Meet the Dean: Julie Funk

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They’re experts in their fields and essential campus leaders. But how well do you know deans across the University?

This occasional Lo Que Pasa series introduces deans across campus and provides insight into their motivations, challenges and reasons for choosing to work at the University of Arizona.

This week, meet the dean of the University’s newest college, the College of Veterinary Medicine, Julie Funk. Learn about her vision for Arizona’s first public veterinary medicine college and why she subjects her colleagues to her singing and humming.

Name: Julie Funk

College: Veterinary Medicine

Dean since: March 18

Why did you join the UA?

Being selected to lead the new CVM at the University of Arizona is the opportunity of a lifetime. The University of Arizona has all the components necessary for a great College of Veterinary Medicine. I couldn’t pass up the chance to be part of something so remarkable.

What do you enjoy most about serving as dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine?

It is the opportunity to deliver on a dream shared by so many in the University and our stakeholder communities. We are building a team of stellar faculty and staff who are making the vision of the CVM come to reality. Every vision is only as good as the team you attract. Our team is passionate and works with integrity. We are cultivating a culture of trust and believe that we are building a great place for faculty and staff to work, and for students to learn. We are also creating a culture of support and care that will ensure that we graduate doctors who are smart, trustworthy and intelligent veterinarians.

What are some of the challenges and rewards of serving as dean?

We certainly have a significant workload right now and we are laser-focused on being ready for our first class in the fall of 2020. We are recruiting faculty that are committed to our vision of a student-centered college. Our program is unlike any other in the U.S., which is attractive to many faculty and potential students. The rewarding part is that we are working as a team,
and everyone who understands what is before us is willing to lend a hand and help and apply their considerable skills to help everyone succeed. No one minds the challenges when you admire and respect the people you work with. I am so proud of the team.

**What's one exciting thing happening in your college right now that people should know about?**

We are incredibly excited about our program and what a difference it will make in the lives of our future students and the people of Arizona. We are designing a program that will have students learning from animals their first week in class. We are hiring faculty that will be teaching in a revolutionary way, using team-based learning as the model. This is an evidence-based approach to improve learning outcomes. The college cares deeply about wellness in the broadest sense. We have that rare opportunity as a new program to weave wellness into every aspect of curricular design as well as college culture. We are also going to be graduating students a full year in advance of when they would be graduating from other programs, allowing them to enter the workforce sooner. This is important to student financial outcomes, as well as increasing the veterinarians available to serve Arizona communities.

**What is your leadership philosophy?**

I believe in leading from a place of unwavering value and respect for the people we serve. That means we operate from a place of integrity and inclusiveness, we stay curious, positive, courageous ? and above all, promote a spirit of excellence in ourselves and in our students. People first. Always. As I mentioned before, real leadership is about serving with integrity and attracting like-minded faculty and staff.

**What is one thing most people don't know about you?**

I care deeply about having joy at work. My colleagues have to suffer my singing and humming at work!

**What is a fun fact about you?**

I am royalty. I was the Michigan Pork Queen.

**How did you get your start in veterinary medicine?**

I was lucky enough to grow up on a small pig farm in Michigan and I loved pigs ? and all animals ? from the time I started to walk and talk. I worked alongside my parents and our livelihood was dependent on our local veterinarian, who, in addition to caring for the health of our animals, was also a leader in the community. He inspired my interest in veterinary medicine as a career.

**Why did you make the switch from private practice to academia?**

I would love to say it was a part of a master plan, but it was not! I was working in private practice as a swine practitioner. I had been offered the opportunity to become a partner in the practice, and that same week, I was recruited for a residency/Master of Science program at the University of Illinois. I had some research experience during my DVM program and was interested in answering some of the questions I had about swine health during practice. Honestly, it also helped that I was not yet making much of a salary, and I did not have a partner that I needed to consider at the time. So, I leapt! I learned I loved research and
teaching, which led me to a Ph.D. and an academic career. I always share this with students: Sometimes it is less about a plan and more about seizing an opportunity.

**Wellness among veterinarians is an increasing concern nationally, with the job being one of the most stressful. Why is this the case and do you see the college addressing that for its faculty and students?**

There are a host of complex reasons why being a veterinarian is particularly stressful, but some of the main ones revolve around the financial burden that graduates might have with respect to debt, and the emotional toll of caring for sick animals and supporting the families who care for them. These are not insurmountable issues, however, if you can build competencies in preparation for the challenges they will face. That is what we plan to do in this CVM. We are building wellness into every aspect of our program, including coursework in managing finances, ensuring our tuition is low, teaching courses on how to take care of yourself in private practice, etc. Not only will our students graduate with a first-rate medical education, but they will have learned real-life skills in a supportive environment so they will have a toolkit of wellness competency available to them as well.

**How does the health of animals impact the health of humans?**

There is an increasing body of evidence that shows a benefit between the human-animal bond and the health and well-being of humans. It is incredibly exciting to think about a future where the human-animal bond is clearly valued for its benefit to human well-being.

We also know that there are diseases that are transferred between humans and animals, and veterinarians play a key role in decreasing the risk of disease in humans through control of those diseases in animals. Animals are an important source of food and fiber and veterinarians are critical to ensuring the health and well-being of these production animals to maintain a safe and wholesome food supply.

*The College of Veterinary Medicine will hold an open house Nov. 13 at 5 p.m. at its headquarters in Oro Valley at 1580 E. Hanley Blvd. Guests will be able to tour the new building and get more information about the program and developing curriculum.*

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[1] https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/college-veterinary-medicine-receives-avma-approval
[2] https://vetmed.arizona.edu/