I am honored to receive the 2014 H. Allen Tucker Lactation and Endocrinology Award from the American Society of Animal Science. This award, named after my graduate mentor, recognizes mentoring of students in the fields of lactation and endocrinology. I thank those that nominated me and the Awards Committee for selecting me for this honor. I thank Dr. Tucker and the students, postdoctoral fellows, and other colleagues that I have had the good fortune to work with since the beginning of my career in Animal Science, all of whom had an impact on my development as a scientist. In early 1980, as I began searching for graduate programs in Animal Science, one of my undergraduate advisors suggested that I apply to Michigan State University. Later that spring when I accepted the offer from Dr. H. Allen Tucker (“Tuck”) to begin my Master’s degree in his laboratory, I had no clue as to the positive impact that decision would have on my professional and personal life. Nor, at the time, did I really understand how strong an influence his training would have on my own philosophy of mentoring students. Later in my graduate career, I began to understand his philosophy on graduate student training and why he was such an effective mentor for so many scientists. Fortunately, as I moved through the professional ranks at the University of Connecticut, he continued to be my mentor.

Each of us develops an approach to mentoring students in research that is usually based on our own experiences as a trainee that gets modified and refined with each student that we interact with over the years. As I reread Dr. Tucker’s philosophy on graduate training (Tucker, 1988), I realized how much my own philosophy parallels the training that I received in his laboratory, a philosophy that focuses on communication, reading the scientific literature, enthusiasm for the science, presenting and publishing data, developing a work ethic, and the importance of teaching.

As in most relationships, clear communication is a key. Students need to understand that the door is open for questions and to discuss issues and problems. Moreover, each student must understand that their contributions in the laboratory are an important part of the research process. Furthermore, it is critical that very early in their training a description of the overall program and research interests (and research impact) is presented to them. However, the most important items to communicate to new students are an enthusiasm for research and expectations for success. That is, explain what drives your excitement for your research and what it takes for a student to be successful in your program. The communication between mentor and student should continue throughout their graduate career and beyond. Celebrate their successes, but be direct in identifying weaknesses without belaboring them (but remind them that weaknesses should all be fixed!). The relationship between student and mentor should be able to withstand criticism and review. In fact, the response to a thorough review is often telling how a student will “mature” as a scientist.

An important part of Tuck’s mentoring of students focused on reading the scientific literature. He expected us to know the literature and contributions of past scientists in the broadest sense of the field. In fact, I can recall my written comprehensive exams,