Veterinary Forensic Pathology Fellowship Minimum Standards Guidelines

Scope: This document outlines the minimum requirements for post-residency training in veterinary forensic pathology (VFP). Described herein are requirements of the trainee, trainers, facilities, and institutions involved in conferring the title of Fellow, VFP. American College of Veterinary Pathologists recognizes the need for additional, specialized training in the form of focused management of medicolegal cases to ensure veterinary forensic cases are meeting current legal and scientific standards. ACVP recognizes and supports this fellowship program but does not have oversight or authority over this fellowship process.

Normative References:
International Veterinary Forensic Sciences Association, Veterinary Forensic Postmortem Examination Standards, First Edition

I. Objective
The objectives of Fellowship Training in VFP are to:

A. provide skills and competencies in forensic postmortem casework that allow the successful candidate to formulate and communicate balanced and reasonable expert opinions on cause of death and related medicolegal issues.

B. prepare its graduates to successfully interact with members of other disciplines inherently involved in forensic casework. These include forensic scientists, law enforcement, humane investigators, and veterinarians.

C. develop Fellows that will be able to provide a leadership role in the veterinary, legal, and lay communities in matters pertaining to VFP, and be well-versed in the judicial process and provide scientifically valid expert witness testimony that can be understood by persons with little or no medical training.

D. ensure that Fellows have acquired a fluency in veterinary medicolegal death investigations.

II. Definitions

A. Case: An individual animal submitted for forensic examination for which a full evaluation is performed, including needed ancillary analyses, and a diagnosis is given, as determined by the Primary Mentor. See Appendix I regarding the type and number of VFP cases that are to be completed during fellowship training.
B. **Fellow:** A diplomate of the ACVP who has completed additional recommended training in veterinary forensic pathology and has passed the VFP credentialing process (see Section VIII).

C. **Fellow Candidate:** An individual who has passed or is qualified to take the board examinations of the ACVP and is currently in a VFP fellowship.

D. **Fellow Candidate Clinic Week:** A minimum of four (4) full working days within one calendar week spent in clinic. Activities during this time may include wet laboratories, research, or clinically related activities as specified by the mentor, Fellowship, and institution.

E. **Fellow (Emeritus):** A Fellow or Founding Fellow who is retired may apply for Emeritus status. The applicant must submit to the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee a letter of justification for the change in status. Approval of Emeritus status is at the discretion of the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee. This status does not have to maintain maintenance of fellowship requirements.

F. **Fellowship:** A curriculum of additional, specialized training in an area of interest for board-certified veterinarians who have finished residency training. Fellowships follow and are independent from residency programs. The anatomic pathology residency and VFP Fellowship training periods may not overlap.

G. **Founding Fellow:** An individual who has received Fellow status as a result of information that was submitted, reviewed and approved during the open call for Founding Fellows (see Section V, A).

H. **Mentor Work Week:** A minimum of three (3) working days wherein the Primary Mentor is on site with the Fellow Candidate. Outside this period, the Mentor remains available to the Fellow Candidate for consultation by the most efficient and appropriate means. This may include a personal visit, virtual meeting, or by telecommunication. The emphasis is that the Mentor must support the Fellow Candidate and ensure high quality case management.

I. **Primary Mentor:** A Fellow or Founding Fellow in good standing with the ACVP who directly oversees the training and casework of the Fellow Candidate.

### III. VFP Fellowship Review Committee

A. Fellowships focused on veterinary forensic education will be overseen by the VFP Fellowship Review Committee.

B. The VFP Fellowship Review Committee shall be composed of no fewer than 10 VFP Fellows or VFP Founding Fellows.
C. The Review Committee shall have a Chair and Vice-Chair and a Secretary who shall record minutes of each Subcommittee meeting.

D. The VFP Fellowship Review Committee shall have no fewer than 5 members within task groups focused on the following activities:
   1. Compiling and administering the annual competency examination for prospective Fellows
   2. Establishment and regular review of Fellowship training curricula
   3. Review and documentation of active VFP Fellows including review of maintenance of certification applications.

