VETRAP 2017

STUDENTS OF THE
CANADIAN VETERINARY
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

ÉTUDEATS DE
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES MÉDECINS VÉTÉRINAIRES
A Letter From Incoming SCVMA President

Welcome back to school everyone! I hope you all had a fun and relaxing summer break. I would like to send a warm welcome to all those who began their veterinary school careers this September. You are joining a community of supportive and passionate veterinarians, students, and other veterinary health professionals from across the country. I am excited to meet many of you and wish you all the best as you enjoy your first year of vet school. I would also like to welcome back our international Students of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (SCVMA) affiliates from seven schools around the world.

The VetRap newsletter is one of many initiatives the SCVMA committee uses to promote and foster relationships between Canadian veterinary students. Thank you to the students who submitted articles for this year’s newsletter. I am looking forward to hearing about the unique and exciting experiences you have had over the past year!

As the SCVMA President, I act as a liaison between Canadian veterinary students and the CVMA Council to keep you updated on all CVMA activities. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to share your feedback and ideas with me, or your school’s SCVMA representative. We would love to hear from you!

In closing, I hope everyone has a wonderful year and that many of you will be able to attend the 2018 SCVMA Symposium at the Atlantic Veterinary College (AVC) this January. It’s going to be a great event! Best wishes and happy studying!

Sincerely,

Kira Moser
SCVMA President
UCVM Class of 2019

Symposium 2018 – Planning Update
Atlantic Veterinary College – Charlottetown PE
January 11-13, 2018

The Atlantic Veterinary College is pleased to announce its former graduate, Dr. Michelle Oakley, as the keynote speaker for the 2018 SCVMA Symposium. Dr. Oakley will discuss her wide-range of experiences as a veterinarian in the Yukon Territory, which we have used as inspiration to organize a variety of wet-labs and lectures. There will be something for everyone, from those planning to work with wildlife to future pocket-pet veterinarians. Looking forward to seeing you there!
Every veterinary student wonders where their studies will lead them and whether their interests will change over the years. The study of medicine, particularly veterinary medicine, consists of myriad fields and disciplines, each of which holds a certain allure. I was no different than any other student when, two years ago, I walked into my first semester of veterinary school. I had begun veterinary school feeling quite certain that my future career would consist of working primarily with horses. However, as I progressed in my studies, I found myself drawn to other species and other aspects of veterinary medicine. Although I have not lost my passion for horses, I have developed a passion for other species as well. I have also acquired an interest in the economic and welfare aspects of agriculture, particularly in the dairy industry. Last fall, I began looking for an opportunity to learn more about the dairy industry and to gain more experience in that area. An opportunity to gain that much desired experience presented itself in the form of a summer internship focusing on the welfare of dairy cattle in a small rural community in Kenya. I applied for the internship and was accepted. So, shortly after I finished my exams this spring, I was boarding a plane bound for Nairobi.

It is difficult to describe how I felt when I first arrived in Kenya and settled into the little rural community of Naari where I was to work for the next three months. I had no preconceived expectations for my summer in Kenya simply because I had not the slightest idea what to expect. I was determined to learn as much as I could, to be open to everything and to enjoy every minute of the time I would spend there. During the first few days, our team spent some time meeting with members of the Naari Dairy Cooperative Society, with whom our internship was partnered. Together, we discussed the
various projects that would be taking place during the summer and established our mutual goals. Throughout these sessions, I was impressed by the hospitality as well as by the courage of the people of Naari. Their determination to improve their agricultural production in order to provide a better future for their children and community was truly inspiring and helped to set the positive outlook that would shape our work for the rest of the summer.

Our work for the summer was to collect data for three related research projects that were designed to assess and improve the wellbeing and productivity of the dairy cows. These three projects were as follows: (1) improving cow comfort in order to increase overall health and milk production, (2) facilitating reproductive success and efficiency in dairy cattle and (3) improving bovine nutrition. It was hoped that by educating dairy farmers and providing some practical assistance in these areas that both the welfare and productivity of the dairy cattle would improve, leading to a corresponding increase in income for the farmers and their families. The agricultural community of Naari was extremely supportive of our efforts and informed us that, since the initiation of these projects a few years ago, they had more than doubled their milk production. It was so rewarding to be given such tangible evidence of the success of our projects and to receive the heartfelt gratitude of these people who, over the course of the summer, had become such dear friends.

