VetRap is an annual newsletter produced by the Students of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (SCVMA) Committee and distributed to all members of the SCVMA.
Hello everyone, I hope you all had an enjoyable summer break! I would like to welcome everyone back for another year of classes! To those of you just beginning your vet school journey, congratulations and welcome to the wonderful profession of veterinary medicine!

The VetRap newsletter is put together every year by the Students of CVMA committee to further foster the connections between Canada’s veterinary schools. It allows for your experiences to be shared with your fellow students around the country. I would like to thank all students who submitted articles for this year’s newsletter.

The SCVMA executive committee is made up of a representative from each of the five vet schools. Throughout the school year, the SCVMA hosts multiple events for veterinary students which rotate year to year among the schools. My role as this year’s SCVMA President includes sitting on the CVMA council and providing a voice for student veterinarians. Please let myself or your SCVMA rep if you have any feedback you would like me to share. I am looking forward to representing you this year and meeting you at the SCVMA Symposium in January at FMV in Saint-Hyacinthe. Best wishes to all of you in your studies this coming year!

Sincerely,

Kate Rundle
SCVMA President
AVC Class of 2021
We arrived in the town of La Ronge around mid-afternoon on a Wednesday. The town, if you have never had the pleasure of visiting, is situated in a beautiful Northern Saskatchewan landscape. Birch and Aspen trees from the Canadian Shield stretch into the horizon in all directions. We parked by the edge of the picturesque lake, which was still partially covered in ice, to stretch our legs before the controlled chaos of the next few days crashed down on us. While exploring the community, we visited a bustling trading post full of local artwork, animal pelts, souvenirs and everyday necessities. After making a few choice purchases, we made our way to an old church hall where we were greeted by social workers and residential school survivors Tom Roberts and Jean Charles to participate in a blanket exercise. Knowing very little about the experience since it was a new addition to the rotation, we checked our preconceived notions at the door and buckled up for an emotional journey.

The blanket exercise, developed by a religious collective known as Kairos, was created in response to recommendations in the 1996 report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that education should be a large component of truth and reconciliation. As we entered the hall, we were asked to remove our shoes and step onto a variety of blankets spread out on the floor. Tom and Jean explained to us that the blankets represented the enormous land mass occupied by indigenous peoples prior to European settlement. They also explained the significance of land in indigenous culture, that nothing is to be taken from the earth without giving something in return. Then, we listened to a sequential narrative describing the calculated ways in which indigenous people were marginalized and isolated by the Canadian government. We watched in solemn silence as they folded up our blankets until we could hardly fit. Many of us were asked to take our seats outside the boundaries of the blankets to signify those lost to residential schools and the domestic violence propagated by intergenerational trauma. And we listened in horror to first-hand accounts of the atrocities committed against these communities.

When the exercise came to a close, the small number of us still standing joined the rest of the group in our seats to form a sharing circle. As we shared our individual thoughts on the experience, it became clear that many of us had received a very different narrative from our public-school education. A narrative full of promise and
adventure, of new land to be colonized and cultivated by our ancestors with very little mention of the indigenous communities displaced and damaged by those actions. It was an incredibly emotional exercise which forced us to question our own privilege and adopt a new perspective on Canadian history. This experience was invaluable to us as veterinary students entering a profession dominated by individuals of privileged Caucasian descent, in a Canada where many indigenous reservations are still isolated and underserved by professions like our own. As new veterinarians, we will have the opportunity and responsibility to affect change wherever we practice. I would encourage all of you to seek out the truth surrounding indigenous history in Canada and do your part to become a better indigenous ally. We cannot go back in time, but we can help break down the systemic barriers our ancestors constructed and better serve indigenous communities with culturally appropriate veterinary services.

The spay and neuter clinic itself was located in the beautiful Jonas Roberts Memorial Community Center. From the time we first arrived on Wednesday to Friday, when clients first started to file in, we worked tirelessly to set up the clinic. General wellness examination rooms were set up in the arena’s locker rooms, intake areas for history’s and examinations were situated in the upper gymnasium and anesthesia, surgery and recovery took up the arena floor. Although the clinic lacked many of the luxuries you may find in your run of the mill veterinary clinic, it functioned extremely well. The WCVM staff, students and faculty as well as the numerous volunteers all worked tirelessly to see over 160 patients and we succeeded in spaying and neutering over 90 of them.

