



TRENDS IN VETERINARY NURSING

ASPCA Training Programs for Veterinary Nursing Students

Maya Gupta, PhD, and Shannon Kelly, MS

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, New York, New York

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) has been at the forefront of animal rescue and protection since its founding as the first animal welfare organization in North America in 1866. For more than 150 years, the ASPCA has been the leading voice in animal welfare, bringing the critical protection of animals to the forefront of society.



The modern challenges facing animals are complex, but the ASPCA tackles these challenges head-on and in innovative ways, including providing vital veterinary care; responding to disasters; pioneering adoption and behavioral rehabilitation programs; conducting critical animal welfare research; and partnering with and supporting shelters, veterinarians, and others who share the ASPCA's commitment to a safer, more compassionate world for animals.

THE ASPCA'S TRAINING PHILOSOPHY

Another key part of this strategy is training law enforcement, shelter, and veterinary professionals, whom the ASPCA recognizes as being essential partners in promoting animal welfare. The core goal of the ASPCA's Veterinary Training Initiative is to shape veterinary professionals to make the greatest impact on animals in their chosen practice setting, their communities, and the veterinary field more broadly through exposure to the ASPCA's specific knowledge, skills, and philosophies.

The ASPCA externship, internship, residency, and fellowship programs bring the organization's unique mission-driven lens, and the expertise derived from working with communities nationwide, into the learning experience for students and professionals who are interested in animal sheltering, cruelty, and access to veterinary care.

Currently, the ASPCA offers 17 training programs for veterinary professionals and students, including veterinary nursing students, in its home base of New York and other locations across the United States (including a remote externship in toxicology).

ASPCA ANIMAL HOSPITAL VETERINARY TECHNICIAN INTERNSHIP, NEW YORK CITY

Established in 2007, the Veterinary Technician Internship at the ASPCA Animal Hospital in New York City currently accommodates 2 to 4 students at a time, for an experience that can vary in length from 10 to 16 weeks, depending on students' school requirements. The nonprofit ASPCA Animal Hospital provides high-quality medical care to animals belonging to the public, as well as to shelter animals and those who have been victims of cruelty.

Learning from a veterinary nursing staff of 32 licensed veterinary technicians (LVTs), interns experience small animal medicine (e.g., internal medicine, digital radiography, dentistry, soft tissue surgery), alongside exposure to shelter medicine, care of animals involved in cruelty cases through the ASPCA–NYPD partnership, and the ASPCA's work providing veterinary care to households experiencing financial challenges. Interns also spend 2 weeks with the ASPCA's community medicine team to learn high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter. A total of 148 students have completed the program to date.

"At the heart of our internship is a commitment to hands-on medical training, offering interns opportunities to attend lectures, participate in medical rounds, and collaboratively practice CPR responses as a team," said Jennifer Coyle, LVT, ASPCA senior director of nursing. "What sets our program apart is its unique approach—providing personalized mentorship as interns rotate through various hospital departments ... and training at our community medicine locations, specializing in high-volume spay and neuter procedures."

The ASPCA's LVTs are dedicated to creating a safe and enriching learning environment, ensuring interns gain confidence, improve their skills during the program, and cultivate a lifelong learning mindset that will serve them throughout their careers.

"Through these immersive and comprehensive real-world experiences, the next generation of veterinary professionals begin to understand why access to veterinary care is needed across our communities," Coyle said, "and they become part of our efforts in making that happen."

Irene Li, LVT, completed the program in 2022 and joined the ASPCA's full-time veterinary nursing staff later that year. Irene said her internship experience was an effective way to learn how to apply her knowledge.

"All my LVT trainers were exceptionally knowledgeable, patient, and encouraging," Li said. "They gave me the confidence to learn hands-on, to ask questions, and to just try."

Li said the level of patient care provided by the ASPCA drew her to work there after completing the internship.

"Not only do they take the physical wellbeing of their patients seriously, they care about the patient's mental



wellbeing, utilizing gentle handling techniques to make each patient feel comfortable and avoid causing them to feel more stress,” Li said. “I felt that the ASPCA would be the ideal place for me to continue learning and become the best LVT I can be.”

ASPCA PEE WEE VETERINARY TECHNICIAN EXTERNSHIP, LOS ANGELES

The ASPCA launched a new veterinary nurse/technician externship program in Los Angeles in 2023, creating a rotation for Platt College veterinary technology students to train with the ASPCA’s community medicine team. This rotation focuses on cats through the ASPCA’s Pee Wee program, which diverts kittens from shelters and prepares them to enter kitten foster care and ultimately for adoption into loving homes once they are old enough to be placed.

Working 1-on-1 with the ASPCA’s veterinary nurses, students get hands-on time with neonate kittens to



SCAN THE QR CODE

to learn more about the full variety of training programs offered by the ASPCA for veterinary professionals and veterinary nursing students.

understand their specific medical and nutritional needs and learn to bottle- and syringe-feed. With older kittens, students learn to administer vaccines, microchips, dewormer medications, and other services. All animal handling follows Fear Free practices, and students learn to provide services without assistance.

There are opportunities to interact with foster volunteers to provide postvaccine or postmedication instructions; to observe high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter at the ASPCA’s City of Los Angeles Spay/Neuter Clinic; and to learn about community cat populations and trap-neuter-return-monitor programs through the ASPCA’s hands-on community cat efforts.

“One thing I love about this program is the amount of hands-on time students get with felines,” said Arlene Hall, RVT, ASPCA interim lead veterinary technician at the LA Kitten Foster Program. “Students gain valuable experience working with kitties of all ages and temperaments, all while using Fear Free practices. Also, being on-site at an animal shelter reduces the stigma surrounding shelters and shelter medicine.”

Through the ASPCA’s partnership with Los Angeles county’s animal care centers, there are also opportunities to learn about feline behavior in the shelter, and even to get a bit of “dog time” through observing playgroups, learning about in-kennel behavior, and observing medical intake with Los Angeles county shelter veterinary nurses.

“It has been so great to see RVT students have the opportunity to learn from passionate, experienced community medicine RVTs,” said Casey Connors, DVM, ASPCA medical director of community medicine in the western region. “These students have learned about a side of veterinary medicine many of them had never heard of or considered as a career path. I’m confident they will take the lessons learned into their careers and hopefully employ some of the philosophies they learned here at the ASPCA.” **TVN**

Maya Gupta

Dr. Gupta earned her bachelor’s degree from Columbia University and her master’s and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology from the University of Georgia. Her primary area of expertise is animal cruelty, including its connections to other forms of violence. As the ASPCA’s senior director of research, Dr. Gupta oversees the development and dissemination of applied research on a broad spectrum of topics in animal welfare. She also co-leads the Veterinary Training Initiative and C.A.R.E.S. cruelty training project at the ASPCA. She previously served as executive director of Ahimsa House and executive director of the Animals & Society Institute.



Shannon Kelly

Kelly earned her bachelor’s degree from Delaware Valley University and her master’s degree in anthrozoology from Canisius University. As the ASPCA’s administrative manager of the Veterinary Training Initiative, she leads projects that improve systems and processes, strengthen alignment between programs, and communicate key messages about the ASPCA training programs to external and internal audiences. She has previously worked in management roles at the Buffalo Zoo, SPCA of Central New York, Banfield, and Northeast Veterinary Referral Center.

