Sometimes the best cowboys aren’t cowboys at all.
You might recognize members of the Walker family from the show ring, but their hearts remain in Prairie Grove, Arkansas where they operate their cattle ranch, Willow Springs Cattle Company (WSCC).

With a strong focus on faith and family, Eric and Linsay along with Mason (16), Whitney (15) and Catelyn (12) strive to raise nationally competitive cattle. Their select herd of 80 cows is dedicated to raising champions. Additionally, they utilize a pool of 600 head of recips from Willow Springs Ranch, which is owned by Eric’s parents, Larry & BeAnn Walker. Their operation also includes nearly 100 acres of row crops managed by the family to supplement the nutrition of their herd in the winter.

As the Walker’s look toward the future, they plan to continue to grow their cattle operation around their foundation females. Their goal is to produce top end cattle for their customer base, while relying on their strong faith to guide them along the way.

As the WSCC operation grows, the one thing that will always remain is their strong focus on family. The Walker’s run their operation as a family and they consider their partners and their customers a part of their family. They are striving to raise champions in the ring and in life.
The first day of the senior agricultural communications students’ spring semester had arrived. You know what that means. A semester to be the big hogs on campus, to tie up loose ends, and, after soaking up our final days in Fayetteville in true senior fashion, be handed the degree we have been chasing for the past few years. What we thought would be the stereotypical senior semester was actually nothing of the sort.

Walking into Agricultural Publications on the first day, we were given a challenge. Every other spring semester the senior capstone class produces this magazine as a way to put into motion the skill sets we have acquired over the years. With each magazine produced, the bar was being raised. From day one, Dr. Jefferson Miller was not shy explaining to us that he knew our potential as students and expected this magazine to go above and beyond. With this commissioning in mind, we set to work piecing together 48 pages of hard work.

AR Culture is a promotional piece for the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences. Each member of the staff was assigned to cover a ‘beat,’ or specific area of interest, that could span any of the 13 different majors within the college or one of its many programs. After spending some time getting to know the different beats, ultimately staff members were responsible for two original stories along with original photography. Sounds easy enough, right? Pulling from the knowledge gained in previous courses, the process actually looked a lot more like: investigation, story pitches, writing drafts, editing, conceptualizing layout designs, editing, accepting constructive criticism, editing, and finally pulling the pages together in the final file.

It hasn’t been an easy road, but it has been one that gave us the confidence we needed as we walk out of the Agricultural Education, Communication and Technology department for the last time. Going through this process has taught each of us more about ourselves as professionals, and gave us the opportunity to see a project bigger than ourselves through to the end.

We would have not been able to complete this project without the guidance of Dr. Jefferson Miller, and we are thankful for his help. We hope you enjoy this issue of AR Culture as much as we did working on it.

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Commercial Beef Cattle and Poultry
Stacy and Joyce Cheevers
Fayetteville, Arkansas
The team travels to shows in the spring and competes in four events that are designed to test a horse’s willingness to listen to its rider, its ability to complete the tasks and quality of movement, all while competing the working cow horse, ranch pleasure, trail and ranch reining events.

With a new challenge to conquer, the team began working hard to achieve these new goals, with the community support they have everything they need to be successful here on The Hill.

"Dedication to the school and team is what drives me every day at practice," said Watson. "Even on the days I don’t feel like riding, I remind myself that everything that I do will help the team accomplish our goals at competitions."

Potter and the team have set their goals high for the next two years. The team has already shown promise and was competitive early on in the season when they attended shows with schools that have developed programs, keeping up with institutions such as Texas Tech and West Texas A&M. With that in mind, the team is working hard to achieve its ultimate goal and become national champions in Division 2.

"I think with the kids we have and the horses we have got we can win [Division 2 Nationals] in the next two years," said Potter.

As with any athletic team, gear and equipment are critical for success. Traditionally, ranch horse members would need to provide their own horses in order to compete. Potter is looking to change that and has plans to increase the horse herd at the U of A to make it possible for kids without their own horses to participate on the ranch horse team.

"I’d like to be able to get some more university horses prepared to compete at shows and wear the UA brand," said Potter.

Since the team started, the community has come forward with a tremendous amount of support. For example, several program supporters have provided cattle for the team to use in practice.

"I think Razorback fans are crazy – I mean in a good way. For the Razorback fans in this part of the world that are also horse people, for them to see trailers hauling horses up and down the road, I think it gives them something to feel good about," said Potter.

At their show debut, riders wearing the UA brand were drawing interest from spectators and compliments from industry professionals at the conclusion of the show. Despite the team’s "fangirling" during the show with all “big-wigs” watching, the real reward comes from much simpler things.

"I like just being on this team," said Williams. "School gets stressful. It’s so different and there are people that are different from me. I’m stressing out. Then I get to come to practice and do what I’ve grown up doing. It’s just a great break."

"Some of the biggest things are – and this is going to sound stupid and cheesy – more intangible. Patience, perseverance and teamwork. A lot of patience with kids that are riding a horse that isn’t ready. Perseverance for the kids that aren’t ready but the horse isn’t," said Potter. "[Teamwork is] really just being able to support everybody else on the team if you name didn’t get called for that show. Not being a grumpy butt when the team wins, even if you didn’t."

While winning is fun, Potter and the team know it isn’t everything. There are numerous intangibles members of the ranch horse team will take away from their experiences. One lifelong skill that Potter hopes each member of the ranch horse team will take away is how to be a better horseman.

“Dedication to the school and team is what drives me every day at practice.”

You may not always win first, but at the end of the day you can always rely on your team members to have your back and push you to get better,” said Whitley Vann, junior at the university.

While the team grows and works together they continue to become not only teammates and friends, but a family.

Watson defines family as, “a small group of people that have the same interests, goals and values – those that become really close to one another and spend an extensive amount of time together.”

It’s not just a team, it’s a ranch horse family.
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS ARE UP TO BAT IN THE GAME AGAINST CENTRAL MICHIGAN. EACH PLAYER IS TAKING POSITION, GETTING READY FOR THE INEVITABLE PITCH. THE PITCHER IS WINDING UP AND THE BATTER IS BRACING FOR THE PITCH, EXPERTLY SIZING UP THE PITCHER’S STANCE IN ORDER TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THE BALL PERFECTLY. THE PITCH IS RELEASED, A SPLIT SECOND OF ABSOLUTE SILENCE, AND THEN SMACK.

“Turf is a plant and is a landscape system that we all interact with, whether it is relaxing on the lawns around your home, going to the park in town or playing soccer with your friends recreationally or competitively,” said Richardson. “It also has a lot of environmental benefits. It is such a good plant for preventing erosion, for building and sustaining soil and for being a good environmental filter in our urban landscapes.”

Both Richardson and Anderson regarded Carr as an inquisitive and committed student to school and work. “The first thing I would say about Tyler is that I would like to clone him and have about 30 other students exactly like him. He has been an absolute joy to have in this department,” said Richardson.

Carr’s ambition and passion for the turf industry has driven him into several leadership positions, not only in his department as president of the Turf Club and participant in the Turf Bowl, but also across the college as a Dale Bumper’s College of Agriculture, Food, and Life Sciences Ambassador. 

Richardson said Carr never waited for Richardson to tell him what the next step was. Carr decided to take the path less traveled and to put himself in situations most would think of as impossible to achieve.

“He has frankly done above and beyond what I would have recommended him to do. That is how ambitious he is,” said Richardson.

Carr said he is following his passion in both school and a career. He wants every upcoming college student to not be scared to follow his/her dream.

“If you find something you are connected to and love, you need to go for it,” said Carr. “Life is too short to do something you won’t enjoy.”