While doing our part to assist this northern community, we noticed many roaming dogs. As we learned, the nature of the community’s relationship with these animals is complex and this can make intervention for the sake of population control and public safety a difficult endeavor. Some dogs were owned, some were strays, all posed some risk to the community members if left without appropriate veterinary care – be it parasite control, spay/neuter, or public education about bite prevention. The role of veterinarians in isolated rural communities like La Ronge should not be understated and our group definitely gained an appreciation of how to help provide culturally appropriate veterinary services to communities like La Ronge.

“If anyone had asked me where I thought I would be for my 30th birthday, I might have said something about a big party or vacation. I would never have guessed that I would be working 16-hour days at a remote spay and neuter clinic in Northern Saskatchewan. Looking back on it now, I could not have asked for a better way to celebrate. The remote clinical practice rotation lived up to my every expectation, and then some.” ~ Courtney Ek

Many of us elected to take the remote clinical practice rotation based on the glowing reviews we heard from other students, or its reputation as an exceptional learning experience for anyone lacking confidence in a surgical gown. However, I think I speak for everyone in the group when I say that practical skill was not the most impactful thing we gained from our trip. The two-week rotation involved not only a remote spay/neuter and wellness clinic, but also a large component of aboriginal community engagement. Over the course of a few days, we were tasked with becoming educators and engaging with the Lac La Ronge Indian Band and surrounding communities in a way none of us had ever done before. It was a truly awe inspiring and unforgettable experience and we, as a group, came out better for having challenged our comfort zones and questioned our privilege.
Ever heard of Oxilia? It is a new company that has already started to make its mark on the veterinary field, and also on the employee placement field. Oxilia is an online platform that allows veterinary practices to find locums to fill the absences in their clinics. Founded by two DVM students from the University of Montreal, François Asselin and Jean-Simon Richard, the project has officially made its website accessible on July 2017 and now includes a team of five employees!

But with any ambitious and audacious project comes a large number of challenges. Working as a veterinary locum for a living is a concept that resonates with younger generations more than the older ones. Veterinarians in their 30’s having to juggle their family and professional lives find the possibility to choose their own schedule and working conditions quite attracting. The “baby-boomer” generation however, used to more traditional ways of managing staff members, see Oxilia as an unusual concept that does not seem to follow the regular steps of hiring. “We feel that there’s a staff shortage among many clinics. At the same time, younger professionals want more freedom and it’s important for them to choose their conditions and have a life that can be adjusted constantly. It’s definitely a new mentality if you compare to the veterinarians who have been there for a long while and are used to work 70-hour weeks non stop”, says Tommy Levasseur, third-year DVM student and member of the Oxilia team. What the team wants to accomplish through this challenge is to show that Oxilia is a valuable option for professionals who want to have a family life. Their goal is also to ensure that the process of the online platform remains accessible for professionals of any level of technology knowledge and experience. The Oxilia team knows that most often, the older generations are the owners of the practices and that they need to be interested in Oxilia as well.
Dealing with studies at the same time as work is another major challenge for most of the members of the team. François and Jean-Simon must plan their weeks in advance in order to keep the business going while having to support the heavy workload imposed by their fourth year of veterinary studies. “Organisation and planification. It sounds obvious, but it’s so true. I just can’t be last minute. In my program, it’s almost a ratio of one hour of homework for an hour of class”, explains François.

“At first, it was pretty hard because we were only the two of us, François and me, so during the finals week and surgery weeks we were having a tough time managing the business, but now with a proper team that has our backs, it got a lot better!”, insists Jean-Simon.

A third challenge, showing up more and more, is the one concerning growth. The growing success of the Oxilia platform implies a constant increasing of registrations by professionals and practices, and an adaptation is needed. “All these new members must be treated by the same quality standards that we established from the start. It can’t be dead on arrival. We need to adapt to our customers, inot the other way around”, mentions François.

The founders are convinced that the faculty in which they learn their craft and the idea of Oxilia are part of their lives that form in reality one same ensemble. The idea of entrepreneurship came up during the many discussions and observations that occurred during their studies. “It’s certain that the mission of Oxilia is not a medical one, first and foremost, but all the techniques and ways of working that we learn at school give us the ability to really understand the reality of the veterinarians. We understand our customer base so much more that way”, clarifies François.

