Adult & Higher Education

Alumni Career Story: Peg Wheeler

Peg remembers her application to the USM Adult and Higher Education program and the telephone interview with Karen and Mike that she had between teaching labs at the University of New Hampshire. Peg was teaching in the Animal Science and Veterinary Technology program at the University of New Hampshire for over 15 years while running her small livestock feed/supply and pet care business in Berwick, ME. As a licensed veterinary technician, Peg was sought out by peers at the University of New Hampshire’s Thompson School of Applied Science to teach a wide range of courses. It was her peers at UNH who encouraged Peg to complete her Master’s degree and the acceptance into the program was really well timed. Class sizes at UNH had been growing and growing and teaching was feeling less and less inspiring. Peg’s first class in Adult and Higher Education, *The Heart of Teaching*, was the impetus for change in her classroom and reigniting her love of being in that classroom.

Shortly after starting in the AHE program, Peg applied and was chosen for her dream job as Program Director for a brand new veterinary technology program at York County Community College (YCCC). YCCC was a perfect location for students in Peg’s home district to be able to access this type of education in an affordable, conveniently located institution with high commitment to student success. The pathways of education for meaningful job opportunities for students in this district have always been of great importance to Peg as she served for nearly a dozen years as a school board directors in the K-12 district.

The program director position required Peg to complete an Associate’s degree prior to what would be the national accreditation site visit for the veterinary technology program. It was a long 3 year journey to complete both the Associate’s degree, the AHE Master’s degree and building the curriculum, putting together the equipment and clinical partner relationships as well as advisory boards and regulatory committees, but each time a new project began in the building of the program, the AHE course Peg was taking supported the design and pedagogical understanding needed perfectly. For example, when it came time to design our student practicum experiences, during her capstone course using survey feedback from peers in the industry, Peg wrote and was published in the *Journal of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators* an article titled *What Makes Internships, Preceptorships and Practicums Work?* Everything came together at the end of the 3 years very nicely but finishing the AHE degree was bitter sweet. Relationships with instructors, peers and advisor, Mike Brady (best mentor a student could ask for) were so supportive that Peg often felt that she was never alone in the project but felt it was a bit scary to strike off alone!

Peg keeps many AHE resources close at hand as she continues to develop as a teacher in the veterinary technology program. Her personal favorites are the works of Parker Palmer, Stephen Brookfield and John Dewey. One thing that Peg learned from the USM Adult and Higher Education program was how profound the impact of a good mentor can be in terms of supporting a life-long love of learning. As John Dewey notes, and as Peg shares with her students, “Education is not preparation for life; Education is life itself.” The relief that Peg felt as a result of the AHE program, to stop feeling like instructors had to be the wise professor with all the answers, but could be co-learners with all students, was an immeasurable gift that will hopefully serve students for a good while to come. Peg already notes that her first group of graduates-to-be are authoring what will hopefully be an advanced certificate at York County Community College in a veterinary technology topic and hoping to follow with others. And in her own educational journey, Peg is exploring the opportunities for advance certificates or doctoral programs while enjoying some time between with her family and her animals.