

My Mentoring approach

As I navigated academia as an undergraduate, I struggled holding space for my identities as both a queer woman of color and an academic. There were many times in my academic journey that I considered exiting this career path because of the cultural mismatch that fueled my impostor syndrome and compromised my sense of belonging. Recognizing how important it is for students to have role models, especially for undergraduate students at the beginning of their academic career, I have decided to pursue a career as a faculty member at a predominantly undergraduate institution to provide the support and mentorship that was so critical for my own success.

As a mentor, my goal is to create a scaffolded training experience where mentees can learn about various aspects of the research process including: literature review, experimental design, project troubleshooting, and communication of findings. I aim to cultivate a safe, supportive, and empowering space, where mentees can learn how to tackle challenges with confidence and think critically and creatively. I believe that mentees should be in the driver's seat of their learning, and as their mentor, it is my role to nurture their natural curiosity and support them in developing agency in their own learning process.

Mentee-Mentor communication

Though communication will look different for each mentor-mentee relationship, at the beginning of the mentoring relationship, I will work with mentees to draft a mentor-mentee contract in order to clearly outline our expectations of the mentoring relationship. In addition to this, I encourage mentees to complete an individual development plan (IDP) so that I can get insight into their short- and long-term goals and personalize the project they take part in and the mentorship approach I take.

Following this, I will schedule a regular meeting time for students and me to read and discuss literature, check in regarding their work, and discuss their short and long-term goals. I feel strongly that consistency is key to establishing a strong mentor-mentee relationship and thus, limits miscommunications. This ensures that we always have a dedicated time where mentees can bring questions, concerns, challenges, and successes for us to reflect on and strategize a plan for upcoming work together. Having been in the mentees' shoes many times before, intimidated by the power dynamic that naturally exists when working with a graduate student or PI, I will intentionally carve out time in our meeting to celebrate successes, big and small, while also providing a safe space for students to bring what they have been struggling with to normalize the experience of failure and challenges in research.

Working in the lab

During the beginning of the mentoring relationship, I will work side-by-side with the mentee to introduce them to the lab space and guide them through experimental protocols that we commonly use. Students will work with me at pre-defined blocks of time dictated by the

mentee's availability, where the mentee will be introduced to what an active research project looks like. As the student becomes comfortable, they will contribute to the project, and eventually take on their own independent project related to the work. I encourage and will support mentees developing an independent project even if not directly related to my research, though mentees may receive less specific feedback the further away the topic is from my research experience because we will both be learning the new topic at the same time!

Building capacity in science communication

As a university researcher that is funded by tax-payer dollars, I care deeply that my work has an impact outside of my institution. I pursue research that uses data collected by citizen scientists (from here forward, community scientists), and I intend to share this aspect with my mentees to introduce them to the importance of engaging and working with the public. In addition, I am active in outreach efforts on campus, and as such will share opportunities for students to practice their science communication. In lab meetings, I often facilitate journal clubs and mini-workshops that will provide the opportunity to learn and develop communication skills outside of an academic environment. I expect all mentees to practice their science communication, as it is a highly transferable skill set!

Diversity & Inclusion

As a mentor, it is of utmost importance to me that I create a safe and inclusive space, where students can bring their "whole" selves to the lab. Mentees will attend weekly lab meetings with our larger group consisting of graduate students, undergraduate students, and the principal investigator. Mentees are encouraged to contribute to our weekly updates for them to practice presentations in a small group setting and gather feedback from the lab group. During these weekly meetings, mentees will be able to participate in group discussions where we highlight and engage with the work of marginalized scholars in Plant Biology and STEM, as well as discuss literature on best practices for recruitment and retention of individuals from marginalized groups.

In one-on-one meetings, I will consistently share on- and off-campus resources for mentees that will serve to "demystify" academia and reveal the "hidden curriculum", so that first-generation and marginalized students are aware of the support they can access on-campus, as well as professional development opportunities they may have been unaware of.

Lastly, I recognize that there are many barriers and responsibilities mentees may face outside of the lab. As a mentor, I never want mentees to feel like they need to sacrifice their well-being and mental health for their productivity and I am happy to extend flexibility and support to those that may be struggling.

