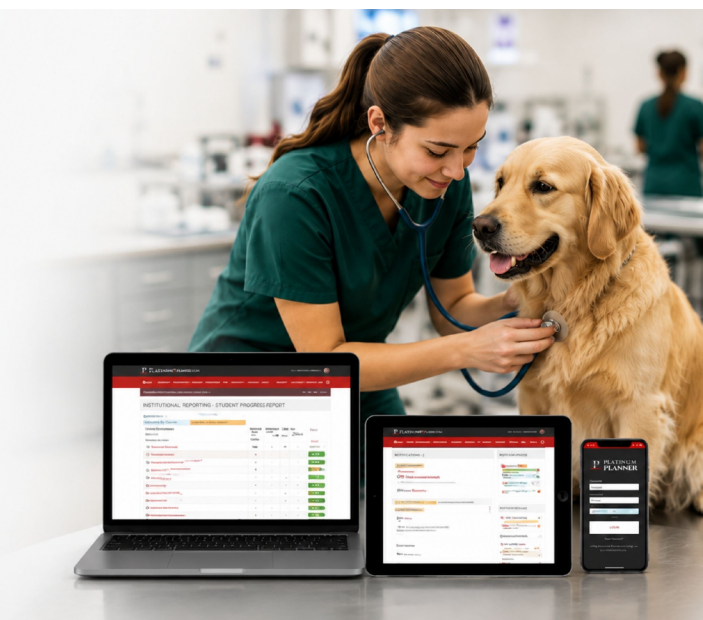
Visit www.avte.net or reach out to the FVTE Committee through help@avte.net.



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Study Strategies for Our Students: Elimination Process and Educated Guessing Skills for the VTNE

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The Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE) is a critical milestone for veterinary technology students. While content knowledge is essential, many students struggle with multiple-choice examinations due to limited familiarity with effective test-taking strategies. As educators, it is our responsibility to introduce approaches that help students navigate these challenges. This article focuses on two practical strategies—the elimination process and educated guessing—that can support student confidence and improve performance during the VTNE.

It is nearly impossible for anyone to know the correct answer to every possible VTNE question, regardless of the number of years spent in clinical practice or teaching. Students may encounter these challenges even with thorough preparation. As educators, we must promote strategies that support academic preparation, whether within core courses or workshops focused on professional examinations. Several strategies can support students in their study process, particularly when understanding VTNE scoring and its implications for test-taking.

Standardized professional examinations typically consist of multiple-choice questions, and the VTNE uses a scaled scoring system in which a passing result indicates competency rather than a simple ratio of correct to incorrect answers. According to the Professional Testing Corporation, scaled scores convert the total number of correctly answered questions to a consistent measure for all test takers. The Veterinary Technician National Examination Candidate Information Handbook, published by the American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB), provides detailed information about the VTNE and its scoring process.

Knowing that incorrect responses are not counted against the final score provides reassurance that applying elimination strategies and educated guessing may be effective when the correct answer is unknown. The VTNE consists of 170 multiple-choice questions, of which 150 are scored and 20 are pilot questions used for future examinations.⁶ With this information in mind, study practices

should focus on selecting the best answer from four available options. Students should complete the entire examination, answering confidently those questions they know and returning later to those they find more challenging. These recommendations are consistent with testing strategies promoted for examinations such as the SAT and ACT,² and are also supported by the VTNE Candidate Handbook, which encourages examinees to answer all questions since there is no penalty for incorrect responses and skipping or guessing questions is permitted.⁶

Applying the elimination process requires carefully reading the question and all answer choices while analyzing what is known about the topic. The wording of standardized examination questions can sometimes create confusion.¹ If an obvious answer is not immediately identified or if more than one option appears plausible, the examinee can remove choices that do not apply or are unrelated to the question. This strategy involves discarding incorrect options to improve decision-making. This approach is grounded in basic probability principles.¹ When one of four answer choices is eliminated, the probability of selecting the correct answer increases to approximately 33.3% (1 in 3). Eliminating a second option increases the probability to 50% (1 in 2). The goal is to reduce available options to improve the likelihood of selecting the correct response without overanalyzing the question while maintaining an efficient pace. Time management is a critical factor in standardized testing, and this strategy helps examinees progress without becoming stalled on individual questions.

