# Health and Human Science Matters Season 2, Episode 2: Laura Malinin

Laura Malinin: I certainly never thought I was going to be a researcher. If you had asked me, when I was an undergraduate, I would've said, "No. No. I'm an artist. I'm a creative. I don't do research." And yet, I find research incredibly creative. And people say, "Do you miss design?" And I dabble, here and there, but no, I don't because I feel like teaching and research are equally as creative. They're equally as fulfilling as doing architectural design work.

Avery Martin: Welcome to Health and Human Science Matters, a podcast by Colorado State University's College of Health and Human Sciences. I'm your co-host and digital media strategist, Avery Martin.

Matt Hickey: And I'm Matt Hickey, associate dean for research and graduate studies. In our college, we make it our mission to optimize human health and wellbeing through discovery and innovation. But don't just take our word for it. Each episode, we sit down with people who fulfill that mission, our college, faculty, and staff, and today, we're lucky enough to have Dr. Laura Malinin with us, the director of the Richardson Design Center. Laura, welcome.

Laura Malinin: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Matt Hickey: So, Laura, we want to start, and we're going to bookend our conversation really with this theme of big problems, big questions that you pursue, as a scholar, and the impact that you hope that that work has. So, we'll start there. Tell us a little bit about big things, big problems, big questions, or ideas that you're interested in pursuing.

Laura Malinin: Sure. So, I guess I would say the core of my research really is around better understanding creativity, so in terms of big questions, creativity is a pretty big one.

Matt Hickey: That's a big one.

Laura Malinin: And of course, we know it's essential for solving the wicked, societal problems of today. So, if we can figure out how to be more creative, then maybe we can be more successful at solving some of these challenging problems.

Matt Hickey: Tell me a little bit more, when you think about the word creativity, because I suspect some people will go to particular areas and not consider the broader notion of what do we mean when we talk about creativity. So, tell me a little bit more about your-

Laura Malinin: Yeah, that's a great question because when you think about the field of creativity research, a lot of it is focused on the psychological processes of divergent thinking, so how many uses for a brick can you come up with, for example, or psychological dimensions of personality of creativity. So, I study creativity in the wild, so I like to look at the natural, dynamical process of creativity, all the way from problem finding or discovering an issue or an area of concern, all the way through to the implementation of a creative idea or problem.

And why I'm interested in this is because I'm interested in creativity from what's becoming to be known as the embodied cognition view of creativity, so how creativity is not all in our heads. It's very much shaped by the tools that we use, the materials we interact with, the people that we collaborate with, and even the places and the settings that we inhabit while we're creative.

So, a really famous anecdote, one I like to share with my students, who I teach interior design and design thinking, and so we talk about these things, is Jonas Salk and his discovery of the polio vaccine. And so, he really talks about how critical to that discovery was time away from his lab. So, he was really frustrated, couldn't figure out how to break through this problem, and so he went to Assisi, Italy, and spent some time in a monastery and was there when he had this great epiphany.

Matt Hickey: Pretty cool, huh?

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: And that really shaped how he thought about later the design for the Salk Institute. And he hired Louis Kahn to, not make it look like a monastery, certainly it doesn't, but to inspire that kind of creativity for the people that work there.

Matt Hickey: That's a beautiful anecdote, and timely, of course, because vaccines are on everybody's minds [inaudible 00:03:49].

Laura Malinin: Yes-

Avery Martin: Yes.

Laura Malinin: ... indeed.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: But sometimes, moving to a different track or path or setting that allows us to ... You can get that almost a laser-like focus on a problem, and you can't see the forest for the trees.

Laura Malinin: Exactly, so there's something to be said for being what we call low-level distraction.

Matt Hickey: That's it. Yeah.

Laura Malinin: So, if you're in a pleasant setting and especially if you have a natural environment that's inspirational around you, it helps you not fixate maybe on a non-productive line of thinking, so that's one way that the environment can play a role in creativity.

Matt Hickey: Now, I have to ask, after Salk, do you have a similar model? Do you find yourself where this is my place, where I can go do something that will allow some of the cobwebs to be cleared away, and I can be more creative?

