

# Clerkship Leader Handbook



**Virginia-Maryland**  
*College of* **Veterinary Medicine**

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# **DVM Clerkship Leader Handbook**

## **Section 1. Overview**

Veterinary student clinical education during third and fourth year is accomplished almost entirely through a set of core and track clinical clerkships. These clerkships are three weeks in duration, with the exception of the December block, which is four weeks. In addition, students have the opportunity to participate in elective rotations, which are chosen based on career plans and individual interests.

An overview of the DVM clinical experience is presented to students during the spring semester immediately prior to entering clinical rotations for the first time. General information includes, but is not necessarily limited to, discussions regarding the transition to full-time responsibilities in clinical clerkships from previous responsibilities in the classroom and laboratory; a presentation about evaluation of competencies and professional conduct; information regarding policies, holiday schedules and attendance policies.

## **Section 2. Appointment of Clerkship Leaders**

Clerkship leaders are appointed by the respective VMCVM department chairs. The clerkship leader is the key organizer and manager of the departmental contribution to the overall clinical education experience at the VMCVM. He/she serves as the liaison between his/her clinical department and the Office of Academic Affairs and is thus responsible for the status of the clerkship program.

## **Section 3. Sources of Information for Clerkship Leaders**

Other resources are available to the clerkship leader. A significant amount of information is provided to students in the *DVM Student Handbook to Clinical Rotations*, which is updated annually by the Office of Academic Affairs. Clerkship leaders are requested to annually review and revise the descriptions and syllabi of their clinical rotations for the website and intranet.

## **Section 4: Roles and Responsibilities**

### **4.1 Role of the Clerkship Leader & Department Chair**

The educational objectives of the DVM program can be found in the appendix of this document. Additional clerkship specific learning objectives (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to be acquired by students in the process of the rotation) must be identified by the departmental faculty members prior to the beginning of the clinical year and written in alignment with the program and educational objectives and competencies for graduation. Any proposed changes to teaching or existing learning objectives need to be approved by the Curriculum Committee.

The department chair is ultimately responsible for the content of the clerkship curriculum and the activities in which students participate. The chair usually delegates responsibility for the essential components of the clerkship, including educational goals and the activities in which students participate. The chair usually delegates responsibility for the essential components of the clerkships, including educational goals and objectives, content, curriculum, activities, and methods of evaluation, to the clerkship leader for implementation. Clerkship leaders and department chairs are strongly encouraged to incorporate curriculum content which aligns with competencies and outcomes. The clerkship leader is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the clerkship and informs the chair of progress or problems.

Veterinary students should be appropriately supervised by a resident, intern or attending faculty member while engaged in any clinical activity. It is the responsibility of the clerkship leader to make these assignments and to ensure students are not attempting clinical activities outside the range of expected achievements or those activities formally prohibited by practice laws. During the clerkship orientation, clerkship leaders should inform students about prohibited activities and provide contact information for reaching the attending faculty on call should the student have any questions or concerns about appropriate supervision, patient safety, or allowed clinical activities.

#### **Section 4.1. Role of the Office of Academic Affairs & the Curriculum Committee**

The Office of Academic Affairs is available as a resource to provide academic support. The DVM Curriculum Committee is responsible for monitoring the clinical program through periodic evaluation of clerkships, including but not limited to review of data from students' evaluations of clerkship experiences. These data are collated and provided to department chairs and members of the Curriculum Committee for their information, review and assessment (see *Section 7.2* for more information).

The effectiveness of every clerkship in meeting stated program and departmental educational goals and objectives is regularly monitored by the Curriculum Committee, with input from the clerkship leaders and personnel in the Office of Academic Affairs. The Committee will periodically review clerkships in depth, as needed, using surveys and other means for collecting feedback from students, faculty, and other service team members. Clerkship leaders may be invited to attend and present at curriculum committee meetings from time-to-time as representatives of the clerkship, when it is reviewed.

Formal evaluations of a clerkship are made by comparing the clerkship's goals and objectives, structure, and accomplishments with the accreditation standards of the Council of Education and various recommendations published by the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges.

Upon review, all clerkships in the clinical DVM curriculum must minimally meet the following [11] quality standards:

### ***Learning Objectives***

1. The clerkship-specific learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the overarching DVM program competencies.
2. Learning objectives are stated clearly and presented early in the clerkship, are written from the learner's perspective, and are prominently located for easy reference.
3. The relationship between learning objectives and clinical activities is clearly stated.