When, despite careful reading, the examinee does not feel confident in identifying a correct answer, this is an appropriate moment to apply educated guessing skills. Developing intuition is essential to effective guessing, and educators can facilitate activities that help students strengthen this ability. For example, trivia games on topics unrelated to veterinary medicine or animal health, such as geography or history, can be used. While some students may have basic knowledge in these areas, the goal of these activities is not content mastery but helping students recognize their ability to make informed guesses. Students may also be encouraged to use mobile trivia applications to further develop these skills outside the classroom, in addition to VTNE-specific study applications. Trivia-based

activities can improve cognitive function, memory, and learning capacity, supporting better academic performance.⁷ Increased practice with these activities can lead to greater confidence and improved performance when students encounter the actual examination environment.

The elimination process and educated guessing skills can be used together. For example, an examinee may have a limited understanding of a topic but still recognize that one answer choice is clearly incorrect. In this case, the examinee can eliminate that option and make an educated guess among the remaining choices, recognizing that they may possess more knowledge than they initially assumed.⁵ The objective is to select the best answer, move forward, and complete the examination efficiently. These tools represent strategies educators can use to support student success and overall performance on the VTNE and other standardized examinations. Preparation involves more than simply reading and reviewing content, as standardized tests do not fully measure excellence or scholastic aptitude.³ Educators should also emphasize that even if students do not achieve their desired results on the first attempt, the process fosters competencies that support future success.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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From Classroom to Clinic: Five Behavioral Competencies to Revolutionize the Veterinary Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Veterinary technology programs are working within an industry that is facing a professional sustainability crisis. Current workforce challenges within the veterinary profession - including gossip culture and the erosion of psychological safety - contribute to high attrition and systemic burnout by veterinary professionals. The curricula within veterinary technology educational programs prioritizes technical proficiency, yet the landscape of the veterinary profession is largely shaped by cultural and behavioral norms. Utilizing an amended framework of professional identity formation, this article identifies five research-supported behavioral competencies that program graduates can leverage to transform the culture of the veterinary workplace.¹ By shifting instructional focus from conceptual professionalism to observable behavior training, educators can have a greater impact on the long-term outlook of the veterinary technician role in the profession.

Keywords: veterinary technology; workforce sustainability; burnout; psychological safety; behavioral education

THE SUSTAINABILITY BASELINE: CURRENT WORKFORCE REALITIES

Veterinary medicine is currently experiencing a professional “sustainability gap”. Recent survey data shows a significantly higher prevalence of burnout in veterinary technicians, with approximately 58.3% of reported results exceeding the standard clinical threshold for emotional exhaustion.² This is not simply about the workload - the cultural environment of veterinary medicine is highlighted as a primary driver, with lack of psychological safety indicated as a critical factor in medical errors, team learning, and staff turnover.^{3,4}

The additional impact of workplace “gossip culture” and indirect communication patterns are proven to be strong predictors of workplace dissatisfaction and turnover intent among credentialed staff.^{5,6} To change this landscape,

veterinary technician programs must advance beyond teaching only what a technician does and focus on how their professional behaviors can help to dismantle toxic systemic values within the clinical environment.

Workplace culture and psychological safety are significant factors which contribute in part to the multifactorial issue of burnout in the veterinary profession, alongside additional influences such as staffing shortages, compassion fatigue, moral distress, increasing workload demands, financial stressors, client conflict, and other factors.⁴ The behavioral competencies explored in this article do not present a comprehensive solution to burnout, but provide an educational strategy that allows veterinary technology programs to address modifiable cultural factors within the scope of veterinary technology curricula.

TOP 5 WAYS GRADUATES CAN CHANGE THE VETERINARY CULTURE

1. Disrupting the “Error of Silence” through Help-Seeking

The stigma associated with uncertainty creates a significant barrier to patient safety and staff retention. Employees within psychologically unsafe work cultures fear punitive or degrading responses to uncertainty, withholding observations to avoid appearing incompetent.^{3,4}

Pedagogical Strategy: Making “escalation” exercises a graded laboratory exercise can reframe help-seeking as an active clinical judgement instead of a passive admission of weakness.⁷ Rather than waiting for a student to fail or miss a step, instructors can insert “Check-in Points” into simulations, where students must justify why they did or did not seek a second opinion.

