

At home in the barn, the lab or the classroom: A day in the life of a Pre-Vet Student

By Suzanne Wilcox English



Mornings at the Barn

A chill hangs over the pre-vet barn at 6 a.m. and if you take a seat on a concrete block to watch the action, you can feel the cold seeping up into your bones.

Ashley Taylor, a tall redheaded senior pre-vet major, walks purposefully around the barn keeping an eye on students from the animal nutrition class. Shovels scrape over the concrete floor as the sophomores and juniors, bundled in jeans, sweatshirts and barn boots, clear out used bedding, feed the animals and sweep the walkways.

Taylor, who was chosen to serve as barn manager for the academic year, rises at 5:20 each day. While at the barn, she grades the students on being present, on time and on task, and also is responsible for vaccinating and caring for the animals, which include dozens of sheep, goats, donkeys, llamas, cows, a couple of barn cats and her dog.

She vaccinates a baby goat and slings it over her shoulder, lamenting aloud that they don't stay that small. With chores finished, the students crowd into Taylor's office to

wash their hands as she does a final walk-through before leaving so she can shower, have breakfast and get ready for the day.

Choosing Quality Academics

"I chose Findlay for the pre-vet program. I applied to big schools, but I realized that it was impersonal, and they didn't have the hands-on," Taylor says. "Here, the animals are University-owned, and everything is done educationally. I like that it is small — professors, not assistants, teaching the classes."

Academics are next on the agenda after the barn. Taylor's classes run 10 a.m. to noon and 1-2 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday; on Tuesday and Thursday, she spends most of the day in the research lab, where she has been working with a faculty member and fellow student Brittany Erbe to determine whether commercial farms' use of antibiotics to promote animal growth is spreading to other nearby farms.

"We set out traps during the summer to collect mice" from commercial, family and organic farms in nearby Putnam County, explains Bethany Henderson-Dean, assistant

professor of biology. The mice were kept alive but their feces were collected and analyzed for increased resistance to antibiotics. “We know there is increased resistance in commercial animals; we are checking to see if that has spread to surrounding farms.”

Taylor and Erbe earned second place for best poster presentation at UF’s Symposium for Scholarship and Creativity in April and were chosen to present the results of their research during Posters at the Capitol in Columbus the same month.

Taylor pointed out that while she grew up around horses — in fact, her parents, Maureen and Scott Taylor, sent her to summer horse camp and even moved so that she could have horses at their home in Topsfield, Mass. — she had never been exposed to other farm animals until she came to Findlay.

Her hard work and long hours were noticed, and she was given the opportunity to work, first as assistant barn manager, and then as barn manager her senior year. “Everything



Back to the Barn

But academic work is only a part of Taylor’s day. After lunch or research time, she does homework and goes out to ride her own horse at a local boarding facility, and then back to the barn for feedings from 6 to 7:30 or 8 p.m.

She showers, does more homework, and might go to a Pre-Vet Club or sorority meeting before turning in around midnight — but not necessarily to sleep for the night.

“When we have animals being born, I’ll have weeks when I don’t get to sleep through,” Taylor said, noting, “One week, 15 goats gave birth, and we had 68 lambs born this spring. It was constant.”

One-on-One Relationships

Taylor advises pre-vet students to immerse themselves in the barns from day one. “I was out there constantly. If you spend a quantity of time, you’ll get quality,” she said, adding, “I may not remember the name of every disease I studied in class, but if I’ve seen it at the barn, I remember everything: what it looks like, what it smells like, and what to do about it.”

I’ve learned about farm management, I learned here — and yet they put me in charge of the pre-vet barn,” she said proudly.

Taylor credits Dr. Michael Kerns, who has been both her professor and work supervisor, with mentoring her as she has matured in the program. “He’s taught me how to be, not just a great student, but a great person, morally and ethically.”

Taylor said Kerns mentored her through the process of applying to vet school, always willing to talk to her, “like my dad away from home.”

She will attend Michigan State University in the fall with plans to be a large animal veterinarian, perhaps in Massachusetts, New Hampshire or southern Maine. “I see myself as a practicing vet with equine and food animals, but I’m not putting specializing out of the picture,” she said.