At the end of the game, Arkansas won 6-2. As the crowd filters out of the stadium, Carr makes his way to the pitcher’s mound and starts doing what he loves to do: manage the field.

All famous recipes have a secret ingredient that makes the dish special. For Arkansas entrepreneurs, that secret ingredient is the Arkansas Food Innovation Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

The AFIC provides product consultation and marketing services for new business owners wishing to improve the quality of their products in an effort to increase sales and productivity. The prep work needed to create a successful food product business tends to include a multitude of tedious steps. Many companies don’t realize they are missing some of the most important ingredients until after they start the recipe. The AFIC helps small businesses by providing some of those missing ingredients.

Jay Honeycutt, owner and maker of Eve’s Treat, used the AFIC’s services to improve his business model, making his production process easy as apple pie. “I didn’t realize how difficult it was to bring a food product to market,” Honeycutt said. “Safe manufacturing in a safe kitchen, which we have here, and all the equipment you need, at least for short run production, insurance, labeling – who knew you needed all of this?”

As a center, the AFIC bases its work upon a mission of providing assistance to small and mid-size agricultural producers and entrepreneurs to facilitate the use of specialty crops for value-added products in local food systems. In 2013, Jean Francois Meullinen, University of Arkansas Food Science professor and department head, provided encouragement for the initial establishment of the AFIC. He envisioned the abundance of assistance that could be provided to local farmers, entrepreneurs and non-profit organizations, helping them reach maximum success. Meullinen and his staff laid out a combination of services, facilities and equipment to assist with commercial production and create value-added products. Sometimes successful innovators bite off more than they can chew in terms of business development. But those actively using the facility say the center has helped them manage their growth and put the icing on the cake.

“I researched my product’s development for three months before I even knew this facility and program existed. It started happening then,” said Honeycutt. “They helped in every aspect.”

For a food company start-up, part of bringing home the bacon is producing an appealing product that attracts consumers. The AFIC has a team of seasoned faculty and staff to assist with the packaging process, providing advice on developing nutrition facts panels, assuring labels conform to federal requirements and designing and printing product labels.

One of the many successful companies that has utilized the AFIC, Pink House Alchemy produces crafts syrup, bitters and shrubs – beverage mixers. The business began to use the AFIC’s services as a stepping stone about four years ago. Pink House Alchemy now sells its products in a dozen states and internationally. “They can help you in every aspect. They provide nutrition facts cheaper than anywhere in the country, it’s an amazing asset,” said Production Manager Ross Barber.

The AFIC is the cream of the crop in the state of Arkansas. Providing food entrepreneurs with open doors to its FDA-certified and inspected food product development facility, the AFIC has honed the development of numerous successful products and companies.

“The services they offer here are pretty unique, and it’s a great way to cultivate a business idea,” said Barber. “Even if you don’t have a business plan, they can help and really get you going from start to finish.”

Seeing agricultural products come full circle makes the AFIC faculty and staff feel like the greatest thing since sliced bread. Mike Davis, pilot plant manager at AFIC, has seen numerous entities roll through the facility, ultimately surpassing the local realm. Davis said he enjoys sharing his expertise in product development and public relations.

Davis said the most rewarding part of his job is “getting to be part of teaching people how to make money using their family heirloom recipes.”

Clients sometimes come in with little knowledge of the administration side of food production, said Davis. The AFIC is able to lend a hand in that area and jump start the process.

“They have helped us ramp up our production and scale up exponentially, so they have been very helpful,” said Ross. “I encourage people to come out and look at the facility if they are interested in having their own business because it is a great asset and there is no other place like it in the region.”

A wide variety of products have been manufactured at the facility, including hummus, hot sauce, pesto and apple butter. The AFIC also works with the local public school system facilitating the use of local produce to make spaghetti sauce for school lunches.

Judging by its recent accomplishments, the AFIC’s relationships with its clients are a recipe for success. And that’s the way the cookie crumbles. ☝️

Lacey Howard
Senior
Bursting the Bubble

Cobb’s international experiences pull her out of her comfort zone

Two young girls are giggling around the green yard, amazed at bursting the bubbles they just blew, before the wind snatches them away. That is the astonishing thing about children: they are fascinated with the smallest of things.

Craig Cobb, a nutrition and dietetics student in the University of Arkansas’ Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences, who is headed for a service-oriented career helping the underprivileged in urban areas of the U.S. or in developing countries, has bursted a few bubbles of her own, and she has plans for a few more.

Cobb grew up in an all-girls’ school but convinced her parents to let her attend a public high school in inner city Memphis, the school district they resided. That experience created a hunger in Cobb.

Now a senior at the U of A, Cobb went on a faculty-led interdisciplinary service project to Mozambique and spent a semester in Costa Rica. Cobb is now trying to adjust back to life stateside, because being alone on a trip in a different country is a challenge. Cobb believes that these journeys have helped her grow, but that has not changed her core values.

“People always say this type of trip is life changing – but it’s more enhancing, developing who you already are,” said Cobb.

In Mozambique, Cobb had many emotions about what she was experiencing.

“I was just kind of in shock at first,” said Cobb. “It’s unlike anything I had seen in my life. We were literally going into the most impoverished environment – one of the most impoverished environments in the world – and the emotions of how to figure out how I felt,” said Cobb. “It doesn’t even matter how I feel. It’s reality – it’s scary about me.”

Seeing how little the people in Mozambique had but how content and joyful they were really intrigued her, she said. “They don’t know what they’re missing out on. But part of me is asking, are they really missing out? Do they have it right?” she wondered.

Cobb’s experience in nutrition influenced her emotions as well, but she said she wouldn’t change her experiences in Mozambique.

“The little people with huge bellies, and studying nutrition, I had a really hard time seeing that. When you look into someone’s eyes and they’re, like, not there – like no one is home. They might be physically dying, but their souls were alive,” said Cobb. “It is an extremely different environment. It was so hard, but it was incredible.”

Costa Rica was a different experience for Cobb because it was longer and she went by herself.

“In Costa Rica, I jumped into this like a long-term living situation where I was living with people who did not speak the same language as me,” said Cobb. “I can speak Spanish, but I did not realize how much Spanish I didn’t know until I got there.”

Life was slower in Costa Rica, and Cobb became a part of the family she stayed with while she attended classes. She learned a lot about herself during her time in Costa Rica.

“Costa Rica living – it’s like this phrase, pura vida. It means pure life – directly translated, it means everything is good – don’t need to worry, we have so much to be thankful for,” said Cobb. “I was learning more of who I am. In Costa Rica there are a lot of things that I didn’t realize in my heart because I was in my safe Fayetteville bubble.”

As Cobb finishes her degree back home in Fayetteville, she reflects everyday on her time abroad.

“Life is so much easier emotionally being at home, but [the experience] was worth it,” she said. “I never want to forget I things I saw.”

She received funding for both of her opportunities abroad and wants students to know that money is not a problem if they have the desire to study abroad.

“Don’t worry about paying for the experience,” she said. “If you really want to go and work hard enough, you can get there.”

Cobb encourages students to study abroad because it will enhance their lives.

“We feel like we have to be a certain way for people, because that’s how they expect us to be,” said Cobb. “In this comfortable environment sometimes we get too comfortable – we need to burst the bubble.”
Yancey described the mom club as the group you join when you have kids. She said the mom club serves as a network of women in similar positions that share priceless parenting information.

"When you become a mom, you don't realize it, but you join this mom club, where all these moms are going out of their way to help other moms out," said Yancey. "Sometimes it's just a smile and a wink saying, 'Hey, I've been there.'" Helping other moms out has become an important part of Yancey's life.