IV. Roles

A. Fellow Candidate
   1. Fellow Candidates have been engaged in an anatomic pathology residency and therefore should begin their Fellowships with certain core pathology competencies.
   2. The Fellow Candidate must have completed the ACVP credentialing process (i.e. credentials application approved) prior to beginning a Fellowship in VFP. It is not necessary to be board certified before beginning the Fellowship; however, it is necessary to be certified as a Diplomate of the ACVP before earning the title of Fellow, VFP.

B. Primary Mentor
   1. The Fellowship in VFP is considered an intensively mentored experience. This may require varying levels of direct (i.e., at the postmortem table) supervision at different phases of the Fellow Candidate’s training.
   2. During the examination of cases, the mentor may be physically present in the postmortem examination room. If the Fellow Candidate possesses sufficient training to proceed alone, the mentor must be available for appropriate consultation to approve overall management of the case.
   3. An individual Primary Mentor can be a mentor for no more than one Fellow Candidate at a time.
   4. Primary Mentors must maintain certification according to ACVP organization criteria.
   5. The Fellow Candidate must receive mentored assistance or observation on a case-by-case basis. Case oversight and review is expected throughout the Fellowship.
6. When the Primary Mentor is not personally available (e.g., mentor is on leave or candidate is on an external rotation), he or she should ensure that there is ancillary mentorship available.
   a) An ACVP diplomate who is not a Founding Fellow or Fellow-VFP may provide supervision when the Primary Mentor is not available; however, postmortem examinations performed under these circumstances will need to be reviewed and approved by the Primary Mentor.

7. The Mentor should be available at least three (3) regular full workdays per clinic week for that week to be counted towards the Fellow Candidate’s case log.

8. At least semi-annually, the Primary Mentor must formally evaluate, in writing, each Fellow Candidate’s progress during the Fellowship and provide feedback to the Fellow Candidate.
   a) The Fellow Candidate must be advised of any deficiencies in time to correct problems prior to completion of the Fellowship. A performance improvement plan should be put in place if deficiencies are identified. If satisfactory improvement is not met in the specified time frame, the Fellow Candidate may be dismissed from the training program.

9. The Primary Mentor must provide an opportunity for Fellow Candidates to evaluate the Fellowship overall, as well as all rotations, conferences, and faculty. These evaluations should be obtained in a confidential manner.
   a) The Primary Mentor shall, every 1-3 years, provide to the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee for full review all the Fellow Candidates’ evaluations of their curriculum to determine whether the goals of each Fellowship are being achieved and whether ancillary institutions/faculty are effective in their training mission.

C. Supporting Forensic Experts: Supporting Forensic Experts are all faculty, other than the Primary Mentor, involved in training of the Fellow Candidate. This includes but is not limited to human forensic pathologists, radiologists, geneticists/DNA analysts, entomologists, forensic anthropologists, botanists, toxicologists, zoologists, crime scene analysts, law/criminologists, and wildlife biologists.

D. VFP Fellowship Subcommittee: This committee will monitor activities of the VFP Fellowships and provide a report to the ACVP Board of Directors as directed. See Section “Specific Program Requirements”
V. Conference of title

The titles listed herein may be used in correspondence or other means of communication.

A. The title “Founding Fellow, Veterinary Forensic Pathology”: Conferred upon an ACVP diplomate who has achieved Fellow status as a result of credentials that were submitted, reviewed and approved during the open call for Founding Fellows from October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024.

1. Minimum requirements for founding fellows in VFP:
   a) Have an established reputation of excellence in the field as documented by three references (i.e., forensic professional, chair/dean, etc.)
   b) Have an established record of publication and/or presentations in the fellowship topic area
   c) Have sufficient experience so as to establish an area of expertise (e.g., >5 years of experience as an ACVP Diplomate)
   d) Can meet these requirements within a finite period (e.g., one year from the call for founding fellows)

B. The title “Fellow, Veterinary Forensic Pathology”: Conferred upon an ACVP diplomate who has successfully completed an Fellowship in VFP, including passing the VFP examination.

C. The title “Fellow Candidate, Veterinary Forensic Pathology”: Conferred upon a person enrolled in a VFP Fellowship who has not yet passed the competency test.

