

Dennis. E Kyle, PhD
FFIRE Mentorship Plan

I value my role as a mentor and know that the most impact I can have on the future of science is to guide the next generation of scientists.

Of course, a major goal for most postdoctoral fellows is to obtain a tenure track position to begin their independent career. This goal is my overarching approach to mentoring postdoctoral fellows.

I am very well prepared to guide fellows in these efforts. Although I have previous experience of my own and with my previous postdocs, in just the last year six years I have personally led the successful recruitment of five new tenure track scientists that have joined the University of Georgia faculty. Plus, in my first six months as Head of the Department of Cellular Biology, I successfully recruited three new Assistant Professors and one Associate Professor. In addition, three of these searches have been dual career hires which are notoriously more difficult. Thus, I have intimate knowledge of the process on which a fellow will soon embark, and I will help guide them on how to apply, how to prepare for the on-campus interviews, how to prepare for their seminar and the chalk talks, and what to look for at prospective universities to identify the best opportunities that will allow them to thrive. I also have many industry and government contacts for postdoctoral fellows that seek positions outside academia.

There are multiple requirements for being an independent scientist that most of us were never trained to do. These include how to manage people, budgets, and navigate the academic bureaucracy. A successful scientist also must understand the strategies for grant applications and how to best position their proposals for success. I will advise the fellow on each of these requirements for a modern academic scientist. The fellow will work with me on grant writing, and ideally, will prepare a K22 or K99/R00 proposal during their tenure in my lab. I also have more detailed discussions on managing grant budgets and how to “learn the ropes” in academia. Regarding the development of a research proposal, the preliminary data, the hypotheses to be tested, and the research strategy will be developed by the fellow with direct feedback from myself and any identified collaborators. It is important to state that I will make all resources available to the fellow for the conduct of the proposed studies. Furthermore, the fellow has my full support to take these data and approaches with them to start their independent career. I always have allowed postdocs to take their studies with them, even in the case where postdocs transitioned to Research Associates and became PI for grants in my own lab. My overarching goal is to enable the fellow to be successful and be able to facilitate a smooth transition to independence without the impediment of having to develop a new project from scratch.

I will nurture development of the fellow by advising them in our frequent discussions, whether they be in scheduled biweekly meeting or the daily discussions we have, which are facilitated by postdoc desks located just outside my office door! As Co-Director of the T32 training program, I affirm that the fellow will have full access to all the training activities that we plan. For example, these have included workshops on rigor and reproducibility, ethics, grant writing (including R and K awards), and careers outside academic. In a few weeks we also will hold a joint meeting with T32 training programs at the University of Pennsylvania and University of Wisconsin where we will have alumni of each program that will facilitate discussions of their different career development pathways to becoming successful independent scientists.

In summary, I believe my laboratory is an excellent opportunity for a FFIRE Fellow. I have a history of mentoring postdocs that have progressed to independent tenure track faculty positions. I also have a strong record of mentoring PhD students. Finally, my current lab personnel are actively engaged in exciting research and help create a great scientific, collegial environment for a postdoctoral fellow to flourish.