Firt and foremost, though, Yancey is a mother to two young girls. Vallie, age seven, is an inspiring biologist who loves reptiles, snakes and saving all animals from extinction. "She wants to be the next Steve Irwin," said Yancey, with a mom's proud smile.

Wyn is a funny and talkative two-year-old who loves animals, especially cows. She is always on a mission. Yancey said Wyn has just as much personality as her sister.

"She tells everybody that her cows are pink, because they have pink ear tags," said Yancey. Like most mothers, Yancey prioritizes her children and their education, especially in the animal science field.

Animal Science student ambassador Zena Hicks works with Yancey on her honors meat science project. Hicks said it's evident to anyone who meets Vallie and Wyn that Yancey started teaching them at a young age.

"They're both very smart," said Hicks. "She's encouraged them to be involved in agriculture, but also encourages them to get involved in other activities that they want to do, like gymnastics.

In fact, it was at Mommy and Me gymnastics with Vallie where Yancey was inspired to develop her educational blog Mom at the Meat Counter. Her relationship with the fellow moms at the gymnastics center, led to her taking the mom club to a new level.

Yancey has been meat scientist at the U of A for 10 years. She teaches the Livestock and Meat Evaluation class, substitute teaches other courses and conducts meat science research projects.

"I am technically a program technician, which is a research technician type job, but I just say that I am a meat scientist if anybody asks," said Yancey.

As a mom, beef cattle producer, and a meat scientist, her work is never done. Yancey said most people don't realize there are such things as meat scientists, but they play an important role with a lot of responsibilities. Meat scientists may study live animals, perform research with fresh meat, lead consumer education with food safety or analyze data for government, trade organizations and companies. Meat scientists also have a significant role in university academias.

"It's important that students understand the end product of livestock production," said Yancey. "A lot of kids come to college and know a lot about the live animal, but don't know anything post-harvest."

The students are Yancey's favorite part of her job. She is always looking for an opportunity to coach a meat science team or take students on tours of meat plants and feedlots. Yancey said she enjoys allowing her students to travel and experience new things.

"I like getting them ignited and excited about how to properly do research and learn about our industry, then help them find jobs and find their place in the world," said Yancey.

It is evident that Yancey is devoted to student development as she shows she cares about them like they were her own children. Undergraduate student Marisol Escamilla has attended numerous trips due to Yancey's help. She said she is grateful that Yancey cares so much for her students.

"Dr. Yancey is amazing," said Escamilla. "She does everything she possibly can to help her students. If there's an event or program you want to attend, she will try her hardest to find a way to get you there, even if it means taking you herself!"

As a former member of the U of A Meats Quizbowl team, Hicks said she got to know Yancey more as a person rather than just a professor. Hicks described days when Yancey reduced her stress by talking to her and giving advice. She said Yancey is a personable professor who gets to know her students.

"I know that our department wants to create a family-like atmosphere, and she definitely made me feel like I had family in animal science," said Hicks. "I know that for me, she showed me very early on that professors actually do care about their students and want them to succeed."

Outside of her students, Yancey continues her role as educator as she advocates agriculture through social media and special programs. Yancey writes her blog Mom at the Meat Counter to share her research based-knowledge with the public.

After she became a mom, Yancey said a lot of people were there to help, so as a part of the mom club she wants to repay the favor. The moms at the gymnastics center were worried about the food they feed their kids due to inadequate information. "They don't know where to go for good information," said Yancey. "So my goal with Mom at the Meat Counter was to pay back the mom club, by giving them good information on what I know about, which is meat."

When the media portrays agriculture negatively, Yancey said, consumers need an explanation in terms they can understand.

Topics on her blog include understanding different types of meat packaging, clarifying current agricultural issues, being happy about happy meals and safe food preparation, sharing family recipes, and telling fun stories about raising her children on a livestock operation.

"I do a lot on social media where I share a little bit about my personal life through Instagram, Twitter and Facebook," said Yancey. "It's not all meat – it's about me too."

Yancey also contributes to the mom club through her participation in the Moms on the Farm tours sponsored by the Arkansas Beef Council. The tours give women without a rural background a firsthand look at conventional beef, dairy and poultry operations. Moms get to see where their food comes from and get their questions answered.

In all that she does, Yancey demonstrates the mom club code as she goes above and beyond to share information. Whether it's a busy Wednesday morning getting her kids ready, a few hours in a classroom, a blog post or a tour in the county, Yancey strives to educate and foster growth like a true mom.

She's raising the steaks for the mom club.
A new north-central Arkansas hog farm was causing quite a stir and the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture had a challenge on their hands.

The solution was no further away than a first floor office in the Department of Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences on the University of Arkansas campus. A fixture in the department and a world authority on water quality and soil chemistry, Professor Andrew Sharpley was given the task of researching the environmental effects of a recently installed hog farm in close proximity to the national scenic Buffalo River.

Originally from Manchester, England, Sharpley earned his bachelor’s degree from the University of North Wales, United Kingdom in 1973 and his Ph.D. from Massey University, New Zealand in 1977. With an opportunity to continue researching nitrogen leaching and oozene layer effects, Sharpley took a position with the United States Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service, where he served for a combined 25 years in both Oklahoma and Pennsylvania before taking a faculty position at the University of Arkansas in 2006.

During his time as a professor in the Department of Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences, Sharpley has become known as an international authority on phosphorus cycling in soil-plant-water systems relating to water quality and managing the impacts of local agriculture on water runoffs. These specialties have proven to be valuable to not only Sharpley’s research but now, the state of Arkansas as a whole.

Fast-forward to 2013, Nathan McKinney, assistant director of the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, answered a phone call from the governor’s office requesting us to assemble a panel of experts to help that would set into motion a large-scale research effort.

“When we began we knew that would now be a five-year study surrounding the farm, our main goal was to remain transparent with everyone,” said McKinney. “We held open meetings, were accessible to the public for questions and with the research publish quarterly public reports about the findings. While Dr. Sharpley worked with our team to bring in samples, we even brought in experts from outside the state to analyze the data.”

Once the go-ahead was given to Sharpley, the investigation was underway.

“Beginning in 2013, we were fortunate enough to receive funding from the state that will help us run the study for the five years, a time span that would allow us to see long term effects,” Sharpley said. “We have set up 12 sites across the area to monitor weekly. We set up on Big Creek above the farm to have a sample of water quality entering the farm and also set up below the farm to compare the quality of the water leaving the farm. The samples are analyzed no more than eight hours after being collected, and we comply with very stringent guidelines so that our findings are to be valued and credible.”

Throughout their data collection, the investigative team has remained committed to protecting the water quality in Big Creek. Though no problems have been found, the investigative team has worked closely with the farmer to ensure that a problem would be caught before it reaches the water sources.

“While we have no evidence of leakage so far, we also set up check points along ponds and the creeks that will alert us if there were to be a situation of that sort,” Sharpley said. “The farmers understand the importance of the river and the implications that leaking nutrients would have, so it has been a team effort to ensure that a problem would be caught before it reaches the water sources.”

The U of A Division of Agriculture was commissioned with the challenge of eventually providing the governor’s office with scientifically rigorous data. Not only did this task involve what will be years of extensive monitoring and resources, but it was also important because the findings related directly to the beliefs, values, concerns and livelihoods of individuals in the surrounding community.

Sharpley leaned back in his chair and paused when asked about conclusive results. “The bottom line is no, we haven’t found anything out of the ordinary or alarming. If we had, you would have heard something by now.”

