

IV. Teaching Portfolio

B. Teaching Philosophy

I love my job. My bucket is filled every day by my students and colleagues. I am the Course Director for all domestic animal anatomy in the Department of Biomedical Sciences (BMS305/531/633) as well as Course Director for DVM Physiology (VM618) and a DVM Large Animal Anatomy Independent Study. As such, I am fortunate to teach undergraduates, graduate students, and our professional veterinary students. Our anatomy laboratory (AZ W117) is a place of respect: where all three of these populations come together at the same time; where what you know matters more than the letters after your name; and where everyone comes to learn, share, and explore together. I live for their “aha” moments, for when learning is novel and connections are made. Whether we are evaluating the clinical significance of an anatomical structure, or helping them to realize the fallacy of having to decide *right now* exactly what it is that they want to do for the rest of their lives, I encourage them to adopt a growth mindset, and to recognize that their happiness may be the key to their success, not the other way around.

I was fortunate to have incredible teachers and mentors who guided me in the pursuit of my academic goals. I earned my DVM from Tufts University in 2004, completed a one-year internship in large animal critical care and equine ambulatory practice, and then came to CSU for an equine reproduction residency. I became a Diplomate of the American College of Theriogenologists in 2007, earned my PhD in reproductive physiology and neuroendocrinology in 2010, and after a post-doc in molecular biology, became a faculty member in the Department of Biomedical Sciences in 2012. However, it was during that post-doc that I had the two most important advising experiences of my own life. The first was with my PhD advisor, Dr. Colin Clay, who simply asked, “What makes you happy?” I had never been asked this before, nor did I have an answer.

Even though I was an accomplished veterinarian and used those skills almost daily during my PhD, I had previously been critical of myself becoming “just” a research veterinarian. Once again I was struggling, but now it was with my choice to start a family and explore my potential as an educator instead of as a “real” research scientist. None of this had to do with my happiness, but of my perception of how others might judge me. It was then that I spent two extraordinary days hosting Dr. Mario Capecchi, co-winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, for a seminar. I had read his autobiographical sketch prior to meeting him, but nothing prepared me for the depth and clarity of the conversations that we had about politics, family, art, and careers. He was ridiculed by the faculty at Harvard University for leaving the “mecca of molecular biology” to start a new research program at the University of Utah. Capecchi has never regretted the decision to forge his own path and pursue what made him happy. Life is too

precious to not be lived fully, or spent worrying about the judgements of others, and his greatest honor was when he became a father.

While I often tell students the Capecchi story and others, I am also carefully listening to their story. They come to me because they know that I will be honest and fair. I started walking over to the Hilton for a cup of coffee with my graduate teaching assistants when I realized they needed a different space to have a difficult conversation. Most of my meetings are now long walks, followed by a cup of coffee or a hot cocoa. Movement helps during a challenging conversation. I also get to model self-care and build a bond as the warm drink soothes their emotions. In the last 5 years, those students have taught me great deal about myself and CSU. From the student whose scores improved after I began giving her oral exams: the Student Disability Center and trust your gut. She was later diagnosed with Irlen Syndrome. From the student who was being physically abused by her partner: the CSU Health Network and Tell Someone. From the student with PTSD who had been sexually abused as a child: Case Management, Dr. Laurie Fonken, mental health services for faculty, and the difference between being available and healthy boundaries. From the student who was admitted to CSU's vet school but loved student affairs: the Student Affairs in Higher Education program at CSU. From the Colorado resident who was admitted to CSU's vet school as a non-sponsored student but she and her husband could not afford the "out-of-state" tuition rate: Chase Weldon and DVM Student Services. She re-applied the following year, was awarded a sponsored seat, and just graduated 2nd in her class with two children. From every student who has taught me about being a better educator and develop strategies to identify students who require an academic intervention before it becomes a crisis: The Institute for Learning and Teaching at CSU.

Where there is a will, I will help them find a way. Dr. Seuss's "Oh, the Places You'll Go!" is required reading for my advisees. I have evolved as an advisor and an instructor because I seek advice, encourage collaborations, and continue to learn. I am uniquely qualified to be more than a veterinarian, or a scientist, or an educator, or an advisor of only population of undergraduate, or graduate, or DVM students. I am someone with whom anyone at any stage of their career can take a walk with and get a cup of coffee. I will never push someone towards particular a path, but my philosophy is to help them to first identify what truly motivates them and to keep them moving forward so that they can see all of the routes that are currently available to them. My goal as an educator is to help them develop active learning strategies that they can use for the rest of their life and to ensure that they open to the idea that new challenges may surface with new opportunities that have yet to be discovered. I am their resource, their ally, and their advocate. Because of them, I am happy and I truly love my job.