A typical day of work began by bouncing along the rocky, red, dirt roads of Naari in our rickety old van that was packed with miscellaneous supplies and medicines. Upon arriving at a farm, we were always greeted with a very large smile and a bone-crushing handshake accompanied by a “Karibu, karibu!” meaning “Welcome, welcome!”. We would thank the farmer for the welcome and then begin our work which consisted of assessing the health of the cows and calves, the cleanliness of their environment and the suitability of their stalls. After gathering this data, we gave the farmers recommendations on what they could do to improve their cows’ health, environment and stall. We would then return at a later date to help the farmer carry out these changes to the stalls and the environment if the farmer was unable to make the changes himself. Although our focus was primarily on dairy cattle, oftentimes at farms we were asked to treat other animals, such as pigs, sheep and chickens, or asked for advice on farming and other related topics, which were often outside our area of expertise. However, we always tried to answer to the best of our ability and every farmer would invariably show their appreciation of our efforts by offering us a cup of chai (Kenyan tea) before we left.

Over the course of the summer, I felt my competence as a budding veterinarian was growing. With each passing day, I became more confident in examining cows and more astute at detecting any abnormality. I had the opportunity to actually see cases of many of the diseases that I had learned about in class and assist in the treatment of these diseases. As a student, I found these opportunities extremely rewarding because they proved that my efforts in vet school were finally paying off. These opportunities also provided the immense satisfaction that comes from the ability to treat and cure an animal and reminded me of place.

The time that I spent in Naari, Kenya is definitely one of the most incredible experiences that I have had in my lifetime. I learned so much during my stay there about veterinary medicine, farming and people. The work that I accomplished
through this internship has made me think that I have found my niche in the vast field of veterinary medicine. I cannot imagine a better day than one spent driving down some old dirt roads on my way to spend time with the animals I love.
Vers la fin de ma deuxième année à la Faculté de Médecine vétérinaire de Saint-Hyacinthe (FMV), mes connaissances s’élargissant peu à peu, j’avais envie de participer à un projet me permettant de contribuer d’une certaine façon au devenir de notre société, tout en partageant ma passion de la médecine des animaux de compagnie. Un projet rejoignant mes valeurs et mes convictions m’a alors été présenté ; la Clinique vétérinaire des animaux de la rue. Peu de temps après, mon implication consistait à occuper le titre de Coordonnatrice de la clinique.

Ce projet a été élaboré en 2000, lorsque l’organisme «Le Bon Dieu dans la rue», groupe d’intervenants venant en aide à de jeunes adultes en situation difficile, a fait appel à la Faculté de Médecine vétérinaire pour leur faire part d’une problématique rencontrée dans leur centre à Montréal. L’organisme offre différents services aux jeunes en difficulté. Plusieurs intervenants y travaillent dans le but de réintégrer ces jeunes auprès de la société, en leur offrant de terminer leur cours du secondaire ou encore d’entrer sur le marché du travail. Lorsque les jeunes font la demande de l’un de ces services, ils ont droit à plusieurs autres privilèges dans le but de faciliter le processus d’obtention d’un diplôme d’études secondaires ou d’un emploi. Des repas communautaires sont fréquemment servis au centre, des vêtements ainsi que de la nourriture leur sont offerts et des activités de groupe sont organisées.

La problématique rencontrée par le centre était la suivante. En effet, beaucoup de leurs protégés possédaient un chien, leur meilleur ami, celui-ci contribuant à leur sécurité, empêchant leur solitude, les gardant au chaud, et leur démontrant une fidélité sans pareil. Certains de ces animaux avaient des problèmes de santé, et vus les moyens restreints des propriétaires, aucun soin ne pouvait leur être apporté. C’est pourquoi le centre a contacté la Faculté de Médecine vétérinaire, afin de joindre les connaissances des étudiants de la Faculté à la demande accrue de services des jeunes de la rue. Ainsi, en 2000, les jeunes ont eu accès à un privilège supplémentaire, celui d’avoir des soins pour leur compagnon à quatre pattes gratuitement.