### ***Assessments of Student Learning***

4. Assessments measure the achievement of the stated clerkship specific learning objectives.
5. The grading policy is stated clearly at the beginning of the clerkship.
6. Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' performance on assessments, and their connection to the clerkship grading policy is clearly explained.
7. The clerkship provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback, throughout the clerkship.

### ***Instructional Materials and Content***

8. The instructional materials, content, and methods contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives and/or select, overarching program competencies.
9. The instructional materials, content, and methods represent up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline.

### ***Clinical Activities***

10. All students are provided with ample opportunities to actively participate in clinical activities that promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives and/or select, overarching program competencies.

### ***Student Workload***

11. Student workload as determined by required clinical and instructional activities (clinic duties, in-person or virtual/online rounds, at-home readings, lecture videos, etc.) is consistent with norms and policies of the program.

## **Section 5. Scheduling**

The Office of Academic Affairs schedules all clinical students based on track, availability of clerkship and minimum/maximum number of students permitted to participate. Each clerkship leader will be responsible for setting minimum/maximum numbers and when clerkships will be offered. This should be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs during spring semester each year.

## **Section 6. Clerkship Orientation**

The clerkship leader, or other assigned individual, is responsible for providing all students, either prior to the beginning of the rotation or on the first day of the rotation, with a document containing relevant information about the clerkship. This written document must provide the following:

- Goals and learning objectives of the rotation
- A listing of all reading assignments or other required instructional activities for which the student is responsible during the rotation
- Required textbooks which the student must obtain
- Schedules for rounds, lectures, clinics, examinations and other experiences that the student is expected to attend
- Information about prohibited activities and provision of contact information for reaching the attending faculty on call should the student have any questions or concerns about appropriate supervision, patient safety, or allowed clinical activities
- Expectations regarding the student's level of performance and responsibility, to include attendance policies
- Methods of evaluation, feedback, and grading

### **Section 6.1. Expectations**

Internal clerkships or rotations may fulfill core, track, or elective requirements. These rotations are scheduled based on a student's track and pre-determined student numbers required for the day-to-day operation of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) and in consultation with the Clerkship Leaders. These student numbers must be maintained to provide adequate patient care. Students are not required to submit any additional paperwork prior to participation on an internal rotation. ***Students are expected to be present and available for teaching and learning per their assigned clinical year schedule.***

## Section 7. Evaluation and Assessment Section

### 7.1. Student Grading and Evaluation

A primary role of the clerkship leader is that of overall assessor of students. In most cases, students will interact with a number of faculty members, staff members, interns and residents, and many of them may have only fleeting interactions with the student in which to base final performance evaluations on. It is the responsibility of the clerkship leader, therefore, to gather input from all members of the service team, and pull this information to triangulate a summative decision about individual student performance at the end of the clerkship. It is up to you to certify student readiness to progress in the program.

Assignment of final clerkship scores (via the One45 rubric) is the sole prerogative of the clerkship leader. The clerkship leader should adhere to principles of fairness and clear communication with respect to the assignments of performance scores. In particular, this includes:

1. Consistent treatment of all students in the clerkship
2. Clear criteria, communicated directly to the students via the clerkship syllabus, about the basis on which performance is evaluated and grades are assigned,
3. Grading based on established criteria (in print and/or on VT/VMCVM websites (e.g. One45, Canvas, etc.)) and not on personal conduct or opinions unrelated to academic standards
4. Timely return of graded work to the student
5. Where appropriate (e.g., where there is more than one assessment task), sufficient feedback through the grading process for the student to improve performance on future assignments/testing
6. Attention to fair and reasonable measures of course content and student performance

#### How are students evaluated on clerkships?

Minimally, all students are evaluated within each clerkship using a rubric in the One45 system. The rubric uses a 4-point scale of (1) lacks competency, (2) developing competency, (3) meets minimum day-1 competency, and (4) exceeds minimal competency. This rubric is to be completed for each student at the end of the 3-week rotation. The student must receive a score of 2 or higher in each criterion of the rubric in order to pass the clerkship. The clerkship leader is responsible for determining how grading is conducted and who within the service contributes to grading (e.g. some or all attendings, clinical staff, house officers, etc.), but only one official rubric may be submitted as final record of the student's performance on that rotation.

Here are a couple common ways that student evaluations are handled within clerkships:

1. **Clerkship Leader is set up as 'head evaluator' in One45.** A number of graders can be assigned to the service within One45, through what is called a "best guess list". Each person on that list will receive a rubric to fill out for each student on the block. The rubric forms completed by anyone not set up as a 'head evaluator' are called 'contributor forms' and they all get sent to the head evaluator, but are not visible to the student. The head evaluator is then responsible for considering all contributor forms in making a final scoring decision for each

student by completing a final ‘head elevator form/rubric’ which is shared with the student as a final record of their performance on the rotation.

