



## Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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# Professor wins teaching award for innovative scientific creativity course

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## Dr. Rodney Dietert has won the inaugural Excellence in Teaching Award for undergraduate and graduate teaching.

The award, which recognizes his dedication and commitment to helping students learn, was presented in December by the College's Department of Microbiology and Immunology. His name will be inscribed on a publicly displayed plaque. In addition, he received a certificate of appreciation and a gift certificate to the Campus Bookstore.

After 37 years as professor of immunotoxicology at Cornell, Dietert started exploring a new kind of teaching style in fall 2012. He designed and co-taught a new course called Tools for a Lifelong Career in Research, which gives practical how-to tips to undergraduate and new graduate students for making the most of their research careers and activating creativity. In the class, students practice a plethora of strategies and tools to inspire fresh ideas that could augment their work, raise research out of stubborn ruts, or spawn entirely new studies.

The 20-student class is based on the premise that creativity can be learned. It is designed to help scientists step outside the box and gain broader perspectives for problem-solving using things like dance, art, sleep, meditation, hobbies, and play. In 2013 it used Dietert's new book *Science Sifting: Tools for Innovation in Science and Technology* (World Scientific Publishing Co., 2013) as a text. The 288-page book includes 31 exercises to enhance creativity and improve research. An electronic version is available to the Cornell community for free through Cornell's library



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“Dr. Dietert's course changed my life,” said one student course review. Several reviews mentioned how the tools helped students think out of the box and build new skills for managing life, coursework, time, and research.

“It's very gratifying to see it's making that big a difference in students' lives,” said Dietert. “For the first time in my career the students as a group voiced that they didn't want the course to end. They were using the tools so much that

they wanted more. That's student impact like I've never seen before in my career. It's a good reflection that it's worthwhile to try some new things."

Dietert gives similar material in academic workshops across the country. He will offer such a workshop as part of Cornell Orientation's Prepare Program in 2014, attended by 260 to 360 incoming international students. It is the first time such a workshop has been offered in Orientation.

"Professor Dietert embodied the ideal professor as one of passion and dedication to the art of teaching while instilling both knowledge and desire in students, not only to achieve their goals but to reach even further within themselves," a student reviewer wrote. "He used unconventional techniques such as games and meditation exercises to get students to reach their full potential, and in doing so, ignited a fire in us that I'm not so sure many of us knew we had."

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