"Unless there was profound evidence that water quality and soil nutrients were changing, you can't shut down an operation solely because you don't like it."
The smooth, silkiness of the wrapper is soft to the touch of the young boy as he picks it up. The packaging makes a crackling sound as the sweet treat inside is revealed. The gap of the little boy echoes throughout the store when he catches a glimpse of the gold past the silver wrapper; the elusive Golden Ticket reflects in his eyes. With a bit of luck, Charlie chose the right candy bar at the right store, which led to an experience he and his grandfather will never forget. By the same token, searching for the right opportunity in college can seem as driven by luck as the search for a Golden Ticket to Willy Wonka’s world of pure imagination. Step outside the classroom and into a real-world opportunity in college can seem as driven by luck as the search for the right store, which led to an experience he and his grandfather had never known. With the framework of the course established, the next step for Goodwin, Edgar and McKenzie would be to recruit students. “This was really a high stakes project and we wanted to make certain that we selected students that we knew could deliver,” said Goodwin. “We wanted to make certain that we had students that had proven themselves not only on work ethic but on capability.” The students selected were to serve as content specialists for the various facets that Simmons must consider during each business decision: poultry markets, commodities, internal systems, nutrition and health knowledge, as well as the macroeconomic agents affecting the poultry industry. By having student experts in each field work with the guidance of the Bumpers College faculty, professional experience is gained by the students within the setting of a classroom. McKenzie, one of the advisors for the capstone course, was motivated to become part of the faculty team because of the real-life application aspect for the students. “Professor Goodwin and I are kindred spirits when it comes to seeing the importance of fostering industry links with the university and promoting students experiential learning in applied business settings,” said McKenzie. With the cream of the student crop under the wings of Goodwin and McKenzie, the student team had to address the opportunity of knowledge management at Simmons Foods and find a solution. Goodwin anticipates providing Simmons Foods with a strong data analysis foundation. “I think in the short term we’ll deliver for certain the data warehousing apparatus, but probably will come up with a few simple relationships that will be of value to them,” said Goodwin. “They want to make sure they can link these seemingly unrelated data sources and information streams so they can make better estimates of what they need to do strategically as a company.” To provide Simmons Foods with a finished product at the end of the semester, the level of aptitude these students must exhibit is above that of a normal class. “The intensity of it is quite high and I think the opportunity to really deliver a quality product that will be used in conjunction with the industry is pretty good,” said Goodwin. As the product of a close working relationship with an agricultural company, this capstone course has the strong potential of continuing beyond its initial run. However, a future course does not solely rely on faculty and industry participants; students are an essential component to the success of the program as it builds a legacy each year. “There’s a lot on the line when faculty in universities make agreements with companies,” said Goodwin. “So they want to make certain they select the right people.” But what makes a student the “right” student? Unlike Charlie and his luck-of-the-draw chocolate bar and coveted Golden Ticket, Goodwin recommends nothing short of hard work and dedication for a student to stand out and become the right student for projects like this. “Get involved very quickly and develop a mentor relationship with a faculty member and a work relationship, if possible,” said Goodwin, providing advice for students who want to be selected. “Be really active in some type of club activity, not just a member but develop a leadership capacity in a club activity. That shows you can actually deliver.” Outside of the classroom and college activities, Goodwin recommends getting an internship as soon as possible. Finding an internship between the freshman and sophomore years “is a beautiful time to start,” he said. “If you want an opportunity to really stretch yourself and find a place where you can grow and have an impact, look into this program and look into these capstone and internship experiences because you’ll learn more there than you’ll ever learn in the classroom.” Charlie’s first step to be a contender for the trip to Willy Wonka’s factory was only a matter of selecting a candy bar. The first step for a student who wishes to collaborate on a project like this capstone course is to attend class. “If you’re not in the classroom, you never have the opportunity,” said Goodwin. “Good academic performance and engagement is sort of your admission ticket to these kinds of exciting opportunities.” Students who work hard and engage with their department will find that being asked to join a special project will be a sweet reward, even without the Wonka Bar.
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You can enjoy a wide variety of amenities – picnic sites and group picnic shelters, swimming beaches, hiking trails, boat launching ramps, and sanitary dump stations. We call it summer fun made easy.

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Cox goes above and beyond to make students feel like family.

She selflessly goes out of her way to accommodate everyone.

her graduate degree. One of her students in her computer application course cheated on the comprehensive final—he copied his project from a previous student. Cox looked into it and ended up turning him into the University’s Academic Integrity Board, and he failed the course. Surprisingly, Cox saw him in her class the following semester. Even though other instructors were available, he chose to take it under Mrs. Cox. At the end of the semester, she asked the student why he retook the course with her after what had happened last semester. His response was he knew he had let her down and wanted to make it up to her.

“That is pretty awesome really,” said Johnson. “He knew he had disappointed her and it was important to him to make it right with her. That doesn’t happen every day.”

The story shows what kind of impact a good instructor can have on students. Cox puts everything into her job and expects students to do the same. This dedication and care is what motivates students to become part of the AECT family.

At least, this is true for students like Carlee Buckner, who is a junior in AECT. “The first time I met with Mrs. Cox, I was greeted with a warm smile,” said Buckner. “She was intrigued by my interests and made me feel at home in AGRI 205.”

Before Buckner had started classes, she made a phone call to Cox because she was having difficulties registering for classes. “All it took was one call to Mrs. Cox, and she was more than willing to help me,” said Buckner. “She went above and beyond. She treated me like I was one of her own, not just a transfer student.”

On the first day of class, Cox sent Buckner an email wishing her luck and telling her she was there for Buckner if she had any troubles. “She selflessly goes out of her way to accommodate everyone,” said Buckner.

Every morning by 6 a.m., students can expect to find Cox in her office hard at work preparing for her day ahead. What they may not know is that her day actually started at 4 a.m., earlier than most people would even consider rolling out of bed.

“Typically between 4 and 5 a.m., I spend time wrapping up things I didn’t get finished the day before,” said Cox. “The time between then and getting to work is the time I take care of my family and get them ready for school.”

Once she arrives at her office, she immediately prepares for her classes that day. On top of her teaching responsibilities, she takes the lead on recruiting prospective students and advising the Representing Excellence, Pride, and Service (REPS) students, who are the department’s student ambassadors.

“She selflessly goes out of her way to accommodate everyone,” said Buckner. “You won’t find anyone more genuine than Casandra Cox,” said Professor Jefferson Miller, who served as Cox’s graduate advisor.

The Mrs. Cox students meet on recruitment visits is the same Mrs. Cox they get when they are sitting in a computer applications class at the U of A. That is why Cox is the real deal.
Lettuce Turnip the Beet
Volumizing food safety awareness at farmers markets

The University of Arkansas is turning up the volume for food safety practices at farmers markets across the country. “Safer and healthier” is the title of the newest popular song sung by many farmers market enthusiasts. U of A Food Science Professor Kristen Gibson and her team of professionals are aiming the spotlight of their research on the local food and farmers market movement by enhancing vendor and consumer awareness about food safety.

Whether consumers buy food at the grocery store or at a farmers market, proper food handling and preparation is tremendously important when it comes to reducing foodborne illness. Gibson wants consumers and producers at farmers markets to continue strong food safety practices just as they would with any other foods bought and sold elsewhere.

Every year 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die of food borne diseases, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Three years ago Gibson and her team developed a United States Department of Agriculture grant-funded kit called “Wholesome and Healthy at the Farmers Market.”

“Increasing consumer awareness of food safety at farmers markets is the premise behind our entire project, of which the market manager kit is only one facet, said Marketing Manager Wright. “There are two main elements at play: actual regulation at the market level and consumer perception of food available at a farmers market.”

Gibson said the growth in the popularity of farmers markets, coupled with a lot of news coverage over outbreaks related to fresh produce, sparked her interest to do this project.