**2. Single form completed by Clerkship Leader in One45.** In this scenario, clerkship leaders are not set up as head evaluators, and other graders in the services do not complete actual rubric forms within the One45 system. In this scenario, the faculty and staff of the service ideally come together for an evaluation meeting in which they openly discuss each student on the block, and work through the evaluation forms as a group, attempting to come to consensus on each criterion within the rubric. While a meeting would be the ideal in this scenario, other methods to contribute feedback for student evaluations could be done through email or other forms of communication.

### **Can my clerkship include additional assessments beyond this One45 rubric?**

Yes, your clerkship may include additional assessments such as written exams, direct observation of procedural skills (DOPS), or other workplace-based assessments that you may individually standard set, and require students to pass in order to pass your clerkship. The use of any such assessments in making progression decisions must receive prior approval by the DVM Curriculum Committee, and must be outlined on the clerkship syllabus.

### **What happens if a student fails my clerkship?**

If a student receives a score of 1 on any of the criterion within the One45 evaluation rubric, they automatically fail the clerkship. If your clerkship includes additional, curriculum committee approved assessments and a student fails one or more of those, then the student should be provided with a single opportunity to remediate and retake the failed assessment(s). If they fail the remediation attempt, then they will receive a failing grade for the clerkship.

### **You are required to provide a mid-point evaluation if you are going to fail a student.**

If a student is performing poorly in the clerkship (based upon the One45 performance evaluation rubric), which may likely end in the student failing the clerkship, then the clerkship leader is required to provide the student with a formal mid-point evaluation. This mid-point evaluation may be in the form of the One45 evaluation rubric (completed as an interim, formative source of feedback for the student), or the mid-point evaluation may be handled as a meeting with the student. While written documentation of the meeting is strongly recommended, it is not required.

### **Students may appeal their final clerkship grade.**

If a student fails a clerkship they may choose to appeal the final grade. Below are the criteria for a student initiating the grade appeal process.

- There was consistent fair and equitable treatment and evaluation of all students on the clerkship. Clear grading criteria were communicated directly to the student via student handbook, clerkship syllabus and clerkship orientation, regarding how performance and competencies are evaluated.

- Evaluation was based on student performance in each of the required competencies as outlined in the published clerkship rubric. Evaluation should not be based on personal conduct or opinions unrelated to academic standards. Timely feedback was provided on all required paperwork and assessments (if applicable).
- If a student's performance on the clerkship (based upon the One45 performance evaluation rubric) places the student at risk of failing the clerkship, then the clerkship is required to provide the student with a formal remediation evaluation as soon as that risk is identified. For clerkships providing a mid-block evaluation, this may be part of that evaluation. However, if the failing performance becomes apparent after a mid-block evaluation was provided, a second formal evaluation should be provided at that time. The remediation evaluation should be in the form of the One45 evaluation rubric (completed as an interim, formative source of feedback for the student) and should be signed by those in attendance.
- Performance measures were aligned with clerkship objectives.

The appeals process includes 3-levels of appeal. The first level of appeal will be a written appeal from the student to you, the clerkship leader. The appeal will be based on the criteria for principles of fairness and clear communication with the respect to the assignments of grades, listed above. If you uphold the failing grade, the student may select to submit a level-2 appeal to the Associate Dean for Professional Programs (which will be reviewed by the DVM Academic Standards Committee). If the Associate Dean (at the recommendation of the standards committee) upholds the original assigned grade, then the student may select to allow the appeal to rise to a level-3 appeal, which is reviewed by the Dean of the College. If the Dean confirms that both the level-1 and level-2 appeals were handled appropriately then the grade will be upheld and the student may not further appeal the grade.

### **Section 7.2. Clerkship Evaluations in One45**

At the end of each 3-week block, students will complete an evaluation form based upon their experience as a student in the clerkship. The evaluation form includes approximately 11 questions on a scale of 1-6, with 1-being poor and 6-being excellent, followed by a series of open-ended questions. Clerkship evaluation reports are provided to department heads on a quarterly basis, to protect anonymity of the students. Additionally, they are reviewed on a regular basis by the Executive Director of DVM Enrollment and Student Services (acting Director of Clinical Education). Upon quarterly review, any clerkship that receives a mean score of 3.5 or below will be reported to, and may be subject to an in-depth review by the DVM Curriculum Committee.

### **Section 7.3. Instructor Evaluations in One45**

At the end of each 3-week block, students will complete an evaluation of each instructor in a clerkship (faculty, interns and residents). Clerkship Instructor evaluation reports are provided to department chairs on a quarterly basis to protect the anonymity of the students. Please see departmental policies for more details on how instructor evaluations are handled in your department.

