

# SPOTLIGHT ON

## University of Calgary Veterinary Medicine

Innovative approaches in teaching the next generation of veterinarians.

### Entrepreneurship, innovation, and community engagement

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The University of Calgary is among the top 5 Canadian research-intensive universities and is known for its focus on entrepreneurship, innovation, and community engagement. These principles mold the innovative approaches to teaching and research that the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM) has applied from its very beginning in 2005.

UCVM was one of the first veterinary schools world-wide to develop a distributed learning model to provide community-based clinical education through partnerships with a network of privately-owned and charity-based clinics, industry partners, zoo, and provincial veterinary services (the Distributed Veterinary Learning Community [DVLC]). UCVM works with DVLC partners to provide experiential learning opportunities to students, to allow clinical faculty and clinical trainees to practice and to conduct applied research. Fourth-year DVM students spend a year gaining hands-on experience in a variety of clinics and settings across Alberta, including remote and rural communities. While on rotation, students live in the communities where they learn and where they often find employment after graduation.

At UCVM, students start experiential learning on day one. The Clinical Skills program is known for its hands-on learning, adopting a scaffolding, educational approach using low- and high-fidelity simulators, cadavers, and live animals. This allows students to gain skills and confidence in a safe and animal-welfare compatible environment that is evidence-based to best learn psychomotor skills. UCVM prides itself on its innovative and entrepreneurial spirit. Many of the simulators used in veterinary schools around the world have been developed by our highly dedicated instructors. Our students engage with a wide variety of species, including learning about beef cattle production, cattle health, and welfare. UCVM leverages WA Ranches, a \$44-million operating 1,000-head cow-calf ranch on the outskirts of Calgary to provide students with a unique learning experience. Students also get hands-on experience at the Calgary Zoological Society, whose head veterinarian is also on faculty at UCVM. As a part of the Clinical Skills program, the UCVM offers low-cost spays and neuters to cats and dogs whose owners may have difficulty paying for these important surgeries.

Along with excellent clinical skills, veterinarians' ability to communicate with their clients is critical to the health of their patients. Parallel to the Clinical Skills program, the Professional Skills program emphasizes non-clinical skills es-

sential for the life-long success of a veterinary professional. The focus is through teaching professionalism, relationship-centered clinical communication, business skills, coping mechanisms to address burnout, compassion fatigue, mental and physical self-care. The UCVM has also a partnership with the Calgary Urban Project Society to host veterinary clinics for pets of people living below the poverty line.

As part of Canada's path to reconciliation, the UCVM is committed to working with, and learning from, Indigenous Canadians. DVM students and faculty are working with indigenous communities around Calgary, across Alberta, and up to the Arctic circle. The focus is to introduce veterinary medicine to high school students, community members, and to develop long-term programs that create culturally safe veterinary services for all.

UCVM prides itself in offering students meaningful opportunities to take what they have learnt in the classroom and apply it in the real world. Students face diverse environments and clients, providing care appropriate for the individual circumstance and experiencing the concept of spectrum of care in real-life scenarios.

The University of Calgary is a research-intensive university and the UCVM is known for its quality of research programs in infectious diseases, regenerative and reproductive medicine, cattle health, wildlife health and ecology, pain and animal welfare, and veterinary education, among others. The relevance and application of research is included in DVM programming where all learners participate in the third-year DVM course, "Investigative Veterinary Medicine and Science Communication." This course provides students with the opportunity to answer real-world veterinary question while working under the guidance of faculty mentors. Principles and application of evidence-based medicine, critical thinking, and effective communication of science to stakeholder groups are emphasized.

Alberta, like many regions in the world, has a critical shortage of veterinary professionals. In early 2022, the government of Alberta has agreed to the additional funding necessary to double UCVM's enrollment numbers from 50 to 100 students by 2025. This includes a new veterinary learning center at our SpyHill campus, new infrastructure to augment learning at WA Ranches, and operational funding to continue to deliver our DVM program. In addition to planning our new building and infrastructure, we are also revising our curriculum to make sure we stay innovative and relevant to DVM graduates of the future. Come and join the fun!

