

What and how students want to learn

The New Generation – a new way of learning?

Anil Tüerer¹, Emma van Rooijen²

President¹ and Secretary-General² of the International Veterinary Students Association (IVSA), Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Istanbul University, president@ivsa.org & secretarygeneral@ivsa.org

The International Veterinary Students' Association (IVSA) is a student run, not-for-profit organisation that represents over 30,000 students from over 60 different countries. One of its core goals is to raise the overall standard of veterinary education worldwide. IVSA works to bring veterinary students together through the exchange of ideas, knowledge and culture through all its different projects and events. As part of its mission of improving the standard of veterinary education worldwide, IVSA actively supports and enables students to improve their education on different topics, such as animal welfare, one health and veterinary education.

Since IVSA can access its network of veterinary students easily, a survey has been sent to its members with questions on their opinion of their education. The aim of the survey is to find out if the opinion of the new generation of vet students complies with the statements that have been made by others about this new generation. It follows a survey previously made by FVE and IVSA with the aim to better understand the career distribution globally for graduates.

A word often used to describe this new generation is 'Millennials'. These 'Millennials' are those who are born between 1980 and 2000 roughly. This generation, just like the generations before, differs in mindset and characteristics from their predecessors. Different people (teachers, writers, politicians, parents, etc.) have different opinions about these changes in the new generation. Some see it as something negative and perceive a loss and lack of skills and knowledge, some see more positive changes. But how do the 'Millennials' see themselves and what do they think about these different opinions?

These earlier mentioned changes in mindset and characteristics call for a change in the way we learn. The methods of teaching will no longer be as efficient and successful as they have been for the generations before. What approaches and developments in educational methods will help these students of the new generation to reach their potential, to thrive and to be successful, and of course to learn? What do students want to see as a change in their education and how they learn?

There are many stigmas associated with 'Millennials', some of which have been given by the older generations.

Negative traits. Millenials have...	How it should be interpreted. Millenials have...
A need to receive immediate feedback	More focus on reflection and self-improvement
Lack of professional boundaries'	A bigger sense of sympathy, more interest in others and understand that you can learn from each other
'A sense of entitlement' lack of critical thinking skills'	A more positive way of thinking, more optimistic
'Unrealistic expectations'	Self-esteem and self-worth
'Higher level of parental involvement'	Bigger dreams because more is possible in this age and time
'An expected "how to" guide to succeed in and Out of the classroom'	Higher parental involvement provides a strong environment and more opportunities to become successful
'The want to reach success with little effort'	A better sense of efficiency and teamwork. Let's not reinvent the wheel every day

This generation of students is more diverse and adaptable, due to more exposure to the outside world through their own experiences or media/internet. They are more interested in personalised learning; they want to understand the purpose of the courses and the curriculum. They need challenging assignment and more visual teaching methods using more multimedia. Students expect their teachers to motivate them and understand them.

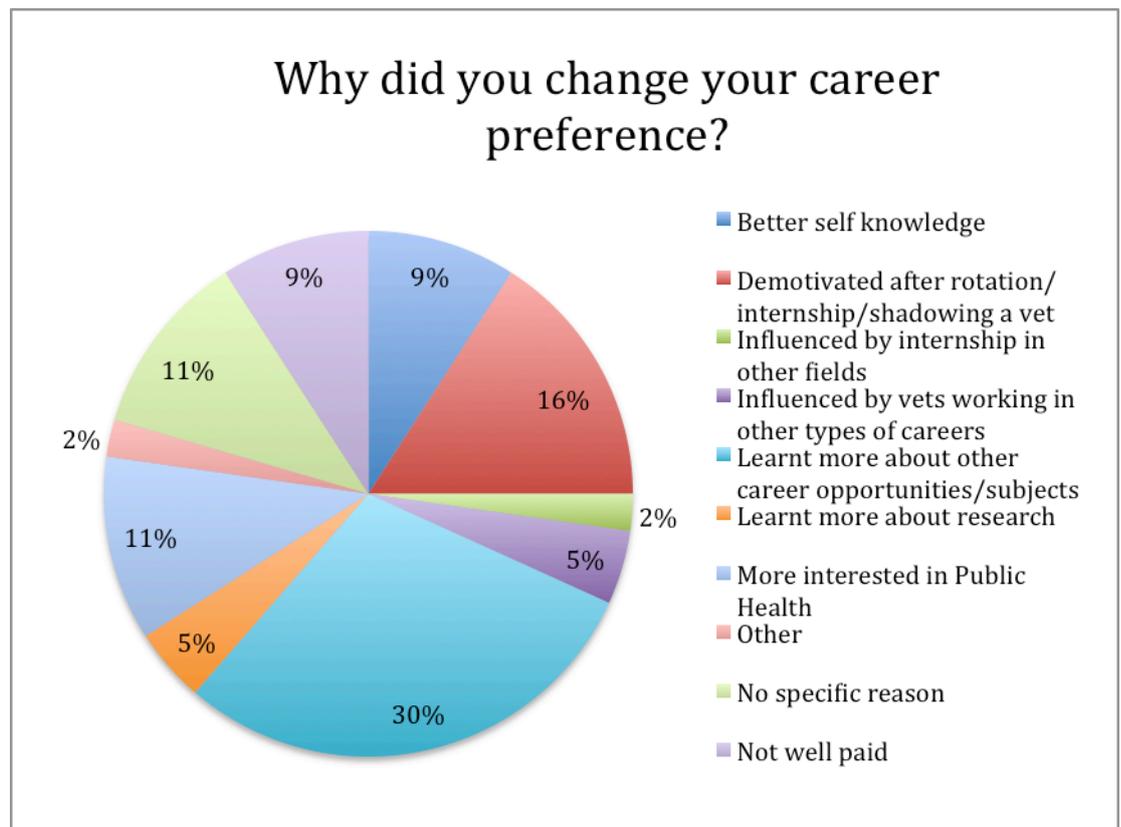
Students have always thought about the future but current students focus more on what will make them happy and what job they would enjoy. The new generation is more diverse and therefore is in need of a more individual teaching method as opposed to the traditional, conservative teaching methods. To explain; who is now, or has been, exactly where they imagined themselves while they were still studying? Why is it a bad thing to move away from clearly outlined paths to achieve something specific? Isn't it better to spend time finding out along the way which path would work best for you and would make you enjoy your job most?