## **Section 8. Student Support**

### **Section 8.1. Student Workload and Duty Hour Guidelines**

Across the preclinical curriculum, the number of instructional credit hours in courses, laboratories, small group discussions, and other educational activities are strictly and centrally monitored. However, during clinical rotations, temporal demands vary greatly, depending on the service. In general, in addition to time spent in clinical responsibilities, students need time to study, rest, complete personal tasks, and maintain personal life with family members and significant others. It is therefore recommended that reasonable limits on night/weekend call responsibilities be established to enhance learning (e.g. 1-2 nights per week). Students who are not on call should be permitted to leave the hospital by a time deemed reasonable by the clerkship leader. Actual work performed by students (e.g. rounds, procedures, and patient care) will also vary by rotation. In general, students should have a minimum of one to three new patient work ups per week, with follow-up responsibility for no more than 10 inpatients. Duty hours should not exceed the guidelines established by the VMCVM Student Duty Hours Policy (see attached as an appendix, below).

### **Section 8.2. Student Counseling Services**

There are counselors from Cook Counseling Center available within the college room 237-A which is located in the hallway down from the Academic Affairs Office. Please check with the Office of Academic Affairs for information regarding hours of availability.

A student may request time away from the rotation to keep regularly scheduled appointments either with a counselor within the college or at Cook Counseling Center. A student must submit a standing letter of the need for regular appointments to the Office of Academic Affairs. In addition, the student should submit an excused absence request through the Clerkship Portal.

### **Section 8.3 Accommodations**

All requests for accommodations during clinical year must be requested through VT Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). If approved, the student must provide the Office of Academic Affairs and the clerkship leader with a copy of the letter provided by SSD.

## **Appendix 1. Guidelines for Conduct in Teacher/Learner Relationships**

### **Consensual Relationships**

It should be understood by all members of the university community that consenting amorous relationships that occur in the context of educational or employment supervision and evaluation present serious ethical concerns. The element of power implicit in such relationships between a teacher and student, supervisor and subordinate, or senior and junior colleagues in the same department or unit, create an environment charged with potential conflict of interest.

Relationships between faculty and students are particularly susceptible to exploitation. The respect and trust accorded a professor by a student, as well as the power exercised by the professor in giving praise or blame, grades, recommendations for further study and future employment, make voluntary consent by the student suspect, given the fundamentally asymmetric nature of the relationship.

Faculty and supervisors should be aware that any such involvement with their students or employees make them liable for formal action if a complaint is initiated against them. Even when both parties have consented to the development of such a relationship, it is the faculty member or supervisor, who by virtue of his or her special responsibility will be held accountable for unprofessional behavior. Complaints alleging sexual harassment, as defined by the prohibited acts above, may be filed by either party of the consensual relationship or by an aggrieved party outside the relationship.

## **Appendix 2. Student Appeal of Grade Process**

This procedure has been approved by the College of Veterinary Medicine to supplement the Virginia Tech Policy Statement on Grade Appeal Procedure (Policy Memorandum No. 38), as well as the Graduate and Undergraduate Catalogs.

Assignment of a grade in a clerkship is the sole prerogative of the instructor(s). Faculty should adhere to principles of fairness and clear communication with respect to the assignments of grades. In particular, this includes:

- Consistent treatment of all students in the clerkship
- Clear criteria, communicated directly to the students via the clerkship syllabus, about the basis on which performance is evaluated and grades are assigned
- Grading based on established criteria (in print and/or on VT/VMCVM websites) and not on personal conduct or opinions unrelated to academic standards
- Timely return of graded work to the student
- Where appropriate (e.g., where there is more than one assessment task), sufficient feedback through the grading process for the student to improve performance on future assignments/testing
- Attention to fair and reasonable measures of course content and student performance

Based on VT Policy Statement No. 38, there are up to three levels of appeal of a final course grade. For the DVM curriculum, the Department/Division level of appeal will be provided by the Office of Academic Affairs.

The student is responsible for initiating levels 1 and 2 of written appeal (Instructor and Associate Dean). If a level 2 appeal is denied, the appeal is automatically forwarded to the Dean as a level 3 appeal. The person responsible at each level of appeal will provide the student with written notification of the decision and where appropriate, a copy will be sent to the Course Leader. If a grade change is made at any level, the person responsible will send written notification to the Academic Affairs Office Manager, and the student's academic record will be updated after verifying with the Associate Dean for Professional Programs.

