Animal Health Science

Herndon Career Center | Video Transcript

I teach Animal Health Science, along with Courtney Martin, for Herndon Career Center. Our program is exploratory, which means students can choose whatever direction within animal science they want to investigate. We find opportunities for them to see those interests come to life.

This class is designed to help students find their passion and explore the different careers in animal health science.

We are fortunate to host the majority of our program at the zoo. When we have classroom time, this allows us to conduct field observations with the animals, get to know particular species, and create products for the animals. We have created enrichment products that students have then been able to see the animals interact with.

This gives students a behind-the-scenes look at what goes into being a zoologist and the care provided to each animal, including enrichment. In class, we cover content such as anatomy and physiology, conservation, and genetics. We also complete enrichment projects where students build different types of interactive toys for the animals at the zoo.

Students work on a year-long passion project, choosing a topic in animal health science that interests them. They take a deep dive into the research, collect data, and present their findings to the community, their parents, and their peers.

Students often enter our program thinking about animal health science in terms of veterinary science. We want to help them determine whether that is the right path for them while also presenting new options and careers they may not have heard about before.

There are limited spots in veterinary school, and it can be expensive, so that path is not the right option for everyone. There is a great need for professionals in all areas of animal health science, including animal research, conservation, and ecology. We want to expose students to any outside field experience they may be interested in and help them see whether it is a good fit.

Students in our program can complete an internship for a semester as a first-year student or for the entire year as a second-year student. This allows them to explore different occupations and see professionals at work. Students also have an opportunity to earn dual credit through Northwest Missouri State University. In addition to internships, they can earn certifications that provide entry-level skills in animal health-related fields.

Our program is very different from a traditional classroom. We bring content to students, but they are also evaluated on their ability to demonstrate professionalism in many different situations. During site visits, students practice knowing when and how to ask questions, thanking people for their time, and remaining focused and respectful—even when the subject is not their favorite.

There is also a great deal of trust in this program. We trust students to get from one place to another, arrive on time, and consistently attend their internships for eight hours a week.

One thing that makes our program unique is that students must have their own transportation to attend our site visits. We travel to places such as the American Royal, Burr Oak Woods, Maple Woods for the veterinary technician program, Swope Park, and many different neighborhood shelters.

Because we have so many site visits, students usually spend about an hour of the two-hour visit helping at the location. At an animal shelter, they might make treats for the animals. We have also visited an apiary with beehives, where students helped with landscaping the area. Whatever help is needed, it is an opportunity for students to complete some of their required volunteer hours for the year.

We get to do so many interesting things and visit so many places. It is a really unique opportunity.