

Teaching and Mentoring Statement

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I am committed to a research career at the interface of basic neurobiology and translational neuro-oncology, which integrates a broad array of scientific fields. For all of my mentees and students, I offer my expertise and professional resources for their study and career growth as scientists and researchers. My overt philosophy as a teacher is to act as a guide and advocate for my students and trainees in their academic and professional journeys. I emphasize four key conceptual frameworks in my mentoring and teaching, and, as my career has grown, I have shown leadership in all of these areas.

First, I promote open communication and spirited wide-ranging discussions of ideas and data, which are essential for enhancing curiosity, cultivating creativity, and building warm and trusting relationships with mentees and students. To refine my relational skills as a mentor and teacher, I have pursued formal training and certification through workshops offered by the Atlanta Society of Mentors, the School of Medicine, and School of Nursing. I have also entered into co-mentoring arrangements with seasoned senior faculty and collaborators, who provided informal mentorship coaching. For laboratory trainees, I meet with them frequently in one-on-one weekly meetings, during which we discuss their individual scientific progress, review project goals and expectations, and connect on shared interests or personal concerns. In my graduate and medical graduate teaching, I routinely spend time in class and in emails answering questions that arise from lectures and reading, clarify unclear points, revisit interesting discussions, and recommend follow-up activities. In the classroom and laboratory, I often highlight “real world” examples from my own training and from scientific history for students to discuss in class. My goal is for students and trainees to understand the origins and present implications of experimental approaches, hypotheses, data, and projects. This makes for engaging lectures and discussions in which I incorporate students’ questions and reference impactful original literature, scientific quandaries, societal events, and personal stories that inform the subjects I am teaching.

Second, I promote transparency, ambition, accountability, and rigor in research training, which are essential for teaching experimental design and interpretation and for cultivating critical thinking skills. As evidence of my leadership in this area, I was co-director of the Molecular Systems Pharmacology Ethics Class. I model these values in my own benchwork and in sharing my experimental successes and set-backs. I believe in providing a stimulating learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks by trying unfamiliar experimental models, learning new research methods with trial and error, asking all sort of questions to advance their understanding, and observing collaborators in the pathology lab and neurosurgical operating room to learn about clinical care challenges. This aspect of my philosophy has substantially advanced my pre-clinical and translational research efforts.

Third, I seek to promote an inclusive environment in which trainees and students from disparate backgrounds feel valued and heard. At times, my lab has been composed of people at all different training stages, from senior residents to sophomore undergraduates, who equally participate in discussions of each other’s projects, and who happen to be of several different nationalities, races, and/or religions. As a result, my diverse trainees and mentees have a strong track record of success: my trainees at all stages have contributed to important laboratory publications, won national and regional awards for their research presentations, been selected for several competitive national fellowship and institutional grants, and earned admission into highly regarded graduate and medical school programs.

Fourth, I promote the professional agency of my students and trainees. Through our interactions, we explore their scientific interests and career goals, and together we craft their individualized projects and experimental plans to meet both their career aspirations and my scientific and research program goals. To date, all of my trainees have remained in science and/or medicine, and are either completing their studies in my laboratory, or have successfully progressed and transitioned to government positions, medical school, graduate school, scientific industry, or advanced clinical or postdoctoral studies. Among my trainees, one is now an academic faculty member at a medical school, another is a CDC fellow, and another is a AAAS Science and Technology fellow at DOD. I have a track record of productive research, teaching, and training, and I will continue to seek excellence.