



DOUBLE DUTY Higher education offered a way for Allen to continue to improve her skills while also teaching students.



CAREER EXPLORATIONS

A Veterinary Nursing Career in Higher Education

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When I graduated from National College in Rapid City, South Dakota, as an animal health technician in 1984, little did I know how my career would evolve over time. Like many young graduates, I believed I would work in a private veterinary practice forever. I was unaware of the many opportunities that would come my way.



When I chose my externship site, it was with the thought I would stay there forever as I hate to move! This externship became my first job at a mixed animal practice in West Point, Nebraska. After about 2.5 years at the practice, I realized I was bored and started looking for a new challenge. I applied for a job at Purdue University in the large animal clinic. It was a 2-day interview process where I had to give a presentation. I chose to talk about the role of the veterinary technician in cesarean sections in the sow. I got the job and moved to Indiana a few months later.

In 1986, I began my career at Purdue as a food animal technologist. I worked with an amazing veterinarian, Harold Amstutz, who taught me so much about a positive doctor–veterinary technician relationship. At the same time, I was being mentored by the other amazing technicians in the Purdue Large Animal Hospital: Harry Latshaw, MS, RVT, and Pat Navarre, RVT. Harry taught me everything about anesthesia, and Pat, as one of the founders of NAVTA, modeled for me the importance of being involved in professional organizations. Purdue has both a DVM program and a veterinary technology program, and so the opportunity to work with both types of students was invigorating and a challenge.

Working on the large animal clinic floor was not that different from working in private practice, except for the extra people and extra time that everything took to accomplish due to the teaching of students. Sharing my knowledge and skills while continuing to be challenged in my growth was amazing. If you have the desire to work at a college of veterinary medicine or a veterinary nursing/technician program, the best way to stay informed is checking out the institution employment websites. You can also reach out to people who work in these places and ask to be a guest speaker, share your passion for the profession, and demonstrate your ability to talk to a group of students. I always encourage people to network at continuing education events like VMX, WVC, or your state VMA/VTa conferences.

After 3 years, there was a reorganization of the veterinary hospital, and I became a large animal surgical technologist. I was working with all the large animal species that came to the hospital. I was increasing my skills in anesthesia and surgical nursing while at the same time teaching students in these roles as well. It was during this time when I found my love of anesthesia. In the early 1990s, Purdue did not have anesthesiologists, so it was the technician's

responsibility to care for these patients. Another great example of the veterinarian–technician relationship was demonstrated during a late-night colic surgery where the veterinarian showed his confidence in my anesthesia abilities by telling me to quit bugging him and to do my job (anesthesia) while he did his (surgery). It showed me he believed in my abilities and was confident that I would take care of his patient.

In 1995, I began my journey to obtain my bachelor's degree in business administration. There were no bachelor's degree programs in veterinary technology at that time. I thought the bachelor of science in business administration degree fit well if I ever left Purdue and wanted to be a practice manager. During that time, a position that opened at Purdue presented me with an idea of my next career step. The director of central supply was responsible for the purchase of disposable goods, sterilization for the entire veterinary teaching hospital, and supervised 4 staff members. I applied for and got the job! I learned so much in this position: first, that I don't really like supervising people; second, how to start an inventory control program; third, what a Certified Registered Central Service Technician is; and, finally, that I continually love to be challenged to learn new things.

In 1999, I was recruited by another amazing veterinarian, Robert (Pete) Bill, to work in the veterinary technology program and to help start Purdue's Veterinary Technology Distance Learning Program. I continued to hone my skills in writing, communication, and thinking outside the box. How do you teach hands-on skills in an online program? How do you build community in online education? How do you show online students they are a part of the university and the College of Veterinary Medicine family? It was a challenge, but I loved it! In 2001, I went back to school again to obtain my master's of science in educational technology and completed it in 2005. During this time, I helped create the 35 didactic courses and 17 clinical mentorships that became the AVMA-accredited veterinary technology distance learning program.

In March 2018, I became the assistant director for academic advising for Purdue's veterinary technology program. At that time, there were only 2 of us advising our residential and distance learning students. Also that year, Purdue changed the name of the program from "veterinary technology" to "veterinary nursing" in support of NAVTA's Veterinary Nurse Initiative. As the



veterinary nursing distance learning program grew, we hired more instructors and advisors to support our students. The profession of academic advising in many ways reminds me of the veterinary technology profession. People don't know what we do and don't recognize our contributions, and our pay does not reflect what we are worth. We both suffer from burnout and compassion fatigue, and we all absolutely love what we do. I did not know when I started as a full-time advisor that the skills I had learned over the years as a veterinary technician would transfer to this new role. I listened, offered guidance, educated, and most of all supported the amazing human beings around me.

Over the years I have been an active member of NAVTA, the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators, and the NAVC veterinary technician program chair, and have served on the NAVC board of directors. I was the second veterinary nurse/technician

to be president of the NAVC and am grateful to have been nominated to the board by Lynne Harris, RVT, who was the first veterinary nurse/technician NAVC board president. I cannot stress enough the importance of networking, stepping outside of your comfort zone to try new things, and engaging with those around you. It brought me many opportunities in my life that I would not have had, such as traveling and speaking internationally about this profession that I love. It is important to find mentors and supporters but equally important to be a mentor/supporter. Share your knowledge, lend your support, and help others be better than you!

I retired from Purdue in June 2023, but I have not quit working for the profession that chose me in the mid-1980s. I have edited the 11th edition of the *Clinical Textbook for Veterinary Technicians and Nurses*, I have helped with the NAVC's inaugural veterinary nurse/technician-specific event, HiVE, in Austin, Texas, and I have continued to grow and learn more each day.

We are so fortunate in the United States to have the support of our profession—many countries do not have the legally recognized profession of veterinary nursing/technology. I have talked to international veterinarians who say the same thing now that U.S. veterinarians said during the 70s and 80s: "What will I do if I let my veterinary technicians do all these tasks?" I smile and explain that without them, we are nothing. We need each other, and pets need us all working at the top of our skill set. **TVN**

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Paige has been a veterinary technician for 40 years and loves the profession that "chose her." She graduated from National College with her AAS in animal health technology in 1984, a BS in business administration from Indiana Wesleyan in 1995, and her MS in educational technology in 2005. She is currently enjoying her life consulting, sharing her passion for her profession, and being Granny to her 5 grandchildren. She and her husband love to camp in their 5th-wheel and travel internationally as often as possible.