

Mentoring Philosophy

Training and mentoring is a core part of my professional identity and one of the most rewarding aspects of my work. All over the world, health problems are deeply rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural forces and demand a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach. My teaching also revolves around imparting knowledge on real-world problems and their solutions, which will train the next cadre of public health professionals to solve novel health problems.

Two important components of my mentoring include: (1) a focus on the development and refinement of an individual program of research for each trainee, including clear definitions of variables and populations of interest, relevant research questions and associated methods best suited to studying these variables within the populations of interest, and long- and short-term goals for developing this program of research; and (2) a focus on future career planning and providing tailored directions towards achieving their long-term career goals. Additionally, I take a very hands-on and collaborative approach to mentoring, with high aspirations for trainees and a personal commitment to helping them reach these aspirations. This is one of the most rewarding aspects of my work, and I remain committed to offering the highest quality training experience possible to those I mentor.

I am an inclusive person and welcome mentees from any background. I am currently working as a member of the Inclusive Excellence committee at the College of Public Health at UGA. I appreciate the fact that different perspectives of people from different backgrounds can be brought to the table and how it adds real value to the whole learning process in academic settings. I help my mentees find their shortcomings and work on those areas to improve, as well as highlight their stronger areas and hone skills that are necessary for them to succeed in achieving their career goals.

Regularity and attention to detail are two other aspects of my mentoring. I meet with my mentees regularly to receive updates and provide feedback. With the discontinuation of the discussion, many pertinent aspects of the previous discussions are lost. Therefore, regular discussion is very important in producing scientific outputs. I also train my mentees to dig deep into the subject matter to ensure long-lasting and comprehensive learning outcomes. Attention to detail is also necessary to avoid pitfalls of overlooking common mistakes in science which lessens the credibility and reproducibility of the findings.

I also value the authenticity of thoughts and clear communication from mentees. I do not impose my ideas and let the mentees forge and foster a line of relevant research that they find most interesting and build their future careers around the topic. I guide them with generic as well as specific advice and directions, and this mix of flexibility and supervision helps my mentees better prepare to be independent thinkers and researchers. I also prefer open communication about the expectations and feedback from my mentees and students, and I continually work on my shortcomings to be a better mentor.

I strongly believe research is teamwork. I personally take every opportunity to learn new skills, build new collaborations, and seek guidance from my mentors. In doing so, I have created a very effective network of accomplished research collaborators who help and support my professional growth as an early career researcher. I will introduce my mentees to my research collaborators and include them in my research working groups, which will be valuable for them even beyond the postdoctoral fellowship. I see my mentees as my future research collaborators with an overarching goal of doing better science and growing together.

Training Plan

Based on my own mentoring experience and with the help of my faculty mentors, I will develop a personalized training plan for the FFIRE scholar based on their career stage, research training, and long-term career plans.

1. Training on Project-specific works: Since the FFIRE scholar will be primarily working on a particular project, I will create a training plan based on the project's needs and tasks. As I work in the social and behavioral aspects of cross-cutting areas of HIV and substance use, the scholar needs to conduct community-based research, communicate with the research partners and participants, conduct data collection and data analysis, and write manuscripts. The scholar will be actively participating in research activities, therefore, they will be trained in human subjects research. Working with the community partners, in itself, is a big learning curve. I will guide my mentee on how to forge relationships with the community partners effectively, which will be helpful for their future independent research. I will also train them in mixed-methods research, covering both qualitative and quantitative research skills.

2. Preparing Future Faculty: Although postdoctoral fellows can pursue diverse careers, e.g., industry, non-profits, for-profits, etc., they are more likely to prepare for academic positions as their future careers. I will provide them with guest lecture opportunities in my classes to provide them with teaching experience. They will also help me to improve on course syllabi and help me with gradings from time to time.

3. Grantsmanship: I will also inspire and help my FFIRE scholar to write career development grants, like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) K01, or K99/R00 grants. As a recipient of NIH K01 grant, I am better positioned to guide my mentees effectively in pursuing the K award. I will train them with techniques, dos and don'ts, and skills related to grantsmanship during the postdoctoral fellowship under my supervision.

4. Peer-Reviewed Publications: Another area I will focus on during the training period of the scholar is publishing peer-reviewed articles. I will help them to navigate the process of preparing manuscripts and publishing peer-reviewed articles in an efficient manner. I will encourage them to come up with their own research questions using both primary and secondary datasets and will guide them in the manuscript preparation and publication process.

5. Preparing for Job Search: Since a postdoctoral fellowship is a stepping stone for a more permanent position, I will guide the mentees in preparing themselves for the job search, interview, and salary negotiation. I will arrange mock interviews and job talks, and other workshops on successful job search during their fellowship.

6. Regular Meeting: I will have one-on-one meetings with my mentees at least once every week. However, the frequency and duration of these meetings are flexible depending on the career stage and workload. In these meetings, I will discuss scientific progress and day-to-day research and teaching activities, provide feedback and identify areas where my support is needed. I also take the opportunity to engage in best practices for human subject research and advise on matters of scientific rigor as we review data collection and analysis plans.

6. Evaluation of Progress and Mentoring Plan: Every six months the postdoctoral scholar will submit a review plan. Based on the progress and their evaluation of the mentoring plan set up in the beginning, I will guide them on the areas where improvement is required and devise a supplementary plan on how we will implement the plan in the next six months.