

**Manor College
Program of Veterinary Technology**

**Guidelines
For
Being an Excellent Externship Site**

Among externship students, there are wide ranges of personalities, levels of skill and abilities. How can externships create a consistently excellent experience given the level of diversity among its students? Below are some suggestions of what to do and what not to do when establishing an externship program.

DO.....

1. **Prepare Practice Personnel:** Communicate ahead of time with each department in the veterinary hospital. Speak personally with technicians AND veterinarians about the externship program. Find out who is enthusiastic about having a student and who is not. **This is the single most important part of setting the stage for an excellent student experience.** It is best to encourage honesty about this and not pressure staff into a situation that they will ultimately resent. Be sure to place the student with technicians who WANT to teach. A sure way to ruin an externship experience is to place the student with someone who resents the extra burden of a student.
2. **Take an Inventory of Personnel Resources:** Based on the people who are interested in hosting a student, make a list of the departments and employees that are available to the extern. The student does not have to spend time in every department, so skip departments in which there is no interest in teaching. If the interest is low in every department, you should not be an externship site.
3. **Interview Well in Advance:** Be sure to set up an interview with the perspective student **well in advance** (about two months) of the first rotation. Summer externs will contact sites for interviews in March and April. Fall externs will contact sites no later than mid-July. Occasionally, there are spring externs, who will contact sites in December and January. Please be sure to schedule the interview during these months.

The interview is a time of exploration. It gives the site supervisor an opportunity to acquire a sense of the student and to determine whether or not the student fits well with the culture of the practice. It also gives the student an opportunity to evaluate the site. **Until a verbal agreement is made, neither the student nor the site is obligated to the match.** In other words, you are welcome to reject students who you feel will not perform well in your practice. Establish specific interview questions ahead of time to help you pick out those qualities in candidates that you feel are most important. Interview carefully.

The interview should include a tour of the hospital and may include introductions to those technicians and veterinarians who have expressed an interest in teaching. If either the site

or the student feels that the site is not suitable, the student has time to interview at another practice.

4. **Determine Interests:** It is important during the interview to ascertain what, if any, particular interests or goals the student has for the externship. For example, some students want to spend all 6 weeks in emergency alone, while others may prefer to spend time in all of the hospital's departments. Because the AVMA-required and recommended tasks are completed on campus, **Manor students enjoy tremendous flexibility during their externship and are permitted and encouraged to taper their externship toward their interests.**
5. **Prepare a Tentative Schedule:** The interview is a good time to discuss a tentative rotation schedule that is agreeable to both the site and the student. Jot down an outline of how much time would be spent in each department. Listen carefully to the goals and interests of the student. For example, a schedule might include two weeks in surgery, one week in LA field service, two days in cardiology, three days in the lab, etc. Each schedule may be different for each student depending upon the time of year, case load, and the locations of the teachers as well as the interests of the students. Obviously, students should not be assigned to departments that do not want to participate in the externship program. At the same time, you should communicate which times and departments offer the greatest learning opportunities (i.e. 10pm to 2am in ES or 7:30am to noon in surgery) and encourage the student to consider these times and departments.

Students are expected to complete the externship on a full-time basis (36-42 hours per week) for 6 weeks. This may include three 13-hour days or five 8-hour days. Time off should be given during religious holidays, Thanksgiving and a day to take the VTNE. This time does NOT have to be made up.

6. **Communicate with the Student and Practice Personnel:** (You cannot over communicate). A final schedule can be generated in collaboration with the technicians and vets who will be teaching. The student is instructed by Manor to call the practice a few days before the rotation begins to confirm the start date and time. Make sure the student is given a written copy of the final schedule with the names (first and last) of the rotation teachers.
7. **Welcome the Student:** All students, no matter how experienced, will feel uncomfortable in a new clinic setting. Making the student feel welcomed and appreciated is an important way to relieve anxiety. Begin by sending a welcome e-mail just before the rotation is to begin and include helpful information such as a list of commonly used drugs. When the student arrives, be sure to know the student's full name, make eye contact and say hello regularly. Introduce the student to personnel in every department and give a detailed orientation of the facility and supplies. Each department should take time to have a mini-orientation as well. Review standard operating procedures and clinic rules for charting and medical record keeping. Check in periodically to see how things are going and make sure to arrange for regular, private one-on-one time, so that you are available to the student without distraction. If the student comes to you with a concern or question, be

sure to address it respectfully and as promptly as possible. Feel free to call Dr. Bassert with any questions (215) 885-2360 Ext. 221.