The Oxilia Team aims to obtain the most global vision of the animal health world as possible, and also of the day to day realities of its professionals. Recently, the founders have hired Victor Gaudreault, who is a registered veterinary technician, to give a hand in the business development department. Charles Brien, a public relations graduate, recently joined the team to ensure that Oxilia’s achievements are seen and that the company obtains all the attention it deserves. “It’s a whole ensemble that completes itself within the company”, highlights Tommy. “We are all passionate about animals, and it’s also a beautiful mix of having entrepreneurship in the animal health world”.

After their studies, François and Jean-Simon plan on managing their business while working part time in practices as veterinarians. A young and dynamic initiative that should keep on growing! To register or to learn more on Oxilia, visit their website (oxilia.ca) or email info@oxilia.ca to speak to the team!
With admission into veterinary school, often students are warmed with a feeling of untouchable excitement and pride, coupled with nervousness for what lies ahead. Despite the ravings of how wonderful it is to be a part of the profession (which it is!), there is undeniably a great deal of stress placed upon students and veterinarians alike to altruistically serve our patients, clients, professors, classmates, and supervisors above ourselves. This quickly becomes apparent when the amount of schoolwork to tackle becomes staggering and the prospect of improving one’s mental health becomes a distant project.

To combat this, the UCVM Wellness Committee brainstormed many ideas to improve students’ mental health and wellness. Among them, was an idea that aligned with the interests that many veterinary students unanimously share: not sitting in a desk all day and beagles. So, in marrying the two, beagle yoga was born. Hosted by the UCVM Wellness Committee and instructed by a lovely Calgary veterinarian and yoga instructor Dr. Kathy Keil, beagle yoga takes place over the lunch hour whereby students bring a yoga mat and enjoy a class surrounded by the UCVM teaching beagles. These sessions often involve upwards of 5 beagles that not only receive meaningful enrichment themselves, but also provide students with a reminder as to why they endure the stresses veterinary school places upon them (usually shown through a lick on the face during upward dog or a well-meaning wagging tail bopping you during stretching). Based on student feedback, the sessions have proven to be a huge success, with many students returning multiple times and encouraging friends to pause their lunchtime studying to take part. As the school year resumes, beagle yoga and other wellness events alike will continue to be a part of the fabric of UCVM and take place for many years to come. The event has also been great to build community and bring together students and faculty as everyone is welcome. Through this activity, and others like it, students will are encouraged to improve their mental and physical health and to serve as a reminder that despite our tendencies to care for others, it is of paramount importance to first take care of ourselves.

Although a simple event, beagle yoga reinforces a connection to mental health and wellness that can often be missing throughout our days plagued by deadlines and studies. Taking an hour to disconnect from emails, exercise your body, interact with classmates from various years, and enjoy the company of animals, teach us so much about being present which certainly has its benefits. It provides a meaningful way to reconnect with what is important and to remind ourselves how lucky we are to be members of a profession that has so much to give.
Beep beep beep beep – my watch heralded 5am. I rolled over and blearily wiped the sleep from my eyes feeling somewhat disoriented. Once I remembered where I was, I was filled with anticipation – an undulating wave of excitement and nervousness overcame me. The weight of the responsibility I was about to undertake rested on my shoulder. Today was our first day on the reservation in Washington and my first day of real responsibility as a student veterinarian on clinical rotation.

Our team was split into three groups – students and staff to perform intake physical examinations on surgical candidates (and later in the day to perform wellness exams), student anesthetists to place catheters, induce, and monitor the animals throughout the procedure and recovery, and student surgeons with professional mentors who performed different aspects of the procedures and whose roles ranged from assisting to performing entire procedures under supervision.

On Day 1, I was an anesthetist and I was anxious. I’d had some experience monitoring two cases in our junior surgery course – both healthy young animals – but these were higher risk patients: healthy enough to undergo surgery but a little older, some a little dehydrated, some a little more fractious than the patients we’re used to in our third year surgery labs. I had also never successfully placed a catheter and this was one of the tasks I was expected to perform today. As the clients started lining up at 5:30 despite our intake which began at 8am, I saw that our work was cut out for us. I was going to have to place a LOT of catheters. “Practice makes perfect” I repeated to myself – a mantra I’d continue to repeat throughout my weeks in Washington. My first patient was a beautiful boxer cross and at the moment of truth, the catheter slid in smoothly and flushed well. I breathed out a sigh of relief and grinned at the technician assisting me. I finally did it! Throughout the day I’d place another 6 catheters and while they didn’t all go as smoothly as the first I had had the confidence boost I needed to know I could do it.

