

## **ANSC Alumnus Justin Simone**

### **St. Matthew's University for Veterinary School**

When I chose to leave the United States to go to St. Matthew's University for Veterinary School, I was a little apprehensive to say the least. After I first met my class and many of the professors at our leadership orientation, however, I felt right at home.

Our program is split into basic sciences and clinical sciences. Basic sciences are covered during the first three semesters and clinical sciences are covered during semesters five through seven. The fourth semester is a transition and combines basic science courses with clinical science courses. Most semesters require seventeen to eighteen credits and the semester with the most credits requires nineteen. We are able to work hands-on with the animals in many of our classes such as clinical skills (which have a small animal, livestock, and specialty portion), behavior/welfare, food animal medicine, large animal medicine, theriogenology, and many others. The dogs and cats that we work with are students' pets. We also have two horses and three goats at our teaching facility as well as many local farms that we go to for other large animal experience. The first seven semesters run year-round and upon completion students attend an affiliate US school for their clinical rotations for the final year.

A challenging component of the program is some courses are taught by visiting professors which means some of those courses are taught in short blocks so it can lead to a

heavy course load during that time. This is not something that I would ever want to change however, because it allows the school to bring in specialists of various fields to ensure that students are getting the best and most up-to-date information. What I really like about the school is the small class size and the professors that we have. My class has twelve students, and classes range from as small as seven to as many as sixteen. This allows for a lot of time with professors to go over something that you may be struggling with and it is less intimidating to ask questions in class. Another benefit of the small class size is that if you'd like to become involved there are many positions in the student clubs. Throughout

my time here, I have been the president of our Behavior Club, president of our Emergency Club, fundraising chair of our Exotics Club, treasurer of our Student Government, delegate of



our school to the student AVMA, and the founder/president of our Veterinary Business Management Association Chapter (VBMA).

There are many things that I love about our professors. Our Dean of Students, who also teaches our clinical nutrition course, is the current President of the American Academy of Veterinary Nutrition. She also graduated from St. George's when they weren't accredited. She is a great resource for students. Our Dean is very accessible to students and also teaches part of our exotics course. She used to teach clinical students at the University of Pennsylvania and is very highly regarded in the exotics field. Our small animal medicine professor is a board certified criticalist and was the first person to report the Fanconi-like syndrome caused by certain chicken jerky treats. Not all schools have a behavior course and we are lucky enough to have a professor who is dually boarded in animal behavior and welfare to teach our behavior course. She also makes house calls on the island and will take students with her for the hands-on experience.



I can answer the question many students which is about the cost to attend St. Matthews. When you include various fees, the total cost of tuition is about \$13,000, a flight from JFK typically ranges from \$350 - \$550 depending on the time of year, and if you live in the residence halls by yourself the cost is \$4200 per semester (all inclusive). Housing can be cheaper if you chose to have a roommate or an apartment. Direct flights from the Northeast leave from Boston and JFK and seem to be cheaper than from many other airports.

The island is modernized and I've found it to be very safe, but it is best to be smart. We get breaks between every semester, our winter break tends to be between three and four weeks and our other breaks are about two and half weeks long. I am able to come home during each break and some students even go home for the occasional weekend during the semester. One of the big draws of this school for me was the small class size and the courses that were offered. My advice for anyone looking at multiple schools is to find out what courses are offered and if you have a specific interest to make sure they offer it. For example, if you are interested in animal behavior, which was one of the other draws of St. Matthew's for me, then make sure that the school you're selecting offers that course.

Lastly, students often ask me what it means that the school isn't AVMA accredited. The biggest difference is that you will have to take the PAVE (which is currently accepted in 40



states) or the ECFVG if you plan on practicing in one of the other states or in Canada. The PAVE is a difficult test but the school prepares you well. You have to pass it before your clinical year and can start taking it as soon as the beginning of your sixth semester. I took it once and passed it as did everyone else in my class. The feedback that we have gotten from the students who have now graduated clinics and have their DVM is that the PAVE is more difficult than the national licensure exam (the NAVLE). The other big difference is the lack of federal loans and if anybody has any specific questions about the school, I'd be happy to answer them. Feel free to send me an email at [jsimone123189@gmail.com](mailto:jsimone123189@gmail.com).