OSCAR
Mentoring Excellence Award
Nominee

Name: Pamela Garner

Department: New Century College

Number of Nominations: 1

1. What characteristics make the nominee an exceptional mentor?

- She is compassionate, driven, and thorough in her approach to guiding students. She is also extremely dedicated to the advancement of her students and mentees in their academic and professional lives via keeping in touch with them and offering words of wisdom when they are most needed.

  ~ Mentee

2. If you personally worked with the nominee, please describe your experience.

- My experience with Dr. Garner has been nothing short of life changing. She took me in as her research assistant when I was a freshman, and I have worked for her all the way up to now as a last semester senior. In that time, she has helped me hone skills that are imperative to my academic success here at Mason and continues to act as a wonderful mentor in my pursuit of professional interests as well.

  ~ Mentee
I am honored to be nominated for the OSCAR Mentoring Excellence Award. As a developmental psychologist and because of my experiences with students at different points in their college careers, I take a developmental approach to mentoring students. The well-known developmental scholar, Jean Piaget, theorized that individuals learn best by doing because it encourages curiosity and engagement, both of which are necessary for deep learning to occur. Other important theoretical perspectives that I incorporate into my mentoring are models proposed by Rogoff and Vygotsky, both of which espouse a view that teachers facilitate learners’ capacity to reach their full potential by guiding their participation in the teaching-learning experience, while at the same time, providing support for success as they move from one level of understanding to the next. A final component of my mentoring involves embracing the core assumption of developmental psychology that learning is life-long. Development is believed to continue across the life-span and each period of development requires a revisiting, reformulation, adaptation of ideas to address varying individual, community, social, and world circumstances. Consequently, I constantly reflect upon my role as an educator and mentor, continually revising my values and beliefs about teaching and learning as I encounter new experiences and challenges in my work with undergraduate research assistants.

Since my appointment at George Mason University, I have taught undergraduate courses at New Century College, the mission of which is to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge with lifelong learning by offering experiential learning that connects the classroom to the world. The program is committed to active learning, independent inquiry, and undergraduate research that responds to the needs and opportunities of a diverse society while preparing students for responsible leadership and citizenship. An important aspect of my teaching involves mentoring undergraduate research. I have been able to work with many talented undergraduates. My area of interest centers on the development of emotional competence in early childhood and early elementary school-age children. I would categorize my work into two sub-areas: examining linkages between emotional and social competence and investigating parents’ and teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and strategies around the socialization of children’s awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation of emotion, especially for children at biologic and environmental risk.

One element that distinguishes my work from research being conducted in other units on campus is the high level of involvement and productivity of the undergraduate students working with me. Together, my students and I conduct research on the social emotional development of young children and we work together to identify and examine cultural and family factors that may be involved in young children’s competence in this area. Students are differentially involved, with some doing field observations and data collection, others coordinating and completing data management, and still others involved in data analysis and manuscript preparation. Without their involvement, my research program would have floundered as the program that I teach in does not have graduate programs.

My work with undergraduate researchers has helped me to maintain a high quality research program. Since joining Mason, I have supervised 25 students and co-authored many articles and presentations with undergraduate students. Though I am certain that the students have benefitted greatly from their work with me, I have also grown exponentially from my work with them. They ask questions that challenge me and offer great strategies for problem-solving, not only about the research, but also about its application in settings centered on children.
Evidence of Mentoring Experience

Since my appointment at George Mason University in 2006, I have been successful disseminating my research widely via peer-reviewed publications, edited volumes, professional conferences, and workshops. Overall, the unifying themes in my research and my mentoring of student research are culture, diversity, and child development and the merging of these constructs to identifying pathways that promote positive social emotional outcomes for young children. Attention to these issues has moved my work increasingly into areas of developing innovative ways to work with the important adults in children’s lives to help them develop the self-competence and social emotional skills that will be important as in the multiple contexts that they encounter throughout their lives.

I have worked at a small liberal arts university as well a large research university, and now a small college within a large university. At one institution, I taught only undergraduate and master’s level students; at another, I was responsible primarily for teaching and “training” doctoral level students, and now, I teach primarily undergraduate students. Collectively, these experiences have led me to a developmentally-based philosophy and practice grounded in theory, practice/application, context, and risk-taking. As part of my research team, I have embraced undergraduate students from a wide variety of fields, including psychology, education, international studies, and social policy in keeping with New Century College’s mission of integrating the disciplines. Keeping my research program intact has required that I “trust” undergraduate students with tasks that are typically reserved for graduate students and I have been overwhelmed with their enthusiasm, motivation, and talent. Below, I discuss my work with and about undergraduates. Although there are many students that I could highlight, I am especially proud of the work of Elizabeth Bolt, Laurence Moses, and Tameka Parker.