En ayant comme objectif de contribuer à la formation de ses étudiants, la Faculté de Médecine vétérinaire a créé, dans le cadre d’un cours, un stage permettant aux étudiants de 3e année de passer une soirée à la Clinique des jeunes de la rue à Montréal. Ceux-ci étant jumelés à un(e) étudiant(e) à la Technique en santé animale du Cégep de Saint-Hyacinthe et un vétérinaire diplômé bénévole, ce stage s’avérait intéressant, formateur et pertinent pour tous.

Mon rôle en tant que Coordonnatrice de la Clinique des jeunes de la rue était de faire le lien entre la centre de Montréal et le stage des étudiants de 3e année, de trouver des vétérinaires bénévoles, de m’assurer de l’approvisionnement des produits vétérinaires et de superviser le déroulement des soirées de clinique, c’est-à-dire un mercredi par mois pendant un an.

Afin d’assurer le bon déroulement des cliniques, plusieurs compagnies sont venues en
aide au projet. Pfizer offre généreusement des produits vétérinaires, nous permettant de contribuer à la santé préventive (vaccins, vermifuges préventifs) et curative (antibiotiques, anti-inflammatoires, etc) des animaux des jeunes de la rue. Des compagnies de nourriture vétérinaire donnent également plusieurs sacs de croquettes à la clinique à tous les mois, permettant aux jeunes d’offrir une alimentation équilibrée à leur animal. Ce sont entre 20 et 30 jeunes qui visitent la clinique à tous les mois, depuis déjà 17 ans, c’est-à-dire environ 5000 consultations depuis !

Cette clinique est l’un des stages les plus appréciés des étudiants de Médecine vétérinaire et l’un des plus populaires auprès des étudiants à la Technique en santé animale. Elle permet aux étudiants d’ouvrir leurs horizons, de faire preuve d’écoute et d’empathie, d’être respectueux et généreux. Elle leur permet également de communiquer leurs connaissances, d’apprendre aux jeunes de la rue différents aspects de la santé des animaux de compagnie et de partager leur intérêt pour le bien-être animal. Il est toujours valorisant de voir les jeunes se préoccuper de la santé de leur compagnon, sachant que celui-ci est souvent leur meilleur ami, un être fidèle avec qui ils passent 24h/24h, à qui ils donnent deux repas par jour alors qu’eux-mêmes n’en auront peut-être même pas un entier. Pour d’autres, leur chien représente leur seul espoir de s’en sortir, ils leur permettent de survivre... C’est pourquoi le projet marche toujours aujourd’hui, n’apportant que des avantages à tout ceux en bénéficiant. Pour moi, ce projet a été une réalisation valorisante, me montrant que la médecine vétérinaire peut être beaucoup plus qu’une médecine scientifique, mais bien une médecine de cœur et de partage.
My name is Shannon Finn, I’m a third year veterinary student, and this past fall I founded the first student club for mental health and wellness at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, Canada. The club is called “OVC THRIVE” and THRIVE stands for “Teaching Healthy Resilience in the Veterinary Environment,” and was built on 3 main goals:

- To promote an open and accepting culture surrounding mental health
- To encourage students to prioritize self-care
- To provide tangible resources for students to improve resilience

My experience with seeing my classmates struggle helped me see the need for this club. OVC has been very good at recognizing that there is a problem with mental health in our field and at our school. I think everyone saw it as a problem simmering beneath the surface, and only witnessed it bubble up during high periods of stress when everyone is unable to keep their cool anymore. We also didn’t really have much in terms of a movement from the student level, and despite all the great advice and information coming from our administration it wasn’t really sinking in with the students. This is why I think it’s so important to have co-ordinated efforts between students and administration, and to have something that is made by the students for the students.

Starting out was daunting! It’s a bit intimidating to have a clean slate, and I wanted to do things really well the first time around (as most type A students do), and so, I reached out to the amazing students of Ross University and the UC Davis wellness clubs for input on what worked well for them! I also worked all summer for the newly formed research group at OVC – the AWAR²E team (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Research and Education), and all five members agreed to be faculty advisors for the club.

One of the most helpful things I did at the beginning was make connections with the existing campus resources. I would suggest this to anyone starting out! I don’t know if it’s like this at all schools, but at OVC, the veterinary college feels very “separate” from the rest of the University of Guelph, even though it’s just across the road. Once I had some details for THRIVE firmed up, I scheduled a meeting with the head of the University of Guelph’s Wellness Education Centre, and she was so instrumental with helping me find funding for activities and including me on some of the campus wide mental health committees. I’ve met so many awesome people because of this, and now the veterinary college is being more included in the discussion about mental health at our campus.

