



**FALL 2025**  
***Alternative Careers to Academia!!***  
**NRSC 7102-001; NRSC 2101-001**  
1 credit; Mondays 5:05-6:20 pm  
**CASE E240**

***NOTE:*** *the last 20 min or so is for people who would like to hang out and chat further with the speaker!*



**NOTE: GRADUATE STUDENTS:** If you are interested in registering for this course but do not have the (INCORRECTLY LISTED) pre-requisite of NRSC 5110 – this is no problem! – Please email for assistance in enrolling: [linda.watkins@colorado.edu](mailto:linda.watkins@colorado.edu) . **You do not need NRSC 5110 prerequisite to enroll.**

Organizers: Office Hours by Appointment  
Justin Stitzlein, M.S. (CU Boulder Venture Partners/Research & Innovation Office)  
~and~  
Linda Watkins, PhD (CU Boulder Dept of Psychology & Neuroscience)

**Format of the course includes 2 parts:**  
**(1) attendance/participation in the speaker series**  
**(2) you choose 8 (or more if you'd like extra credit) videos, with self-paced quizzes, on topics of most interest to you from the Canvas class site**

This course features weekly guest speakers, with degrees ranging from bachelor's through postdoctoral training prior to leaving academia. For many, their career paths have little to do with the degree(s) earned.

The paths they meandered through life to their current positions are equally diverse as are the ways they moved from job to job, and the wisdom/insights gained.

Join us to explore their life stories and advice to people starting out – a great opportunity to ask them everything you want to know about finding and getting the jobs you'll love! In addition, class members will select a series of videos to watch and answer questions about from a list of topics directly relevant to finding and getting the ideal job and career for you.

### **Class Schedule**

**Aug 25 – Justin Stitzlein** - Introduction to the course; Why it is so hard to leave academia

**Sept 1 - LABOR DAY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

**Sept 8 – Michael Mestek (Global Head of Clinical Research & Medical Science for Acute Care and Patient Monitoring, Medtronic, Boulder, CO)** received his bachelor's in economics from Bradley University's College of Business, and his PhD in Applied/Exercise Physiology from Auburn University with a minor in statistics. After several research and clinical exercise physiology positions, he ended up at the University of Colorado - Boulder with a post-doctoral Research Associate position studying cardiovascular health. He moved from CU-Boulder to Medtronic working in Research & Development, including working on FDA regulatory issues, and patient

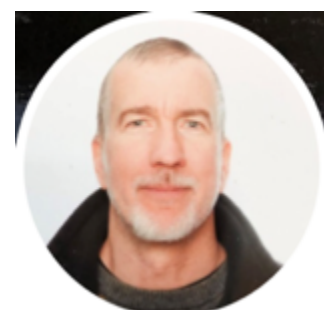


monitoring including intra-operative brain monitoring as well as hemodynamic monitoring and temperature management technologies. Moving up the ranks, he served as Senior Program Manager for Global Medical Affairs, Director of Global Market Development working on high growth international market development, Director of US Marketing, Senior Director of Global Marketing for perioperative patient monitoring, and now Global Head of Clinical Research & Medical Science for acute care and patient monitoring.

**Sept 15 - Molly Nickerson (Medical Director, SpringWorks Therapeutics, Boulder, CO)** received her PhD in Integrative Physiology and Neuroscience from CU-Boulder. She then joined Questcor Pharmaceuticals, going up the ladder from Medical Science Liaison (MSL) for the Mountain Region for Multiple Sclerosis, to Senior Medical Science Liaison for Multiple Sclerosis mentoring team members, authoring publications in medical journals, engaging with thought leaders in new therapeutic areas, and developing strategy for team projects. Taking on the role as Associate Director of Neurology Medical Science Liaisons, she led Multiple Sclerosis and Infantile Spasms teams, published on key initiatives, developed and maintained relationships with key opinion leaders (KOLs), and developed medical strategy, marketing, sales leadership and training. Moving to Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, she became the Director of Neurology MSLs in the Autoimmune and Rare Diseases Divisions, managing teams in multiple sclerosis, Infantile Spasms, Intrathecal Spasticity and Pain. Transitioning to Mitsubishi Tanabe Pharma, she served first as Regional Medical Affairs Director and then Associate Director for Translational Research and Medical Sciences, supporting new product development, biomarker evaluation, clinical trials, and medical affairs. In her current position with SpringWorks Therapeutics, she began as a Senior Medical Science Liaison, then Principal Medical Science Liaison, and now Medical Director.



