

Breathing for Birds: My First Year as a Student of Veterinary Medicine

Beth Noe

Department of Biology
Lake Forest College
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045



Beth Noe '10 working in the Wildlife Medical Clinic at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

"You need to give him 10 breaths per minute," my team leader says to me over the surgery table. I scramble to try and get a heart rate while looking at the clock. We have just placed a severely dehydrated Cooper's hawk under anesthesia because he needs an intraosseous catheter placed into his ulna. That's right, we're going to be giving him fluids directly into the bone. I've heard about this before, but I've never seen it actually performed. Finally, my team leader asks, "Do you want to try it?"

It's just the team leader and myself in the clinic. Completely terrified at the thought of sticking a giant needle into something I can't see, I manage to respond, "I'll stick to the breathing part." Squeeze the rebreathing bag, close the valve, squeeze the bag again, open the valve. I can do this! I watch as he deftly places the catheter in one try.

This is a very typical situation in the Wildlife Medical Clinic at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Completely managed by the students (under clinician supervision, of course), we take in injured wildlife brought in by the community and try to nurse them back to health. It's a major time commitment—one I question sometimes while studying for my first year exams—but the hands-on experience is completely worth it.

Becoming a veterinarian has been a goal of mine since before I can remember, but the road to vet school has not been easy. There are currently only 28 accredited veterinary schools in the United States, and each school only accepts an average of 100 students per year. I applied to four schools and had received two rejection letters in a matter of weeks after I pressed the "submit" button on the online application. After being placed pretty far down on the waitlist at another school, I only had one chance remaining, and luckily I made it to the interview stage here at UIUC. A few months later I was in the parking lot in front of my dormitory jumping around with an acceptance letter in my hand, shocked that this moment was finally happening.

Since school has started, time has flown by so fast that it's hard to believe my first semester is almost over. The vet school at UIUC works in quarter systems and has implemented a brand new curriculum where first years start out by spending their first eight weeks in clinics while moving to a different department every week. By being paired up with a fourth year student, we were able to see what a typical day will be like in three short years when we will be making the decisions and doing the examinations. Overall, everyone's schedule was different; I started out in small animal internal medicine, moved to farm animal medicine, then spent some time in ophthalmology, then equine medicine and surgery, anesthesiology, surgical skills, ultrasound, and finished with a public health rotation. Next year, as a second year student, I'll get to go back into the clinics in order to get even more experience in the other areas of the hospital, such as, exotic animal medicine and soft tissue or orthopedic surgery.

This year, there are two of my classmates from Lake Forest who are first year students with me at UIUC. Three students, from a very small school like Lake Forest College, all getting accepted to a veterinary school in the same year is pretty remarkable when you consider the thousands and thousands of people who apply for a spot. The key to getting in is to make yourself look unique and different from everyone else, and the easiest way to do that is experience outside of the classrooms. Whether it's research with a professor, an internship, study abroad, or even an additional major in something outside of the sciences, all of these things can help you become a more well-rounded candidate and make your application look stronger. When I was at Lake Forest I was a Richter scholar, I had various internships during the summers working with animals, I was a biology and French double major, and I completed a study abroad program in Paris working at a vet clinic.

Leadership skills are also important to have when entering a medical profession because it shows that you know how to work with people and that you can handle pressure and deadlines. I was Vice President of Lake Forest College's chapter of Beta Beta Beta national biological society and publication chair of *Eukaryon* my senior year. Additionally, I was involved in many other things on campus, such as, the radio station and sorority life. My advice is to make sure you work hard, but at the same time leave yourself some free time to enjoy college life during the undergraduate experience, because the concept of free time has no meaning once you hit the professional level. I feel like I'm studying for finals every single day of the week!

The satisfaction I got when that Cooper's hawk woke up from anesthesia unharmed was very overwhelming. I could not believe that we, a third year student and I, a first year student, had the knowledge and the skills to perform a pretty serious procedure by ourselves. One of the major reasons why the clinic exists is exactly to provide such types of opportunities to students, so they can apply what they learn in the classroom to actual cases. Being in the moment and being comfortable calling all of the shots is a skill I haven't yet perfected, but I've got three and a half (very long) more years to practice!

Note: Eukaryon is published by students at Lake Forest College, who are solely responsible for its content. The views expressed in Eukaryon do not necessarily reflect those of the College. Articles published within Eukaryon

should not be cited in bibliographies. Material contained herein should be treated as personal communication and should be cited as such only with the consent of the author.