

Meet Marlana: Doctor of Veterinary Medicine student



Ever since she was little, Marlana Lopez dreamed of working with animals. In high school, she also gave herself the goal of travelling and studying overseas. As a final year [Doctor of Veterinary Medicine](#) student, Marlana is living out her vision.



Moving to Melbourne

Marlena is of Mexican-American heritage and moved to Australia from California.

She arrived in Melbourne on the first day of orientation. Despite not having much time to settle in, re-locating to Melbourne was a positive experience.

“I found the Australian people to be very welcoming and warm. I’ve really loved my experience moving to the city.”

It helped that Marlena could relate to her new peers, many of whom had also moved to Melbourne to study.

“I was incredibly grateful that so many of my classmates were international students who were going through the exact same process; we really leaned on each other for support during the settling in period at the start of the program.”

The University of Melbourne’s Doctor of Veterinary Medicine is an attractive choice for many international students because the degree is internationally recognised; it’s accredited by the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council and the American Veterinary Medicine Association.

Her study experience

Professional experience is a key part of the four-year degree, including a lecture-free final year full of practice-based learning. This is well suited to Marlena who describes herself as a “kinaesthetic learner.”

“I learn best when I’m able to get hands-on in the material,” she explains. Given this, it’s no surprise anatomy and surgery are her favourite subjects: she can put her theoretical knowledge into practice.

Outside of class, there are many other opportunities to gain experience, and this has seen Marlina shadow veterinarians around the world. She has travelled to Bali, different states in Australia, and back home to California to work at the Santa Ana Zoo. Best of all, this experience contributes to her degree.

As a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine student, you’ll participate in external placements in your first and second year. This may be at farms, zoos and other workplaces within animal industries. In the next two years, you’ll spend time at animal clinics and hospitals.

“By far, the high for me within the veterinary program has been the opportunity to complete extramural placements globally. I’ve been able to travel to different countries, shadow leaders within the veterinary community and build networks.”

These industry networks have led to further opportunities for Marlina, such as scholarships and invitations to conferences.

The fourth, and final, year of the program is “the most hands-on year...when you have the opportunity to really act like a mini-veterinarian while still being supervised”.

“This year, in my final year, I had plans to complete extramural placements in South Africa, as well as a placement at Werribee Zoo, which is a local zoo in Melbourne. I also planned to travel to Ireland to shadow a cattle veterinarian.” Marlina explains.

These plans have been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however Marlina is still able to receive the experience she needs to graduate; she can complete her placements at the University’s **U-Vet Animal Hospital**.

Working with animals

Outside of her studies and placements, Marlena works as a veterinary nurse. With so much experience, she's not short of animal stories.

She's performed x-rays on a gibbon, assisted in the treatment of a gunshot wound in a monkey in Indonesia, and has worked with all kinds of Australian species (kangaroos, wallabies, snakes and orphaned magpies). A fun animal fact she shared with us is that pigs are pregnant for three months, three weeks and three days.

She knows an impressive array of animal facts, including that wombat droppings are cube shaped, adult cats don't meow to communicate to each other but to seek human attention, horses produce about 10 gallons of saliva a day, and that humans have the same number of neck vertebrae as giraffes.

One memory that stands out for Marlena, is her time working in an animal clinic in Bali. During the month she was there, she helped care for a dog who didn't have use of its legs upon arrival. She assisted in providing the dog with a range of veterinary care, including acupuncture, medication and physiotherapy. By the time she finished her placement, the dog gradually was able to walk again.

It's interactions like this that motivate Marlena and remind her of how rewarding her career can be.

"There are some lows and some emotional struggles that veterinary professionals face on a daily basis, but it is also a very rewarding career. I don't think there is a career more rewarding, where you can actually save the lives of animals every single day."

Her passions

Mental health and pet owner education are two areas Marlena is passionate about.

It's easy to imagine that veterinarians spend their days playing with cute animals. In reality, veterinarians will often face stressful and emotionally challenging situations. Her final year research project focuses on determining the prevalence and predictors of depression, anxiety, and stress in Australian veterinary students. In addition, Marlena is a committee member of the charity, Love Your Pet Love Your Vet®, and is helping to raise awareness of veterinary wellbeing and mental health.

She is also motivated to promote animal conservation and responsible pet care through her own [blog](#).

Her advice and ambitions

Marlena suggests putting yourself out there and trying to get as much experience as possible when at university. For Marlena, this meant reaching out to local animal clinics and veterinarians.

Making the most of opportunities is something she intends to continue doing as she starts her career after graduation.

“I believe my generation will play a pivotal role in rectifying some of the damage climate change has had on the planet, and I want to contribute to that cause. In terms of what I will be doing after graduation, I am keeping my mind open to whatever prospects may come. The world is full of opportunities and I want to try as many as I possibly can.”

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