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Nuñoa Project Reflection

Four years ago, I did not anticipate travelling across the world to work with alpacas. My first encounter with these unique creatures was at 14 years old visiting a local farm. My mother and I were immediately drawn to their beautiful fiber and quirky behaviors and before long we were building a herd of our own. I spent my high school years observing their behavior and picking up information on the species at various shows and events.

When I began my education at the University of Massachusetts studying animal science, I heard about Dr. Purdy's program with alpacas, which was highly recommended by his students. The classes offered by Nuñoa Project not only gave me knowledge and experience that will serve me well in my future working with animals, but also helped immensely with the management of my own herd. Where I live there are limited options for alpaca veterinarians, so knowing about different ailments common in alpacas has been incredibly useful. I enjoyed working with both the alpacas and donkeys equally, although the two species are very different. I found the most interesting part of the classes to be the reproductive work. I practiced several techniques for reproductive success, including ultrasound and semen analysis.

With the knowledge I acquired during my years in college, I felt confident in my ability to help alpaca farmers elsewhere. I am so fortunate to have been given the opportunity to travel to Peru to do this work. The beauty of this country is breathtaking and I especially enjoyed experiencing the culture which is so different from our own here in the United States. Being able to help both the animals and farmers in the communities we visited was a rewarding experience because these animals are their livelihood. Giving advice on how to improve their genetics means more than winning a blue ribbon in Peru. To these farmers, it contributes to their survival. This trip was eye opening because I saw a different perspective of the alpaca industry in the place where it originated. Additionally, there was so much to learn from the brilliant doctors and fellow students with whom I travelled.

I am so grateful for the incomparable experience Nuñoa Project has given me. It is a wonderful program that is continually improving. I would recommend getting involved with the Nuñoa Project to anyone interested in animals, veterinary medicine and helping people.