

Mentorship Philosophy

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Conducting research is incredibly rewarding experience for both students and mentors. I actively foster quality experiences and strive to develop creative and engaging projects that students can take on as their own. Thus, I treat undergraduate students as peer scientists-in-training, where we debate our understanding of a topic and, together, we design, conduct, and analyze an experiment. Actively including students in all aspects of the scientific process provides a framework for them to pursue future questions and continue in fulfilling careers. I have already mentored three undergraduate students at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka on projects related to chemical profiles and anti-inflammatory effects of *Albizia* and chemical profiling of *Rhinacanthus* (Acanthaceae). These students are from diverse backgrounds, and through mentorship I was able to develop inclusive and diversity-aware methods of leadership. I also recognize that undergraduates have lives outside of my research, and do my best to enrich their resumes via research experience without undue burdens. I have taken the time to understand the needs of individual students, whose lived experiences will be different from my own. In these project, I ensured they had the skills set to conduct the work by regularly communicating through the planning process and reinforcing proper techniques.

When mentoring research students, I try to involve my students in all stages of the research process, and I encourage them to publish their research and present at conferences. This way they gain early experience in all critical aspects of science and its dissemination. My students successfully wrote their dissertations and presented at conferences (in English, their second language). Currently, I'm mentoring an undergraduate student in the University of Florida through a laboratory project to collect flow cytometry data. My research program is conducive to involving many students in a variety of projects, as it integrates field work, laboratory analyses, and modeling frameworks. These research opportunities will focus on preparing students to be successful, fostering their interest in biology, pushing them to ask questions, and designing studies that improve our predictions of how ecosystems will respond to future climates.

Even though mentees have specific tasks to do in my research, I set up their work in such a way that they can take ownership of aspects of my research if they desire. One of my undergraduates took advantage of this, which gave her a valuable experience and aided in her decision to start working in a pharmaceutical company. Additionally, I try to make every effort I can to connect my students to professionals different from my own path to give my students early exposure to the varieties of careers possible with a graduate degree. I am proud to have written a recommendation letter for one student who has gone on to pursue graduate school, because I realized that I have had a role to play in inspiring her career choice. Certainly, mentoring undergraduate and graduate students can be challenging, but they have been very rewarding experiences.