

Biography

Kristen Johnson, Ph.D.

Dr. Kristen Johnson received her B.S. in Animal Sciences with an interest in animal nutrition from UConn in 1980, and then went on to Michigan State University where she earned an M.S. and Ph.D. in Animal Sciences with again an emphasis in animal nutrition. She attended Colorado State University for post doctoral experience in animal energetics. She is now currently a professor at Washington State University in the Department of Animal Sciences and teaches several undergraduate classes including a freshman seminar, upper division courses in Ruminant Nutrition and Beef Cattle Production, and graduate classes in nutrition and nutrient management. Her research program includes work in whole animal and mitochondrial energy expenditure, methane production by ruminants and nutrition and the environment. The path she took following UConn now is not one she would have predicted but rather is the result of a lot of opportunities leading to her current position. (Read more about Dr. Johnson's experience...)

If you had asked her in high school or any of her UConn colleagues what they thought she would be doing now, it would not be a Professor teaching and conducting research! She did not grow up on a farm but really liked the combination of basic and applied science and animals. She loved the courses at UConn, particularly those that allowed her to be at the barns and see how the microbiology or biochemistry she was studying was relevant. Dr. Nathan Hale and Dr. Donald Kinsman, both ANSC professors, were particularly influential because they took a personal interest in her and would ask her to come and help out. She was honored then, but she knows now she was free labor (she does the same thing at WSU!). She was a part of Block and Bridle and other animal science activities which allowed her to get to know the Animal Science faculty and staff. Down the road this lead to letters of reference from people who really knew her (and she still got into grad school!)

When graduating from UConn the idea of a PhD was quite alien to her, and she just wanted an MS degree with more nutrition knowledge. However, once in graduate school, she discovered that she really liked the research part and that a PhD was the way to do more of that. (Note: It was at MSU that she met our current Dept Head, Dr. Zinn -- she says perhaps she should write another column with Dr. Zinn stories!) One thing that she noted while at MSU and CSU was that her UConn undergraduate training was different than the undergraduates at these two places. After thinking about it she decided her UConn experience was better. At UConn she was able to take classes in all species and all of the core disciplines of animal science. This gave her both breadth and depth of knowledge. For example, her first TA assignment was teaching the meats class where she processed carcasses to retail cuts. She remembers thinking she wished she had done better in that class because now she has to teach it to undergrads with knives. The breadth she obtained at UConn helps her even now when working with undergraduates.

At WSU she tries to give her students a lot of the same things she appreciated at UConn. She liked an advisor who knew her name and what she wanted to do (after she figured it out, then they both knew). The opportunity to go out to the farms and work with the livestock with a faculty member who took the time to explain the science mattered to her. She also appreciate that she was given the opportunity to do anything she was willing to try. Finally, she appreciated that her advisor tried to guide her but generally let her do it her way. She had to say, Dr. Hale was usually correct, and if she had listened it might have been easier, but he let her figure that out.

In summary, she is grateful for the opportunities she had as an undergraduate in animal sciences at UConn. It is in large measure those opportunities that led to the next opportunity and then the next one. Most people have varied career paths and it is the things you get to do along the way that make you a success.