Laura Malinin: Yeah, I do. And it's changing too. So, I find that I'll find a place that's working for me, and then, when I feel that things are stalling, I'll either change up that environment in some way, could be as simple as playing different music, rearranging the furniture, cleaning my desk, or I'll go to a new setting. And so, sometimes, I find it really helpful, if I've been working in my office, and it's a nice enough day outside, I'll just sit outside for a little bit. And it just helps me think a little bit differently, sometimes, about the problem.

And so, moving around, it's interesting. I study the stories of eminently creative people too, and they often talk about voting with their feet. When things are not happening, they go to a new setting, or they walk around, or they try a new environment. And there's a famous saying that great breakthroughs happen in the bed, on the bus, and in the bath.

Avery Martin: Yes. Yes.

Laura Malinin: And so, I don't think there's anything magical about those places necessarily, but they're interstitial spaces, where we're not heads down focused, and sometimes, that's really beneficial.

Matt Hickey: So, I have to ask you the genesis of your interest in creativity. How did Laura get to where she is today? Was this a lifelong passion? Did you have a mentor or a moment? Or what influenced you? We always talk about fingerprints in here. Whose fingerprints do you continue to carry with you?

Laura Malinin: Yeah, I think it was really an evolution. So, creativity was something that was really valued in my household, growing up. My mother was an artist, my father a physicist.

Matt Hickey: Wow, that's a cool combination.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Yeah. Yeah.

Laura Malinin: So, of course, I studied architecture.

Matt Hickey: Yeah.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Laura Malinin: The oldest child, I had to appease them both, somehow. And so, I think that was always something that was valued, but in terms of research, my journey was really a non-linear one. So, like I said, as an undergraduate student, I majored in architecture and art and art history. And I started practicing architecture, and I practiced commercial architecture as primarily a lead designer for a lot of commercial buildings, restaurants, workplaces, schools, which I enjoy, churches, a lot of buildings-

Matt Hickey: Wow.

Laura Malinin: ... a few residences, but mostly in the larger, commercial sector. And then, it's one of those things where you have this life plan, career pathway that you've got planned out. And I was going to become a licensed architect, and I was going to work my way up to partner in the firm. And at the point at which that happened, which was a lot faster actually than I anticipated it would, I was really right at that moment of everything that I thought I was working towards, and I realized I wasn't particularly satisfied with my job anymore, that there was something missing. And so, I decided to try teaching, and so I started-

Matt Hickey: I have to ask you-

Laura Malinin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: ... that's not a small shift.

Laura Malinin: No.

Avery Martin: No.

Matt Hickey: So, what did you go through? There must have been some anxiety, some-

Laura Malinin: Absolutely, having a great career and saying, "Can you hold that thought for a minute? Let me go try something else for a while."

Matt Hickey: Yeah. Yeah.

Laura Malinin: And not only that, but I couldn't find a full-time teaching position immediately, so it was part-time. So, my husband hung in there with me. He was patient, gave it a go, loved it. So, I had started teaching at a design college, and within six months, out of the blue, I got a call from a high school principal, and he said, "So, I heard you're an architect, and you're teaching. And someone said you'd be perfect to create this new high school program for us." And I said, "Really? Because I have no teaching experience with high school students. But why not? It sounds interesting. Tell me more."

And so, that was really probably the most pivotal moment. So, I was teaching at what is traditionally considered a career in technology campus, where students from the local high schools would come for half the day, and I created an architectural design program for them. And so, it was for students that wanted to go straight out from high school into a drafting job, maybe they would want to go to community college and get an associate's degree, or they wanted to build a portfolio for a four-year university. So, it really ranged. And while I was there, I was only there for two years, but I created the program, so I learned how to design curriculum. I created a dual-enrollment program so that students would get dual credit with the community college for the courses.

