

Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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Stellar teaching recognized

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Dr. Dorothy Debbie has won the inaugural Excellence in Teaching Award, presented by the College's Department Microbiology and Immunology.



The award, which recognizes her dedication and commitment to helping students learn, was presented in December. Her name will be inscribed on a publicly displayed plaque. In addition, she received a certificate of appreciation, a gift certificate to the Campus Bookstore, and a letter sorter with the Cornellian medallion for her desk.

A senior lecturer at the College, Debbie explains bacteriology and mycology to veterinary students in Block IV as well as undergraduate and graduate students from different colleges at the University. She also serves as a tutor group leader and is probably best known for introducing innovative teaching techniques into her classroom. For instance, she has been using iclickers in one of her veterinary classes for four years, giving students the opportunity to respond electronically to polls.

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“Their responses confirm understanding,” said Debbie, who is cognizant of providing safe environments for people to learn and test their own comprehension. “Cold-calling on students is not incredibly effective. It makes them nervous. With the iclickers and using electronic polling, no one knows how one student responded to my question versus another, unless they share among themselves. The aggregate data provides a roadmap for me. Can I move on? Do I need to revisit a particular topic? Is the learning complete?”

Debbie also uses case-based learning, the “pair-share” approach where students discuss thoughts in pairs and then share insights if called upon, online videos and podcasts, and traditional lectures. In the future, she hopes to incorporate polling options that use cellular technology and allow for more response options.


The selection process was very competitive, with nominations for the Department's Excellence in Teaching Award submitted by faculty and students. Debbie received high marks from peers and students alike, with common themes

noting her commitment to incorporating different teaching methodologies into her classes to address different learning styles and her dedication to ensuring a challenging yet supportive environment.

“Dorothy’s self-motivation and extraordinarily high expectations of herself and her students are inspiring,” said Dr. Avery August, professor of immunology and chair of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology. “It is clear that her peers and students hold her in high esteem. I am delighted that her talents and compassion are being recognized and look forward to the rewards that her innovative approaches to teaching will bring in the future.”

Debbie earned her bachelor’s degree at Johns Hopkins and her doctorate at Stanford, although she is an avid believer in life-long learning and regularly takes advantage of programs offered by Cornell’s Center for Teaching Excellence. She enjoys hiking, biking, and running and likes to read, a passion she says is perfect for professors: “I get paid to read and then share what I’ve read with my students. How could it be better?”

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