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SCAVMA AUCTION
(Photos at left and bottom row) Penn Vet’s Student Chapter of the American Veterinary Medical Association (SCAVMA) held a nautical-themed auction this year to raise money for the organization. Students, faculty, staff, donors, alumni, and parents donated a variety of items for the silent and live auctions. Proceeds from the auction allow SCAVMA members to attend conferences and symposia throughout the year.

ONE HEALTH AWARDS
(Below) Penn Vet Dean Joan Hendricks is flanked by the winners of the 2015 One Health Award, Drs. Haim H. Bau and Changchun Liu of Penn’s School of Engineering and Applied Science. Bau and Liu have developed an inexpensive, high-sensitivity platform for molecular diagnostics at the point of care. They have used the new platform to adapt existing technologies to detect pathogens in humans, animals, food, and water.

The One Health Awards are announced at the beginning of the Microbiome Symposium. Dr. Jo Handelsman, Associate Director for Science at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, delivered the keynote speech at the 2nd annual Microbiome Symposium.
Veterinary school is as terrifically rewarding as it is arduous. Emotionally, physically, and personally. For the families, friends, and mentors joining us tonight, you are likely well acquainted with how quickly the euphoria of having successfully completed our first spay can give way to panic over an upcoming exam. For two-and-a-half years you have patiently fielded our tearful phone calls, first-year insecurities, and second-year doubts, and you have endured the holiday dinners when we excitedly dove into a rapid-fire recounting of something that promptly nauseated the rest of the table. If we have made it to tonight in reasonably sound physical and mental condition, it is because you have been there for us. It is because no matter how long we go without calling, or how many occasions we miss due to late nights spent studying, or with what certainty we will find another poor, pathetic creature to add to our already sizeable menageries, you continue to support and to love us. You have cared for us when we were exhausted, and ill, and in those heart-wrenching moments when we questioned if this would all be worth it in the end. And I am sure that I am safe to speak for the entirety of V’17 when I say that we are tremendously grateful.

In reflecting on the past two-and-a-half years, I can’t help but be amused that perhaps the best decision I have made regarding my career in veterinary medicine has been choosing to defer my veterinary education. In doing so, I have had the good fortune to be a part of the incredible Class of 2017. Of course, when I arrived at Penn Vet for the first day of orientation, I was terrified. I was afraid that you, my classmates, would all be infinitely more intelligent, better clinically prepared for our chosen profession, and possessed of greater charisma than I could ever hope to emulate. And what a genuinely rewarding experience it has been to have had you prove me correct on every count!

How wonderful to be surrounded by peers with backgrounds in criminal justice, mathematics, French, anthropology, and dance; classmates who hail from as far away as Puerto Rico, Scotland, and Greece, and from every corner of the United States. Before arriving at Penn Vet, we were neuroscientists, dairy herdsmen, and systems engineers in defense; valedictorians, captains, and presidents. It would have been easy, even expected, that placing 126 such driven, focused, and ambitious individuals under the same academic and professional pressures would result in anything but camaraderie. And yet, that is precisely what we have achieved. We have applied our strengths, talents, and personal
connections to better the class as a singular entity, without expectation that these acts of goodwill be returned in kind.

When asked why it was more shameful for a Spartan to be caught without his shield than without his sword, King Demaratus replied, “Because the latter they put on for their own protection, but the shield for the common good of the whole line.” Whether by sharing massive compilations of study questions, the sudden and consistent appearance of baked goods during midterms, or an outpouring of support for a classmate who has found a stray pit bull in the middle of the night, the Class of 2017 shields its collective well-being. And it is this willingness to give selflessly of ourselves, to celebrate the individual successes of our peers, and to pull together rather than apart when placed under tremendous strain, that I find truly admirable.

There is a pervading sentiment not only in the world of veterinary medicine, but in American culture generally, that to succeed you must excel. But if I have anything to offer to this talented and accomplished class, it is that excellence can be found in doing the ordinary well. In demonstrating gratitude often and openly, in being kind to those around you, and in possessing courage and humility in equal parts. And what better confirmation of the joy to be had from the many small pleasures of the everyday, than in enjoying the company of an animal who is loved? In return for the most basic offerings of food and water, a place to sleep, and a bit of our time and affection, we are gifted with an animal’s remarkable capacity to provide comfort, security, and a sense of purpose to their human comrades.

We have long employed animals to assist our disabled, to aid in the development of life-saving medical advances, and to comfort those for whom human contact is simply not enough. The tender simplicity of the human-animal bond has long been appreciated in the written tradition, with one of my favorite examples appearing in Homer’s “Odyssey.” When Odysseus finally returns to Ithaca, the only one who is able to recognize the infamous Greek strategist is his aging hound, Argos. Overjoyed at seeing his master, Argos flattens his ears and wags his tail, but is too weak to rise to greet Odysseus who cannot risk revealing his true identity by acknowledging his beloved dog. Yet despite his resolve to maintain his guise until he has reclaimed his homeland, Odysseus—who has up until this point, shed tears only for the heroes who fell at Troy—weeps at the sight of his old dog who is happy simply because after 20 years of waiting, his human has finally returned home.

Many of us, if not all of us, have had the great privilege of coming home to our own Argos. They go by different names of course, by Olly and Otto, Bain, Finn, Sunny, and Sampson. Then there’s Wellie, Willy, and Isabeli. There are bunnies, too, like Jaee and Samuel L. Jackson, and cats like Penny and Peaches; Twist the rat, and even a cow named Rosie. So despite the sleepless nights and early mornings ahead, and regardless of how many hours we clock in at the wrong end of one species or another, and even though it will take considerable presence of mind to handle the moment when I realize Dean Richardson’s questions are coming from the man himself rather than the relative safety of a test page, I cannot imagine a more rewarding career than to have devoted ourselves to caring for the animals who so effortlessly enrich our own lives.

To my classmates, I wish you all the best as we take this next step on the path to becoming veterinarians. Have a lovely evening with your guests and may your white coats receive a proper breaking in from your loved ones waiting patiently at home. Congratulations, V’17.