And then, the first day of class, I was very excited about all these students, who were there to learn to be architects, and I asked them why they were there. And half of them were like, "I have no idea. My advisor stuck me in this class. I don't even know what this class is." And so, I was like, "This is going to be a little different experience than I thought it was." But it was an amazing experience, so we actually all had a great time, I think because they didn't know why they were there. I was interested in finding out what would energize them and motivate them. And we won our first student design competition that very first year. And I had students with a lot of different backgrounds, and I saw some of these students that had really not done well in school suddenly flourish. And that got me really curious as to why. What is it about a design class that was helping them learn and helping them learn in interesting ways?

So for example, I had one student who had an individualized learning plan, so I had to meet with his parents and his counselor. And they were talking about his ability to be able to finish out high school and that that was going to be a challenge for him, primarily because of math. And I said, "Wait a minute, did you say math? Because we teach CAD, and he's doing geometry every day, and he's one of my best students." And so, there was something about being in a software program, learning geometry, that made it very easy for him to learn, where he was struggling, and so that got me really interested in how people learn. And that was where I began, then, moving more into research. So, I decided to get a master's degree in education and educational psychology, and then, shortly after that, we moved to Colorado.

And I had an opportunity to go work at the university down the street, so to speak. And I was teaching instructional design, and I was teaching in the architecture program there. And my colleagues there really were the ones that talked me into getting a PhD, so I got a joint PhD in cognitive science and design and planning, which a double major again, because I was really interested, at this point, in thinking about how to understand how people learn, the roles of tools and materials in their learning processes, and especially to better understand how to help people be more creative and learn about design, so that was really where I started moving into creativity research.

Matt Hickey: That's fascinating, isn't it?

Avery Martin: Yes.

Matt Hickey: And I think there's millions of lessons here, in some ways. Our audience, we hope, of course, are students that would be interested in coming to learn design thinking or other things we offer in the college, but I think there's also some lessons here. So, I don't know if anybody has called you brave or bold, but that move to flourish in a particular area that had been in your wheelhouse and your pipeline, for some time, and to make it and then say, "I'm going to go try something else." Can you now reflect on that for us, years later, and say, was it a function of I had permission, or I had the support network or just lessons we might be able to share with listeners who might find themselves in similar position of, this is not exactly what I anticipated, and I want to try something else, but I don't dare?

Laura Malinin: Exactly, exactly. So, yeah. It's something that I've been talking with, and I don't know if I can tell you what the exact recipe was.

Matt Hickey: Sure.

Laura Malinin: So, I'm teaching this semester, developing a new class for the design center called Designing Your Life. And so, we talk about this.

Matt Hickey: Wow, yeah.

Laura Malinin: And the way that I saw it, at that time, was I suppose we talk about this idea of creative confidence, that somehow, you feel like it's okay to take a risk because you have enough confidence that you can take what you've learned and move on if you fail at this. If it's not the right move, it's not the end of the world. You can pivot, so to speak.

Matt Hickey: True.

Laura Malinin: And so, I think going into teaching was a big pivot for me. And I not sure why then, except it felt like, if I was going to become a partner in a firm, that was a big commitment, and I felt a big sense of responsibility that, if I accepted that, I was going to be all in. But I didn't feel all in at that moment. I was really questioning whether I wanted to be one.

Matt Hickey: So, there's an element of integrity here, as much as anything else.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: Yeah, I think so. I think it was being self-reflective, true to myself, not being too risk-averse, which is sometimes hard when you're paying a mortgage and raising children and all of that, but realizing that I felt that I had acquired enough experience, in enough different areas. And I had a nice network too, so I also talked to students about, like I said, I got called out of the blue to go teach high school, just because of the people that I knew and that I worked with.

And so, I felt reasonably confident that I could go back into the world of architecture, but I just wanted to give this a shot, so to speak. And so, I thought, well, a year. I'll see how it is in a year. And then, once I started teaching, man, I was like, "Yeah, I'm not going back." I just love this. This is really where I want to be ...

Matt Hickey: That's fun. Yeah.

Laura Malinin: ... which is funny. Coming from a family of teachers, I originally thought I had no interest in being a teacher. But-

Avery Martin: It's in your DNA. Yeah.

Laura Malinin: Yeah, it must be in my DNA. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: So, I'm struck by how often we have conversations, and even reflecting on my own pathways of, when I was an undergraduate, could I, in my wildest dreams, picture myself sitting here, doing what I do now? And I think for you, again, the picture was different.

