Allie Keller: In Science, Community is Crucial

Last year, the opening of the College of Natural Sciences Learning Community marked the beginning of a new era of community development and student support. Now the CNS has affirmed these priorities by hiring its first learning community coordinator, Allie Keller.

Keller, a Fort Collins native who received her master’s in biology from Northern Arizona University, is the best kind of science junkie. Trained in the sciences and enriched by study and work abroad, she can reach students in two languages and fully understands the value of integrating curriculum with community. Having developed science curricula herself, she has seen some of the pitfalls in science education – and created fresh solutions.

Recently, as a teacher on assignment for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, Keller spent time in the departments of engineering and natural sciences at Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH) in Hidalgo, Mexico. Her work there emphasized cultural sensitivity, student life, and teaching transferable professional skills.

“One of our main goals is to help students find purpose and meaning in science education,” Keller says. “By making connections beyond their curriculum, science students can foresee what their work means out in the world.”

That, in turn, means greater success both in and out of the classroom.

Keller will begin by putting in place long-term programs for mentoring and helping first- and second-year students succeed in their (sometimes daunting) initial coursework. She’ll also incorporate community engagement and service projects, which will create new bonds and shared investment among the CNSLC’s 400 members. And while much of what Keller develops will be new, she’s not starting from a blank slate. The already-successful Peer Academic Leaders (PALS) program, for example, will lead the way and create new leadership opportunities for CNSLC residents.

“This position is the embodiment of our focus on student success, and Allie is a wonderful fit,” says Lisa Dysleski, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Programs. “The learning community is a huge asset to the college and CSU, and I have great expectations for the future.”