

ARGUS INSTITUTE

College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

News

Fall 2010

Preparing for Practice

The bar for quality veterinary care was set high for Alexander Bennett as a high school student working at Silver Creek Animal Clinic in his hometown of Park City, Utah. Bennett's mentor, Dr. Randy Barbe, embodied all that Bennett envisioned he wanted to be as a veterinarian – a clinician with a passion for medicine, delivering care with compassion for the animals and people he served.

Now Bennett is a senior veterinary student at Colorado State University. The first two years of learning were heavily grounded in anatomy, physiology, and pathology. He spent countless, disciplined hours breaking down the systems of species one by one to master precisely what makes an animal's body work and how – as a veterinarian – he could help when it doesn't.

"I've always been interested in science and these are the fundamentals we are supposed to learn that lead us to diagnosis and treatment," explains Bennett.

Based on those early lessons, what Bennett looked forward to was how his veterinary education at CSU would challenge and expand his communication skills – his ability to connect with *people* – because he knew just how critical these professional skills are in serving animals and their caregivers.

CSU's veterinary curriculum has long stressed the importance of interpersonal skills. Known as "day-one skills," the training is carefully designed to prepare graduates to help animals and their families on their first day as practicing veterinarians. Communication skills provided by the Argus Institute are a key part of this core knowledge.

"Our science-based courses help prepare us for treating patients," notes Bennett. "In veterinary medicine, we think we are in it to serve animals. Yet, every animal comes with a person. I have always enjoyed the aspect of veterinary medicine that helps people. I was anxious to learn the 'science' of communication in the Argus courses."

"Communication skills can be defined, measured, observed, and taught," says Dr. Jane Shaw, director of the Argus Institute.



Alex Bennett interviewing Lorilynne Lawson with Scoob.

"Our curriculum is designed to demystify what students often perceive as illusive."

Part lecture and part laboratory, the Argus communication curriculum enables students in their junior year to study the techniques for establishing and maintaining client relationships. Then, students practice those skills in a videotaped, simulated appointment that involves paid, professional actors portraying cases that students will likely see during their senior year in the hospital and then in practice.

"The fall course lays foundational skills in history taking and building relationships with clients. Developing a high level of engagement with the client is key," says Shaw. "It's what sets the tone for the rest of the visit and determines client understanding of diagnostic tests and agreement with treatment plans. When the client feels like a partner in their animal's care, there is much a veterinarian can do to help the animal."

"There truly is a methodology to creating trust and developing rapport in a relationship," notes Bennett. (over)

The Argus Institute Team

Erin Allen, LSW – Clinical Counselor, Gail Bishop, BS – Clinical Coordinator, Erin Gerdes, BA – Masters in Social Work Intern, Del Rae Heiser, BS – Program Coordinator, Carrie Katona – Work Study Student, Jane Shaw, DVM, PhD - Director



Back: Jane with Cliff and Gail with Nikki.
Front: Erin with Samantha and Del Rae with Tesha.

Our Mission

The Argus Institute's mission is to strengthen veterinarian-client-patient communication and support relationships between people and their companion animals. We do this by:

- 1 Offering **support** to people who are facing challenges surrounding their pet's health care.
- 2 **Teaching** compassionate communication to veterinary professionals.
- 3 Conducting **research** in veterinarian-client-patient communication.
- 4 Providing **community outreach** through the student-run Pet Hospice Program.

Colorado State University

VETERINARY TEACHING HOSPITAL

(continued from front)

“The fall section of the Argus training enabled me to expand my toolbox.”

“Yet this was only half the training,” says Shaw. “There is a second half of core communication competencies for being successful veterinarians, particularly in explaining and planning. The clinical interview must evolve from history and concerns to diagnosis, treatment, options, and decision making.”

With a proven track record of the fall curriculum, this spring Argus launched the second part of the course. Students now spend an additional week in the communication lab working with simulated clients and receiving feedback on their performance from mentors and peers. In taking their skills to the next level, students tackle challenging conversations, such as delivering bad news, financial hardships, and emergency situations.

“We get so focused on diagnosis, rushing to define exactly what’s wrong so we can fix it, that we forget the client needs time to come along on this journey with us,” emphasizes Bennett. “While it might be our hundredth time diagnosing a cruciate tear, we have to remember it may be the client’s first. We have to move at their speed so the client feels they are part of the diagnostic process and ready to implement the plan.”

Bennett is finally seeing patients at the CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital with the oversight of board-certified faculty. In the final clinical year, he is focused on integrating the two skill sets, basic sciences, and communication skills and, already, his clients and patients are benefiting from the skills he honed in the Argus communication lab.

“Almost every case I’ve worked with in the hospital has involved one or more aspects of the practice cases,” explains Bennett. “During the Argus training, we were able to work through these cases in a safe and supportive environment so that it would not be such a struggle when it matters – when there are very real consequences to what we are doing, seeing patients and clients.

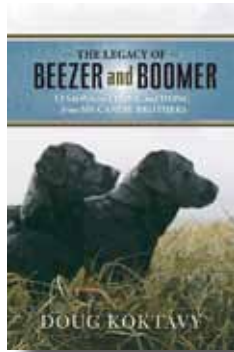
These skills are going to really make or break my future practice.”

Thank You

The Argus Institute wishes to thank Banfield Charitable Trust and Hills Pet Nutrition for their continued support of the communication curriculum.

Animal Teachers, Human Student

The Legacy of Beezer and Boomer: Lessons on Living and Dying from My Canine Brothers is an inspirational story about one man’s journey finding peace during his beloved dogs’ illnesses. The author, Doug Koltavy, has graciously offered to donate 50 percent of book sales through Dec. 31 to the Argus Institute. You can order a copy at www.BeezerAndBoomer.com.



The Art of Racing in the Rain

The *New York Times* bestseller, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* by Garth Stein, was selected by Fort Collins Reads as its 2010 “One Book, One City” project. Stein’s beautifully crafted story depicts a captivating look at the wonders and absurdities of human life ... as only a dog could tell it. We loved it! Visit www.fortcollinsreads.com.



Path of Honor

Words of tribute by loving families, friends, colleagues, and clients are inscribed on bricks in the *Path of Honor* at the CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital. The engraved bricks are part of the healing atmosphere at the hospital and recognize the human-animal bond. When you purchase a brick, your donation supports the Argus Institute. To order a brick, visit our website at www.argusinstitute.colostate.edu.



ARGUS INSTITUTE

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For questions or estate giving information, please contact the CSU College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences Development Office at (970) 491-0663.

The Campaign for Colorado State University