2. Eliminating Indirect Communication (The Gossip Circuit Breaker)

Triangulation is often the source of toxicity within the veterinary environment. This occurs when grievances are aired to third parties instead of directly to the individuals involved. This behavior erodes trust, and is a leading predictor of workplace dissatisfaction.⁵

Pedagogical Strategy: “Redirection Role-Play” exercises during clinical rotations allow educators to evaluate students on their ability to apply specific scripts to scenarios involving indirect communication. This could sound like, “I hear your frustration, but have you spoken directly with the person involved?” This guides students to take the position of cultural circuit breakers, preventing the spread of toxic workplace norms before they can take root.⁶

3. Dynamic Prioritization to Combat Decision Fatigue

Burnout is listed as a primary factor in veterinary staff turnover, and often results from “decision fatigue” under high-pressure, multi-tasking environments. Technicians who are not effective at triaging their own mental bandwidth in addition to patient needs face the highest risk for early-career attrition.⁸

Pedagogical Strategy: In the final hour of a long lab, implement “Shift Scrambles” where three new “emergent” cases are introduced. Require students to then revise their priority lists - this forces the learners to re-evaluate task urgency under time pressure, building the mental agility necessary to manage the unpredictable nature of clinical practice without becoming overwhelmed.

4. Developing “Coachable Confidence”

Feedback is often perceived as a threat to professional identity, and many students take this type of input as a personal insult rather than constructive advisement. Resistance to feedback is a defense mechanism, but graduates who cannot accept critique often stagnate in the clinical environment. This leads to professional frustration and eventually may cause the individual to leave the field.⁹

Pedagogical Strategy: Utilizing a “Pre-Critique Self-Reflection” allows students to identify their own knowledge gaps before receiving an instructor’s evaluation. Educators may assign students to submit a short video or written note identifying their top three “growth areas” prior to sharing the faculty assessment. This turns the feedback loop into a collaborative, rather than punitive, process.

5. Modeling Sustainability as a Professional Competency

The “Martyr Complex” - a belief that overwork demonstrates dedication - is a primary driver of attrition and burnout in veterinary medicine. Data shows that students who lack boundaries during training face significantly higher likelihood for clinical depression and burnout once they reach practice.¹⁰

Pedagogical Strategy: Faculty should prioritize “Narrating the Norm” by explicitly teaching boundary setting and delegation as essential skills. Application of behavioral modeling as well as structured lessons aligns the instruction with the underlying value. A “Workload Audit” assignment provides a structured format for students to analyze a hypothetical clinical schedule and identify where a technician should consider delegating a task to prioritize patient safety and personal stamina.

OPERATIONALIZING BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

These pedagogical strategies extend beyond a theoretical framework, with several having already been incorporated into veterinary technology educational settings through simulation exercises, communication role-plays, and reflective assignments that are assessed through structured rubric evaluations. Initial implementation suggests that

TABLE 1: INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL CHANGE

Behavioral Competency	Workforce Problem Addressed	Structured Lesson Strategy
Normalizing Help-Seeking	Patient safety risks; isolation	Mandatory Escalation: Graded checkpoints in anesthesia or emergency simulations.
Direct Communication	Gossip culture; triangulation	Scripted Redirection: Role-playing direct responses to workplace conflict or “venting.”
Dynamic Prioritization	Burnout; decision fatigue	The Shift Scramble: Rapid re-prioritization exercises during high-stress lab segments.
Coachable Confidence	Feedback resistance; stagnation	Gap-Analysis Reflection: Pre-feedback self-assessments to foster self-awareness.
Sustainable Practice	The “Martyr Complex”; attrition	Boundary Analysis: Case studies focused on delegation and workload management.

existing laboratory and clinical coursework can be modified to incorporate behavioral competencies with minimal curricular redesign. Instructors may add measurable rubric elements to existing assessments related to appropriate help-seeking, task prioritization, time management, communication, receptiveness to feedback and professional self-reflection.

By embedding these behaviors into existing course elements, programs may begin to collect longitudinal data on professional competency with minimal initial revision. Additionally, the visible inclusion of these assessment criteria reinforces the importance of the behavioral component for students. Some examples of immediate implementation opportunities within existing curriculum include:

- **Anesthesia Skills Checkoffs:** Add a rubric criterion to evaluate if the student appropriately seeks assistance when encountering uncertainty or if they identify patient instability.
- **Laboratory Practical Exams:** Include a task prioritization component assessing the student's ability to multitask, organize workflow and respond to challenging clinical demands.
- **Clinical Rotations:** Modify existing clinical evaluation forms to include assessment areas for direct communication, teamwork, and feedback responsiveness.
- **Case-Based Assignments:** Include additional reflection questions that require students to identify knowledge gaps, decision points, and opportunities to seek consultation.
- **Simulation Activities:** In addition to technical performance, add measurements to evaluate students' escalation behaviors, delegation decisions, and prioritization strategies.