On Day 2, I was to be a student surgeon. This was the role I had been looking most forward to and it did not disappoint. Through some odd coincidence my junior surgery team had only been allocated feline and canine spays during our course – it seemed that there was a shortage of male patients on the weeks we were scheduled to be in the operating theatre. As such, I had never performed a castration and so was determined and excited to get this experience. The six student/veterinarian teams performed ~30 surgeries that day, three of my five were neuters. By the end of the second week I was performing feline neuters on my own. It was the ideal situation – our surgeries had time limits, so you generally had to choose which skills you wanted practice most and the surgeon would perform...
... the rest so you could optimize the time you had to practice/learn those techniques. Each veterinarian had a different way of doing things and we could pick and choose whatever worked best for us. We had been performing circumferential and transfixing ligatures in school – RAVS introduced me to the miller’s knot and I quickly became a convert. This ligature helped me sleep that night after a long day of surgeries, as I’m sure it will continue to do throughout the year to come.

On the third day, my role was intake. I looked forward to improving the efficiency of my physical exam and to interacting with clients. Most clients came as families – grandparents, parents, children, aunts and uncles. Many had more than one pet, some had over ten dogs or cats living in their homes and others had females with puppies or kittens. Many of my preconceptions were challenged that day – I thought we would see thin animals, ill animals but most of these pets had the same level of care as those in my community in Ontario. I can’t recall how many times I had to encourage owners to feed their pets less. Our clients loved their pets, valued their pets and put their pet’s needs before their own. I certainly learned a lot about myself as a pet owner and will strive to do better by my own pets by following their example. My rotation was teeming with beautiful depictions of the human-animal bond.

As the two weeks passed our team became more efficient and tight-knit. We moved to other reservations and other communities and each time were amazed at the love and standard of care people had for their animals. One family arrived at 12:30am and slept in the parking lot to ensure their pets would make the list for surgery as they had missed sign up the year previous. The dedication was overwhelming.

"I was surprised to find that it was the relationships I formed with the clients and their families that were the most meaningful aspect of this rotation for me"

In the end, we provided medical services for just under 750 animals and their families over the course of two weeks. The practical experience I gained in the role of anesthetist and surgeon were absolutely invaluable, but I was surprised to find that it was the relationships I formed with the clients and their families that were the most meaningful aspect of this rotation for me. Although I am still confident that I will work in a food animal practice, I see RAVS as a new passion for me – a way to give back to our communities, a way to hone my skills as a veterinarian and an experience that I hope to return to year after year throughout my career as a veterinarian.
In the midst of fall semester finals, there is no better way to procrastinate, yet still feel productive, than applying for a summer job. Now that we had finally made it to the big leagues (vet school) not just any position would do. With only two summers left ahead of us, now was the time to make them count and explore the veterinary medicine industry. After the whirlwind of exams, in a coffee-high, sleep-deprived state, we packed our bags. With a booming horse population, Calgary Alberta had job opportunities that couldn’t be passed up, and being the maritimers we are, we couldn’t resist the draw of the west.

Burwash Equine Services
Haley Greenbank - Summer Student

I first started the journey of becoming a veterinarian from my passion for equine sport. With venues like the Calgary Stampede and Spruce Meadows, this province has some of the best equine athletes in Canada. When the opportunity to work at an equine practice in Calgary Alberta came, I couldn’t pass it up. After the very long drive across our beautiful country and getting lost several times on route to my first day of work (most likely due to staring at the beautiful Rocky Mountain range) I finally found the clinic. Having only just finished my first year of veterinary school at AVC, I felt like a deer in headlights walking in. Thankfully, my fear quickly faded as several friendly faces welcomed me into the Burwash Equine practice.

