

# David Arias '16, LVT, DVM, Transformed by First Trip Overseas with Mercy

I'm a city kid," said David Arias '16, LVT, DVM. "I'd never been out of the five boroughs before I went to Mercy College." Arias travelled to Belize twice as an undergraduate veterinary technology student and says it cemented his choice of profession as a veterinarian and his connection to the environment and love of the rainforest with all its attendant wildlife. "I saw how hard the locals worked to keep wildlife going," he says. "I sat through lectures, through treatments, and I spent a fair amount of time under water. That was amazing because I didn't know how to swim! I had to challenge myself to get out of the boat and get down there."

It was all under the watchful eye of Mercy professors and local coordinators, who he says were very protective about all the students, constantly communicating their passion for local wildlife.

Sabrina Timperman, DVM, associate director and associate professor of veterinary technology, notes, "Seeing wildlife such as iguanas, agouties and coatimundis in their natural environment gives our students a greater and deeper understanding of



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how these animals fit into their local ecosystem and how that ecosystem then fits into the more global environment. Second, by witnessing firsthand the richness of this geographical region, they gain an appreciation for the need for conservation efforts locally as well as around the globe. Third, they have the opportunity to practice their clinical skills. Observing, evaluating and critically thinking about a case are all skills which they will later need to perform when they are working in the field back home."

Arias says Mercy College was a blessing. "The whole team laid out my career for me and they basically structured me as a well-rounded student to be ready for veterinary school." A first-generation student from Colombian immigrant parents, he says the program was difficult, but his Mercy

education made him a better veterinary student and a better clinician. His was not the traditional path: while attending Mercy he was raising a daughter and working full-time even as he studied and went to school. Arias remembers having to save up money to take the trip to Belize; he eventually went there twice with the Veterinary Technology Program before graduating and moving on to veterinary school.

Arias is now a co-owner of the International Animal Clinic in Queens, NY located in the very neighborhood where he grew up. He is mindful that choosing to open his business there gives him a chance to give back, and “to show young children growing up there now that they do not have to be defined by the circumstances of their birth.”

**“You can do anything in this life as long as you believe in yourself, and people believe in you, and that’s what Mercy College did for me.”**

Arias continues the pay-it-forward ethos of the Mercy Veterinary Technology Program by donating his veterinary expertise overseas — most recently in the Dominican Republic — doing surgeries and donating supplies to struggling communities.

Meanwhile his Mercy degree sits right above his desk, a continual reminder of possibility and promise. “You can do anything no matter your past, where you come from, or your obstacles — you can do anything in this life as long as you believe in yourself, and people believe in you, and that’s what Mercy College did for me.”



Stephanie Acosta '16, LVT, MA



Alexandra Garcia '18, LVT



David Arias '16, LVT, DVM and Anthony Aponte '15, LVT

Photos provided by David Arias '16, LVT, DVM & Sabrina Timperman, DVM