

Training a New Generation of Faculty

Success is what happens when chance meets preparation—but sometimes you need a little nudge to grab the opportunity. Dr. Derek Cissell, a new assistant professor of diagnostic imaging, was completing a Ph.D. in the lab of Dr. Kyriacos Athanasiou, a renowned bioengineer on campus, when a faculty position opened in radiology. Cissell had completed a four-year residency in radiology at UC Davis before pursuing his doctorate and knew it was the perfect opportunity to combine research and teaching.

While Cissell was reluctant to apply before finalizing his Ph.D., his mentors pushed him to do so. Thankfully, he did.

“The position here was a once-in-a-life-time opportunity,” Cissell says. “It was definitely a case of being in the right place at the right time.”

The seed to pursue specialty training had been planted in veterinary school at the University of Pennsylvania—a suggestion also made by Drs. David Wilson and John Madigan who mentored him at UC Davis while he completed a two-week externship in the large animal clinic in 2004. That experience proved critical in bringing him back to California in 2007 to begin the radiology residency. During his residency, Cissell co-authored some research projects that were funded by generous donors to the CCAH.

“I realized during the residency that I really enjoyed teaching as well,” he says. “To combine academia and teaching, I knew I’d have to take the next step and pursue a Ph.D.”

So Cissell returned to his first college interest of engineering and joined the Athanasiou lab where Dr. Boaz Arzi was completing his post-doc training. Cissell collaborated with him on the pioneering procedure of regenerating mandibular bone in dogs.

Cissell’s current research interests focus on using imaging to evaluate tissue function and disease noninvasively in the musculoskeletal system, particularly cartilage. While on clinics, Cissell works in large animal radiology and in CT, MRI and nuclear medicine. He’s always been interested in musculoskeletal biomechanics, particularly in horses, since his undergrad years when Cissell played polo.

When he’s not in clinics or the lab, Cissell enjoys driving a tractor and fixing fences on his 10-acre property west of Davis. He also recently acquired his first horse, an off-the-track Thoroughbred named Mambo who needed to heal from a stress fracture in his pelvis. With luck, Cissell says he will be able to pull his old polo gear out soon and start smacking a ball around the backyard.



Derek Cissell