Wright added, “There are consumers who are under the impression that produce purchased at the farmers market is safer than produce they could purchase at a grocery store, which is not necessarily the case.”

Too often, people forget the importance of safe food handling practices. Whether you are buying food at the grocery store or at a farmers market, proper food preparation is key in reducing foodborne illness. By encouraging consumers and producers to join the food safety crowd, they can make an impact on the local food industry.

A small voice can carry this idea a long way. Similar to a choreographer counting down the steps in a 5-6-7-8 style, Gibson recommends six easy steps for households to implement regarding their fresh products:

• Check – for bruising or damage
• Clean – hands, surfaces and utensils
• Rinse – fresh fruits and vegetables
• Separate – from contaminants
• Chill – cut produce below 40 degrees
• Compost – if in doubt, throw it out

Time may change the way consumers shop, but grocery markets are a trace of the history of food shopping. Farmers markets are a main ingredient in the nation’s food supply, and the tradition dates back to 1730. The market allows for a place that puts the producers and their food in front of the consumer.

According to the USDA, there has been a 76 percent increase in farmers markets across the nation since 2008. The obvious growth in interest of consumers sets the perfect stage for Gibson and her educational kit.

For the market producers, there is not the same jam session of regulations across the spectrum. Through its research, Gibson’s team has noticed an inconsistent melody of regulation.

“There is no USDA regulation on farms making less than $25,000 a year in sales from produce, and we’ve learned from our research that there may be county, state, and local health regulations but these are often up to the interpretation of the health inspector,” said Wright.

Like figurative beach balls to bounce across the audience during a hit song, Gibson and her team have worked in a few fun aspects to the packet. Incorporating tangible marketing pieces in a fun way was a method for creating attention to the project.

Scheduling a gig is something this band has not had a problem with. The team connected with several farmers market managers to help promote safety with their innovative kit. It includes “wash me” cards that can be coupled with fresh produce, reusable shopping bags, recipe cards and various other promotional supplies.

Since fresh produce is primarily used in the kitchen during the food preparation and cooking process, the recipe cards provide customers with something they are more likely to keep in the kitchen for a long period of time.

“We wanted to provide information they would find interesting and helpful, such as nutritional facts and storage guidelines, as well as the food safety information,” said Wright.

When christening the name of the project, Gibson purposely chose to avoid words with negative connotations so the consumer would focus more on the materials and not on the assumptions that unfavorable words tend to make.

“The research team agreed that the term ‘food safety’ can be off-putting to managers and vendors, as well as consumers, so I researched other ways to say ‘safety’ and came up with the words ‘wholesome’ and ‘healthy.’ And so the name of the kit was born,” said Wright.

Words such as safety, procedures and many others tend to not resonate with consumers, so they were notes that Gibson and her team were not willing to play.

“The goal is to not to scare the consumer, but help them to be aware,” said Gibson.

Food safety is often on a big stage in the food industry, but learning about it is a concert that many people miss the chance to see. So as this band wraps up its set, they hope their song “Wholesome and Healthy” plays over and over in the minds of producers and consumers.

It’s a song with a beat that Gibson hopes gets stuck in the heads of all farmers market customers. Check, clean, rinse, separate, chill, compost. And the beat goes on.

Lacey Howard
Senior
Experiencing Life Lessons

Time flies by for students – before they can blink, graduation is approaching and they often wonder if they are ready to compete in the job market. Obtaining an undergraduate degree is important, but being prepared for the real-world is even more important.

Internships give students insight into what life is like post-graduation, but most internships are short-lived and sometimes don’t even seem like a real job.

Capstone courses are another solution. Required by some academic departments to give students a chance to apply the skills they have learned in their coursework, they provide classroom experience in a real-world scenario. A capstone course is a good way for students to get their feet wet in agricultural communications, for example, but it’s still not the same as real-world work experience.

However, there is an additional opportunity at the University of Arkansas for students interested in agricultural communications to engage with experiential learning.

The Experiential Learning Lab (ELL) is a service center that gives students hands-on experience to apply the skills they have learned from classes to the real-world. It serves small clients and field experience by working with clients on both small and large-scale projects.

The students produce professional quality work for the ELL, which makes them more marketable when they enter the industry after graduation. Jefferson Miller, the director of the ELL, started the service center to give students the opportunity to gain real-world experience in order to be more competitive in the job market after graduation.

According to Miller, students can go through a four-year degree without ever having an experience that makes them ready for their career. Students who work for the ELL gain real-world experience by working on a team, communicating collaboratively with clients, dealing with client issues and being able to produce work clients are satisfied with.

Equine Science Professor Kathleen Jogan, a client of the ELL, explained that each encounter with the ELL has been a positive experience. Jogan said her relationship with the ELL has evolved from getting help with small design projects to getting advice for large-scale communications strategies.

The ELL’s impact on our program has grown to determining where and how to market and creating materials to market to our audience,” said Jogan.

Morgan Marley, the undergraduate coordinator of the ELL, explained how working for the ELL has provided her with a diverse work experience that has helped her understand what area of communications she wants to pursue after graduation.

“I could not have asked to be involved in a better program, especially for me and my interest because the ELL has catered to what I wanted to do and helped me develop my skills toward the jobs I want to do after graduation,” said Marley.

In a recent evaluation of the ELL, according to Miller, past students reported that their bosses thought they were highly qualified and impressed with their skills. This information was important to Miller because many “entry level” jobs actually require one to three years of experience. This creates a barrier for most students when entering the workforce; however, through the ELL, students gain the experience that makes them competitive.

“They [ELL staff] are a step ahead of people they are competing against for entry level jobs because they do have practical experience. They can have discussions in the job interview about things they have already done, and the discussion is not limited to what they have learned how do,” said Miller. Miller agreed that the ELL has made serious progress since it began in 2014.

“I think it is important that I thank George Wardlow, our department head, for supporting this idea, and I even had to get approval from the dean and the administration in order to set up this service center. If I hadn’t had that support to pursue this project, then it wouldn’t have happened,” said Miller.

The ELL is now a self-funded program that not only gives students the experience they need for the future job market, but it also provides students access to the latest technology, which helps them produce high-quality work. The ELL currently employs a six students, but Miller plans to expand the program in the future.

“We have to manage the size of the ELL in terms of the number of students we employ and the number of clients we take on because I’m only one person and I have a lot of other responsibilities, but I do see some room for growth,” said Miller.

The ELL has made a lot of progress since 2014, but with expansion in mind, Miller plans to be able to provide this hands-on experience to even more students while maintaining the high standard of work they produce. In comparison to internships and capstone courses, the ELL is providing more than just an opportunity for application; it’s providing an avenue for on-going professional development.

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**Rock the Runway**

**Fashion show features student designers**

“I don’t design clothes, I design dreams.” – Ralph Lauren

Apparel Merchandising and Product Development students in the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences are designing their dreams. The program in the Bumpers College School of Human Environmental Sciences, is giving students not only the opportunity to design clothes but also to design their dreams. This wasn’t the first time the opportunity has been offered to students, but this year the show was bigger and better than ever. The annual fashion show, billed as “Metal and Shine” this year, features student designers and allows the students to show off their design skills. Douglas Gearhart, fashion connoisseur and one of the faculty members organizing the show, said the event was revamped this year.

“When I came here to interview for this position, they invited me to a show at Carnall Hall last year. I thought it was so great that it needed to be blown up and offered not only to faculty but to other students, student’s parents, and also the public,” said Gearhart.

Gearhart is no novice to the fashion show game. He learned how to put on a first class show while working in industry as a fashion marketer. Gearhart said his time in fashion marketing prepared him for this position and to reorganize the show.

“I spent 30 years in New York City, and I worked in the fashion industry. I was involved with several shows over the years and also the public,” said Gearhart.

