

International Experience Report

What aspects of this experience did you find valuable that you could only get abroad?

During this experience, I had the opportunity and the duty to translate for my peers that were traveling with me. I was able to connect very well with the locals in Guatemala and speak for the students that were with me when needed. On this experience, I also had the opportunity to learn and experience the culture of Guatemala by visiting the Tikal National Park and eating traditional meals on a daily basis. I find all of these incredibly valuable because I feel the best way to be fully submerged in a culture is by experiencing it and living through it. Being able to translate was very valuable to me because my goal is to always better my Spanish whenever possible.

Please provide feedback on the mentorship and experience provided by the onsite mentor(s).

Dr. Morales was very attentive to all of the questions that were presented to him throughout our time in Guatemala. He was very clear in his instructions and always wanted to make sure that we were getting the most out of our experience by constantly keeping us involved. His goal was to make us think critically about every situation we were presented with. Both Anna and Alejandro were very willing to give a background on their previous experiences and the mistakes that they had committed in the past. This was very important to me not only so I don't make the same mistakes, but, also so I can understand how they have evolved with their learning.

Provide a BRIEF summary on a case that provided the best learning experience. Describe how your previous knowledge played a role in the experience, what new knowledge you acquired during the experience and if any prior knowledge would have been helpful.

The case that provided the best learning experience for me was during our primate practical. During our practical, we had six spider monkeys that needed to be sedated in order for treatments to be performed and blood to be drawn. In preparation for this practical, we learned about the difficulties of working with primates due to their intelligence, and the dangers of working with them. We were given an explanation over the methods of capture and handling and were taught how anesthetics such as ketamine and xylazine work in the body and how they are administered. When it came to handling the animals, my previous knowledge of animal handling played a huge role when it came to restraining and assisting with vitals. My experience in watching blood draws on various animals also made me very comfortable in taking blood from one of the spider monkeys. I believe some basic knowledge of the anatomy of exotic animals would have been more beneficial for me but I never felt that I couldn't follow along.

Would you recommend this experience to other students? Please provide an explanation:

I would recommend this experience to all students who are interested in veterinary medicine, even if it does not involve wildlife or exotics. This experience showed me how veterinary medicine is practiced in an environment with limited resources. This experience can help a lot of students by providing them with a different perspective within veterinary medicine but also in general. It was very rewarding to learn about the culture of Guatemala and be in an environment that I am not accustomed to.

Program Evaluation

How satisfied were you with the food and housing arrangements?

I was very satisfied with the food and housing. I feel that the housing arrangements met my expectations and I felt safe the entire time. The meals were always wonderful and we were given a variety throughout our time there.

What were the highlights of your experience?

The highlight of my experience was being able to give IM injections to multiple species of parrots and doing a blood draw on the spider monkey. I was very worried that I would not be allowed to provide treatments to some of the animals because I was the only student who was not currently enrolled in vet school. Dr. Morales made sure that I was involved and pushed me to do things that he knew I was capable of doing.

What advice would you give yourself before signing up?

The advice that I would give myself is to not hesitate. I made sure to do my research on the organization and the program to be sure it was something I would be comfortable doing. Although I did my best to prepare, I was still very hesitant. The hesitation caused me to stress a lot and almost not apply to the program.

What did you not expect/what surprised you the most about this experience?

Something that surprised me about my experience was the amount of translation that was required for our everyday tasks. We were aware that understanding Spanish would be beneficial but I did not expect to use it to the extent that I did. I was extremely grateful for the opportunity to practice my Spanish in a new environment but I did not realize how crucial it was in certain situations. Regardless, I am glad that I was able to be of service for so many and also learn new things in my experiences.

Did you observe any difference in veterinary practice there compared to in the U.S.?

There are differences in the way veterinary medicine is practiced at ARCAS versus what is seen as traditional. This is not only because it is a different country, but, also because it involves the handling of potentially dangerous animals. A majority of the medication that was available at the clinic was donated medication. For one patient, we used a mixture of ointment, honey, and sugar to help heal a wound. In the United States this could be seen as not giving good quality of care whereas at ARCAS, it is using the resources available to provide adequate treatment to an animal. There is always the common goal of providing safe and reliable treatments to improve the well-being of the animal.

What challenge/opportunities did you face on the program and how you handled them? What did you learn from that experience?

A challenge that was presented on this program was the fact that I had a lower level of knowledge compared to my peers. In order to overcome this, I made sure to stay engaged and ask questions when necessary. I also had to understand that there are certain concepts that could not be learned in a short time. Even with limited background knowledge, I was able to obtain a lot of new information through hands-on learning.