**Sept 22 - Brooke Harrison (Vice President, Medical Writing at Edgewise Therapeutics, Boulder CO).** Following a bachelor's in biology at Johns Hopkins U. and both a masters in exercise physiology and a PhD in Integrative Physiology from CU-Boulder, Brooke was a postdoctoral fellow at Myogen, Boulder, focused on developing therapeutics for cardiovascular disease. This was followed, after acquisition of Myogen by Gilead) by a Clinical Research Scientist position at Gilead Sciences. He then took on a research associate position at Biofrontiers as well as founded Boulder Medical Writing, a medical writing and consulting startup. Joining Clinipace (a contract clinical research organization) in Boulder, Brooke went up the ranks from medical writer to senior medical writer to senior medical and regulatory writer to Associate Director for Regulatory and Strategic Development. Moving to Forma Therapeutics (therapeutics company focused on sickle cell disease, leukemia, glioma, acquired by Norvo Nordisk) he served as Director and then Senior Director of Medical Writing. He now serves as Vice President of Medical Writing at Edgewise Therapeutics in Boulder, which focuses on serious muscle disorders including muscular dystrophies and serious cardiac conditions. Brooke additionally continues to serve as Medical Coordinator for Boulder Mountain Authority; a position held since 2012.



**Sept 29 - Lisa Marshall (Associate Director Science Storytelling, and Adjunct Journalism Instructor CU-Boulder)** received her bachelor's in journalism and political science from CU-Boulder and recently returned to earn her Masters in 2022 in Multimedia Journalism with an Integrative Physiology specialty from CU-Boulder. Her writing career has spanned positions as a Health and Medical Science writer and editor with the Boulder Daily Camera newspaper, as a freelance journalist specializing in health, science, and running publications with articles in Web MD, Men's Journal, Runner's World and an array of consumer publications which focus on health and medical science, examining the interplay between environment, genetics, health, diet, physical activity



and stress. Lisa is also the Associate Director of Science Storytelling at CU-Boulder, sharing research news, editing, planning stories and news releases for climate science, engineering and planetary science, health, medical science and the social sciences. Lisa also helps produce research videos and co-hosts a science-based podcast called Brainwaves.

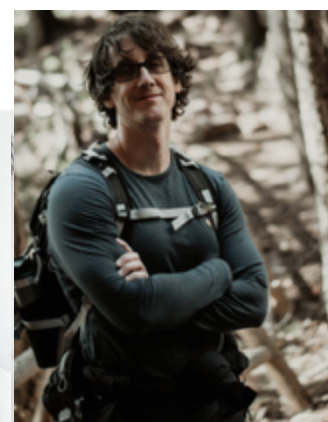
**Oct 6 - Joel Stanley (Chief Executive Officer [CEO], AJNA BioSciences, Denver, CO)** writes: "We come armed with a deep understanding of the science in nature and a strong desire to fearlessly explore uncharted territories. Our field is the healing power of botanics, and our purpose is to serve and better the planet through them." He began in the cannabinoid business joining the family cannabidiol (CBD) company, Charlotte's Web, serving as CEO and Chairman for 11 years, and now remaining as a member of the Board of Directors, writing: "Our mission is predicated on the belief that nature and science are not mutually exclusive for a healthy planet. We believe it is only through a mutual understanding of both that we can reimagine the future of healthcare and correct the faults of a system that has failed us." He now serves as CEO of AJNA BioSciences. AJNA focuses on select plant and fungi species with a well-established history of therapeutic use. They are working to develop the world's first FDA approved full spectrum cannabinoid drug for Autism Spectrum Disorder, a full spectrum psilocybin novel anti-depressant, and a pipeline of other plant medicines in development.



