



# Gregory L. Florant (1951-Present)

Professor of Biology

**Colorado State University**

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*"Don't let any barriers keep you from your passion." Gregory Florant, 2006.*

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## Overview

Dr. Florant is a full professor of Biology at Colorado State University. His research interests are centered on the mechanisms that animals use to adapt to different situations. Recent investigations have focused on animals that hibernate and the mechanisms they use to regulate energy stores. Specifically, studies of the quantity and quality of lipid stored in the form of fat have proven fruitful in elucidating potential mechanisms for sparing the metabolism of essential fatty acids in mammals. Other research interests include the role of nutrients in regulating food intake and hormonal regulation of metabolism. These studies have addressed the hypothesis: can diet alter metabolic processes including food intake and pancreatic function. Corroborating laboratory results with field experiments is a critical aspect to all of these studies.

*This interview was conducted in 2010.*

## Early Life and Education

Ever since he was a child, Gregory L. Florant has been interested in how animals interact with their environment. At a young age, he became interested in falconry and began raising and taking care of birds. Additionally, Florant attempted to learn as much as possible about these animals and strove to increase his knowledge through reading. As a young man, Florant worked at a local animal hospital and then at the Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo. The latter job had an especially strong influence on him, and helped to nurture his scientific interests. His childhood fascination with the natural world led him to wonder how animals respond, survive, reproduce, and evolve in changing environments—Florant would eventually dedicate his life's work to answering these formative questions.

## **Career**

Florant has remained in the environmental field for so many years because he loves his job. He cites his work on the effects of fatty acids on animal hibernation and his research on animal thermoregulation at very low temperatures as career achievements. He has been elected as a fellow to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, received two Fulbright scholarships, and published articles for five decades. The opportunity to raise a family has been another highlight. “I’ve been married for 20 years. Raising two teenage children has really been my major highlight...that and still being gainfully employed in science,” he jokes. Dealing with some of the funding issues associated with life in academia have been low points. “It’s a tough time to be in science right now,” he laments. “Grant supports, as well as funding for federal programs, are very low.”

Though funding continues to be an obstacle for many people interested in pursuing careers in environmental science, Florant is able to provide opportunities through various mentoring programs. He is a Ford Fellows liaison for all minorities in three Midwestern states and is also a mentor in association with the National Institutes of Health. He has mentored minority undergraduates in the biology program at CSU and his two previous universities, and continues to use his knowledge and experience as a model to encourage minorities to pursue their dreams in science.

## **Importance of Mentoring to Career**

Florant’s parents—particularly his father, Lester E. Florant—were influential in helping him develop his academic interests. Florant remembers his father, an electrical engineer and physicist, fostering educational involvement and encouraging his children to excel academically. As a scientist, his father always encouraged his son to do his best in science. Growing up in Palo Alto, Florant also had the benefit of attending an academically rigorous high school, with great teachers who pushed him and made him realize his potential. Bob Riseborough worked with Florant on his first publication while he was still in high school and helped him to go to Cornell University. While an undergraduate student at Cornell, Florant studied Biology and Ecology. After completing his degree, he attended Stanford University where he received his Ph.D. in Biology/Physiology in 1978.

Mentors inspired and guided Florant as he pursued his interests. Among Florant’s mentors are the late Dr. Michael Garraway, a former professor of botany at Ohio State University, and Craig Heller, Florant’s Ph.D. advisor and professor of biology at Stanford University. Florant did his post-doctoral research at Montefiore Hospital, Einstein College of Medicine in New York, and went on to teach biology, comparative anatomy and ecology at Swarthmore College and Temple University before arriving at Colorado State.

## **Advice to Young Professionals**

Florant advises minorities considering a career in the environmental field to be the best they can be. “Don’t let any barriers keep you from your passion—you need to not let anyone get in your way,” he says. “Realize that you have good ideas, and then make those good ideas come to fruition.”