Future curricular revisions may utilize the data collected from this initial implementation to create focused assessments directed toward areas concern, such as prioritizing task hierarchy or improving feedback receptiveness.

CONCLUSION: THE GRADUATES IMPACT ON CLINICAL CULTURE

Veterinary technology graduates are poised to enter the clinical workforce in positions that influence the future of the professional culture and landscape. Veterinary technology programs have the power to be more than just technical silos; they can become the architects of a new professional culture. By anchoring curriculum in behavioral solutions based on current workforce data, educators can influence graduates to enter the clinic with the ability to seek help, prioritize effectively, receive feedback, deliver direct communication, and work sustainably. These skills go beyond fulfilling a job description and work toward actively repairing the landscape of veterinary medicine.

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Vet Tech Olympics

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Whether it's a deck of cards, a volleyball, or a puzzle grid, games captivate us. It's no surprise that games can also impact how students learn. Game-based learning (GBL) is a pedagogical approach that uses gameplay to achieve specific learning outcomes. These games can be digital or non-digital and involve structure, goals, and defined outcomes. Effective game-based learning requires a balance between meeting the intended learning objectives and maintaining the player's motivation to engage in the game.¹ Examples of GBL are KAHOOT!TM or Jeopardy!TM.

There is a growing body of literature demonstrating positive outcomes from game-based learning for students in elementary, secondary, and higher education.² To date, no studies on game-based learning have focused specifically on veterinary technician students. The closest comparisons come from research on nursing students, which show overall positive outcomes on engagement, knowledge, and clinical skills.^{3, 4, 5}

In contrast to game-based learning, gamification is another strategy used to increase student engagement and is defined as the use of game elements in non-game contexts.⁶ An example of gamification is creating a leaderboard for homework completion.

At Carrington College we used the Vet Tech Olympics to improve engagement, hone psychomotor skills, and prepare students for their final practical exam. This game-based learning activity is adaptable to a variety of course content. Below is a case study of how we implemented the Vet Tech Olympics in our program.

LEARNING OUTCOME

Demonstrate proficiency in the psychomotor and didactic skills required for the fourth-term final practical exam.

PREPARATION

Students were divided into teams and received a description of the competition events ahead of time. Each student

participated in one individual event as well as all team events. Students were encouraged to prepare for the events ahead of time.

Instructors gathered supplies for each event, and classroom tables were arranged with a judges table at the front of the room and a station for each team facing the judge's table.

The event was enriched with music and a medal ceremony.

COMPETITION

Individual Events

- Assemble an E-collar
- Wrap a gown pack
- Place and tape an IV catheter in a model
- Perform suturing on a suture board

Team Events

- Folding hand towels
- Drug calculations and drawing up the correct volume
- Parasite identification
- Breed identification

After all events were completed, scores were tallied and the winning team was announced. When appropriate, answers for each event were reviewed. An award ceremony followed, during which gold, silver, and bronze medals were presented.

This activity was extremely well received, with 100% class attendance. Students were actively engaged - laughing, collaborating with peers, and putting forth significant effort. Although the sample size was small, the cohort that participated in the Vet Tech Olympics had a higher average score on their final practical exam compared to cohorts that prepared using more traditional methods.

The Vet Tech Olympics can be adapted to a range of subjects. For example, it can be used to review laboratory procedures through events such as reading a refractometer, preparing blood smears, identifying urinary crystals, and calculating white blood cell differentials. It can also be

applied to dentistry, with events like scaling, charting, and taking radiographs. Based on our experience, game-based learning is an effective strategy for enhancing both engagement and comprehension among veterinary technician students, and the Vet Tech Olympics is a valuable addition to any program's teaching toolkit.

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Stacking the Deck: Building an Effective VTNE Study Plan

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There is a particular type of pressure and anxiety that builds as an exam approaches for both students and the people who teach them. The VTNE is no exception. Students know their stuff in real time and in the clinic, but somehow when it's translated into verbiage on a computer, they second-guess their skills. Furthermore, not all students start from the same point. While brick-and-mortar students may come with limited clinical experience, distance learning students may have to unlearn habits that don't align with VTNE expectations.

