

Dr. Jennie Willis is an Associate Professor and applied animal behaviorist in the Department of Biology. She holds a PHD from Colorado State University in Zoology with a focus in Animal Behavior. Her dissertation research was related to dog cognition and problem solving. Since that time, she has worked with species ranging from mice to ferrets, and from cats to cattle!

Dr. Willis has made a career in helping companion, zoo and farm animals using the scientific principles of human behavior change, including positive reinforcement and errorless learning. For many years, Dr. Willis has helped, pet parents and their animals, along with their veterinarians, solve severe behavior issues. Her life focus has been helping people and their pets navigate towards better solutions in when they struggle with challenging issues like biting, reactivity, separation anxiety, self-mutilation, house soiling and escape among many other issues.

Dr. Willis is the Director for the Professional Science Masters (PSM) Degree in Zoo, Aquarium and Animal Shelter Management. She and her graduate students conduct applied research to benefit the lives of animals in managed care and organizational settings. Her special research interests include: behavior modification strategies for aggressive animals, evaluation of animal welfare, analyzing and developing enrichment, analyzing efficacy of animal training protocols and understanding public perceptions of animal behavior and training. Her particular interest is in improvement of adoption rates of cats through enrichment, evaluation and training.

Dr. Willis teaches several courses in applied animal behavior that are available for undergraduates and graduate students in any program including: BZ 479 Biology and Behavior of Dogs, NSCI 579 Applied Animal Behavior In Captive Populations and BZ 478 Behavior and Biology of Cats. She also has study abroad courses for students to study animal behavior in Kenya and Madagascar.

Dr. Willis speaks and consults internationally for groups and organizations on a variety of animal training and behavior modification topics. She is a member of the Animal Behavior Society, American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, Animal Welfare Agencies of Colorado, the Association for Animal Welfare Advancement and Animal Behavior Management Alliance.

In her spare time, Dr. Willis enjoys spending time with her human and canine family hiking, swimming and adventuring in the Colorado mountains.