Burwash is a smaller clinic compared to Moore’s with 5 senior vets and 2 interns. It’s been a pleasure to be surrounded by such a capable and supportive team. Each of the vets here have their own specialty whether it is dentistry, podiatry, lameness, theriogenology or surgery. Being surrounded by such a well rounded team has been an amazing experience and I constantly have the opportunity to learn about new cases. As the summer has flown by, I’m becoming more comfortable in the clinic and on the road (my favourite place to be). I’ve been quickly whipped into shape; from trotting lamenesses, to foal wrangling, to assisting with dental extractions and I love learning new tips and tricks from everyone here.
Externship students are a big part of this practice and they’re constantly rolling in from all over the world. It’s inspiring to see their confidence grow as they get more hands on experience at the clinic and I can’t wait until it’s my turn to be an extern! The students here are so eager to share their knowledge and I’m learning more and more how veterinary medicine is like a big family. It’s comforting to know I have a plethora of veterinary friends to help steer me through the roller coaster ride that is vet school.

One of my favourite parts of the summer has been student rounds with Dr. Crystal Lee, she’s a wealth of knowledge and has a gift for teaching. So far this summer we’ve discussed foaling preparation, equine dentistry, colic, radiographs, and theriogenology. Having the opportunity to broaden and brush up on my knowledge as I work has helped my understanding of equine medicine tremendously. Experience and exposure is a great teacher and I’m thankful to get to spend the summer in Canada’s horse country. I’ve fallen more in love with equine medicine and with this province and I can’t wait to come back!
The moment I pulled through the iron gates I realized I was in the big leagues now. Moore’s is a team of thirteen brilliant doctors all with one thing in common, the ability to give the gift of knowledge. Known for its extern and internships, Moore Equine felt like the Seattle Grace of Calgary. I was surrounded by brilliant minds - acupuncturists, chiropractors, and surgeons, oh my! It’s inspiring being surrounded by dedicated, hard-working people around the clock, and I emphasize, AROUND THE CLOCK.

My mornings and weekends are spent at the racetrack and the rest of the time I’m touring the countryside making farm calls and having ambulatory lectures (or naps) in the truck. I couldn’t have asked for a better suited position, as growing up around the Standardbred race track is the reason I got into veterinary medicine. For the past two years I have managed to keep up with school while training and racing my own horses. If you thought moving across the country was going to stop that, think again. Before I had my own plane ticket, I had booked a trailer ride for my Standardbred race horse, Elm Grove Kaptain.

I spend early mornings at the track jogging Kaptain and doing my barn chores. The hardest part of my job is handing over the reins to someone else on race days while I’m busy with Moore’s running jugs, administering pre-race medications, scoping horses, performing lameness exams, and scrubbing for joint injections. The second toughest part of my job was learning the names of everyone and their dog... literally. The trainers at the track are used to the vets and technicians knowing their horse’s routines and nicknames. If a trainer comes up to me and says, “Tommy needs his shot”, I now know that by “Tommy”, he means “Camita B & E”, and by “shot”, he means 4cc of hydrocortisone given IV 3-4hrs pre-race. If I had a dollar for every time I’ve said, “I’m sorry, what’s his name?”, so far this summer, I wouldn’t need to be in vet school.

Now that I’m 2 months in, I’ve mastered a lot of the nicknames and routines, along with many other veterinary skills. I’ve learned to love the phrase, “do you want to do it?”. After what felt like a lifetime in the classroom, I am now getting the chance to put some of that information into real life situations. A wise man (my dad) once said, “they say experience is the best teacher, I say experience is the only teacher”. After only a couple months out in the field with some talented equine vets, I am beginning to see the truth behind that phrase.

Halfway through my “summer”, I’m feeling like I never really left the classroom. With every new day comes a new hands on experience, a new pop quiz, and a new lesson learned. I couldn’t be more thankful to the vets of Moore Equine for training me both physically and mentally and giving me the chance to grow and learn as a young professional in the industry of veterinary medicine.
We know it’s still early on, but how has your clinical year experience been so far?
Everyone at Cornell has been so welcoming and helpful. The clinicians really push you to make clinical decisions and apply all the information you learned in the classroom to your patients.

Any rotation you are really looking forward to doing?
My Neurology rotation! It's my favorite part of medicine, and I can’t wait to experience some unique cases and get a chance to help some more of our furry friends.

