

Ten New Animal Communicators Reflect on Their Training and Ideas for Advancing the Profession

Cathy Chenard, MS
Coralville, Iowa, USA

Abstract

The field of animal communication (AC) is growing, yet it is not recognized as a profession by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and has no standard educational requirements, credentials, professional association, or peer-reviewed journal. To learn how newly certified ACs feel about their preparation for their new career and what they believe is needed to advance the profession, ten Soul Level Animal Communicators® (SLAC; eight females, two males; mean age 57 years) who graduated from the Danielle MacKinnon School in 2022 were interviewed via Zoom or phone. All graduates felt well-prepared to conduct AC sessions with clients but slightly less confident in building their businesses. The SLACs planned to specialize in assisting clients with lost animals, recently adopted animals, behavioral issues, pet grief, and end-of-life care. Half the class offered additional services such as pet portraits, Reiki, and life coaching. To advance the profession, the SLACs called for public and veterinary education about AC, greater collaboration and networking among professionals, and advocacy for the field. The SLACs recognized the existence of fraudulent practitioners but did not think it was time to initiate licensing or credentialing. Some SLACs wanted research studies to validate AC and legitimize the profession, while others were interested in basic research to understand telepathy better. One SLAC envisioned a professional association and peer-reviewed AC journal. Overall, the SLACs felt ready to practice as professional ACs and identified several ways to advance the profession. To confirm and broaden the views of these ten SLACs, a comprehensive survey of professional ACs is needed.

Keywords: Intuitive interspecies communication, animal communication, education, professionalism, research, certification

INTRODUCTION

The animal communication (AC) profession is growing, with professionals on nearly every continent and rising numbers since the 1970s (Barrett et al., 2022). More than 180 books have been written about AC, and numerous teachers have emerged to train, mentor, and certify professional ACs (Barrett et al., 2022). Penelope Smith developed a code of ethics in 1990 (Smith, 1990) that has been adopted by many ACs (Barrett et al., 2022). *Species Link. The Journal of Interspecies Telepathic Communication* (Species Link, n.d.) was founded in 1990 by Smith although she no longer manages the publication and issues have only been sporadically released since 2017 (Smith, n.d.). In 2022, an International Multispecies Research Symposium was convened to discuss the need for AC research (University of Saskatchewan, 2022).

Contemporary ACs come from diverse professional backgrounds, such as business, counseling, animal care, engineering/computer, and healthcare (Barrett, 2022). However, AC is not recognized as a profession by the United States (US) Bureau of Labor Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2022a), which recognizes dog groomers and pet sitters, occupations that have professional associations and certification programs (BLS, 2022b). AC also lacks standard educational requirements, credentials, specialty practice groups, or peer-reviewed journals, found in healthcare professions such as dietetics (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, n.d.; Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, n.d.).

As the AC field expands, it is worth investigating how AC professionals feel about their training, whether they are specializing, what they think is necessary to advance the field, and if they believe research is needed. To offer insights into these issues, ten recent graduates from the Danielle MacKinnon School (DMS) (MacKinnon Media, Inc. (DMI), 2022) were interviewed.

THE 2022 GRADUATING CLASS

The graduates, including the author, (eight females, two males; eight from the US, two from other countries; mean (range) age 57 (40-68) years) were interviewed in April/May 2022 via Zoom or phone using a semi-structured questionnaire. Class demographics were previously reported (Chenard, 2022). Graduates agreed to be interviewed, recorded, and named, and

received a copy of the paper to review. Interview transcripts were examined for salient quotes but not analyzed using qualitative methods since this is a personal perspective paper.

The US-based DMS offers an online AC certification program (DMI, n.d.). The program includes three AC courses and one business class. Certification requirements include conducting a reading at one online AC lab; a passing grade for two 20-minute telephone AC feedback calls; submitting 20 written case studies with at least eight from paid clients; creating a business website that includes a professional headshot, biography, service description with pricing, and a contact page with a business email and phone number; providing four written testimonials from clients. Additional details about the DMS program were previously reported (Chenard, 2022).

Graduates who choose to be affiliated with DMS after graduation have permission to use the Soul Level Animal Communicator® (SLAC) credential. SLACs have access to resources and support from DMS including “mastermind” meetings, a book club, AC practice sessions, help to locate lost pets, and the chance to serve as teaching assistants for DMS classes.

HOW PREPARED DO YOU FEEL TO PRACTICE AS A PROFESSIONAL AC?

All graduates felt well-prepared to conduct AC sessions with clients.

“We are absolutely ready. ”

“I don’t second guess myself at all like I once did. I just tell them because I know that it’s what I’m getting from the animal.”

Being confident, however, doesn’t mean some graduates don’t still have doubts or nerves.

“As a new AC, I mean, I still have some doubts, like did I make that up?”

“I feel really pretty good. And I realized that I learn something from every reading . . . I have mixed emotions . . . frankly, still get a little nervous before reading.”