Laura Malinin: Very different, and I certainly never thought I was going to be a researcher.

Matt Hickey: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: If you had asked me, when I was an undergraduate, I would've said, "No. No, I'm an artist. I'm a creative. I don't do research." And yet, I find research incredibly creative. And people say, "Do you miss design?" And I dabble, here and there, but no, I don't because I feel like teaching and research are equally as creative. They're equally as fulfilling as doing architectural design work.

Matt Hickey: And sometimes, I think we make the mistake of imagining our future as a still photo, instead of this unfolding, 16 millimeter film, or it's a dynamic thing.

Avery Martin: Yeah. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Goals can be good, of course, and still photos run together, become the film, in some ways. But it's interesting that some flexibility, which maybe is a synonym for creativity, in some ways, can be-

Laura Malinin: Certainly necessary for it anyway.

Matt Hickey: Yeah. Yeah.

Laura Malinin: Yeah. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: So, how did CSU get on this unfolding horizon of Laura's creative journey?

Laura Malinin: Yeah, so I was teaching at, as we said, the university down the street, and I had not yet finished. I was in the process of finishing my PhD, and I was at a creativity conference. It was actually a very small, invitation-only conference, which was really interesting. So, there, I met a bunch of interesting people, but one person that I met was Catherine Lee, who was teaching in the interior design program there.

And so, Catherine ensured that I applied for the position. She could be very persuasive. I think she called me up, every week, and said, "I don't see your application yet. You should apply for this." And I wasn't on the tenure track. I was in a senior instructor position, and so I was not necessarily looking to make a change. I was pretty happy where I was, but it was an interesting opportunity. And once I got here and learned more about the university and learned that the interior architecture program was in the College of Health and Human Sciences, that intrigued me a lot because I really thought that that was a very unique place for a design program to be sitting and in a really positive way.

Matt Hickey: And so, we managed to bait the hook and get you to not only apply, but actually come join us.

Laura Malinin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: And you've got this really cool position in a really cool place, an absolute pearl, as far as I'm concerned, of all of our campuses, the Richardson Design Center. So, talk to our listeners a little bit about what is a day in the life of Laura Malinin? And as we said so many times, there is no typical day, in many ways, but talk us through a little bit about what academic life looks like for you and cool activities at the RDC.

Laura Malinin: Yeah. Yeah, so I wear two hats, and I'm still-

Matt Hickey: At least, yeah.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: More than, most days. I'm still a halftime associate professor in the interior architecture and design program, so I still teach in that program and have service responsibilities. So, I generally teach the first part of the capstone course for our interior design ... They take it the second semester of their junior year, and it's their big, capstone project. And there's a lot of environmental psychology in that class, so I really enjoy that. And I usually teach a graduate class, as well. And then, I have my research SITs in the department, my research percentage, and then I'm also, halftime, the director of the Nancy Richardson Design Center, which was just been an amazing experience. So, the design center, the very early planning for that started right when I came to CSU, so I was in the very first visioning meeting. I was invited to that, which was-

Matt Hickey: That's fun, yeah. Yeah.

Laura Malinin: ... exciting. And so, that's really been a process that I've enjoyed being part of. And I like to tell people ... If you've toured the building, you've heard this. But I like to tell people that we had 64 visioning meetings before we even started working on the architectural design for the building. And that involved, what is this going to be? Is it going to be a building? Is it a curriculum? What kind of experiences do we want students to have here? And that was a design thinking, creative process, in and of itself.

Matt Hickey: Took the words right out of my mouth. Yeah.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Exactly, yeah.

Laura Malinin: So, I think the main group was about 94 different people, from all different fields, industry, alum, faculty, staff, students, really helping to shape that vision, so that's been really exciting. And then, the center opened in January of 2019, so not long before the pandemic, and it's just been explosive growth ever since. Even all through the pandemic, we've continued to have face-to-face classes, so the classes, we have an AUCC class, Foundations of Design Thinking, that continues to be incredibly popular.

