

Faculty Profile: Dr. Carmen Lau

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Students in the School of Veterinary Medicine can look forward to a new face in front of the classroom this fall. Dr. Carmen Lau is a licensed veterinarian boarded in anatomic pathology with a PhD in biomedical sciences, and she brings with her a passion for hands-on learning and extensive experience working with amphibians and reptiles.

Describe your journey to working at Utah State. How did you come to be here?

Carmen Lau: I went to vet school at the combined program between University of Nebraska at Lincoln and Iowa State University, similar to the USU and WSU program. I did my pathology residency at Texas A&M and decided that I definitively wanted to work in academia and diagnostics. Having grown up in the Midwest, I've always wanted to move somewhere with at least a semblance of topography. Working at the Utah Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory satisfies all of my career and personal goals!

How did you decide to specialize in anatomic pathology?

CL: I decided to become a pathologist late in my fourth year of veterinary school, much later than most people decide their career paths. I had been hesitant to continue schooling after vet school, but I love the hands-on satisfaction of performing a necropsy (an animal autopsy) and the high success rate of finding answers, especially when compared to other fields of medicine. I realized early in my vet career that being a general practitioner of small or mixed animal practice didn't appeal to me for many reasons, but there are so many other career options in the field of veterinary medicine that it took me a while to decide which one I would pursue.

You also have experience with reptiles, including a publication on a highly unusual water mold infection in an American alligator. What interests you most about working with reptiles?

CL: I've always had reptiles since I was a kid. I think they're a highly underrated category of pets due to people often inheriting their parents' fear of reptiles and amphibians. I love the wide variation in the reptile and amphibian species, to see anatomical and physiologic differences between chameleons and axolotls and pythons. And with the underrepresentation of reptiles in veterinary medicine, great potential exists for discovering new diseases in every species and every patient with which we work.

What research topics are you pursuing now?

CL: My appointment is diagnostics and teaching, so rather than pursuing research, I dedicate my time to performing necropsies on any animal that comes into our facility and reading biopsies that local veterinarians send in after they perform surgeries. In the future, I hope to collaborate on research projects, particularly if they have reptilian or amphibian models, such as skinks or frogs!

What should students expect from you as a professor?

CL: This fall, my students should expect overwhelming enthusiasm during the systemic pathology course I teach for vet students. I hope to infect them (no pun intended) with a love of pathology and necropsies. It's a high-intensity course with high standards, but I know our students can handle it.

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