“Right after we completed the class, I think I felt really confident, and I still feel confident but not quite as much. And again, I think it's a function of not doing it full-time . . . on the business side.”

Several SLACs were employed full- or part-time in other jobs, offering AC nights and weekends. Three graduates were already in business for themselves and planning to add AC to their existing services. One was planning to make AC a full-time business.

Graduates feel confident in their AC skills but slightly less confident in the business and social media skills needed when self-employed.

“I think it's a matter of social media, which I don't care for at all. But I know I need to get on it.”

“I haven't started my blog. I have had many ideas but I'm like scared to start my blog.”

“I'm scared to venture out onto social media . . . and yet at the same time, we need to do that nowadays to advertise for yourself.”

I've never had my own business before . . . I've gone through over 100 business cards already. I just give them to you . . . at the vet . . . to anybody that walks up, practically. So yeah, I just, you know, try to get myself out there. But at the same time, I really want to be careful about my time. Not overbooking myself. Because I also have you know, a life.”

DO YOU PLAN TO SPECIALIZE?

SLACs work professionally with humans and their pets, although some also connect personally with wild animals they encounter on walks or at zoos. As for specialization, some are waiting to see what opportunities arise.

“Right now I’m just really taking whatever comes but what seems to be coming is animals who are ill or injured or passing.”

For those wanting to specialize, the area of interest arose from their lived experiences.

“I do have some personal interest in lost animals. I know that can be a really challenging part of communication, but I went through it with one of my animals who wound up passing while she was [lost] and it was a very traumatic story.”

“I want to work with rescue animals. You know, where they come home and the animals are like my animals that I have adopted and are not instantly my best friend. You know, they don’t honor me because I brought them home . . . and I want people to know that just because you feel like maybe you’re not enough that can change.”

“I want to work with people who still are unaware about this beautiful connection they can have [with their animal]. A lot of the readings that I do are about separation anxiety, or like anything related to human things that the animal may have a problem with.”

Several SLACs are interested in supporting people experiencing an animal’s death.

“I really do like the end-of-life stuff. That makes me sound morbid, but just basically helping that transition go smoother for both parties is where I really enjoy especially helping the human component because I know animals, they got it all together.”

“Every single one of my clients is almost identical in what they’re looking for . . . everybody has an animal who’s crossed over and, more importantly, riddled with guilt about the animal’s crossing. So I discovered that as I suspected that being able to connect with your animal who has crossed over is really healing, and that was kind of my mission.”

Half the class was offering one or more services in addition to AC. These included animal oil paintings and digital portraits; animal photography; Reiki for humans and animals; life coaching; food/wine trips to Italy; dog behavior consultation/training; and pet loss support. Graduates

offering oil painting/digital portraits combine them with AC as a “celebration of life” to help with grief after the death of an animal.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO ADVANCE THE PROFESSION?

Graduates expressed various ideas.

Offer Education

“Teach the possibility [of AC] to kids in school . . . teach the kids about AC and animal rights . . . there's so many things that kids don't learn in school.”

Take Risks

“Starting . . . that brave step forward and reaching out to veterinarians and reaching out to people who are not . . . already into the woowoo stuff . . . not staying within that comfortable zone of like-minded people is where it needs to go . . . we don't want to cram it down anybody's throat . . . we're not there to change anybody, but just say hey, look at this . . . if you know everybody who does AC can get one foot in the door to someone who's kind of skeptical but in a professional . . . way. That's going to be massive.”

Support Skeptics

“I really don't know other than to help people . . . this opening up that a lot of us are learning right now . . . Some people shut it right down . . . but if they're willing to learn and open up to it, then I think that will help . . . I don't know how to go about getting people to live that way. But I mean, it is a way of life as well.”

Work with Veterinarians and Other Animal-Related Professions

“Introduce ACs to vets by offering free sessions to give them an actual experience so they can understand when an AC referral might be beneficial to their human and animal patients.

For example, when there is no medical reason the cat isn't using the litter box or the human client needs some support in making end-of-life decisions . . . train vets in AC . . . an annual or 6-month visit with an AC along with the visit to the veterinarian to check in with your animal."

Leverage Mainstream Media and Journals

"If they see it in mainstream media, then all of a sudden, that means it's good enough . . . that means other people are buying into it and that individual doesn't feel like the weirdo seeking out you know, ACs."

"Maybe one day news stories like the one about a cat who led searchers to a woman who fell down a ravine will also include some quotes from the cat." (Kane, 2021)

"I think the idea of having a magazine . . . for lay people to introduce them to AC . . . like cat fancy and dog fancy magazines . . . different ACs could write columns . . . like a Dear Abby. . . tips for connecting with your animals."

"I think it would be really great to have a professional peer-reviewed AC journal . . ."

"[Seeing] . . . something in their professional veterinary journal about AC . . . some studies or articles from a vet who works with ACs as part of their practice and the benefits they have seen. It would even be great to have articles from vets who are ACs themselves."

