

A part of something bigger

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Mr. Shannon talks about his job as a husbandry supervisor and his passion for playing a role in the advancement of science.

How did you become interested in working with laboratory animals?

I became interested in laboratory animal science while working in a laboratory for two years at the Genome Center here at Washington University. I next accepted a job in animal husbandry for the Division of Comparative Medicine, because I felt working directly with the animals would be an exciting experience and expose me to a side of research I hadn't yet seen. It was here that I learned a lot about colony maintenance as well as the relevant federal laws and policies, and the more I learned, the more interested I became. The first colony I cared for was in a laboratory working on Alzheimer's research, and just knowing that I was part of something much bigger gave me the enthusiasm I needed to advance into a leadership position.

Describe a typical day in your current position as husbandry supervisor at Washington University School of Medicine's Division of Comparative Medicine.

I typically start the day by checking in with my staff. I make rounds to all my caretakers in their animal rooms to make sure everything is going well and to answer any questions they may have. Since I have ten employees, this can take some time. Afterwards, I start on

other tasks such as writing and responding to emails, organizing transfers of cages in and out of the facility, scheduling facility tours with new university personnel and anything else that needs to get done. At this point, I also touch base with the other supervisors on the floor, including the facility manager. Throughout the day, I check on my staff to make sure they are completing tasks on time and to resolve any issues that may come up. Towards the end of the day, when things are starting to slow down, I write up billing forms if needed and delegate extra work for the next day. Before I leave, I make one last run through my area before I head to my office to check my email and voicemails one last time. The nice thing about being a supervisor is that my days are typically busy and there is little redundancy. I also really enjoy being in a position of leadership—having my own staff and greater responsibilities.

How do you think your experiences have helped you in your current work?

I was a caretaker for several years before I was promoted, so I know what it's like to change cages, deal with investigators and do whatever my supervisor asks of me. I also worked in a laboratory so I'm somewhat familiar with that work setting and the types of schedules they deal with every day. I use the knowledge I gained from each of these positions quite often in my current role. It's imperative that I understand where my staff and investigators are coming from when they have questions, comments or concerns.



What are your future or long-term career goals?

My long-term goal is to be an animal housing facility manager. I believe it's an attainable goal if I just keep working toward it. Another goal I have is to complete my degree in Psychology through our institution's tuition assistance program, which would improve my chances of getting a better job in the future.

What do you love most about working in laboratory animal science?

Investigators constantly remind me how vital quality animal husbandry is to their research. I work in a place where people are doing such amazing things all around me in the medical and research fields, and I love knowing how important my role is in helping them do their work. Lab animal science has been key in so many medical breakthroughs; I'm just a link in a long chain of people working toward a better understanding of medical science.