

# **GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM FUNDED EXPERIENCES**

*INTERESTED IN STUDYING ABROAD? CHECK OUT THEIR EXPERIENCE BELOW!*

DESTINATION: SOUTH AFRICA

**AWARD RECIPIENT AND CLASS: PALLAVI ORUGANTI, CLASS OF 2022**

---

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

"I had the opportunity to travel to Mpumalanga, South Africa to conduct field research for a project entitled, "Influence of sociodemographic factors on infectious and zoonotic pathogen risk in a resource-limited community at the wildlife-livestock interface, Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region, South Africa." I conducted this research as part of the Veterinary Scholar Summer Research Program under the mentorship of Drs. Amanda Berrian (Veterinary Preventive Medicine) and Elisabeth Root (Geography) and with support from the Global One Health initiative (GOHi) and the College of Veterinary Medicine Global Engagement Travel Scholarship.

My project utilized social science methods (specifically ethnographic methods from anthropology) to investigate zoonotic disease risk factors in the community. Our main objective was to better understand how factors like gender could affect exposure risk to zoonotic pathogens causing acute febrile illnesses, such as Q fever, tick bite fever, and leptospirosis, in the rural Mnisi community. This project was conducted in collaboration with the Mnisi Community Programme (MCP) at the University of Pretoria Faculty of Veterinary Science. The villages in the study area are unique in that they stand at a critical human-livestock-wildlife interface, with many villages and cattle grazing areas bordering wildlife game reserves.

For the fieldwork, I conducted household observations and focus groups discussions with community members. Through these methods, I was able to better understand the daily livelihood activities of residents and get a firsthand perspective of potential risks of pathogen exposure, problems faced by the community, cultural attitudes, and the role of animals in people's lives. I was humbled by how welcoming people were to allow me to visit them in their homes and share their culture with me. This experience reaffirmed my career goals in global One Health and public health and was an opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of applying social science methods to issues of veterinary medicine and public health. I am grateful to the Mnisi community, the MCP Environmental Monitors who provided invaluable research assistance while in the community, and my advisor Dr. Amanda Berrian for allowing me to be a part of this memorable experience. I am excited to continue working on this project as we move into the data analysis phase, and I can see how our results inform research, training, and community engagement efforts within the MCP and even the broader One Health Platform."

## ***How did the scholarship enhance this experience? Would you encourage other students to apply?***

"The Global Engagement Travel Scholarship enhanced my experience in South Africa by providing the funding to cover expenses related to the travel and stay in-country. With this support, much of the financial strain of traveling abroad was taken off, and thus I could focus on developing the research methods and proposal. It is great to know that we have a support system at OSU CVM for students to partake in unique opportunities to engage outside the classroom and clinic. Veterinarians play a critical role in public health, conservation,

and as stewards and advocates for health across the world. The Global Engagement Travel Scholarship encourages and enables our students to experience these important roles for themselves and to think about the potential impact of the veterinary profession in a greater global context. I would definitely encourage other students to apply for the Global Engagement Travel Scholarship. Traveling abroad is an enriching experience in many ways. You gain not only skills in cultural exchange and understanding, but also in tackling challenges in a novel environment. Conducting this field research, I often had to take a lead role in training our community guides on the goals of the study, keep and adjust a fieldwork schedule, and work across language barriers. While difficult, I was able to practice project management and gained confidence in working within a new cultural setting. These are critical skills both for a clinical veterinarian and for a career in global health. It is invaluable collaborating with veterinary colleagues across the world and to connect directly with community members who depend on animals in their daily life. Hearing a livestock owner talk about the cultural value of animals in the community, women expressing their desire for better water access to their homes, and talking with the Environmental Monitors about their role and passion as community animal health workers are just a few examples of the perspectives I gained during my time abroad. It humanized my interest in veterinary medicine and demonstrated that we cannot separate the medicine and science of research from the culture that shapes the attitudes, actions, and aspirations of people. It is the people I met while traveling that made this such a memorable and impactful experience. Traveling to participate in a veterinary or research experience allows you to apply what is learned in the classroom to the real world, but also gives you a greater perspective on the impact you can have as a future veterinarian. "

**Pictures from the Program!**



*Figure 1(right): The field research team, from left to right: Violet Ndlovu (MCP Environmental Monitor), Pallavi Oruganti, Philemon Mbhungele (MCP Environmental Monitor), Dr. Amanda Berrian (Veterinary Preventative Medicine Department- OSU)*



*Figure 2(left): Pallavi (center) with community focus group participants and the MCP Environmental Monitors who served as research assistants, translators, and community guides.*



*Figure 3: Pallavi at the Hluvukani Animal Clinic, part of the Mnisi Community Programme that promotes One Health research and outreach through low-cost veterinary care.*