Once the school year came around, many students were aware that THRIVE existed – we made social media pages and created Wellness Carts (full of games and colouring and other fun things) that popped up around school. On Club Days (two days near the beginning of the year where students can sign up for clubs), I set up my board and put a little “for free!” sign indicating that there was no cost to sign up, and I was shocked that some people just avoided my table! I think this was the first time I really experienced the stigma about this topic. We did manage to get
a fair amount of students sign up, and in the end it didn’t really matter too much because our events were made for everyone to participate in.

Fast forward to November - I had a really great executive committee put together. We had a few initial meetings and there was so much enthusiasm about possible events that we all took a breath at the end of one meeting and said “Maybe we should just make a THRIVE Week?” We reconvened, and then the next meeting we picked the date, our tentative schedule of events, and got to work making sponsorship proposals. We had a tight timeline of about two months to put everything together and raise funds, but it’s a true testament to the executive team that they felt we could do it (and do it well!) and put in the time to make it happen.

The full schedule of events for Let’s THRIVE Week can be found on our Facebook page– I won’t go into detail about each event (I could go on for days!) but feel free to contact me if you have any questions about Let’s THRIVE Week that I don’t answer here. I thought the best way to discuss this week was to go back to our 3 goals, and talk a bit about how certain events really helped us achieve those.

Goal #1: Providing tangible resources for improving resilience:

We wanted to provide all students with something they could physically take away and use, but we also wanted to make sure everything in Let’s THRIVE Week was free – so here’s a big thank you to OVC and OVC Pet Trust for giving us such generous sponsorship.

I was put in contact with a Masters student from a nearby university who had created a mental health “first aid kit” start-up company called PASS Inc. She had this amazing product in her kits, which are these flashcards that have “tweet-length” counselling advice (which were all evidence-based too!) as well as resource hotlines. We included these in our kits, as well as a card for LGBTQ+ specific, and University of Guelph specific resources, a pen, and a pad of paper. We got sponsorship for kits for every DVM student and also the teaching hospital interns, and the executive put them all together.

We have tests on Monday morning, and so we handed out these kits after the tests to all the students. They were extremely well-received! It was a great feeling to provide students with something that was actually useful.

We also wanted to include the student clubs at OVC that had values similar to ours – that is, they try to improve student life outside of improving technical skills and knowledge about veterinary medicine. These clubs included the OVC Christian Vet Fellowship, the OVC Business Club, and the OVC Student Chapter of the Lesbian and Gay Veterinary Medical Association (SCLGVMA). The SCLGVMA created the LGBTQ+ resource card for the kits, and all of the clubs, as
well as the OVC Peer Helpers contributed really cool designs for buttons that we handed out at events. This was another thing that students could take and wear to display their support of Let’s THRIVE Week and mental health.

**Goal #2: Encourage students to prioritize self-care:**

Students know that self-care is important. The disconnect is the fact that we rarely actually do it. We tried to have good nurturing, stress-relieving events like Yoga, Paint Night, and Curling to incorporate some creativity, mindfulness and physical activity. These all had nothing to do with vet school – they were just fun! We got a really good turnout at all of them.

My favourite event that we did to encourage self-care was the “I am Also” campaign. One of the things I learned from being involved in the academic mental health world this summer was that having diverse interests and taking the time to look at yourself and appreciate the parts of you outside of being in vet school is actually beneficial to mental health. So we made the “I am Also” wall and gave students nametags that they could write down something that they “are” that didn’t have to do with vet school! I put down “meme queen” and “funny” and “fan of The Bachelor” but it took me longer to think of those things than I’d like to admit! When I got people to contribute, SO MANY people struggled to come up with something, and we’d just smile and tell them “that’s the point of this exercise!” And everyone came up with something eventually. It was a pretty fun event, and super easy to do.

**Goal #3: Promote an open and accepting culture surrounding mental health:**

This was the biggest goal of the week, by far. Like I said, we have this knowledge of “mental health” as kind of this obscure entity that plagues veterinary students, but don’t really have a face to the name. There is very little sharing about personal experiences with mental health, and a really huge stigma to battle, as much as we don’t like to admit it.