So, if any students are listening to this, if you want to be in that class, you need to stay on the wait list. We keep trying to tell students that we try to open up wait lists, but we hear, oftentimes, that students are like, "I've tried for three semesters to get into that class." We offer it all year round, every fall, spring, summer, and then we have toolbox courses. And those came out of student input, so students said, "We really want this just-in-time approach to learning that we can't typically get in our typical college curriculum."

And so those are one to three credits. Most of them are one to two credits, and they're focused on particular skills and technologies that we ... We like to think of design thinking as being a, not interdisciplinary, but transdisciplinary curriculum, and that it really applies to all different fields and disciplines.

Matt Hickey: And the RDC embodies that transdisciplinary approach because it's not just students from CHHS or DN that are in and out of that building, or faculty, for that matter. And so, talk to us a little bit more about the kinds of things that go on under the roof.

Laura Malinin: Let's see. Within our first year, we had students from 64 different majors and concentrations taking our classes, all eight colleges.

Avery Martin: That's incredible.

Matt Hickey: That's ... Yeah.

Laura Malinin: So, we were super excited when we got that first vet med student, and we could say every college.

Avery Martin: Yeah. Yes.

Matt Hickey: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: And some of our earliest champions were actually a group of chemistry students that were super excited about having the design center. They wanted to create a design club, and so we have a undergraduate certificate and undergraduate minor that students can earn. We have a graduate certificate, which is offered online, that professionals can learn. But we have a lot of other activities as well.

So, we have our fabrication labs that are open to everyone, and so, if you're not in a course that uses the labs as part of the curriculum, you can come in and buy an access pass for $130 for the semester. And that's for students, faculty, or staff, and that gives you access to all kinds of trainings, all of the tools, the equipment. So, we have a woods lab, a metals lab, a prototyping lab. We have virtual reality, screen printing, and you can use any of that equipment. And then, we have a little bit of materials, also, that's included in that so that you can try out different things, if you're not sure, so it really is about fostering exploration and letting people test out different things, try different things, and see what resonates with them, what they like.

And then, we also do different kinds of outreach activities as well, and we do workshops with high school. We have a new, dual-enrollment program with high school students for two of our courses, and we do community workshops and a lot of different kinds of events. So, when we first opened up, we had so many events, the first year, 54. I like to keep track of numbers, in case you hadn't caught on to that.

Avery Martin: Yes. It's great to do.

Laura Malinin: 54 events, the first year. And I was in a meeting, one day. We were introducing each other around the table. None of us had known each other. And somebody, when I said I was with the Nancy Richardson Design Center, they said, "You're with the party school." And I said, "The party school?" And she said, "You're always having events over there."

Matt Hickey: That's interesting.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: I don't know if I like to be known as the party school, but-

Avery Martin: Yeah, different connotation. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: ... yes, we are always having events that we are very busy, over there, with a lot of events.

Laura Malinin: That's interesting, isn't it?

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: And so, that slowed down, obviously, during the midst of the pandemic, but we are very quickly getting very busy again with a lot of tours and events and workshops and things like that.

Matt Hickey: I'll bet. I'll bet. So, for our listeners, again, I might be an art major. I might be a chemist, as you talked about, or a biochemist. I might be a health and exercise science major. What has design thinking got to do with me? Why think about design thinking?

Laura Malinin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Why should we all think about design thinking?

Laura Malinin: So, design thinking ties very nicely with my creativity research. It really comes out of, back in the 1950s, there was a real interest, suddenly, in the field of psychology and studying creativity. So, creativity was something that hadn't gotten a lot of attention because it's really hard to study. So, along with that, maybe just a few years later, there also became a big interest in understanding how designers think, so design cognition is that field of research. And so, those two bodies of research have been around for quite a long time, really are the underpinnings of what we call, today, design thinking.

So, design thinking became popularized in the late 90s, early 2000s, primarily by the Stanford D School that started a design thinking program, and by IDEO, which is a product design company. And one of the leaders of IDEO helped design the D School curriculum, and so it became very, very popular. And really, what it is, is it's drawing on research from design, cognition, and creativity to develop particular processes, tools, and methods that people can easily learn, to help them basically drive creativity, to help them be more creative. So, the whole thinking behind design thinking is that anybody can be creative. Anybody can learn to be ... Creativity is more like a muscle to be exercised.