**Oct 13 - Joe Dragavon (Director of the BioFrontiers Advanced Light Microscopy Core, Univ. Colorado-Boulder).** Joe earned his BS in Chemistry and PhD in Analytical Chemistry (Univ. Washington, Seattle). As part of his graduate work, the objective was to measure multiple parameters of single cells in real time, correlating genomic and proteomic events, with his focus being on development and characterization of a system capable of monitoring oxygen consumption rates of single mouse macrophage cells in real time. From there, he held post-doctoral positions in England (University of Hull, 2007-2008) and France (Institut Pasteur, 2009-2014). In all of these academic research positions, his work often bridged the gap between the available technology and the academic investigation. This led to him developing capillary optical waveguides as sensors for industrial purposes, in-line sensors and sensing techniques to allow monitoring of each step in an antibiotic synthesis, a system capable of fluorescence lifetime imaging and spinning disc microscopy, and use of bioluminescent *E. coli* bacteria as an unconventional light source for in vivo fluorescence imaging in small animals as a means to increase the production of red photons which are not readily absorbed by hemoglobin. During this time, he greatly expanded his imaging expertise to range from single cell and whole animal bioluminescence imaging to widefield and confocal microscopy to advanced approaches such as 2-photon, fluorescence lifetime imaging, and various super resolution techniques. His imaging experience has led him to his current position as Director of the BioFrontiers Advanced Light Microscopy Core at CU-Boulder.



**Oct 20 - Jayson Ball (Member of the microfabrication team, Neuralink, Bay Area, CA).** Jayson grew up in the Pacific Northwest, earning his Bachelor's from Evergreen State College in Psychology at Olympia, Washington. From there he came to Boulder and first became a volunteer in CU Boulder Neuroscience Lab, then Postgraduate Research Assistant and a Graduate Research Assistant upon entering the Psychology and Neuroscience graduate program. In parallel, he continued his loves of strength training (owner of Feral Fitness; strength coach for Barbell Logic Online Coaching; owner





Front Range Gains) and rock climbing. He became enamored with Elon Musk's Neuralink company which was striving to use beyond-state-of-the-art methods to meld the mind to the outside world, allowing people with no voice to speak in real time with "their" own voice through AI, allowing people with no motor control to reconnect with their world by translating what their neurons willed to happen into actions in real time, and so on. Knowing that he was aiming at Neuralink allowed him to focus post-PhD on gaining the skills to maximize his chances of being hired, which happened in Fall 2025. He'll be sharing these experiences and the amazing work Neuralink has ongoing.

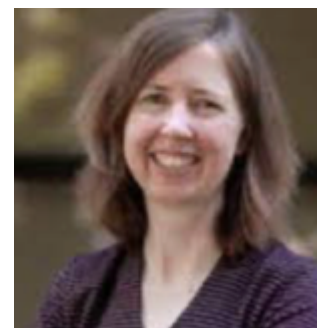
**Oct 27 - Jana Watson-Capps (founder of Jana Watson-Capps and Associates, LLC, a consulting firm for academia and biosciences),** received her Bachelor's in Biological Sciences from Stanford University and her PhD in Biology from Georgetown University. After teaching in the Biology Department of Metro State College in Denver and working as a project/development consultant in Denver, she served for over 7 years as the Associate Director, Chief of Staff and Head of Strategy for Biofrontiers at the University of Colorado-Boulder to develop and implement the institute's interdisciplinary programs and industrial partnerships. After forming her consulting firm, she now helps companies, universities and non-profits with strategic planning and coalition building within the interdisciplinary life sciences. She has experience and strengths in interdisciplinary science and education, academic-industry partnerships, strategic planning, large-team management, multi-stakeholder project leadership, communicating science, grant writing, fundraising, and building research communities.