Elizabeth Bolt began was a psychology major and completed her degree in 2014. She began as a research assistant with me during her freshman year. Initially, she entered data and progressed to data collection for a funded project aimed at understanding the linkage between the quality of teacher-child relationships and preschoolers’ social-emotional competence and whether associations were moderated by type of preschool. Elizabeth was eventually assigned the role of supervisor to another undergraduate student, Laurence Moses (see below) and, together, they coordinated the data collection process for a larger study of preschoolers’ peer-related social competence. During her senior year, Elizabeth developed her own OSCAR proposal and she was funded to conduct an independent research project. We eventually begin a complex analysis of that data and hope to have a manuscript ready for publication by the end of the summer. Elizabeth is currently enrolled in the master’s program in School Psychology at GMU. In the meantime, Elizabeth’s training and effort resulted in the following publication:

A second student I wish to highlight is Laurence Moses. Laurence also began her work with me as a first year student in Integrative Studies. Laurence was a first-generation student of color who was interested in understanding more about the marginalization of economically disadvantaged students. Through her own review of the literature, she concluded that teacher dispositions were especially important in the establishment of positive teacher-student classroom interactions and that teacher preparation programs should address the issue of teachers’ social emotional competence. As a result, we began a project aimed at understanding preservice teacher’s emotional competence. We worked with another team of researchers at Virginia State University to coordinate the project and to recruit the sample. This project resulted in a published manuscript:


Laurence was also a co-author on the paper listed above. She is currently working as a project coordinator for a company developing charter schools in at-risk neighborhoods in the District of Columbia.

Currently, I am working with Tameka Parker, a psychology undergraduate student. Tameka also began her work with me as a first year student. Most days, I forget that she is an undergraduate as I assign her all kinds of task, including data collection, data entry, writing, and editing. Tameka makes contacts with preschools, supervises and trains other undergraduates. She has become a fixture around New Century College and is considered a part of the staff. She is super-talented and has worked on multiple projects, including a project on family child care providers and a study of emotion picture books. Recently, she was chosen as a student scholar by OSCAR to conduct her own independent project. SAs part of that program, she is working on a project that considers differences in beliefs about bullying among early childhood teachers, early childhood education students, and parents of young children. We are both excited about the project as so little is known about bullying beliefs among adults who interact with very young children. The data for this project has been collected and she is in the process of analyzing the data. Tameka has accomplished a great deal during her time at GMU. As part of her work in my lab, she co-authored the following publication:


Tameka is graduating this May and has been accepted into the MSW program at GMU.
I am also supervising **Emaan Jadoon**, an OSCAR student assigned to Duhita Mahatmya who is now working at the University of Iowa. The three of us communicate via email to make sure that Emaan gets the supervision and training she needs.

**Other Work in Undergraduate Research**

I am also a participant in the **Center for Engaged Learning Research Seminar on Mentoring Undergraduates** (chosen from a national search) along with Duhita Mahatmya, Shannon Davis, and Rebecca Jones. The GMU team published the following paper on this topic:


As part of this initiative, we also developed a multi-site research project that examines faculty mentoring of undergraduate research. The research team includes researchers (and data) from several institutions of higher learning, including the University of the South, University of St. Thomas, and the College of New Jersey.

Recently, we submitted two proposals for consideration for presentation at the 21016 meetings of the **Council on Undergraduate Research** as listed below:


The team is also developing a book chapter that considers faculty-student mentoring relationships among students of color.

Finally, I was recently also chosen to be part of the 2015 Psychology Judging Panel for the Undergraduate Awards. GMU only recently became part of this academic awards program, which is aimed at identifying and encouraging the best undergraduate research around the world. As part of this effort, I reviewed hundreds of undergraduate research proposals and learned a great deal about how to incorporate best practices in my own work with undergraduate student researchers.

I am especially excited about the new first year student, Tamera Toney, working with me this semester and witnessing her development as an undergraduate scholar over the next few years.
March 14, 2016

Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research  
George Mason University  
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Dear members of the QEP Leadership Council:

It is with sincere pleasure and high praise that I support Dr. Pamela Garner’s nomination for the OSCAR Mentor Excellence Award at George Mason University. Dr. Garner has been on the frontlines of fostering a culture of student scholarship, especially in New Century College (NCC).

