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## Contributing Disciplines in AHT: A Program- Approach Success Story

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*Animal Health Technology (AHT) has five contributing-discipline courses: two chemistry, both taught until this term by Sylvie Tardif, and four biology courses taught by Maria Panzuto, Claire Sergeant, and Heather Roffey. In a spirit of true collaboration, they and the AHT-discipline teachers have integrated these courses into the program. Tamara Brown, AHT teacher and part-time Pedagogical Counsellor, and Patti Kingsmill, Pedagogical Counsellor, sat down with the four teachers to discuss their experience with the AHT program.*

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### **Patti & Tamara: Could you tell us how you first came to teach contributing-discipline courses in the AHT program?**

**Claire:** There are several microbiology contributing-discipline courses at Vanier. As a microbiologist, I wanted to try teaching each one.

**Maria:** In my case, the person who had been teaching the course retired. That was 16 years ago. I've been teaching it ever since.

**Sylvie:** A teacher went on sick leave, so I replaced him. I fell in love with the entire AHT group, not only with the students, but with the teachers and the course material too.

**Heather:** Three years ago, I took on the Anatomy and Physiology courses after a teacher retired. I would be very sad if I ever lost the chance to teach them. They seemed a perfect fit for me, since my Dad is a vet and I grew up on a dairy farm.

### **What do you love best about teaching contributing-discipline courses in a tech program?**

**Maria:** I enjoy the students. They're very focused and serious about their studies. It's a joy working with them in the labs.

**Heather:** What I teach the students is so applicable to them. Also, I am always learning new things from the program meetings and

the extra resources I read. I love watching how the AHT technicians interact with clients and simplify the information they communicate. I reflect that in my teaching: I explain concepts to my students in the same way they will need to explain them to clients.

**Claire:** When we ask for ways we can connect our course content with the program, AHT teachers and technicians are always generous in sharing with us.

**Sylvie:** Yes!

**Claire:** What we learn from the techs is amazing. They share their experiences with the students. Sometimes, when I'm going over the application of a concept, they'll tell the students, "Pay attention, because when you graduate you'll need to do this."

**Maria:** I agree. It really brings so much more to your class if you communicate with the techs and teachers and attend program meetings. You bring what you learn into your course.

**Heather:** I would echo that. I enjoy the collaborative process.

### **Sylvie, you have been teaching in AHT for over 20 years. Are you still learning?**

**Sylvie:** Yes. I am always on the lookout for new applications for what I'm teaching. I'm always creating new real-life examples to help students apply their learning.

### **How would you characterize teaching a technology course?**

**Maria:** The focus in pre-university and technology programs is different.

**Sylvie:** Very different. The first year I first began teaching, I came from research and industry and had trouble finding the right level of learning. In the second year, I threw out everything I had and put myself into the student's shoes. Once I did that, and integrated the resources given to me by AHT, I said, "Okay, let's first focus on applications, then we can go back to the concepts once we know why we are doing something."

**Claire:** Years ago, while working on a program revision, I learned to do backward course design. I liked that approach—looking at what students were expected to do once they leave the program.

**Sylvie:** Our students have to learn not to be afraid to use new instruments. They have to transfer their skills and build their confidence. As a teacher, I'm in the same situation. When I have to teach content that is new to me, I can reach out to my colleagues for help.

### **How would you describe your working relationship with one another as contributing disciplines? How do you limit unnecessary repetition between courses or support the transference of learning across courses?**

Claire Sergeant  
(top left)

Maria Panzuto  
(top right)

Sylvie Tardif  
(bottom left)

Heather Roffey  
(bottom right)

**Sylvie:** I know what Maria is teaching so I try to stay in step with that. We all have an idea of what the other is covering.

**Maria:** I have added Sylvie as a teaching assistant in my course on LÉA to avoid redundancies in what we cover.

**Sylvie:** And so we can reinforce certain concepts for each other.

**Claire:** We use some veterinary case studies and are in the process of creating more.

**Are those cases provided to you by AHT teachers? Are they examined across multiple disciplines, each of you teaching a piece of the puzzle?**

**Claire:** Yes, exactly. We are tired of the binge-and-purge method of studying. Now we can tell students that what they are learning with us will be needed for their case studies in other classes. Eventually, these case studies will be used throughout the entire program. For example, we might have a case study looking at sick fish: the health of a fish is reliant on aquaria, fish waste, and the nitrogen cycle. The concept involves both chemistry and microbiology.

**Heather:** We also have a case study that looks at chronic kidney disease.

**Sylvie:** And one focused on the biochemistry involved in the energy production of working dogs.



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**How do you balance teacher autonomy with program needs?**

**Sylvie:** Collaborating with the program doesn't affect my autonomy. I'm not losing; I'm gaining because I'm learning.

**Claire:** It's actually nice knowing you don't have to cram in as much content as you might have expected. By focusing on the competencies, and what is relevant to the students, you streamline your course content and concentrate on ensuring students understand the concepts.

**Sylvie:** Ask us for help! And attend departmental meetings. Don't be afraid to ask for reference books. Be part of the team. That's very important.

**In your opinion, what support can a program committee give their contributing-discipline teachers?**

**Heather:** Invite them to program and department meetings. I would also say that if possible, contributing-discipline courses should be assigned to teachers with some seniority who are likely to reteach the course. If they are assigned to teachers at the bottom

and how their course contributes to the overall program.

**Claire:** And you have to explain your course's role in the program to your students. They are so overwhelmed with core courses, they sometimes put biology on a lower priority level, and they shouldn't.

**Heather:** Observing surgery labs really helped me. I saw students applying the theory I had taught them. Going on a field trip or visiting a stage site also really helps teachers get an idea of where their course fits into the program.

*It really brings so much more to your class if you communicate with the techs and teachers and attend program meetings. You bring what you learn into your course.*

**Sylvie:** We love teamwork. We don't pretend to know everything. We are open and flexible to change and to modifying things.

**Has working more closely with AHT impacted your motivation as a teacher?**

**Sylvie:** Immensely. The AHT teachers provide me with information about practical veterinary applications of what I teach. I can then develop authentic problems for students to solve. I already know organic chemistry like a textbook, but the applications in the AHT field are new to me. It's fun learning about them! I grow as I learn.

**What recommendations would you make to those teaching a contributing-discipline course for the first time?**

**All:** Ask for help!

**Claire:** Ask help from the coordinator.

of the seniority list who may not get to teach the course again, they won't get the chance to improve the course and continue to integrate it with the other courses.

**If the teacher gets overwhelmed, how can the program help?**

**Heather:** Prioritize what needs to be covered. Make it clear what you expect the students to know upon completion of the course.

**And understand the role your course plays in the program?**

**All:** Yes.

**Claire:** Show them the grid. Give them the course framework for their course and maybe other relevant course frameworks.

**Sylvie:** They should have an idea of the program's competencies, exit profile,

and how their course contributes to the overall program. They talked about exotics, water, bacterial growth, and ammonia in water. It was very interesting and relevant to chemistry, biology, and microbiology. It's all linked!

**Claire:** Ask to visit other classes. I sought out the 4th term microbiology AHT teacher. I would always ask what she was teaching that day. This year, I asked to share an office with AHT teachers. It's great having that closer connection!

**So you don't feel like you're on the margins? You know you're an integral part of the program?**

**Claire:** Yes, we have been made to feel like we belong.



**Patti Kingsmill** is a Pedagogical Counsellor in the Pedagogical Support & Innovation office.



**Tamara Brown** is a veterinarian and teacher of Animal Health Technology. She also works part-time as a Pedagogical Counsellor in the PSI office.