Yes, some people seem to be a little more inherently creative than others, but it's something that anybody can learn, anybody can get better at. And so, design thinking really just provides an understandable structure and process to help people become more creative, to give them tools to help them think more flexibly about an idea, to help them understand an idea better. So, for example, we say it's human-centered, which means that it's empathy-driven, and so some of the core principles of design thinking really involve learning how to listen deeply and empathetically to others, being really good observers of the situation, being able to be a novice in a situation, so not coming at a problem with our own, personal experience lens, but being able to be a little more open to really seeing a problem from multiple dimensions or multiple perspectives.

And if you can define a problem really well, that's really one of the biggest pieces of having a creative solution, so a well-defined problem is going to yield a more creative solution than a less well-defined problem. And so, problem finding, we talk about problem finding a lot, is really, really important, and so we focus a lot on that, but then also on giving people tools to work with users and stakeholders and other people that might be involved in a problem, to help them come up with creative solutions.

Matt Hickey: And this creativity, again, I'm circling back to some of our earlier conversations, can often be manifested as things, deliverables, products that are in three dimensions, tiny houses, interior architecture, but it seems to me, it also can be in the traditional two dimensions of words on a page, poetry or prose, notes, shades that are applied to a canvas. So, again, I just love this more expansive because I'm one of those guys that would say, "I don't have a creative bone in my body," that kind of thing. And I think helping take the blinders off, that creativity can be manifested in a variety of different ways, at least for me, it's encouraging.

Laura Malinin: Absolutely, and so it's not just about artistic creativity. So, a system, a method, a process, all of those can be creative outputs, an experience, so you could design an experience for somebody. It does not need to be a product. When we teach the introduction class, we usually focus on a product because it's a little more tangible, and you can get user feedback more easily on a product. But as we move up through the curriculum, we definitely expand that much beyond process.

In fact, one of our capstone courses is Designing for Defense and working on declassified problems from the US Department of Defense, and those are not usually products. Occasionally, the solution is a product, but oftentimes, it's not a product. It might be a system. And we're looking at expanding other kinds of problem spaces, so yes, right now, we have two capstone courses. We have what's become known as the tiny house course, which is a design and build. So, we built the first tiny house, finished it in the spring, sold it this fall, and we're now in the process of designing the next one.

Matt Hickey: Yay.

Laura Malinin: And then Designing for Defense, and then eventually, we're actually talking about, possibly as early as this fall, rolling out another capstone that would have a different kind of a focus. Again, the key to all of these is students are working with industry. So, I probably didn't talk about that too much, but they're working specifically with people in the industry, with mentors in the industry or people that are involved, stakeholders in these different problems, whether it's housing and homelessness, with the tiny house, or defense problems with Designing for Defense or other kinds of problems.

We've worked with a lot of nonprofit organizations, Food Bank of Colorado, Defy Colorado, which is interested in prison system reform and how people ... So, that would definitely be an example of more of an experience or a system solution, how you help people, once they're out of the prison system, become able to transition better into life and new experiences for them and what the future holds for them. And so, those are some other kinds of things that we've tackled in those courses.

Matt Hickey: Wow.

Avery Martin: That's incredible.

Matt Hickey: Yeah.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: So, in the spirit of what the future holds, imagine yourself five years down the road. What are you doing? What's the RDC doing? How has design thinking penetrated just the campus, I hope, but far beyond?

Laura Malinin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Cast us a vision.

Laura Malinin: Gosh, it's funny. When we opened in 2019, I wouldn't have predicted the vision that we have today, which is just how many students we've touched, how robust the growth has been in the RDC. It's been much like a fire hose. No, I feel like we're sometimes just trying to stay ahead of the demand, so in terms of the future, some of the things that we're trying to do, in the RDC, is develop our own materials and methods, based on our own research, that we can then teach people. So, I think that's an area that ties maybe a little more into research.