A change should not only be made in the way of teaching but also in what will be taught to the students. Yes, veterinary students are interested in veterinary medicine but they are also interested in the bigger picture. Students want to be engaged in public health through interdisciplinary collaborations.

We had 297 participants from all over the world particularly from Europe (60%) and Asia (20%) with an even distribution of students from each year of study. The majority of survey results are presented below. One of the key findings is a change in behaviour in the new generation of veterinary students with an overwhelming preference to choose a career they will be happy in (90%) rather than gaining financial success. Students are now becoming more aware of the diversity of careers out there, particularly with a strong interest in One Health. However, 75% of participants maintained their motivation to be a practicing veterinarian, with others interested in veterinary public health, research and NGO careers.

38.5% of students said their career preference had changed since being at vet school, and reasons for this included better self-knowledge and awareness of career opportunities from school or their own research and experiences. Figure 1 represents student responses on reasons for career preference change.

Figure 1



Students mainly study through reading their notes (70%) but others said they prefer group learning and using visual aids (40%). There is an increase in the use of online resources such as Vetstream. IVSA actively encourages veterinary schools to regularly source feedback from students on their learning or 'how they feel about vet school so far' and suggestions should be proactively acted upon. A happier student equals a more successful student!

Greater emphasis on communication within the veterinary school on their expectations of students and listening to how and what role students perceive or value they have in vet school. Continue to provide feedback to students and provide support on the more challenging aspects of vet school. Feedback is no good unless the necessary support network is there to facilitate the student's progress to be competent in all the necessary skills.

Student wellness is an important topic and more emphasis on mindfulness, communication and support to students must be provided. Starting a wellness support network in the school and encouraging regular tutor meetings for students can reduce stress, anxiety and provide better communication on vet schools expectations to students. Universities can proactively encourage students to broaden their thinking and participate in extracurricular activities.

The predominant teaching method used in education is lectures (figure 2). From the survey, students prefer more Practicals, small group teaching and interactive seminars. IVSA encourages a shift to use more multimodal teaching methods. Small group seminars provide greater lecturer-student interaction and can prove to provide greater student engagement. It will also allow understanding of subject areas students need more support in. This can increase academic performance and improve classroom experience.