Students thrive under Dr. Garner’s mentorship. What comes to mind is Lev Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he/she can do with guidance or in a collaborative learning environment. To me, ZPD describes what Dr. Garner does to enrich undergraduate learning through her mentorship: She challenges students to identify and pursue an interest and will provide them with appropriate support as barriers surface. The success of this approach is clear with the number of students who have received OSCAR URSP awards under Dr. Garner’s supervision (2) and the number of peer-reviewed articles Dr. Garner has co-authored with her students at Mason (3). Currently, we are co-mentoring an OSCAR work-study student and work closely to ensure that the student gets strong training in research as well as professional guidance. I know that my own mentorship and collaboration with undergraduate students, while a NCC faculty member and even now, is influenced heavily by my observations of Dr. Garner’s work with and trust in undergraduate students.

Beyond her direct mentoring, Dr. Garner also contributes to the field of mentoring through her publications examining the role of diversity in teaching, learning, and mentoring. Dr. Garner is a strong advocate for supporting the academic and professional development of traditionally underrepresented students, and we are currently developing a book chapter that investigates the experiences of faculty and students of color in undergraduate research and creative activities. This project is an extension of our work as part of the Elon University Center for Engaged Learning Seminar on Excellence in Mentoring Undergraduate Research; an opportunity to which we were accepted from a national call.

Altogether, Dr. Garner not only brings expertise, but also compassion and integrity, to the development of the next generation of engaged and skillful scholars and professionals. Receiving the OSCAR Mentor Excellence Award would be a wonderful way to acknowledge the mentorship Dr. Garner has done. For further queries, please contact me at the phone number or email address provided below. Thank you in advance for considering this letter of support.

Best Regards,

Duhita Mahatmya, Ph.D.  
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Leaders. Scholars. Innovators
To the OSCAR Mentoring Excellence Award Selection Committee:

Since she took me under her wing as an undergraduate research assistant during my freshman year of college, Dr. Pamela Garner’s exceptional mentorship has shaped my entire undergraduate experience and professional development for the better. Early on, Dr. Garner expressed faith in me and introduced me to the world of research through challenging—and extremely enriching—instruction. In teaching me how to operate SPSS statistical software, develop and prepare questionnaires, properly collect and organize data, as well as navigate the process of submitting manuscripts for publication, my mentor has allowed me the opportunity to master my understanding of research processes via firsthand experience. Such experiences have benefited me to the point of being able to manage and supervise other undergraduates in their research efforts. I am incredibly appreciative of the high-responsibility environment that Dr. Garner has created for me as I understand it is a rare occurrence for students to be as well-trusted as I have been for the period of time I have spent working with her.

From the time I was a first-year student, Dr. Garner set a high standard for me, which has driven me to strive for excellence in all that I have attempted since becoming her undergraduate research assistant. She has assisted me in achieving some of my most significant accomplishments in the past three and a half years. Under her mentorship, I was recently able to co-author a scholarly publication about the role of service-learning in linking childcare providers and preservice professionals. Being published in a peer-reviewed journal as an undergraduate student is something I am sure I would not have been able to achieve without a mentor like her who is committed to going above and beyond the call of duty to further advance the talents and interests of students.

I truly feel that I have flourished under Dr. Garner’s supervision, and she has most certainly played a major role in my journey towards the achievement of my future goals. Currently, she is mentoring me through the completion of my first independent project and her help has been integral to my success. It is incredibly awe-inspiring to have a mentor who takes the time to explain complex concepts regarding validity and reliability in experimental designs—all despite being busy with teaching multiple classes and handling research projects of her own. Dr. Garner’s genuine and compassionate character is one of the many reasons that working with her has been so motivational for me. In fact, her support and dedication to my advancement as a scholar was the primary inspiration for my decision to pursue a Master’s degree in Clinical Social Work at George Mason University once I complete my undergraduate degree in May. Upon being notified of my recent acceptance, Dr. Garner was the first person I informed. That is because, in a little under four years, she has been the person who enabled me to hone skills, such as such as critical thinking and analytical inquiry, both of which are necessary for the successful completion of a Master’s degree. She has also instilled in me the confidence to undertake the dissection and investigation of complex research ideas. Additionally, her sheer faith in my abilities has made a powerful impact on my own willingness to pursue endeavors that I would have once hesitated to try.

Not only has Dr. Pamela Garner’s mentorship facilitated the progression of my professional and scholarly maturity, but it has played a large role in my personal maturity as
well. For me, she has been a consistent source of encouragement, guidance, and structure since I met her. Therefore, I do not simply consider Dr. Garner to be an asset to my university experience. Rather, in her, I know that I have someone who will serve as a meaningful lifetime mentor. I ask that you please consider her for this honor as she is deserving of recognition for the difference she has made in the lives of multiple students—especially mine.

Thank you,

Tameka Parker