

August 10, 2019

Dear AAFV Scholarship Committee,

My name is Elizabeth St. Germaine and I am a 3rd year veterinary student at Western University of Health Sciences. It was an honor to be chosen as a 2019 AAFV student scholarship recipient. The support provided through this scholarship helped me to defray some of the tuition costs of attending AQUAVET® III from June 23 – July 28, 2019. The AAV3 program was an intense 5-week course focused on the clinical aspect of captive aquatic animal medicine.

The first two weeks were taught at the Georgia Aquarium where the focus was on aquarium medicine. We performed and observed clinical techniques of anesthesia, behavioral conditioning, diagnostic lab work, endoscopy, necropsies, physical examinations, radiographs, restraint, ultrasound, and venipuncture on various aquatic animal species. One of the aspects that I highly appreciated was the quality of care provided to all animals, no matter the species and the staff always have the best interest of the animal in mind with a strong emphasis placed on animal welfare. Before a blink of the eye our time with the Georgia Aquarium team was over and we made our way to Athens, Georgia.



The third week was taught at the University of Georgia with a focus on endoscopy and surgery in fish and reptiles. This training was extremely valuable as working with endoscopy equipment is often not taught in veterinary school and many students do not have the chance to perform surgery on aquatic animals. Aside from the hands-on activities during this week all the students provided a 55-minute seminar presentation. I delivered my presentation on anesthesia in marine mammals focused on pinnipeds and the differences between the three families: Odobenidae (walrus), Otariidae (sea lions and fur seals), and Phocidae (true seals). Now with our presentations completed and some experience in surgery and endoscopy on fish and reptiles, we left the United States to head to Mexico.

The last two weeks were taught at three Dolphinaris facilities (Cancun, Riviera Maya, and Cozumel) in Mexico, where the focus was on dolphin medicine and training. We performed and observed clinical techniques that included behavioral conditioning, endoscopy, physical examinations, sample collection and analysis, and ultrasound. The most valuable part of these last few weeks was the amount of hands-on training with ultrasound and observing the voluntary behaviors that the dolphins had been trained to present for medical procedures.



The experiences at the Georgia Aquarium and Dolphinaris truly highlighted the importance of communication and relationships. Strong relationships between the veterinary team and animal caretakers/trainers allows for the highest quality of care for the animals. It is through the relationships that the animal care team has with their animals that alerts the veterinary team of the slightest change in behavior. With this information a plan is communicated and trust between the animals and caretakers allows for the completion of necessary diagnostic testing. Along with communicating within the staff team, there is a lot of communication with the general public. The Georgia Aquarium and Dolphinaris provide great educational opportunities to their visitors, which educate them on about animal welfare, conservation, and ocean health. Through these experiences I was not only able to build relationships with staff members from each of these facilities, but also with my fellow AQUAVET® III classmates from around the world.

Overall, the opportunity to participate in AQUAVET® III was an amazing experience that I will reflect on frequently. I'm extremely grateful for the support I received and want to thank the AAFV scholarship committee again, because without your support I would not have been able to participate. Opportunities outside of the classroom like the AQUAVET® III program allow me and other students to gain valuable technical skills and knowledge in the aquatic animal medicine field for our future success. I look forward to exploring future opportunities in aquatic animal medicine!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth St. Germaine
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