**Nov 3 - David Cohen (Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at TechStars, Boulder and international).** After receiving an AA (Associate of Arts) degree in Computer Science (U. Central Florida), he first worked as a software engineer doing engineering and economics research, followed by Director of Development at Automated Dispatch Services. He then founded and served as Vice President (VP) of Research & Development (R&D) at ZOLL Data Systems, working on budgeting and management of software engineering, testing, and documentation. He founded and served as VP R&D of Pinpoint Technologies, building technology, managing engineering teams, and managing budgets. Next he founded iCentric Corp and served as its Chief Technology Officer (CTO) and founded earFeeder, serving as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). He has served as an adviser on company boards including SendGrid, Chowbotics, Wunder Capital, LevelTen Energy, Entrepreneurship Initiative, and Endeavor Colorado. He then founded and served as CEO and Chairman of the Board for TechStars. TechStars helps founders of startup companies succeed. It helps founders scale up their startup into world-changing businesses through startup funding, training and development. TechStars is now multi-national (15 in the U.S. including in Denver) having established TechStars Accelerators which offers 3-month programs designed to help entrepreneurs find product-market fit, get traction, and access capital and mentorship. In addition, TechStars Foundation has worked to make innovation and entrepreneurship more accessible and inclusive by training of, and investing in, non-profits, providing powerful and scalable path to economic equity for marginalized communities. Based on TechStars Foundation investment, they have trained more than 10,000 entrepreneurs around the world and mentored a new generation of venture capital (VC) investors.



**Nov 10 - Teisha Rowland (Staff Fellow, Office of Gene Therapy, Office of Therapeutic Products, Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, Food and Drug Administration).** Teisha received her PhD at UC Santa Barbara in molecular biology where her research focused on human pluripotent stem cells and retinal biology. After postdoc training at CU- Anschutz medical campus,



focused on high-throughput screening of compound libraries of patient iPSC-derived cardiomyocytes followed by postdoc training at CU-Boulder on epigenetic mechanisms of immortality of cancer cells, Teisha became the Director of Stem Cell Research and Technology Resource Center for the MCDB department of CU-Boulder. From there, she joined Umoja Biopharma as a Principal Scientist, iPSC Team Leader for engineered allogeneic therapies. She now serves as a Staff Fellow with the FDA. In addition, Teisha has served as a Scientist for Science Buddies, producing science projects for K-12 students, a medical writer/editor, columnist for Biology Bytes for the Santa Barbara Independent, and author of "Making the Leap from Academia to Industry".

**Nov 17 - Joey Azofeiffa (founder and Chief Executive Officer [CEO] of Arpeggio Bio, Boulder CO).**

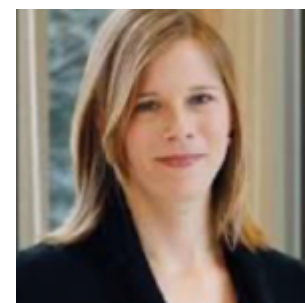
After receiving a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and molecular biology (Vassar), he received a PhD in computer science from CU-Boulder. His doctoral dissertation focused on the relationship between medicine, transcription factors, and enhancer RNAs using a unified mathematical theory and novel numerical algorithms. From there, he worked as a data scientist first with Forma Therapeutics gaining expertise with next generation sequencing analysis, state of the art machine learning, probabilistic modeling, data visualization and database management. From there he moved to Merck as a data scientist, building novel models for multi-omics data integration applied to high throughput flow cytometry, new models of meta-genomics data and novel extensions of ATAC-seq pipelines. He then founded and served as CEO of Arpeggio Bio, a therapeutics company focused on using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and laboratory robotics to develop drugs to fight drug resistance in cancer using the analysis tools he developed at Merck and Forma Therapeutics. He and his team have raised over \$20 million in venture capital funding from Y Combinator and other venture funds. He was chosen in 2023 as one of the 40 emerging business leaders under 40 yr of age in Boulder Valley and Northern Colorado.