Our approach to tackling the stigma was to just get people talking and sharing. We know so many people struggle, but we don’t know who struggles and when did they struggle and what did they struggle with? Luckily for us in Canada, Bell Let’s Talk Day was the week before Let’s THRIVE Week. This is a day that Bell Canada puts on where you can use social media with the hashtag #BellLetsTalk for the purposes of bringing about these important discussions and breaking down stigma. Bell donates 5 cents to mental health charities for each post including the hashtag. This has been happening for about five or six years now, and it’s pretty well known in Canada. So we decided to use this nationally recognized day to kick off our story sharing and promote Let’s THRIVE Week.

We came up with the “Humans of OVC” social media campaign. It’s basically the same as Humans of New York, but with a mental health spin. We had three executive members, one faculty, and one volunteer photographer to get this thing going. We had four stories to share on Facebook, and we thought “you know, that could be enough to share during the week leading up to Let’s THRIVE Week, and that will be a good promotion!” We scheduled two students’ stories to be shared on our Facebook and Instagram (#HumansofOVC) on Bell Let’s Talk Day, and then the next ones during the rest of the week. We didn’t expect the response we got. The photos
and stories pretty much blew up online, and people were talking! Pretty much within hours, I was getting emails from people wanting to take part and share their story, so we collected more stories, and now we have shared over twenty people’s stories since then – including the Dean of OVC!

For Let’s THRIVE Week, we also made our “One Voice Come Together” (OVCT) wall. This was a banner that was going to be displayed in the main foyer where we were posting anonymous submissions of stories about mental health. We collected some stories in advance through an anonymous survey, and we also had paper at the wall for students to take and write their own story or respond to stories on the wall. I was a bit worried about this event leading up to it – we had never given students an anonymous platform to talk about their struggles in an unfiltered way. We were vetting submissions for anything harmful or inappropriate, but didn’t end up having to exclude any. We allowed students to voice their frustrations with their class and the school if it was conducive to their story, and the wall was visibly to anyone walking through the school at any time. I expected some backlash for having something so “negative” posted in the open, but that never happened. After the wall was put up, it started off slow; I think people just didn’t know what it was all about. But soon we got more submissions and the crowds came by. The responses that people wrote were so heartwarming. It was a good visualization of the struggles people have and the kinds of challenges people are living with outside vet school. We will be posting some of these posts on our Facebook and Instagram in the coming weeks.

My favourite moment of the OVCT wall was this: Every day that we had it up, our Associate Dean of Students came by and read the posts and look for any new ones that went up. I worked for him this summer, and I had approached him a few times to make a submission for Humans of OVC. Although I didn’t get any response, I just figured he was busy and got a million emails, so I thought I would ask him in person sometime soon. On the third day of the OVCT Wall being up, near the end of the day I got an email from him with his story about growing up with Tourette’s Syndrome and how that affected his mental health over time, and he attached a picture and said I could post his name. He’s a very professional person, and also very visible to the student community, and he had never revealed this about himself before. To this day it’s the most viewed, liked, shared, commented on post on Humans of OVC. I have the inkling that he did this without prompting after reading all the stories on OVCT, but I haven’t asked him yet to confirm!

Finally, we also had a mental health panel. We had four students and two faculty come and share their stories about mental health, ranging from diagnosed mental health conditions to the stresses of practice and professional life. We had never done anything like this before, so we had no idea what to expect! I met with the panelists the week before so that they could share their stories with each other, so they wouldn’t be hearing their colleagues talk about difficult things for the first time in front of an audience. I would definitely recommend this if you’re thinking of running a panel, because it helps everyone be comfortable and the panelists were really supportive of each other. It was a truly powerful evening, and the panelists got a standing ovation at the end from our crowd of about sixty people. The best part was, so many people hung around after to just talk to each other about their own stories and to show support.
The feedback for Let’s THRIVE Week has been remarkable. I think opening several different avenues for sharing personal experiences was really monumental, and it felt kind of like the floodgates had opened. We were all made aware of the magnitude of struggles experienced by students, which I think has resulted in 2 things: people started to feel less alone in their own struggles, and everyone became a bit more compassionate and empathetic to those around them. We are hoping to continue the openness that Let’s THRIVE Week has brought to OVC in order to work toward reducing the stigma surrounding mental health.
My childhood dream of becoming a veterinarian has only been modified from its original form to include the earnest ambition in my heart to make a difference in the world. I have long been tormented by global concerns such as climate change, deforestation, the illegal wildlife trade, emerging infectious diseases, and the Anthropocene extinction crisis.¹ I feel passionate about One Health ideologies and wildlife medicine, and believe that the only way for us to solve the problems that we face as a global society revolve around our relationships with each other and our ecosystems. I had also suppressed my travel bug for some time, so when the opportunity to participate in Global Vets² arose, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to make use of some of my skills as an aspiring healthcare professional.

