Communication Curriculum
Teaching Philosophy

The driving goal of our Communication Curriculum is to graduate career-ready veterinarians with “day-one skills” to serve and work with diverse clients, animals, team members, and promote public health and animal well-being. In order to meet this goal, we design our curriculum based on the following principles, values and objectives:

Adult Learning Principles
Applying adult learning theory has been instrumental to teaching professional students, who are already accomplished when they enter the program. Problem-based learning creates an active and relevant learning environment for generation Y students. We strive to engage students, create an active learner-centered environment, elicit students’ perspectives, and capitalize on students’ pre-existing knowledge and experiences as a foundation in which to build new skills.

Active Learning
The in-classroom communication modules are consciously designed with 1/3 focus on presentation of content and 2/3 time spent conducting exercises using video demonstration, small group discussion, clinician case presentations and role-playing. In junior practicum we flip the classroom, requiring students to complete pre-reading and take a quiz on the skills, so that they come into class with a base knowledge level. We then optimize the classroom time by practicing and applying the skills to prepare for the simulated client laboratory.

Experiential Learning
We utilize experiential learning techniques in the communication laboratory, which creates an opportunity for students to interact with simulated clients, practice their clinical interviewing skills, receive feedback from their peers, client and coach, and reflect on their communication through watching a videotape of their performance. Although challenging, stretching students beyond their comfort zone by interacting with simulated clients in a safe and supportive environment reveals powerful lessons often from the client’s viewpoint.

Theoretical and Evidence-Based
The communication courses are skills-based and theoretically pinned to the educational framework of the Calgary-Cambridge Guide. The focus is on both what skills can be used each phase of the clinical interview and how to apply these skills in the clinical setting with clients. This approach creates a strong communication toolbox that can be carried to each consultation, implemented in diverse situations and adapted to individual style.
**Integration throughout the Curriculum**
An effective communication curriculum incorporates opportunities to practice skills throughout all 4 years of the program. In addition to building skills over time and increasing the level of difficulty, integration of communication skills training throughout the curriculum enables reiteration of concepts and enhances learning, long-term memory and overall retention.

**Professional Development of our Educational Team**
The same learning principles are applied to professional development and the training of the communication coaches. The coach development process is experiential and includes initial training to practice the coaching process and facilitation skills, followed by in the moment coach-the-coach feedback and debriefing to identify effective coaching strategies and address challenges. No matter how experienced, coaches commit to renewing their training each semester they participate in the course to take their skills to the next level.

Likewise, a similar model is used for professional development of the simulated clients. A skills-based training is conducted prior to each course to review the communication skills and to highlight best practices in providing descriptive and supportive feedback. In the moment coaching is provided during the laboratory and learning objectives are reviewed in the debriefing session after each laboratory.