The VTNE spans the gamut of veterinary topics: anesthesia, surgery, pharmacology, client communication, and more. And while their curricula address all of them, it can be overwhelming to condense and extract the pieces that can make or break a passing grade. As educators, there is an opportunity to help students approach exam preparation in a strategic way.

RESEARCH SAYS START WITH THE TEST

Students should start with AAVSB's VTNE content outline. Before reviewing course notes or grabbing a textbook, guide students through the percentages allocated to each topic and help them understand which areas are pain points. Even better yet, start students with a practice test like the HESI (Elsevier) or those through AAVSB, which give them a clear indication of their strengths and weaknesses. Numerous studies have shown familiarizing students with exam questions and structure can reduce test anxiety and improve scores.^{1,2}

STUDY SMARTER, NOT HARDER

Though rereading, highlighting (and hoping) are the most used techniques to study for any test, research suggests these efforts do not lead to better results. In a review by Dunlosky and colleagues,³ ten commonly used learning techniques were studied and only two ranked highest – practice testing and distributed (spaced) practice. Meanwhile, highlighting and rereading ranked in the bottom. A follow-up study published by Donoghue and

Hattie⁴ showed almost the same findings. Educators have a dual role: sharing this information with students and helping them find or build the tools they need to study more effectively.

BECOME A (LABRADOR) RETRIEVER

Testing and practice quizzes have been shown to be some of the most powerful learning techniques. A major review by Serra et al⁵ showed how these techniques have been adopted in health education both for in-house training and the use of external platforms such as Anki and Quizlet. We can help students by incorporating quiz questions into lectures and creating practice questions with detailed answer rationales (not only for correct answers but also the incorrect ones) to help students understand not just the “what” but the “why”.

GIVE THEM SOME SPACE

Beyond knowing what to focus on, students also need to understand the importance of spaced repetition. Multiple studies have shown that consistent practice over time is more effective for retention than cramming large amounts of material into one behemoth study session right before an exam.^{3,4,6} Educators can help students build studying into their daily routines. Whether it's answering a few quiz questions, reviewing flashcards during a break, or revisiting key concepts on a regular basis, small efforts can strengthen memory and recall. Learning can be enhanced during class sessions, too, by encouraging students to summarize and recall main points from a previous lecture or lab at the beginning of the following session.

WEAVE THAT (MEDICAL) TAPESTRY

Interleaving is the process of incorporating different subjects and material into one study session rather than focusing on one topic at a time. For example, instead of spending an hour one day on anesthesia and an hour the next on pharmacology, students should be encouraged to study both in a single setting. By challenging a student's brain to switch between topics, it has to work harder to retrieve and apply the material and that's what makes it really stick.³ Interleaving helps prepare students for the kind of topic changes they can expect both on the VTNE and in real life.

LET'S GET REAL FOR A MOMENT

It's one thing to teach students the best study strategies; it is another to get them to use those strategies in their daily lives. Between school, work, family, and maybe even a little fun now and then, who has time for continued repetition and recall?

This is where educators can shine. By creating and implementing the tools students need or showing them how and where to find them, educators can give them a little bit of their lives back. Flashcard software like Anki, study resources like Quizlet, VetTechPrep, Zuku Review, and AI powered tools are on the rise, and live and asynchronous courses through organizations like the Veterinary Support Personnel NetworkTM (VSPN), VetTech Prep, VTNE101, and the Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association (ISVMA)'s VTNE Masterclass are abundant. As an educator, your role is to help students make informed decisions on how and where they should use them.

There are numerous structured review programs available to students. The ISVMA offers an VTNE course annually that consists of four, live, two-hour review sessions. VetTechPrep and VTNE101 provide question banks and study guides that students can sort through at their own pace. And Zuku Review offers an asynchronous course built around case-based learning and questions that simulate the exam.

VSPN's VTNE Review is another course offered both live and asynchronously. Written and produced by credentialed and specialist veterinary technicians and educators with decades of experience, the course not only offer covers the major VTNE test topics but also guides students in learning test-taking skills and organizing their study time. This November, VSPN is offering a comprehensive hour-and-a-half "Night with the Experts" session, open to members (a free membership), where attendees can ask questions and delve deeper into challenging topics.

The VTNE will always cause uncertainty for students approaching it but with the right tools, and educators willing to direct them, that looming deadline can become something manageable rather than menacing. The strategies that work – retrieval practice, spaced repetition, and interleaving may not be those that students gravitate towards on their own so it's up to educators to introduce these techniques early, build them into the rhythm of their daily lives, and point them to the tools and habits that last well beyond test day.