We spent months fundraising and searching for the veterinary projects that we would contribute to for seven weeks of our summer. Bright eyed and presumptive in the prospect of our change-making trip, we embarked on our journey to Nepal, Lao PDR, and Borneo. Our project in Nepal was with the Bhaktapur Animal Welfare Society, an organization that conducts sterilization, vaccination, and parasite treatment projects in the Kathmandu Valley. We participated in surgeries, appointments, and daily treatments of the animals at the clinic. In Lao PDR, we worked with several international veterinarians to collect baseline health data for a group of 13 Asian elephants (Elephas maximus) at the Elephant Conservation Center (ECC), a sanctuary for elephants who once laboured for the logging industry. In Borneo, we had the pleasure of working with The Great Projects and the Bornean Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF) at the Samboja Lestari Orangutan and Sun
Bear Rehabilitation Center. Although we knew we were unable to participate in much medicine at the center due to multiple health hazards associated with human contact with great apes, we were excited to help with behavioural enrichment and construction of a new ‘baby playground’.

As people who study and practice veterinary medicine are often some degree of ‘Type A’ personalities, we have a tendency to display a front of perfection and strength. We isolate ourselves from our peers in an attempt to protect ourselves from the vulnerability that comes from admitting feelings of inadequacy, mundanity, and the sometimes crippling fear of making mistakes. However, we do a disservice to ourselves as budding professionals entering a field plagued with depression, compassion fatigue and suicide\(^3\) to avoid admitting when experiences have been disappointing, challenging, or painful. So - while my Instagram feed portrays one side of a truthful expression of many extraordinary experiences in Asia, in reality, our Global Vets trip was not all that I had envisioned it would be.

In Nepal, we had hoped to contribute to street dog sterilization programs by employing our surgical skills. However, over two weeks, we participated in only five spay surgeries, and while we were responsible for the injectable anesthesia of our patients, our dreams of ligating our first ovaries were not realized. We were forced to make moral decisions about our education and animal welfare, which were confounded by cultural differences in medical understanding, when an animal that had been medically mistreated was offered to be a cadaver for practicing procedures. In Laos, one of the male elephants died suddenly and we were unable to move forward with post-mortem diagnostics as there was inadequate infrastructure to test for possible infectious zoonotic pathogens. At times I felt powerless; I lacked authority and had limited knowledge of practical medicine as I was trying to navigate through an environment of limited resources, sub-par welfare standards, and cultural differences in gender roles. The harsh realities of global deforestation, poaching, and animal cruelty \(\textit{literally} \) stared me in the face – in the eyes of beautiful Bornean orangutans (\textit{Pongo pygmaeus}) confined to cages for quarter centuries, and in those of wise, wrinkly elephants whose natural homes frankly do \textit{not exist anymore}.\(^4\)

However, these experiences have revealed a need to challenge my assumptions, practice patience, and self-reflect more deeply. I am realizing that my feelings of discomfort and disappointment in my trip rooted in my admission that I am as guilty as anyone for engaging in a ‘white saviour complex’\(^5\). One of the criticisms of voluntourism is that many people go to do international ‘aid’ work while being entirely underqualified for the tasks at hand. I told myself that Global Vets would be different, that I did have some degree of specialized skills, and that these skills were needed. However, spending two weeks in each location was never going to give me an adequate understanding of the true intricacies of the challenges faced by veterinary and conservation professionals abroad. It was


\(^2\) Global Vets is a college-endorsed, student-run club that allows veterinary students the opportunity to experience international veterinary and health care in developing countries. Every year the club fundraises in order to send second year students to developing countries to volunteer their time with various organizations and/or veterinarians.


