Global Veterinary Medicine and Sterilization and Wellness Clinics Abroad Seminars

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This seminar course was created and first offered in the Spring of 2014, as part of the growing commitment of the College of Veterinary Medicine to continue to internationalize the curriculum and help develop students’ desires to participate in international projects. This seminar class provides the opportunity for veterinary students to share their experiences in planning and implementing projects abroad. Many veterinary students each year plan projects abroad. One program is called Expanding Horizons, which offers Cornell veterinary students a truly unique opportunity to experience veterinary medicine in a developing country.

The program provides grants to Cornell veterinary students who are interested in veterinary experience in developing nations. Students spend 6-10 weeks in a developing country engaged in either veterinary research or hands on veterinary experience (this ranges from wildlife rehabilitation to working with local farmers to develop artificial insemination techniques for their dairy herds). Some countries that our students have traveled to through this program are Ghana, Uganda, Madagascar, Thailand, Vietnam, Honduras, South Africa, and Kenya.

Another example of how the curriculum at the Veterinary College is becoming internationalized is the Field Techniques in International Wildlife program. Organized by veterinary faculty members Dr. George Kollias and Dr. Jamie Morrisey, this experience aims to provide veterinary students the opportunity to learn about various non-native species and gain hands on experience working with these animals. Students learn about local cultures and work with wildlife sanctuaries, refuges and bioparks in developing nations. Examples of opportunities include assisting in performing dental work on jaguars and health examinations on tapirs and howler monkeys. Coursework at the Tropical Education Center complements fieldwork. Current programs occur in the Honduras and Belize.

Also, FARVets (Field, Abroad, and Reach-out), organized by Cornell veterinary faculty member Dr. Paul Maza, is dedicated to implementing projects abroad to assist local animal welfare organizations with their missions of vaccination, increasing animal welfare awareness via pet education, treating medical conditions and addressing overpopulation by holding sterilization surgery clinics. During the surgery clinics, students perform examinations, anesthesia, and perform and assist with ovariohysterectomies and castrations, and surgery recovery. In addition, students work with local veterinarians and animal shelter staff and volunteers to communicate and educate the local pet owners on aspects of pet health and welfare. An important aspect of this program is to assess and nurture the human/animal bond in places abroad, and for Cornell
veterinary students to reflect on their experiences and how the experiences they’ve had has changed their perspective of the human animal bond and veterinary medicine in the host countries as well as how their experiences abroad has influenced their progression through the veterinary curriculum. Cornell vet students have travelled to Mexico, Grenada and Costa Rica as part of the program. Plans are made for working with communities in Belize, Peru, Bulgaria, and the Republic of Georgia.

Many students also participate in programs run by organizations outside of the Veterinary College, including WorldVets in Nicaragua, RVets in Mexico, HSVMA RAVs project in Peru, Christian Veterinary Mission projects in Nicaragua, and others. These students may apply for credit via the Opportunity Block, Special Projects in Veterinary Medicine, and Research in Veterinary Medicine designations.

Back at home in the Veterinary College, the internationalization of the curriculum is realized via presentations given by the travelers to their classmates. Also, if applicable, project participants complete their research and analyze their data and prepare a report that will be evaluated by the program supervisor. Importantly, this report is shared with the partners in the host country to further the scientific information accumulated to support the specific goal or cause.

In particular, the Seminars in Topics of Veterinary Medicine is a class that provides a forum in which the Veterinary College community can be made aware of the important involvement of our students internationally. As most of the work for these projects is completed abroad, there may be little awareness of such global projects back at home in the Veterinary College. This seminar course has given students the ability to fully detail their work and gain acknowledgment for it. Most of the students in the course have not yet embarked on global projects, and are inspired by the presentations of those who have participated in projects abroad. These students, because they cannot present a seminar, are required to write proposals on hypothetical international projects or ones that they actually plan on implementing.

Learning outcomes are difficult to standardize in the internationalized portion of the Veterinary College curriculum. As the projects are individualized for most of the participants of international projects, the concrete learning outcomes are determined by the student, the host partners, and the faculty advisor. Most of these concrete learning outcomes are related to the new scientific knowledge found, the clinical or research techniques used, and the results of the various clinical or research projects. However, one area of evaluation common to all international projects is the reflection of students on their experiences. Students that have returned from global projects will comment on their recently completed international trip. Students that have prepared proposals for a future trip will write about their predicted perceived perspectives on the same topics. The questions for these perspectives include:
Global Service Experiential Learning:

- What results do you hope to gain regarding the veterinary medical issues of your project?
  What broader veterinary medicine issues does your project address?
- What results do you hope to gain regarding working with the people in this area?
- How will this project trip change the way you think about veterinary medicine in the US compared to the country you visited?
- How will this trip affect your perspectives and responsibilities in global and intercultural issues?
- Please write how you might describe and define the term Global Service Learning, and Global Community, and how it pertains to veterinary medicine.
- How is/are the issue(s) you sought to address connected to your own life? To your community (however you define it)? How would you go about addressing the issue(s) on a local scale, in your own community?
- In what ways do you take part in the complex global systems that contribute to the issue(s) you sought to address (whether intentionally or unintentionally)? How can you change your own behaviors to reduce your contributions to the issue(s)? (In other words, how might you “think globally but act locally”?)