

Engaging with communities

MODULES: VPL 200 and VPL 300 – Veterinary Professional Life

Course description

Veterinary Professional Life (VPL) 200 is part of a broad module taking place over five years in the Bachelor of Veterinary Science degree. In the second year, the curriculum covers societal roles and responsibilities of veterinarians, cultural diversity and group skills, and stress management. The second-year students visited Freedom Park for the cultural diversity component. VPL 300 students design and implement educational programmes in collaboration with community partners. In this module, students learn how to be a successful veterinarian. Students are given an opportunity to experience in real life what it means to be a community veterinarian and to start developing practical skills like communication, negotiation, and teamwork, thereby integrating various learning outcomes for VPL.

Community challenges

Students engage with school learners and in some instances adults, about primary health care, One Health topics and/ or the veterinary profession. No veterinary services are offered, only educational engagement. Students go in groups of five and do a presentation/ engagement with community partners such as schools and animal welfare organisations.

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They are required to do two visits, that is, a pre-implementation visit and an implementation visit. During the pre-implementation visit, the students work with the community to identify a specific challenge to be addressed in the area. This results in a total of 32 community partners/ projects and 35 student groups that implement interventions.

Opportunity description

As a vet, you will be involved in community engagement, which is considered as a key priority by the University of Pretoria and the Faculty of Veterinary Science. Through community engagement we can use our knowledge and skills to assist and empower communities in order to alleviate problems, leading to a better life for all people and animals in South Africa. The community engagement project provides you with an opportunity to participate in community service before the clinical year, and to prepare for your compulsory community service year after you qualify. It is a group project and requires you to interact with team members as well as community partners and participate in a process that benefits the community.

Impact

All the skills covered in VPL 300 contribute to the development of emotional intelligence. Students utilise this opportunity to develop their emotional intelligence, so that by the time they qualify as a vet, they are well prepared for what awaits them in the workplace. The students toured Freedom Park and had a discussion on cultural diversity, privilege, power and how South Africa has transformed. They had an open discussion about their personal experiences, how they feel and which changes they would like to see going forward in the democratic South Africa. These discussions are a crucial eye opener for the students, help to raise awareness of the surroundings they find themselves in and is a small step to equip them for challenges that they may face in the future.

Community partners

Adventures with Elephants, Bela-Bela SuperSpar, Community and Veterinary Services Southern Africa, Freedom Park, Highveld Horsecare Unit, Lory Park Zoo, Schools and Temba Clinic