“The basis of the event was the same as in the past; students designed and sewed the garments, which were then featured in the show. However, this year the event was held off-campus with a professional lighting set up and a professional DJ. Besides creating visibility for the program and for the Bumpers College, the fashion show is actually a benefit fashion show, raising funds for study tours in the AMPD program. Students are able to travel to New York City, Las Vegas, the U.K., China and other fashion centers to explore the industry. The study tours enable students to see full circle the entire fashion industry and give them even more skills and experience to succeed in their careers. At this year’s show, three students were specially featured with five outfits they design and create. Each student in the AMPD major was allowed to submit two looks to be considered for the fashion show. There were about 40 students featured overall in this year’s show. The three students chosen to be featured in the show applied for the opportunity. They competed against their peers and earned their spot on the runway with their vision and their determination, said AMPD instructor Stephanie Hubert.

Dallas designer Raul Torres played a featured role in the fashion show as well. The alum of the University of Arkansas AMPD program presented three looks at the fashion show using his own professional models. Gearhart said Torres has become a successful designer and moved to Dallas to start his career.

“We felt it important to honor him by asking him to come back,” said Gearhart.

Gearhart said he is excited about the opportunities that this show and the AMPD program offers students in design as well as learning to run their own business. Gearhart, who graduated from the Sam M. Walton College of Business, said he might have taken a different route if the AMPD program had been available when he was a student.

“If this had been available when I was here, I maybe would have been a designer,” said Gearhart.

This one fashion show project provides students the means to showcase their unique style and design abilities while allowing them to exercise their professional skills.

“My main goal is to show off what the students can do, and the second goal, probably just as important as the first goal, is to let people know outside this area or Bumpers College what we’re doing here and the importance of it,” he said. “I’ve seen so much talent since I’ve been here, and this gives students a chance to show off what they know and what they can do,” said Gearhart.

Hubert echoed Gearhart’s enthusiasm about the value of this year’s “Metal and Shine” fashion show project.

“This one project allows them insight into the decision making process experienced by designers, patternmakers, financial teams, factories and more,” said Hubert.

Gearhart hopes to continue to develop and promote this New York City worthy show in future years. This year’s show at the Fayetteville Town Center was one of the most successful in the program’s history, said Hubert.

“Our students experience the apparel production process from the initial design inspiration through the construction and marketing of their garments. They expand their vision of what it takes to get fashionable garments in to the hands of consumers,” said Hubert.
Faculty leading students on educational adventures

As the plane rattles in descent and the cabin grows still, anticipation from students and faculty fills the air at the start of this new adventure. The faculty count their students in preparation for their arrival in this new country. These University of Arkansas students are participating in this program with the goal of changing their lives and gaining valuable experience in their chosen discipline.

In 2013, the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences established the International Programs Office to expand the amount of faculty-led programs available for students. Due to the growing amount of opportunities available, students are able to explore their interests in numerous countries stemming from Asia all the way to South America. These opportunities allow students to become culturally aware and broaden their minds to the world around them.

Leslie Edgar, Assistant Dean of Student Programs for the Bumpers College, has led one of the faculty-led programs to Belgium. She has a long-standing appreciation for faculty-led programs because they help the students to gain a perspective that is going to impact their lives and help them to gain a perspective that is going to impact their careers, academic development and personal life.

“Faculty leading students on educational adventures”

“Faculty-led programs give students a deeper, rich understanding of how their skills learned in the classroom can be applied in another setting,” said Edgar.

Michelle Bailey, faculty lead for the Community Development in Belize program, stressed the importance of faculty-led programs because it allows a faculty member to transform their classes and the individual experiences of students on the trip.

“Faculty-led programs allow a faculty member to get out of the box, to learn something and bring back that something to impact their other classes,” said Bailey. “The other reason is that when the faculty member is there, the study abroad experience can be molded to fit the needs of the students on that trip.”

Edgar mentions that the biggest advantage of faculty-led programs is the comfort that the faculty bring to students.

“Students are able to explore a new country and different culture with the advantage of learning from and traveling with a university faculty member,” said Edgar.

Maggie Jo Hansen, a graduate student in the Bumpers College, has participated in three faculty-led programs. Her experiences abroad have changed her not only in her personal life, but also in her academic and professional lives as well.

“Academically, I became a more serious student because I understood how what I was learning in the classroom applied to the real world. Professionally, I learned a lot about the challenges of working across cultures and across disciplines. Personally, I learned how to use my time and skills to make a significant impact on what I am doing. I learned how to become more significant personally, using my time and resources, interests wisely,” said Hansen.

Bailey said one of the advantages for a faculty-led program in comparison to a regular study abroad program is that there is more freedom and opportunity for hands-on experience.

“We had freedom to adjust the program to fit our needs and the needs of the community,” said Bailey. “Students have the opportunity to plan, implement and evaluate their skills in a different setting.”

The knowledge students gain during one of these programs allows them to be more prepared for situations that arise at home, said Hansen.

“I think that the more knowledge you have about other cultures and other countries, and about how your industry or discipline works there, the more in-touch you with what you are doing at home,” said Hansen. “You will be better in your discipline because you’ve seen other perspectives, and a lot of times that’s what inspires the most creative solutions to problems we face in our jobs.”

According to Hansen, the purpose of faculty-led programs is to introduce students to their disciplines in another country and help them to gain a perspective that is going to impact their careers, academic development and personal life.

“For example, the Mozambique program introduces you to a sustainable poultry business in Africa that started from ground zero 11 years ago. The current Belgium program is to introduce you to sustainability practices in Western Europe,” said Hansen.

Faculty members work hard to create these valuable experiences for students.

“You have to find a faculty member that is willing to invest time and energy outside of working hours. It’s a huge commitment,” said Edgar. “If you have a faculty member leading a program, you know they have their hearts in it, because it takes a lot of their time.”

Edgar was passionate about the importance of these programs for both faculty and students.

“The important part for a student is building themselves as a professional. The important part for faculty is helping build [the students] as global professionals and seeing that change,” said Edgar.

Bailey explained the tremendous impact of community development programs on participants due to the connections that are made.

“I think getting out of your comfort zone and seeing that other cultures are more alike than different is good for all of us,” said Bailey.

For a student looking into one of these programs, there are many benefits, not only in their academic lives but also in their careers, said Hansen.

“You will become more relevant both as a professional and as a student. You will also understand your discipline better and you will be a better problem solver,” said Hansen. “You will be able to work with other people better because you will understand both cultural and personal differences. If you can master cultural differences you can handle anything else when it comes to working with people.”

One of the most moving experiences Bailey had while leading her first program was when she returned to the U.S.

“The most impactful moment was coming back to the Dallas/Fort Worth International airport. We went from having zero choices, to having this overabundance of choices, and there was air conditioning,” said Bailey. “That was impactful, how much we take for granted.”

Students are often apprehensive about international programs due to the cost, but if a student works hard there are many opportunities for funding any of these programs, such as scholarships, financial aid, grants, fundraisers and paid internships.

“The costs are just numbers but the benefits are limitless. You can never put a price on the benefits you will receive when participating in a faculty-led program,” said Hansen.

Hansen said she has never met a student who regretted participating in one of these experiences.

“Students have nothing to lose and everything to gain when going on one of these programs. It will benefit you for life,” said Hansen.

As the students and faculty members board the plane for the return home, they have a mixture of sadness and excitement in their eyes. They are sad to depart from this life-altering adventure, but they are excited for what the future holds and the opportunities that await them at home.

Maggie Jo Hansen, UG, A Graduate student, conducts a survey in Mozambique as part of a faculty-led program.