Protect the Public and Ourselves

Graduates discussed the need for regulation, but the consensus was it was not necessary now.

"There's always the quacks . . . in every trade . . . how do you help people determine somebody is legitimate, versus somebody who's pretending, who sold your site pretending to be you . . . I think that's one reason why I was so . . . bent on becoming certified . . . to show . . . I am . . . legitimate."

“How do you know who's real who's a fraud and all that? So there are websites that you could send complaints to and say that people are frauds and just about everybody had somebody writing in that they were a fraud. And I was like, well, how can you trust those?”

“I think it's really hard to regulate something where there can't be generalized standards that are tangible. Whereas like the dog training field, we have . . . research that tells us the ways we used to do things 20 years ago are terrible ideas and do not work because we have all this research now to back it up. And that's what makes change happen. I think it's hard . . . everyone's going to do intuitive stuff differently because how our intuition works is very different . . . I think it's going to be like the gold standard going through places like [DMS] . . . this field I think it actually does it more service to not be regulated.”

“I wouldn't advocate for licensure or anything like that. But I know there are people out there that you know, aren't necessarily trained.”

“People need to do their homework and see where people got their training and do their due diligence.”

Address Ethical Questions

“Animals used for research . . . do we need to have informed consent for animals? . . . if it's a human . . . there's an informed consent . . . I get to ask questions . . . say yes, I want to participate . . . no, I don't want to participate . . . animals are sentient beings . . . we can communicate with them . . . are we obligated now . . . to get informed consent?”

“Since animals are considered property . . . that could be another area for ACs . . . you know, advocacy for animal rights and things like that.”

Work Together

SLACs see value in supporting each other, animals, and the profession.

“What we have going for us that I think is so wonderful is her [DMS] community, right? The mastermind and all the things that go on . . . Nice to have like-minded people around and that's huge.”

“I think it's really great for groups of communicators to work together and do things and get out there like . . . The Animal Communication Collective™.” (The Animal Communication Collective™, n.d.)

“I would like to see . . . some kind of an organization . . . ACs get together . . . and discern all these issues, talk to the animals . . . see what needs to happen and put together some kind of a plan.”

IS AC RESEARCH NEEDED?

SLACs were not opposed to research, although, some felt more strongly about the need for it than others, and the types of research proposed varied.

Validation

“I do think we need it [research]. Because I think it's gonna go a long way into converting some folks. I think that's our bargaining chip . . . wedge the door open a bit. What that looks like, I have no idea because I don't just wrap my head around how to quantify and be able to get tangible data and not just be anecdotal. Evidence that's hard, I don't know what that would look like.”

“I think it would help bring authenticity and proof to those skeptics who are very science oriented.”

Accuracy

“How on the mark we are with personalities or even if the animal is on the other side and you're asking the animal are you there with my grandma, you know, what can you tell me about my grandma and verifying how true that is with the person that's still here on earth.”

“How well the animal can direct us to what they have knowledge of what's going on with them.”

Benefit to Humans

Some SLAC mentioned studying how AC can reduce grief and resolve behavioral issues such as litter box problems or help veterinary office patients and staff.

“I just love the idea of stories, and I think it would be really neat to [talk with] people who had lost animals . . . who have seen ACs before, during or after . . . to talk about their experiences. ”

Benefit to Animals

Another SLAC was interested in the animal's perspective.

“I'd be curious, and I don't know how you would do this, but the value [of AC] to the animal?”

Profession

Others expressed interest in understanding the type of person who uses or becomes an AC.

“What types of people actually pursue an AC for their own animal . . . what type of person is actually drawn to AC as a profession?”

Telepathy

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Contact: hello@eternalheartconnections.com

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A couple of classmates wanted to better understand telepathy.

“Studies on how the energetic level works between a human and an animal or in between trees or in between any living essence like what's the connection really there?”

LIMITATIONS

These views are from ten newly certified ACs who trained together at a US-based online program and plan to work with human clients and their pets. While their perspectives are valuable, they may not reflect the views of ACs from other teachers or countries, those with more experience, or operating in different contexts such as with wildlife or zoos. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the state of training for professional ACs and identify ways to advance the profession, a more comprehensive survey involving a larger sample of ACs is needed.

CONCLUSION

Ten recently certified SLACs felt well-prepared by the DMS to practice as professional ACs but acknowledged the challenges of growing a business. Some graduates were interested in specializing in areas reflecting their personal experiences. Ideas for advancing the profession included taking more risks in sharing about AC; educating the public and animal-related professions; increasing media coverage; establishing a professional association and peer-reviewed journal. Graduates suggested working together to promote growth and address ethical concerns. Research is viewed as necessary to legitimize the profession. Licensing or credentialing was not seen as beneficial at this time. A more extensive survey of professional ACs is needed to validate and expand upon these views.

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