What was the motivation behind choosing to do your clinical year outside of Canada?
When it came to choosing a clinical school, my main goal was to get home as quickly as possible.

Cornell was my first choice because it was close enough that I could drive home if I had time off. Plus, I am able to do all my core rotations in the first 9 months. After that, I can go home early and complete my externships in Canada.

Sounds like you can’t wait to start practicing back home. How much did where you grew up influence you becoming veterinarian?
A lot. I grew up loving animals and knowing I wanted to be a vet. We were regulars at the Toronto Zoo when I was a kid. I’ll never forget one summer when I held up our departure from the cottage because I was adamant I say goodbye to the chipmunk I'd been feeding all week.

As I got older I realized I had a passion for medicine and science, as well, and birthday presents went from being stuffed animals to textbooks on horse and goat medicine.

Sounds like you’re doing what you were meant to do.
Every step I've taken has only affirmed for me there's nothing else I'd rather be doing.

Obviously, a big step was going to Ross Vet. Why did you choose Ross?
The biggest draw for me was the accelerated curriculum and that the rolling admissions meant I could start in January instead of having to wait for the following September.
What is your overall impression of the Ross Vet DVM program?
Whenever people ask me this question, I tell them I think my education at Ross has been just as good if not better than if I'd stayed home for school. Plus, I found it easier to commit to studying and learning when I was away from all the distractions of life at home.

The school also has lots of programs for the students. There are clubs that run events that help solidify clinical skills, upper-semester students can apply to be Teaching Assistants for younger classes, and the professors here are amazing! For most of the faculty, teaching is their main focus, and they are passionate about helping us succeed.

How about living in St. Kitts? A bit warmer than Canada.
I’ll be honest, the first year was the hardest for me. You have to adjust to living in a different place. You can get homesick. But then people who started as strangers become your new family, and they understand what you’re going through like no one at home.

Now that I look back, I wouldn’t have traded those 2 1/2 years for the world.

I’ve grown so much as a person and have a unique skillset I feel will only help me become a better veterinarian. I have friends from all over the world. I got to experience a new culture, and our few days off were spent swimming the Caribbean Sea. How can you beat that?

St. Kitts’ winters certainly are more tolerable than Canada’s. I take it you were pretty active while on the island?
Definitely! I took advantage of so many of the clubs that Ross has to offer!

Many of the clubs offered outreach to the local community, which was amazing. There were also lots of opportunities to gain new skills and earn certificates with many of the clubs.

Any favorite clubs or activities?
I was a club officer on the Small Ruminant Club, which helped me gain more hands-on experience, work with professors outside of the classroom, and teach other students new skills. I also enjoyed being a Teaching Assistant for five semesters, which was another great way to help younger students succeed.
Glasgow University saw its inaugural year with the CVMA in 2017. The club was designed to represent the small but proud Canadian population throughout the school and was made as a way for students from all years to come together and enjoy different aspects that we all love from our Canadian homes. We put on several events throughout the year, both social and academic. Our main academic event was our suturing practical where we had various stations showcasing suture patterns as well as real world situations. Instructional videos were presented as well as hands on help from more senior year students. A printed suture pattern guide was also handed out, to remind students of the various patterns we have learned. With great thanks to our main sponsor, VetStrategy, the event was a resounding success. Another academic event we hosted was a webinar presentation from Cody Creelman the Cow vet. The event was very well attended and received, and we look forward to continuing to work with Dr. Creelman in the future. 

As is the Canadian way, we balanced our academic activities with a healthy dose of social events, focused on unifying our Canadian population and helping expand the love of Canada to students from all over the world. Our first event was a meet and greet but we quickly expanded this to an outing watching Glasgow’s own Breahead Clan hockey team! We also hosted a potluck Thanksgiving, a Christmas karaoke pub crawl and put on our cowboy boots for a good old-fashioned Barn Dance. We were able to infuse Scottish folk music with some Canadian country music and the event turned into a huge success, bringing people from all over together. For our first year as a club, we felt it was a great success, with our events being well attended and received. We hope to continue with traditional Canadian events, organizing more hockey games and barn dances, as well as organizing lunch and learns, different academic events, practicals, and fundraisers for charities. We hope to even collaborate in friendly competition with other UK schools, particularly Edinburgh! We love Canada and we love showing our Canadian pride even when we are far away from home.