Alexandria McLeod
Junior
The urgency of solving pollinator population decline

If you turn on the news today, you will hear an array of stories that describe threats to the human race. Disease, famine, terrorist attacks, you name it, the news is plastered with these headlines every day. A headline that you don’t see running across the top of your screen in bold, red writing, is the urgency of the decline of pollinator populations around the globe – an issue that could potentially effect our way of life as we know it.

The pollinator population has been dwindling for quite some time now. Scientists are not fully aware of the reason for the decline, and it’s becoming a worrisome trend. The more that we learn about the importance and benefits of pollinators, the more that we see that they are a vital part of our agricultural system, and we are starting to feel the hurt of their reduced numbers.

There are many factors that have been attributed to causing a decrease in pollinator populations around the world according to the United States Department of Agriculture, including parasitic mite invasions, habitat destruction and colony collapse disorder, an instance when the worker bees leave behind the hive and the queen. This dangerous disorder is endangering the social creatures, but could the main culprit be a product of man?

Researchers at the University of Arkansas are conducting studies on the multidimensional aspects of pollinator and pest management. The main goal of the research is to develop strategies to improve pollinator health, and to maximize their ability of pollinators to thrive. Over one-third of the human diet is dependent on pollination. Now, not only is there the question of if our world has the capacity to grow food to nourish our over 7 billion inhabitants, but we are facing the decline of the very organisms that make growing food possible!

Joshi said that if the general public could recognize the importance of pollinators and provide support of research, that would be a big help for the cause.

“The general public could give pollinator research a boost,” said Joshi. “People need to realize the importance of pollinators and the threat of their population declines.”

Of course, Joshi’s research isn’t all gloom and doom; he said he enjoys his research immensely, and it is a subject that he feels passionate about. “It’s the ability to work in a project team and collaborate with others in the industry that is my favorite thing,” said Joshi. “I really enjoy the opportunity to make new scientific contributions in my research interest areas.”

It is astounding to think about the impact that one small insect makes on our day-to-day lives. Between pollinating the plants we eat, to putting honey on our breakfast table for our biscuits, pollinators play a much larger role than is immediately evident. Hopefully, thanks to scientists at the university, we won’t be seeing prolific headlines about pollinator extinction any time in the near future.

Neel Joshi observes pollinators in the field. 

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Department of Entomology conducts extensive research on water mites

Scientists are always trying to remedy a problem. Whether it is the cure for cancer, a new antibiotic or environmental safety breakthroughs, scientists are always searching for new and improved ways to fix these issues. Recently, scientists at the University of Arkansas have been researching an organism that holds the key to solving some of these problems.

The Department of Entomology staff is conducting a massive water mite research program, incorporating more than 30 students to aid in the research. These creepy, crawling critters are highly under-researched, and there are presumed to be more species of mites on Earth than there are existing insects. The expansive research project taking place will determine consequences that mites have on our ecosystems, as well as new benefits. That is why the foundational research conducted by this organism can provide.

An important piece of the puzzle in utilizing water mites for scientific gain is simply naming the vast number of species. Ph.D. candidate Ray Fisher’s specialty is naming and classifying new species of mites. Fisher said he discovered seven new species of mites in his backyard alone!

"Isn't it amazing that without names, mites might be more important than we expect?" said Fisher. "The next antibiotic treatment or the next pesticide in the mites I’m researching? We will never know until we complete that, we will never know!"

Fisher said that it is funny that these mites are “hidden in plain sight” to us. Even areas that we frequent in our short travels to the grocery store or school can hold so many tiny things that we never knew existed.

"I feel like an old explorer, like how Darwin must have felt when he first set foot on the Galapagos Islands and he saw a swimming iguana," said Fisher. "It’s the way you feel when you see things that no one has ever noticed."

The number of mites that are unnamed are astounding; perhaps only one-fourth of the species are identified. Fisher said that in order to figure out the benefits of an organism, there has to be a considerable amount of foundational research, the starting point of the rest of science, to help develop the benefits and consequences that this organism can provide.

"In my mind, science is halted because we are in this phase of trying to describe things and until we complete that, we will never know," said Fisher.

What's in a name? How do you differentiate deadly nightshade from other non-poisonous blue and purple flowers? You are able to because it has a name with clear parameters that include the description of the deadly plant. If you don't have a name to describe a species, how can you use it as a point of reference? We must know an organism's food source, diseases it carries, and life cycle before we can identify potential benefits. That is why the foundational research conducted by this organism is beneficial for these mite-y organisms.

Associate Professor Ashley Dowling, who serves as Fisher’s graduate advisor, said the goal of the water mite research is to eventually start looking at them as bio-indicators of water quality. "Mites are potentially a very powerful tool," said Dowling. "People tend to look at larger insects in the streams that we are focusing on, but mites themselves have a lot to do with what's going on there."

What if water mites could have been used during some of the recent water local water quality disputes that have received national attention? These tiny bugs could have eliminated years of political and social stress that the research of the water quality caused.

Another focus of the water mite research program is to inform the public not only that mites could cure ailments that are bothering them, but also that they are an excellent way to set the stage for school children to become interested and involved in science.

Dowling said the favorite part of his research is developing ideas and talking to others about science. He is working on a program that utilizes the mites through a citizen science project for elementary and junior high school students. The program will use large and furry velvet mites, which seemingly resemble cute plush pets - on a much smaller scale, of course. The initiative of the program is to encourage students to learn about the scientific method and to learn how to make conclusions.

"We want to use the mites as a focus in some of their science classes and get them interested in how the scientific method works, asking questions and making observations," said Dowling. "It will be a good way to interact directly with students."

Because so little is known about mites, some researchers have visions of massive scientific discoveries related to them. The mite research program inspires the scientists not only to discover new theories, but also to develop a new lease on the way they see the world. All of these amazing abilities of these organisms might be right in front of our eyes, and we are simply blind to them.

"You expect to find a new species of mite in the deep sea trenches or in the African Congo," said Fisher. "You say to yourself, 'I expected that to be there,' but you don't really think about that in your own backyard."

There are only 12 programs in North America currently studying water mites, according to Robert Weidenmann, Entomology department head. The fact that one of the most impressive and largest projects is taking place in Fayetteville is mite-y astounding. One mite even called it amazing that the answers to our troubles mite be "hidden in plain sight."
After four years working for a diploma, each individual student wants to make it to the next step. Whether that be a career or graduate school depends on each student.

While undergraduate education is the first step, acquiring experience is also needed when out on the search for what to do next. Students with experience have a stronger resume, more connections and a higher chance of reaching the next step.

For the Department of Horticulture at the University of Arkansas, there are many opportunities for inexperienced students ranging from general hourly jobs to full research projects.

Other students have taken the initiative to pursue these opportunities and now have experience, a well-built resume and contacts willing to provide letters of recommendation and advice on what the next step may be.

Jack McCoy is a senior in the Department of Horticulture at the U of A. His next step after earning his bachelor's degree is to pursue a master's degree in plant breeding.

He said he has been able to work for the department since his sophomore year. He has participated in several opportunities including maintaining a plant collection at the university's farm, working with strawberries, grapes and blackberries in high tunnels, interning for the breeding program and teaching a class to underclassmen.

"I am successful because I am not afraid to ask for opportunities," said McCoy. "Initially I showed interest and I bugged people about more opportunities in the department, which started a chain reaction where I ended one project and it wasn't hard to find another."

Overall, McCoy advises future students to be interested and feel comfortable to ask about opportunities.

"If it wasn't for the opportunities I had working in horticulture as a student, I would not have found my love for horticulture and continued loving horticulture," said McCoy.

Lesley Smith is also a senior in the Department of Horticulture. Her next step is to pursue a master's degree to become an extension agent.