1. A person who has successfully completed an anatomic pathology residency and completed a VFP Fellowship but has not passed the VFP competency test may indicate only that they have completed a Fellowship in VFP. No title or formal acknowledgement is conferred. An individual who misuses the terms, “VFP”, “forensic”, or “fellow” in their credentials may be subject to adverse action by the Fellowship Review Committee.

VI. Institutional Requirements

A. The VFP Fellowship training must be conducted at a veterinary medical facility (diagnostic laboratory or institution) or animal forensic laboratory that offers sufficient scope, volume, and variety of VFP cases. Forensic caseload is essential to providing training and all participating programs must be able to provide a minimum of 35 core
medicolegal postmortem cases per year, along with ancillary caseload management.

B. Fellow Candidates should have broad exposure to postmortem diagnostic imaging techniques during the workup of VFP cases.

C. Fellow Candidates should have exposure to the criminal justice system, to include scene investigation, legal proceedings, and instruction in animal law.

D. Complimentary services necessary for the management of complex VFP cases must be on-site or otherwise readily available. These may include:
   1. Medical imaging facilities
   2. Toxicology laboratory
   3. Entomology services
   4. Ballistic laboratory
   5. Taxonomic identification services

E. The primary institution will establish the position and stipend, if available.

VII. Initiation of Fellowship

A. A written agreement (Fellowship Training Agreement) shall be crafted by the institution with administrative approval. Agreements will detail the roles and responsibilities of the Fellow Candidate, the primary training institution (Department Head or Hospital Director), and the Primary Mentor.

   1. This training agreement must specify the agreed duration of the training program (minimum of one [1] year, maximum of three [3] years).

   2. The Fellowship Training Agreement must also include:

      a) The schedule of practice in the first 12 months of the fellowship. This includes specific date ranges for external rotations and other ancillary activities.

      b) Description of a regularly scheduled didactic program consisting of attendance at case conferences/journal clubs covering VFP, basic science, and clinical research. These involve no less than 20 hours of education in a broad cross section of forensic topics.

      c) Names and specialties of the Supporting Forensic Experts who will directly oversee portions of the Candidates’ training
d) The schedule and format of performance review and feedback sessions

e) A completed ACVP VFP Fellowship Registration Form (Appendix II)

f) The signatures of the Fellow Candidate and Primary Mentor.

3. Time off for ACVP board preparation, vacation, and other duties may be specified between the Fellow Candidate, Primary Mentor, and Institution.

4. This agreement will serve to define the clinical and educational relationship between the Fellow Candidate and the training institution(s) as to their responsibility to provide mentorship to the Fellow Candidate for the entirety of their training.

5. By signing the Agreement, the Fellow Candidate indicates that they will undertake their clinical role with the utmost integrity, care, professionalism, and responsibility to the institution and the clients whom they serve.

6. By signing the Agreement, the Primary Mentor indicates that they take sole responsibility to provide education and preparation of the Fellow Candidate for success in the Fellowship.

7. The Candidate is expected to remain in good standing throughout the Fellowship in VFP with both the training institution(s), ACVP, and all state and federal licensing agencies.

8. A registration fee of $1,000 to VFP Review Committee will accompany the Agreement.

9. The institution retains a copy of this agreement.

B. The Fellowship Training Agreement must be filed with the VFP Fellowship Review Committee at least sixty (60) days prior to the start date of the VFP Fellowship.

VIII. Training requirements

A. Fulfillment of the Fellowship requires the Candidate to be primary pathologist on at least 35 forensic cases. A Case Log must be maintained to record these cases. Information in the Case Log will include:

1. The medical record number

2. The general type of case, noting which cases may be applied to satisfying the Case Log Minimum Requirements (CLMR – Appendix I)
3. Notation of approval as a case by the Primary Mentor

B. The Case Log will be submitted for review to the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee every 6 months and again at the end of the Fellowship.

C. The Fellow Candidate is responsible for creating appropriate medical record documentation while in training.

D. The Fellow Candidate shall endeavor to publish with the scrutiny of peer review. The candidate will be required to conduct a research or clinical investigation project during the VFP Fellowship. Qualification to sit for the VFP examination requires submission to a peer-reviewed publication of at least one manuscript for which the candidate is the first author.