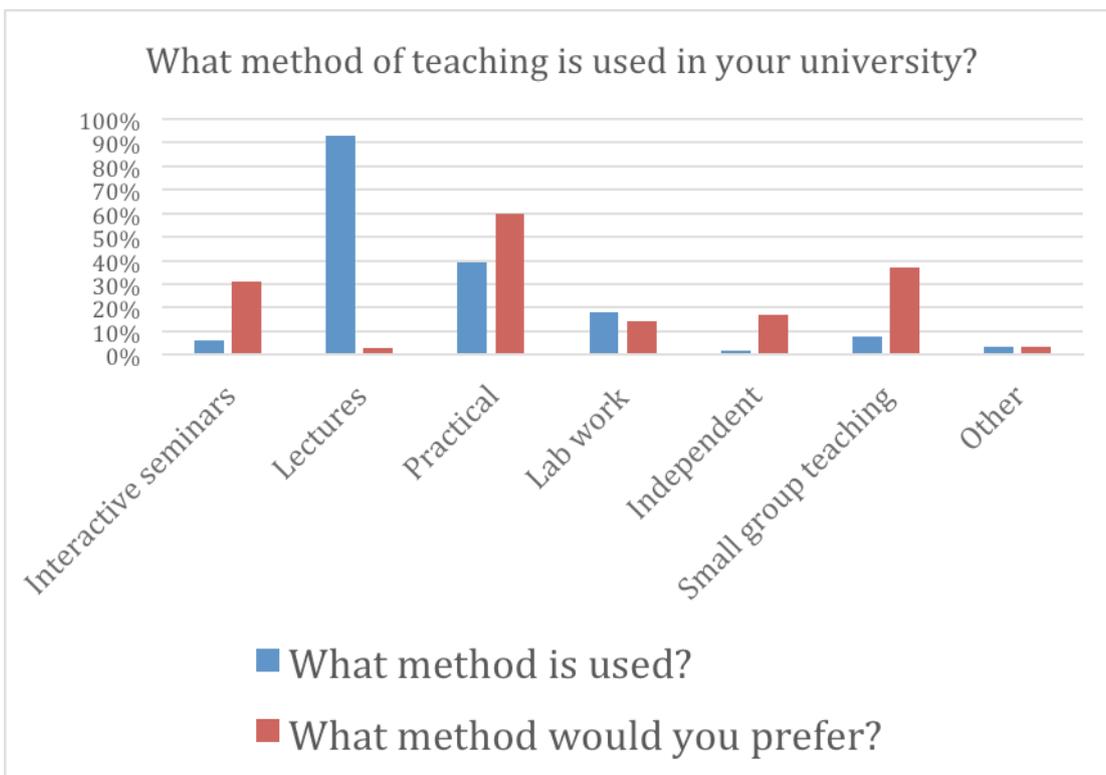
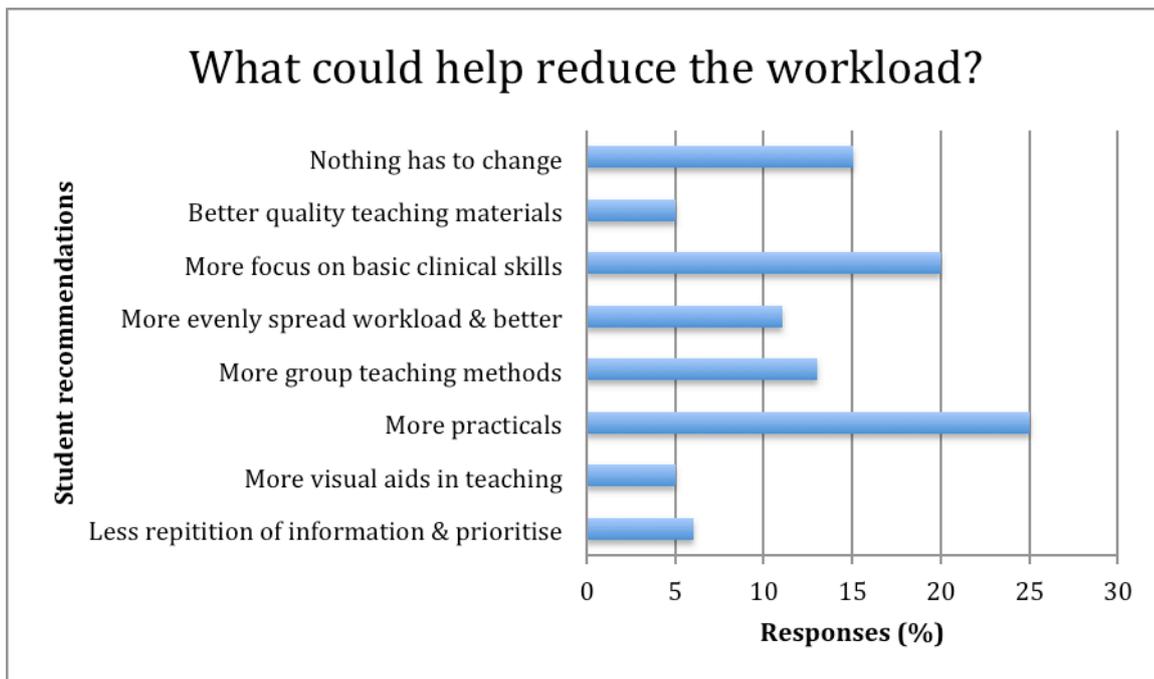


Figure 2

70% of students agreed the workload in the veterinary course is excessive, with 9% agreeing an uneven distribution of workload. As referenced in figure 3, suggestions for improvement include more Practicals, better communication between departments, less repetition, more personalisation and prioritisation of subject teaching, more focus on important subjects, particularly applied knowledge and soft skills. Figure 2

Figure 3



IVSA encourages veterinary schools to use more motivational and inspiring teachers and tutors with an increasing interest in student wellness. Universities should be using creative, adaptive and balanced teaching methods to the learning/cognitive abilities of each individual student in the class. IVSA encourages sending surveys to students on how they learn and present lectures on different learning methods. Following on, universities can then adapt the predominant teaching method to the learning abilities of the students. From this survey students prefer better communicating teachers, more inspirational tutors and more practical and modern teaching methods.

In conclusion, students' interests are changing and what they are exposed to is changing too. Education should be as evolved and adaptive as the veterinary profession is to our developing society.

Reference:

Jodie Eckleberry-Hunt, PhD, ABPP Jennifer Tucciarone, MD. (2011). The Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching "Generation Y". *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*. 3 (4), 458-461.