Lesley interned for the breeding program for two summers where she assisted graduate students with projects and data collection for the student's dissertations.

She also gained experience in collecting data from harvest, maintaining research plots and processing soil samples.

Lesley said she is excited for graduate school but knows she would not be on the route she is now if it had not been for her experience.

"You need experience to get experience," said Lesley. "A 4.0 grade point average is impressive, but having skills and experience makes someone a more qualified candidate."

Preston Smith is a junior in the Department of Horticulture. His next step awaits him in December of 2017, but he is still preparing to become a more qualified candidate.

Preston works in hydroponics. He started searching for experience by asking professors of available opportunities.

An opportunity arose and he was emailed about the position because of his persistence.

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Teach Ag
“Sometimes the best cowboys ain’t cowboys at all,” sang Garth Brooks. That is the ultimate portrayal of one Arkansas native.

It started very early in life for this young lady. Recalling her childhood, she remembers carrying feed buckets up and down the alley of the horse barn while her mother worked. Because her mother was a horse trainer and a farrier, this cowgirl, Fawn Kurtzo, learned the western way of life early on. As she reflects on her past career as a horse trainer and on her childhood, she remembers carrying feed buckets up and down the alley of the horse barn while her mother worked.

Kurtzo's mother had a philosophy: once the horses were finished it was time to sell them. “I didn't have just one personal horse. Most kids just grow up with one horse. We primarily started green colts and didn't do much finishing. We did a lot of 30-day work. From 16 to 18, I always had a colt to ride,” said Kurtzo.

Having such a short time to “fix” her client’s horses, Kurtzo learned to be resourceful, especially when she encountered a horse with a unique problem or that needed unique training. “No one trick fixes the issue,” she said.

For every new challenge, Kurtzo taught herself how to find a solution. Her resourcefulness and self-confidence in problem solving would be one of her most important tools as a graduate student and as a professional communicator. Because she worked in the Ozark Mountains, many of the horses she trained were trail horses. These horses needed to be safe going down the highway, in the woods and crossing water, among many other abilities.

In that part of the country you have to have a horse that you can get off the mountain with – one that won't kill you,” said Kurtzo. “People would give me horses that couldn't back up, that couldn't stop, that had no balance and say, ‘By the way, you've got four weeks.”

So, now, Kurtzo is coming up with communications strategies for the Bumpers College under the same types of pressure. It’s her responsibility to create marketing and promotions media and content on short notice. She has to quickly find an approach, develop tactics, messages, and designs, and execute the plan.

To no surprise, following graduation from high school Kurtzo remained in the equine industry by accepting a full-ride scholarship to ride and train horses at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. “I was working with one problematic horse named TJ in my spare time. The students would come out and watch me because I changed the whole demeanor of this horse,” she said. “It wasn't about winning for me; it was about helping the individual animal. If there was a challenge, I was game,” said Kurtzo.

Kurtzo took a hiatus from college, and upon returning to the Ozark Mountains, she began riding colts again as well as working for various ranches in the area. She said this is when she really honed her horsemanship skills. “I was introduced to the old vaquero style of riding. I rode colts and gave riding lessons. I was a hand; I rode a wide variety of horses. During that time is when I started wearing my flat hat,” said Kurtzo, who became known as the Flat Hat Kid. In 2010, she returned to school at the U of A, where she began studying agricultural education. Meanwhile, she was working for a ranch, where she learned a lot of natural horsemanship skills.

She implemented those skills while working on a project with the ranch’s owner and Kurtzo became passionate about horses. “I knew there was a need for professionals who can understand horsemanship but can also relay that message to the people,” she said.

She felt comfortable knowing the faculty would provide her with a chance at becoming the best professional she could be.

The faculty here are dedicated to helping students follow their professional dreams by sharing their resources. Professional development experiences range from the global level to personal insight over a cup of coffee in the kitchen,” said Kurtzo.

“I was a hoot at video editing,” she said. “I knew the faculty would provide me with a chance at becoming the best professional I could be.”

The shift from long days in the barn to long days in a classroom was one of Kurtzo’s most difficult challenges. “She has persevered, worked hard, and dealt with adversity. She is a testament that even though life might be difficult, if you have a goal and work toward it, you can achieve whatever you desire,” said Edgar.

In true cowgirl fashion, Kurtzo didn’t turn her back to a good challenge. “Making the transition from entrepreneur to pursuing yet another major while being older than most of the students in the classroom was really a challenge to myself to prove that a person really can do anything,” she said. “I had reached a point where I didn't know what I wanted to do but I knew what I didn't want to do,” said Kurtzo.

Kurtzo has... taught herself to be an accomplished professional with skills in graphic design and videography.

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In the summer months that followed, you would have found Kurtzo in Blue Eye, Missouri. She would have been in the barn where she lived, trying to keep cool with nothing but a fan, working 16-hour days training Welsh ponies and babysitting two children.

“I told the kids, ‘If you’re going to hang out with me in the barn, you might as well learn to ride.’ So by the end of the summer they were both riding,” said Kurtzo.

Shortly after working those long hot summer days with no health insurance and barely making enough wages to live off of, this cowgirl decided to hang up her hat, turn the horses out to pasture and pick up a backpack and return to the classroom with a renewed focus.

“I realized I couldn’t be a cowboy forever, and that is when everything changed,” she said.

The following spring, she reached out to her former University of Arkansas advisor, Don Edgar; about returning to The Hill.

Kurtzo didn’t know what she wanted to do, but she knew returning to the university would provide choices about where she could take herself as a professional in the equine industry. “I had developed a level of trust with Don Edgar when I was at the university that stayed with me forever. I knew that I could always reach out to him,” said Kurtzo.

Feeling a personal connection with a professor really hit home for Kurtzo.

“I told Dr. Edgar I wanted to return to school because I wanted to improve my communications skills. I knew I was passionate about horses. I knew there was a need for professionals who can understand horsemanship but can also relay that message to the people,” she said.

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It didn’t take long for Kurtzo to find her place, again, in the Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology Department, this time with a concentration in agricultural communications.

Bumpers College Assistant Dean, Leslie Edgar, said the first time she talked to Fawn, she instantly liked her. “I could not answer all of the questions she had, but what I could tell her is that she would have the skill sets she needed to be successful,” said Leslie Edgar.

Leslie Edgar said she believes with an education and hard work, anyone can find success. “While she was an undergraduate, I hired her to be the Bumpers College communications assistant. I knew she had the skillset, heart and determination to be successful in this position. I knew this long before she did,” said Leslie Edgar.

Leslie Edgar, who is also an agricultural communications professor, said the best part of her job is getting to know her students and watching them succeed. “After Fawn graduated with her undergraduate degree, she moved into a graduate assistant position focused on college communications. I have not regretted, for a single second, that I hired Fawn. She has been a huge help to our college and has had a positive impact on our communications and communications strategies,” said Leslie Edgar.

Once a respected horsewoman, Kurtzo is now a respected graduate assistant pursuing a master’s degree at the University of Arkansas. “Fawn’s hard work, skills and never-give-up demeanor has moved our college communications to the next level,” said Leslie Edgar.

Kurtzo credits her work ethic, drive and determination to every horse she ever rode and every hour she spent learning how to get there.

“Watching Fawn grow as a professional has been a blessing to me. She is a joy to work with, and I have learned as much from her as she has learned from me,” said Leslie Edgar.

Though Kurtzo’s days are now filled with textbooks, computer monitors and classrooms rather than horses, saddles and the outdoors, she’ll always be a cowgirl. And it’s safe to say that “sometimes the best cowboys ain’t cowboys at all.” 🐎
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