This opinion piece does not reflect that of all of the members of Global Vets, only my own. While I wanted to discuss some of the more difficult aspects of my trip, there were plenty of incredible experiences, and the Bhaktapur Animal Welfare Society (http://bawsnepal.org/), the Elephant Conservation Center (https://www.elephantconservationcenter.com/), and the Bornean Orangutan Survival Foundation (http://www.orangutan.or.id/) are all doing really great work overall in terms of conservation and animal welfare.

I am discovering that there are hidden lessons in all experiences, and that sometimes what you need to learn is not what you expect to. Reflecting on my experiences with Global Vets, I am further realizing that there are endless interconnections between global inequality, unsustainable resource extraction, and animal welfare issues. As veterinary professionals, whether our goals are to do elective surgeries for peoples’ furry family members or study emerging infectious diseases in the jungle, we have a responsibility to educate ourselves beyond medicine and into the deeper issues of society. None of the worlds’ issues will be solved by one person, one profession, or one initiative; but veterinarians absolutely have valuable and diverse roles to play in global issues. While I faced some disappointment on my trip, and have had to take a hard look at some of my motives, these experiences did further inspire me to challenge the status quo of this profession and to ensure that veterinarians are at the forefront of work that is truly improving our relationships with local people and the other species that we share this planet with.
A Glimpse Into the Future: My Experience at the Class of 2021 Interviews

Jill Girgulis – University of Calgary Veterinary Medicine, Class of 2020

When I think about my first year of vet school, so many days and moments come to mind. Whether I’m recalling the lecture where the professor couldn’t stop laughing when he caught a student sleeping in the front row, the time when my class went outside for a year-end photo only to be greeted by snow flurries in late April, or when we all got a little too enthusiastic about free access to the ultrasound machines, it’s obvious that a lot stood out from the past year. Here at UCVM, class sizes hover around 30, the entire faculty is relatively small to begin with, and our clinical skills facility is in a completely separate part of town from the main University of Calgary campus. Needless to say, it makes sense that the vet school often operates as its own community. However, on one particular day when my class had the chance to interact with people from outside of our faculty, the school was busy interviewing applicants for the future Class of 2021. UCVM employs a specific format, known as the MMI, or Multiple Mini Interviews, for admission to the DVM program. As a result, in addition to an on-site essay, our interview day consists of applicants navigating eight separate interview stations, with two minutes to read the prompt and then eight minutes to respond to the scenario once they enter the room. Given that they’re faced with new examiners at each station, the idea is that there’s an opportunity to start fresh every ten minutes, regardless of how successfully or miserably the last station went.

As first-year students, my class was responsible for offering our assistance on the day of the interviews back in March. As someone who actually really enjoyed the whole interview
process back when it was my turn, they didn't have to ask me twice—I was going to be there, no matter what.

Being in a drastically different position than last year, throughout the entire interview day I was acutely aware of the fact my classmates and I were living representations of what all these students were hoping to achieve. Since we were serving as unofficial ambassadors for UCVM that day, as a result, I had a suspicion that many of the applicants were watching us closely—because that’s exactly what I did when I was in their place.

It was inspiring to hear the words of our Assistant Dean of Admissions as he addressed the applicants and provided them with a rundown of the day’s proceedings. As I sat in that theatre beside one of my classmates who I’d actually met at interviews exactly one year prior, I couldn’t help but feel that we’d really come full-circle. I was very pleased to discover that the same words that had resonated with me last year were still very much relevant now. He told the applicants that the day was about selecting people to join our profession and become our colleagues. He encouraged them to think about someone they admired during their interviews and then pointed out that the reason they admired them was most likely not because of the grades they got in school. He really stressed the importance of communication and personality, and I was glad the applicants got to hear this prior to entering their first interview station.

It can be difficult to explain, but the reason why I was so excited about the chance to be present for the new class’s interviews was because I truly felt, for the entire day, like I was being offered a rare glimpse into the future of my profession. Out of the 125 or so students seated in the lecture hall while they listened to welcoming remarks that morning, I knew that just over 30 of them would be joining our school in the fall and then, four short years later, venturing out into the world of veterinary medicine. But who would they be? Which of these comparatively capable, determined applicants would eventually be selected? Was there ever any real way to know for sure?

Either way, I can’t wait for their arrival in September!