

Mentoring philosophy

As a mentor, my goal is to help mentees realize their scientific potential and gain practical skills they need to be successful in the career paths they choose after leaving my lab. I will share with them my scientific and life knowledge, to the extent they are willing to accept, without reservation. I strive to foster a lab culture that (1) promotes respect regardless of training stages, (2) values diversity, and (3) emphasizes integrity and responsibility not only towards personal growth but also the lab, the department, the institution, and the larger scientific community.

We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Seniorities and titles do not equate to knowledge or truth. In the lab and in life, we are all learners. I believe it is important to recognize this when interacting with one another. A work study student or a technician may not know how to write a paper or a successful grant like a graduate student or postdoc. A student or a postdoc may not know how to run a dishwasher or prepare key reagents for an experiment. Yet they are all vitally important for the success of the lab. When I interview people who wish to join the lab, the first thing I tell them is that there is no hierarchy and everyone is valued in the lab. It's only when we respect one another, we are able to lift one another up. I believe I learn as much from my mentees as they learn from me, and it is the shared joy of making discoveries together that bond us as mentor and mentee.

I got to be who I am today all because my late thesis advisor Dr. Mika Salpeter took a chance on me 35 years ago. I still remember the call I got from her at 2AM Taiwan time asking me whether I would like to work with her at Cornell as a graduate student. It was not easy leaving my family behind, and over the years I struggled to fit in culturally and professionally. However, the journey offered so many ways to challenge myself and exposed me to different ways of thinking through the wonderful friends and colleagues from all over the world. My life is so much richer because of it, and I have learned to look beyond the lack of qualifications of those who seek opportunities due to their social, economic, or cultural background, and instead envision their potentials as scientists. I will encourage my mentees to embrace diversity and allow it to enrich their scientific and personal lives as well.

As scientists we are entrusted by the society to pursue knowledge for bettering mankind. This is a privilege that comes with great responsibility. As a mentor, I see it as my obligation to instill in my mentees this sense of responsibility by conducting scientific research with the highest rigor and integrity. Not only are we responsible for our own conduct, we are also responsible for establishing a community that shares the same value. Thus, I will encourage my mentees to engage in meaningful service and professional development activities even if it takes time away from their own research.

Like any relationship, a successful mentor-mentee relationship requires hard work. Effective, timely, and open communications are key. In addition to regular group and one-on-one meetings, I will make myself available whenever I am needed. My goal is to maximize the scientific growth and at the same time ensuring the overall mental and physical well being of my mentees. With this in mind, I will work with my mentees to set expectations and evaluate understanding, and adjust the frequency and style of communications as necessary. While some may require daily check-ins especially when they first start, some may be more independent and prefer periodic updates. A tailored mentoring approach that evolves as a mentee makes scientific and personal advances will

prevent unnecessary conflicts and misunderstanding. Ultimately, I am interested in investing in the individuals and helping them succeed in becoming an independent thinker and scientist, because that is how I judge my own success.

I recently received an email from my postdoc mentor Dr. Colin Nichols on celebrating the 30th anniversary of his lab. Below is an excerpt from his email, which echoes how I feel about my own mentoring experience.

“Life is a rich tapestry, as they say, and within our ever-changing and ever-diverse group, mine has been enormously enriched through all the parties, sports, thinking, arguing, and learning that we have enjoyed, along with all the many laughs and a few tears. Over the years, we have made some wonderful discoveries, and genuinely helped to understand and treat diseases, but the best reward for me has been to know you all and to see your lives blossom - as scientists, doctors, colleagues, parents, and friends”.

I have truly enjoyed learning and making discoveries with the students, postdocs and staff I have had the fortune to work with over the past two decades, and I look forward to working with more in the future.