8. **Provide Feedback Along the Way:** Be sure to provide feedback to the student during the externship. This is particularly important if the student is not performing well. Simple, constructive feedback and encouragement can go a long way. An evaluation form can be designed to solicit written feedback from each department as the student moves from one area to another. This facilitates calculation of the final externship grade and helps the student understand their performance in each department. Listen carefully to any concerns that the student may present, so that they can be addressed promptly.
9. **Work to Build Student Confidence:** The best teachers are patient, supportive and encouraging. Coach each student while they are performing tasks. Talk them through putting in an IV catheter, for example. Compliment the student when something is done well. Use humor and have fun. Get to know the student, and work to build confidence, particularly in areas where there are weaknesses.
10. **Know the Student and Work to Provide Appropriate Challenges:** The best teachers are those who challenge their students and encourage them to do MORE. The first step is to learn about the student. Has she worked in practice? Where? When? And for how long? What tasks did she do routinely? In what areas would she like to grow? What are her strengths and weaknesses? Because students are new, they will naturally feel uncomfortable, and may not know what to do initially. The clinic teachers need to take the initiative at first. For example, an ice breaker would be saying something along the lines of “Don’t just stand there, come here and put in this endotracheal tube. I’ll walk you through it. You’ll be fine.” Try to keep the student engaged in as many nursing tasks as possible. Avoid treating students as gofers or as cleaning ladies. Particularly encourage experienced students to be involved and challenge them with level-appropriate duties.
11. **Work to Cultivate a Future Employee:** Students tend to go to externship sites in which they have employment interests. Keeping this in mind, and treating students as potential employees helps generate a greater degree of commitment towards preparing them for clinical positions.
12. **Understand that Life Happens to Students Too:** Cars have flat tires, children become ill, vertebral disks herniate, personal (family) catastrophes occur. You should expect this. Students who miss externship time for these reasons must notify Dr. Bassert (as well as you) and must make it up. Excessive absences, on the other hand, are problematic and represent a serious problem. Be sure to contact Dr. Bassert in cases where the student is unreliable.
13. **Review the Final Evaluation Form with the Student:** The final evaluation, if done well, provides the student with valuable feedback that can be applied at the next practice site or employment position. It is important to be as objective as possible and take into consideration the feedback from all of the departments. Do not grade the student on personality or popularity. Make sure that the evaluation of specific tasks summarizes into

a logical final grade. Also, keep in mind that a C- or below is considered a failing grade that would necessitate repeating the externship rotation (refer to course syllabus). Dr. Bassert must be notified if a student is expected to receive a C- or below.

Over the past two decades, students have met on campus after completing this course to comment on their externship experiences. The following “Don’t” list was generated from some of these debriefings.

DON’T.....

1. Create an externship that is primarily observational and based on shadowing another technician without offering opportunities for doing many clinical tasks.
2. Neglect to offer hands-on opportunities for the student to perform and practice the nursing tasks listed on the task check list.
3. Ignore the goals of the student.
4. Neglect to give the student specific jobs to complete.
5. Forget to communicate with other practice personnel about the student before s/he arrives. In other word, the student should not be a surprise to your co-workers.
6. Ignore the student, neglect to make eye contact or neglect to introduce the student to other staff members.
7. Intentionally intimidate the student.
8. Forget to give the student a schedule.
9. Compare the student to other employees or previous externs.
10. Compare VT Programs.
11. Deprecate another extern in front of the student (they may well be good friends).
12. Whisper about the student with co-workers in front of the student
13. Undermine hospital co-workers and other hospital departments in front of the student
14. Drag the student into gossip and negative practice politics.
15. Criticize the student while she is performing a technical task, rather ...provide encouraging instruction.
16. Make negative assumptions about the student, rather than ask her if your assessment about her/him is or is not true.
17. Assume that all students are beginners (many are not).
18. Teach a student how to perform elementary tasks, such as how to restrain a cat, using a baby voice.
19. Surprise the student with a poor grade at the end of the rotation.
20. Disrespect or ignore the concerns of a student when she comes to you for support.
21. Ask another co-worker to help you with straight forward tasks when a student is standing nearby with nothing to do.
22. Prevent or block the student from becoming engaged in clinical work that s/he is there to learn, such as reading charts, performing SOAPs, etc.
23. Ignore the student when s/he asks a question.
24. Neglect to show the student the ropes and clarify the standard operating procedures.
25. Develop a clinic culture of blame and criticism.
26. Go out for lunch with all of the other technicians and exclude the student who remains by herself.

27. Keep students who are mothers with young children (in day care) after hours.
28. Schedule the student as a “cover” for an employee shift.
29. Confuse being rude and cold with being a person who sets “high standards.”