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Program Profile:

Hillsborough College Veterinary Technology Program Resumes Student-Run Animal Wellness Clinics

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The Hillsborough College (HC) Veterinary Technology Program resumed its student-run Animal Wellness Clinics (AWC) during the spring 2026 semester. For years there had been a demand for animal wellness clinics sponsored by the college's vet tech program. In spring 2022, the first AWC opened its doors. The clinics were highly successful and provided care to animals belonging to college faculty members, staff, and students, along with the vet tech program's community partners. However, in 2024 the clinics were paused pending the hiring of a vet tech program lab and clinic supervisor. Finally, in February 2026, after hiring a full-time lab supervisor, the AWCs resumed, much to the delight of the vet tech students and the college community. "Our vet tech program wellness clinic has always been in demand," said vet tech faculty member Cindy Robinson, CVT. "We were getting a lot of inquiries about starting back up, so it's wonderful that we're once again providing this service."

Program personnel established all the logistics for the AWCs, including a premises permit to conduct a veterinary clinic, a fund site for ordering supplies and in which to deposit funds, a merchant services account, and procedures for the collection, reporting, and processing of income. After the college provided initial funding for start-up costs, the clinics quickly became self-supporting, even though they are low-cost for clients. In addition, the AWC procured practice management software to allow for maintenance of electronic patient records, online appointments, generation of receipts, and inventory management.

According to Lab & Clinic Supervisor Jessica Montilone, CVT, "the AWCs are a unique opportunity for students to have contact with pet parents and their pets to deal with everyday problems in a clinic environment." The vet tech program expects that AWCs will be held two or three times per term during the regular year and once or twice during the summer term. The clinics are set up in the vet tech classroom area on the HC Plant City Florida campus and offer low-cost animal wellness-related services to clients.

"Student-run enterprises such as the AWC are innovative because they provide students the opportunity to conduct all aspects of the business related to their profession," said Montilone. During the AWCs, vet tech students practice such activities as client check-in, reception training, patient record maintenance, payment management, exam room skills, etc. The students are also enthusiastic about the clinics. Vet tech student Kiana Peltzer, Class of 2027, said, "It is definitely a good learning experience taking care of patients and getting the opportunity to educate clients; it gives me a lot of confidence."



FIGURE 1. VET TECH STUDENTS SIERRA HALLADAY AND VICTORIA MATTHEWS STAIN AN EYE DURING A STUDENT-RUN CLINIC.

Students also get credit for working the AWC. "Clinics are attached to the Work Experience externship classes and students can use interesting cases from the clinic as part of their Work Experience journals," said Anthony Spatola, CVT, coordinator of the vet tech program's Work Experience classes. It also provides the opportunity to practice and

check off essential skills such as subcutaneous injections, venipuncture, and performing diagnostic procedures.

In addition to dealing with the business and logistic aspects of a veterinary clinic, vet tech students provide vaccinations, diagnostic tests, and parasite prevention to their patients. At the end of each clinic day, faculty members and students hold rounds to discuss any interesting cases they encountered. Students are also responsible for contacting clients with follow-up information and test results. Vet tech student Catherine Eurich, Class of 2027, not only worked the clinic as a student, but was also a client when she brought “Axel”, her 5-year-old Belgian Malinois, to the AWC for vaccines and bloodwork. Catherine summed it up best: “the clinic provides really thorough care for a great price, and we learn a lot while having fun.”

The Hillsborough College Vet Tech Program highly recommends student-run clinics for vet tech programs. They are an opportunity for vet tech programs and students to enhance their community service and learning experiences.



FIGURE 2. VET TECH STUDENTS STEPHANIE ALMODOVAR-FORSYTHE AND AVERY BROWN PREPARE VACCINATIONS.

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TOOLS TO SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN THE ENTIRE VETERINARY TEAM

AVMA resources help the entire team deliver compassionate, high-quality veterinary care and build strong relationships with clients and coworkers.

- The Positive Pet Care Guide: Help foster healthy lines of communication and a positive partnership between staff and pet owners
- Language of Veterinary Care resources: Leverage language to strengthen relationships with clients and improve patient care
- Wellbeing toolkit: Support your personal and professional wellbeing
- Journey for Teams: Practical and free learning modules that help you build a more welcoming and engaging workplace

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