### **Level 1 Grade Appeal: Instructor Assigning the Grade**

Within 10 working days of written notification of the final course grade, a student may file a written grade appeal to the instructor assigning the grade if the student believes the grade was calculated incorrectly, was not assigned in accordance with established criteria, or was assigned in an arbitrary or capricious manner.

## **Level 2 Grade Appeal: Associate Dean**

Within 10 working days of written notification of the level 1 appeal, the student may file a second level of appeal to the Associate Dean, who will refer the request to the Standards Committee. If the Standards Committee has already rendered judgment on the student pertaining to dismissal or reinstatement in the same semester as the course for which the grade being appealed, the Associate Dean will form an ad hoc committee consisting of four faculty not providing instruction or assessment in the course/clerkship being appealed. Either committee's responsibility is to ascertain whether the grading standards were clearly stated in the syllabus, the grade was assigned in accordance with established criteria, and assigned in a fair manner consistent with performance of required work and assessment of other students in the course. Either committee is advisory to the Associate Dean. The Associate Dean has the prerogative to send the appeal back to the Committee for additional fact finding on the issues raised by the student or Committee in the appeal.

## **Level 3 Grade Appeal: Dean**

If a level 2 appeal is denied, the Associate Dean automatically forwards the levels 1 and 2 material to the Dean unless directed otherwise by the student appealing the grade. The student may forward to the Dean a response to the level 2 report within 21 calendar days of receipt of the report. The purpose of the third level of appeal is to ascertain whether appropriate due process has been

followed in the first two levels of appeal. The Dean has the prerogative to send the appeal back to the Committee for additional fact finding on the issues raised by the student or Committee in the appeal. The Dean's decision is final.

## **Appeal of a Grade that has Resulted in Dismissal**

If the grade(s) being appealed has (have) resulted in dismissal from the DVM program, the student is not permitted to continue in the program. If the appeal is denied and a student is dismissed, tuition refunds will follow university policies and procedures.

### **Appendix 3. Student Duty Hours Policy**

Student work hours during clinical rotations should enable them to participate and learn while also providing time for rest. Every clerkship should provide a supportive educational environment with a commitment to patient safety and student well-being. Accomplishment of the core clinical objectives should be feasible within the designated time frame of the rotation.

Using the below policies as a framework, students should advocate for themselves to maintain physical and mental well-being. The following protocols regarding DVM Student Duty Hours for clinical clerkships are to be applied in the VMCVM Teaching Hospitals:

1. Adequate time for rest and recovery should be provided. Any student on-site for 18 consecutive hours or more must be given a minimum consecutive ten-hour break between shifts.
2. If combined time away from clinics does not equal greater than 8 consecutive hours, then adequate time for rest and recovery must be provided.
3. Students must be provided with one day in seven free from all clinical responsibilities, averaged over the course of the length of the rotation. This should include on-site and on-call duties, as well as mandatory in-class time. Excused absences and personal days will be counted as free day(s). Total free days cannot exceed three (3) working days total over the course of the clerkship and the time off will be agreed upon by the clerkship leader or clinician on duty.
4. On-call shifts must occur no more frequently than one shift in three days, averaged over the course of the length of the rotation.

#### **Footnotes:**

- a. On-site = any work done within the veterinary facility or field in connection to the rotation and away from the student's home.
- b. On-call = student is no longer on-site, however is available to work by being contacted by rotation leaders to report to on-site duty.
- c. It is not the responsibility of faculty or staff to monitor student hours.
- d. Students may ask faculty/staff if the policy can be applied, but can also opt to stay longer if they wish

## **Appendix 4: Student Injuries**

The Virginia Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine has long had the policy that veterinary students learn to be veterinarians by participating in the care of patients under faculty supervision. There is an inherent and assumed risk working within the veterinary profession. While every effort will be made to provide appropriate training and safeguards for students so that these risks are minimized, they cannot be totally eliminated. Students assumes responsibility for all health costs associated with participation in the veterinary training program, including injuries. The college will not reimburse for any medical expenses.

Students are required to participate in patient care as one of their fundamental responsibilities during their veterinary education. Students are expected at all times to follow universal safety precautions in order to safeguard their own health and safety. Under certain rare and extenuating circumstances where the risk to the student significantly outweighs either the educational benefit to the student or the health-care benefit to the patient, a supervising faculty member may suggest that a student be exempted from, or a student may ask permission from the supervising faculty to be excused from participation in certain aspects of patient care.

All student injuries must be reported using the student injury report form on the Intranet. The reports must be submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs. No medical advice should be given to the student other than to strongly encourage them to seek medical attention in non-life-threatening situations.