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## Mesa Community College partners with Midwestern University to enhance experience for vet tech students

 Graham Bosch  1 hour ago  5 min read  Add comment

Mesa Community College is teaming up with the Midwestern University College of Veterinary Medicine to provide more opportunities for veterinary technician students.

“We were privileged enough to get the dean of the [Midwestern University] vet school on our advisory board, and when he came out and saw our program... he wanted to see if there was a way we could partner up to help our students get the best experiences possible,” said Dr. Kimberly Focht, director of the Veterinary Technology Program at MCC.

The MCC vet tech program is accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association, which requires students to participate in four internships: small-animal medicine, large-animal medicine, specialty medicine and emergency medicine. It is one of only five nationally-accredited vet tech programs in Arizona.

“We boast the highest pass rate on the national board,” Focht said. “We have a 94.4 percent pass rate, and the national average for passing the VTNE — the Veterinary Technician National Exam — is about 59 percent. We’re very proud of our students and how well they do on their testing, and the industry in general seeks out our students for employment.”

The two-year program has competitive admittance as well. Only 24 applicants are accepted into the first-year group each fall semester, and usually at least 50 to 60 apply. There are 42 students in the program now.

“Students have to watch their GPAs and make sure they have animal care experience in some form, whether that’s working for a groomer or a vet clinic [or] a rescue group,” Focht said.

MCC finds opportunities for its students by creating partnerships throughout the Valley. The college works with Mayo Research Clinic, which has internships on lab animal medicine, as well as the Arizona Humane Society and [Maricopa County](#) Animal Care and Control.

The college's [latest partnership](#) with the Midwestern University vet school will provide MCC students the internship that is often most difficult to come by, which is large-animal medicine — specifically, cows.

“We’re required by our accreditation to train our students in handling cattle — bovine — and the [university’s] vet school has a teaching herd of cattle which allowed us to be able to formulate a bovine skills lab with their instructors for our students, versus us having to try to find cattle available — a dairy or somebody that owns cattle that would be willing for our students to work with those animals,” Focht said. “It turned out to be kind of a win-win situation for both of us.”

The benefit for Midwestern University is that instructors will get the first look at MCC vet tech students in case the students have an interest in teaching, Focht said. As for the students, the mutual exposure may be helpful for veterinary medicine and vet tech students alike, she said.

“We’re in our infancy, so we haven’t sent our students over for internship yet; our partnership is very new,” Focht added. “Their veterinarian medical students would be working alongside our vet tech students in their internships, so that would give them an opportunity to work along other students and be able to form relationships that way, too.”

The vet school is happy to have the “pick of the litter” when it comes to interns — and future vet techs, Focht said.

“Well-trained veterinary technicians are at the heart of the animal health care team, and we truly appreciate the opportunity to work with Dr. Focht and her students,” said Dr. Thomas Graves, dean of the Midwestern University College of Veterinary Medicine.

In total, vet tech students are required to work with the six most commonly-seen animal groups in order to be nationally-certified: cats, dogs, rabbits, rats, equine ([horses](#)) and ruminants (goats, sheep, cattle, etc.).

[Maricopa County Animal Care and Control](#) helps on two of those fronts by providing dogs and cats each August for teaching purposes.

“They come to live with us for the nine months of the school year, and in that time frame our students do all of their wellness care and medical attention,” Focht said. “They get all of their wellness vaccines, their wellness testing. Our students are assigned to them for their behavior project, and [the dogs] get to learn to walk properly on a leash and how to sit and stay and be well-mannered pups before we spay and neuter them in the spring.”

Vet tech students perform dental cleanings and insert microchips on the animals before they are put up for adoption in May and sent to their “forever homes.”

“The pet industry in general generates billions of dollars every year, and that includes food sales and toy sales and all of that,” Focht said. “We have a very robust veterinary medicine industry in the Phoenix area, including specialties.”

The veterinary specialty industry has grown significantly in the past 20 to 25 years, Focht said. When she graduated vet school in 1995 there was only one emergency veterinary

“If an animal needs something more than a [general] practitioner can do, we can send them for just about anything that your human doctor would send you for,” Focht said.

Specialty and emergency vets need certified vet techs, and they want ones with the training, experience and skills necessary for the job, she said.

“Our students have more options available to them now than they did even 10 years ago as a certified vet tech,” Focht said.

Midwestern University is the largest employer of certified vet techs in the state, so the partnership is a good way for students to see the job first-hand and decide if that’s somewhere they might want to work, she said.



**Graham Bosch**

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