We're also using the building as a third teacher, so to speak, so that's another part of my research, which is understanding how places can help spur creativity, especially interdisciplinary creativity. And so, we're actually using augmented reality to understand people's experience in that place.

Matt Hickey: Wow.

Laura Malinin: So, I think my ultimate goal is to help develop more effective strategies, to help people unlock their creativity and be more innovative, as well as to design places that are better at fostering interdisciplinarity and creative collaboration.

Matt Hickey: Makes you want to hang out over there, doesn't it?

Avery Martin: Yes. Yes, it does.

Matt Hickey: It's pretty cool. So, Laura, you have an opportunity to be part of the faculty in this College of Health and Human Sciences, and I wonder if you can share some reflections about what you like best about working in the College of Health and Human Sciences.

Laura Malinin: Yeah. What attracted me to the college, and I alluded to this earlier, was the fact that it is a college of health and human sciences, and the human part of that, that we're always focused on how we can improve people's lives through all these different perspectives. I think the health piece also appealed to me. So, many people may not think of creativity in this sense, but creativity is part of what's called positive psychology. And we understand that creativity is important for our wellbeing, and it's important across the lifespan.

So, I also do research with aging and looking at how being engaged in creative activities give us better outcomes, as we age, and so I think that was another piece that was really intriguing. And then, the third piece is just all the collaborations. I think I have collaborated with someone, multiple people, in many cases, from every single unit in this college.

Matt Hickey: That's great.

Laura Malinin: And I've just found that so wonderful, and that's true at CSU, in general, just how enthusiastic people are about interdisciplinary collaboration, which is not true everywhere.

Matt Hickey: We're fortunate. Yeah.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: And I found that very, very personally satisfying and energizing.

Matt Hickey: That's cool. So, you've hinted at the next step up, so institutionally, we're at a land grant. One of the things I've really enjoyed about CSU, in the 25 years I've been here, is that they don't just say that. That's really written into our ethos. So, talk about the land grant mission and how your work dovetails so nicely with that. And you've hinted at that by the party [inaudible 00:32:36]-

Laura Malinin: The party school. Yeah.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Laura Malinin: I probably shouldn't have said that. Now, that's going to make that worse. I'm going to hear that again, the event school-

Matt Hickey: There you go.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Laura Malinin: ... or something. Really, the community outreach school-

Matt Hickey: Exactly.

Laura Malinin: ... is really what it is because that's really what all those events were about is about outreach. And yeah, so CSU, to be honest, I wasn't super familiar with what a land grant university was until I started exploring CSU and thinking of it as a place where I might want to work. And I realized what a fabulous fit for me, personally, because the kind of work that I do is very engaged. It's working with the local community to solve important, wicked, societal problems, and of course, the impact of that can go beyond the local community. But starting local and starting with the people that are here in northern Colorado or in Colorado more generally, and working with them, I think is something that's been really exciting.

Like I said, I like to study creativity in the wild, and that's how I do it, is working on real projects with real people and exploring how those creative processes evolve and how we can make them more effective and make sure we have the right people at the table that are engaged. And so, co-design and participatory action research are components of the work that I do, and I think that just fits really nicely at a land grant university.

Matt Hickey: That's so well said, and I'm struck, again, by your phrase of studying creativity in the wild because life can be wild. We were talking about that, as we started today, that even our little, microscopic journey, this semester, has been a bit wild, and the last two years have been wild for all of us. So, the healthy people, healthy places mantra, we get healthy communities from our college mission, really is in the wild, in the sense of we're looking at people and families where they're at, in their native environment.

Laura Malinin: Absolutely.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: We're not ecologists, in the strict sense of the word, but I think moving out of the lab-based setting and into where are people interacting and where can creativity be manifested is a really cool way to think about approaching how we do what we do. So, thank you.

Laura Malinin: Thank you.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Laura Malinin: It's been a pleasure chatting with you today.

Avery Martin: And that's the show. Thank you for listening to another episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Matt Hickey: Be sure to listen to the rest of season two, as well as our episodes from season one. And if you want to learn more about our College of Health and Human Sciences, go to www.chhs.colostate.edu.