



Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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Appetite for adventure: Elvina Yau, D.V.M. '20

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The online moniker for Elvina Yau, D.V.M. '20, captures much about her. Known as Elvina the Explorer to followers of her [blog](#) and [Instagram account](#), the third-year veterinary student professes a “cheesy love for alliteration” and personal philosophy that values curiosity and an adventurous outlook. “I’ve always fancied the idea of being someone who sets off to discover, traverse, and investigate, whether in the context of scientific research, travel, or personal soul-searching,” she said.

True to this spirit, the native of Long Island, New York, has followed her passion for animals and their health to far-flung places across the globe, from Australia to Africa and Asia. It has also landed her at Cornell’s College of Veterinary Medicine, where her current pursuit of a D.V.M. degree recently received a boost from three prestigious scholarships: the [Merck Animal Health Scholarship](#), the [Zoetis/AAVMC Veterinary Student Scholarship](#), and the [Simmons Educational Fund Business Aptitude Award](#).

“I was surprised, humbled, and deeply grateful upon winning these scholarships,” said Yau, one of three sisters, whose parents immigrated from China. “As a first-generation student, I’m especially driven to honor the educational privileges made possible by familial sacrifices. My acceptance to the College of Veterinary Medicine was monumental for my family.”

Yau’s path to Cornell began on her parents’ living room couch, where she used to watch National Geographic and Animal Planet with her father every night. Now she regularly finds herself in the same settings that first inspired her love for animals and wanderlust.

Whether researching owl monkeys in Argentina during college at the University of Pennsylvania on her first-



A cheetah photographed by Yau during her Expanding Horizons project in Namibia.

ever international trip, studying zoology and kangaroos at the University of Melbourne during a semester abroad in Australia, or using Expanding Horizons funding to learn more about Asian elephant welfare in Chiang Mai, Thailand and cheetah nutrition in Otjiwarongo, Namibia – Yau embraces the physical, cultural, and mental challenges of traveling and working abroad.

“In Argentina, we marched for miles in the Gran Chaco forest through knee-high swamps and muddy sludge to locate monkeys,” she recalled. “Despite incurring injuries and illness, communicating complex terms in a second language, living in a

campsite where natural predators lurked, and not showering for days, it was a sheer joy to traipse through the forest and sleep under the stars to the sounds of crooning birds, frogs, and other mysteriously wonderful wildlife.”

Yau’s experiences have found a complement in coursework on One Health, moving her onto a path towards a career in conservation medicine. Along the way, she has been honing longstanding interests in photography and writing, for example through an internship with CVM Marketing and Communications department at CVM, freelance journalism for non-profit organizations and the environmental news platform Mongabay, and her blog.

“Ultimately, becoming a veterinary photojournalist establishes my niche in society,” Yau said. “I’ll be lending a healing hand, compelling image, and resonant voice to our beloved cohabitants of the animal kingdom, who in turn sustain my curiosity and personal fulfillment.”

-By Olivia Hall