**Nov 24 - FALL BREAK HOLIDAY**

**Dec 1 - Amy Tindell (Intellectual Property law, Partner at Holland and Hart law firm, Boulder, CO)**

received her bachelor's degree in Cognitive Science from Dartmouth and her PhD in Biopsychology and Neuroscience from the University of Michigan. Following that she entered law school and received her J.D. in Intellectual Property from Boston College Law School. She was worked with MassChallenge, a not-for-profit group that supports entrepreneurship to help launch and grow new ventures. She was then a Senior Associate with Tapestry Networks in Boston, a professional services firm that brings together leaders to solve complex problems, such as healthcare issues, and a Bar Manager at Venture Café in Boston, which provides networking opportunities to entrepreneurs, investors, developers, and other members of the startup community. After an Associate position with McCarter & English law firm in Boston focused on intellectual property, she moved to Hollard and Hart law firm in Boulder specializing in intellectual property legal practice, first as an Attorney and now as Partner.



**Dec 5 (Friday) -Eric Furfine (Entrepreneur, Chief Executive Officer [CEO] and Chief Scientific Officer [CSO] of Mosiac Biosciences. Boulder CO).**

Following a bachelor's degree in chemistry (Wash. Univ.), PhD in biochemistry (Brandeis) and postdoc in molecular parasitology (UC San Fran), he was a Scientist at Burroughs Wellcome, followed by positions at GSK going from Scientist and Director of Biochemical Analytical Pharmacology. After GSK, he served as Vice President of Preclinical Development of Regeneron, Senior Vice President of



Research and Preclinical Development of Adnexus. Moving to Eleven Biotherapeutics, he held positions of President of Research and Development, and Chief Scientific Officer. This was followed by Chief Scientific Officer of ImmuneXcite and then Ohana Biosciences, founded Furfine Biotech consulting and now CEO and CSO of Mosaic Biosciences, a biotech that is developing protein and antibody therapeutics.

**Grading: CLASS PARTICIPATION IS EXPECTED AND VERY STRONGLY ENCOURAGED!!** Please bring questions for the speakers - this is a unique opportunity to explore non-academic careers. Please take full advantage!!

There are **2 paths to success** in this course – both are easy but require your participation.

The total number of points (where 100 is considered a perfect score) is broken down as follows:

**(A)** There are **14 class sessions**. Attendance gains you **5 points** for each session for a total of **70 points**.

**(B)** There are (at least) 15 videos on our class Canvas site (I continue to work on adding more as appropriate become available, so may be more than 15 to choose from during the course).

Current listing:

- Why Leaving Academia is Harder Than It Seems
- Overqualified or Underqualified: Which is it, and what to do about it
- Climb to the Top of the Heap: Essential Job Application Best Practices
- 3 Mistakes PhDs Make When Starting Their Job Search
- Building Professional Relationships Online – Focus on Non-Academic Job Search
- What Every STEM PhD Needs to Know About Going into Industry
- Common Mistakes PhDs Make in Their Resume and How to Avoid Them
- 3 Skills Every PhD Should Have When They Graduate
- Networking and Why Every PhD Should Do It
- How to Pitch Yourself to Employers
- What Every PHD Should Know About Using LinkedIn
- Tales from the Dark Side: How to Find Rewarding Industry Careers and Relationships
- How I Decided to Leave Academia
- Developing an Innovation and Starting a Company -- Student to Faculty
- 4 Things to Consider if You Want to Start a Business

At **minimum**, watch **8** of the videos that most match your interests, and **take the associated quiz**. This is an **open-video quiz** (that is, have the quiz open and available as you watch the video so to be able to watch for and answer as you go). **Each quiz is worth 4 points**. So, for the expected minimum of 8 quizzes = **32 points**. You can watch an **additional 3 videos with quizzes for Extra Credit (max 12 points of extra credit)**, so a **max possible quiz total of 44 points**.

**(C)** The final grade is the grand total of your total attendance scores and your total quiz scores, as above. Standard 90 and above=A, 80-89=B, with +/- breakdowns etc. applied as standard.