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Megan Baker
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Faculty Audiobook Digs Into Dog Cognition

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Dog owners who often wonder “Why in the world does my pup do that?” can finally get answers, thanks to Illinois Wesleyan University Associate Professor of [Psychology](#) Ellen Furlong’s new audiobook [*Decoding Dogs: Inside the Canine Mind*](#).

Furlong, who leads the [IWU Dog Scientists team](#), was approached by *The Great Courses* series to produce an audiobook about dog cognition for Audible, an online audiobook and podcast platform owned by Amazon. This particular topic was appealing because their research found that dog walking is one of the top-three activities that people participate in while simultaneously listening to an audiobook.

“I leapt at the chance for a couple reasons,” Furlong said. “First, I thought it would be really fun to help people get to know their dogs a little better. People are very curious about their dogs, and often want to know both more about what they are thinking and also what they can do to make them happy.”

While Furlong previously published dog psychology research in several academic journals along with authoring a few book chapters, this was her first project geared toward a popular audience.

“Science is often accessible mostly to scientists, and I think it is our duty as scientists to make results of our work not only available to the public, but also accessible,” Furlong said. “This project was written for a broad general audience and therefore allowed me some freedom and flexibility to tell a compelling story about dogs that should be accessible even to those who are most afraid of science.”

Furlong was commissioned by Audible and *The Great Courses* last summer, and during her spring sabbatical, Furlong focused on writing the audiobook from home — with her dogs surrounding her. Furlong finished writing in March and recorded the audiobook in May.

The COVID-19 pandemic prevented Furlong from recording in a local studio, so she travelled to *The Great Courses* headquarters in Virginia to record the audiobook using their studio.

“The recording process was really fun,” Furlong said. “I was in a recording booth and could hear my editor and the sound engineer through headphones. They gave me feedback if I stumbled over a word or needed to re-read a particular passage. I had practiced reading the book out loud to my dogs and my husband several times before heading over and found myself stumbling over some words and phrases, but when I was in the booth, it all came pretty easily.

“It was kind of a surreal experience because I have had an audible membership for years and am an avid audiobook fan. So, it was really fun to be able to be a part of the process and see how the proverbial sausage is made. I really enjoyed it.”

Furlong’s audiobook takes listeners on a deep dive into the minds of dogs. As listeners learn about the canine brain, they also gain a deeper understanding of canine feelings and thoughts.

“I hope that people take away that dogs are complex creatures and that there is still so much to learn about them,” Furlong said. “Psychologists have only been seriously studying dogs for the sake of learning more about them for the last 20 years or so. This may seem like a long time, but in scientific terms it’s a blink of an eye. We have learned so much about them but we still have many many more questions that are as yet unanswered. This can be frustrating for folks who want an easy answer, but for scientists this is an awfully exciting time to be studying dogs.”

While writing the audiobook, Furlong drew from research conducted at Illinois Wesleyan, and gives credit to the students — and dogs — who made this work possible.

“I refer in the project to some studies that we have worked on in the IWU Dog Scientist lab,” Furlong said. “This means that some of our local dogs have contributed to the body of knowledge that was part of the project.”

For example, Furlong discusses a dog named Leo in the audiobook, one of the lab’s regular visitors who has particularly good social skills, and she speculates about where his skills may have come from.

Furlong emphasized, “All of the work that we do in my lab involves students. Without students there would be no dog research and so I have the students and dogs to thank for 99% of what I do.”

Decoding Dogs: Inside the Canine Mind is [available for download](#) through Amazon’s Audible platform.



Associate Professor of Psychology Ellen Furlong has produced a new audiobook *Decoding Dogs: Inside the Canine Mind*.



Associate Professor of Psychology Ellen Furlong recorded her audio book *Decoding Dogs: Inside the Canine Mind* at *The Great Courses* headquarters in Virginia.