E. The Fellow Candidate will present at least one comprehensive VFP case to an audience that includes their mentors and may include other specialists and residents. The case presented should be complex, multidisciplinary, or provide significant or novel information sufficient to generate discussion. The venue may be within the training institution or at a scientific conference and is intended to prepare the Fellow Candidate to successfully navigate an integrated discussion with members of the medicolegal community.

F. Candidates will be required to participate in and/or observe the processing of a minimum of 2 crime scenes and attend at least 2 criminal trials or hearings.

G. The Primary Mentor and supporting faculty will determine if the Fellow Candidate has successfully completed the Fellowship. To sit for the examination, the Fellow Candidate must submit the following documentation within 3-years of initiating the VFP Fellowship:

1. letter of application to sit for the VFP examination
2. a supporting letter from the Primary Mentor documenting successful completion of the program
3. documentation of completion of training requirements, including the case log, titles and venues of case presentations, summary and status of the research project, and title/abstract of submitted manuscripts
4. semiannual assessments made by the Primary Mentor of the trainee’s performance.

The VFP Fellowship Review Committee will grant Fellow status based on the examination results.

IX. Training Program Oversight

A. The VFP Fellowship Review Committee will review for approval each Fellowship Training Agreement on request by a Fellow Candidate and Primary Mentor. The program approval will remain in force for 3
years, providing no substantive changes in the program or personnel occur.

B. The Primary Mentor of a Fellowship shall periodically submit to the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee evaluations of the program provided by Fellow Candidates and Supporting Forensic Experts involved in the program.

C. Adverse and unforeseen events may occur during the Fellowship training period. These events may include the departure of the Primary Mentor or a change in external rotation. In the event of a significant change in the curriculum or personnel, it is the responsibility of the Fellow Candidate to contact the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee within 60 days of the key event with a clearly defined and outlined solution. In the absence of a Primary Mentor, no further Fellow Candidate Clinic Weeks can be logged until a new Primary Mentor has been identified and the change to the Fellowship approved by the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee. Fellow Candidates should understand that such significant change might result in a delay to completion of the training program. If no acceptable solution can be found, the Fellowship might be terminated.

D. The VFP Fellowship Review Committee will create a report specifying:
   1. number and location of Fellowships
   2. names of Fellow Candidates pursuing Fellowships
   3. results of requirement completion
   4. requests for Fellowship modification

X. Competency test

A. A competency test will be given once yearly for Fellow Candidates who have successfully completed Phase I of the ACVP exam, and have successfully completed the requirements of the VFP Fellowship (see Section VIII).

B. The Examination Committee of the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee will compile and administer the competency test.

C. The results of the examination will be presented on a final pass-fail basis. The passing grade is a minimum of 70%.

D. Candidates must pass the examination within 2 successive offerings of the examination. There will be an option to request deferral for cause (e.g., medical reasons or maternity/paternity leave) without the deferral limiting the number of examination attempts permitted. If the candidate does not pass the examination within the two successive attempts, an additional Fellowship must be initiated.
XI. **Maintenance of Fellowship**

A. Annually, VFP Fellows and Founding Fellows are required to submit to the VFP Fellowship Subcommittee documentation of 15 hours of continuing education in the field of veterinary forensics and/or forensic science. This can include:

1. Public and documented biomedical/scientific conferences/meetings/workshops in the forensic field
2. Online learning
3. Scholastic seminar
4. Reading from a professional journal (max 2 hours)
A log of at least 35 VFP cases performed under direct supervision of a Founding Fellow or Fellow, VFP during the VFP Fellowship must contain the following specific case-type minimum requirements:

Category 1: Neglect/starvation/hoarding – 3 cases

Category 2: Gunshot/sharp force – 3 cases

Category 3: Blunt force – 3 cases

Category 4: Other* – 3 cases

*"Other" cases may include drowning/asphyxia, inter/intraspecific fighting, intoxication, ritualistic and/or sexual abuse