NARRATIVE

I am honored to receive the 2013 OSCAR Mentor Award nomination. Faculty engagement in student mentorship is vital to student and faculty development, the creation of a culture of scholarship, and creative process is critical to the mission of George Mason University. It is truly an honor and a privilege to be in a career where I have the opportunity to engage students in research and share my passion.

Mentoring is guiding students in the process of discovery, learn how to be comfortable outside their comfort zone, and constantly stimulating their creative thought process to find new avenues to answer a research question. I enjoy fostering students’ interest on a topic, to critically appraise the literature, and cultivating the development of their questions and experiments through critical thought process. Guiding the students on how the research process can answer important questions of their interest, and aiding to expand their understanding of the world is awe inspiring. Since arriving at Mason in 2010, I have embraced mentoring students’ scholarly development as an important and fulfilling part of my job, and I have enjoyed creating new venues and opportunities for student involvement in scholarship.

I actively promote undergraduate student involvement in research. To accomplish this, I created the SMART Lab Team, Research & Development (STRiDE) group. The STRiDE group mission is to promote undergraduate and graduate student involvement in ongoing research projects, as well as engage students in critical and creative thought processes, and support the ideas generated by the students. It is a space where undergraduate students can interact with PhD and Master students, and everyone has the opportunity to share experiences, concerns, and challenges and work together to overcome such barriers. It is a space that I promote as a friendly environment, where students can voice their opinion, present their work, and embrace new research opportunities.

To provide a regular forum to foster a culture of student scholarship within the Division of HHP and the greater Mason student community, the STRiDE group meets on a weekly basis to discuss a wide variety of professional development and research topics. In particular, discussion items include i) current status of projects, ii) conceptualizing new projects, iii) involving students in the human subjects protection process (e.g., HSRB), iv) question and answer opportunities for students to address questions or concerns with current and future projects, as well as research in general, v) brainstorming about their own projects, and vi) receiving mentorship on their own project progress. In addition, the STRiDE group regularly hosts a journal club once a month to promote the critical appraisal of current evidence and best practices in biomedical related research. I believe that engaging students in the entire research process from conceptualization to dissemination is an important way to provide students an opportunity to expand their minds, experience how research is conducted, and motivate them to achieve their future professional goals. I have been fortunate to mentor students for several years and have learned more from the students than I have taught them.

My teaching and research both influence and inform each other. I like to think of my research and teaching as a united symbiotic process. This perspective leads me to continuously emphasize the link between theory and practice, focusing on the fact that research is a process to produce useful information to be disseminated. In my undergraduate Research Methods (PRLS 450) course, I encourage student enthusiasm about the research process. Through this course, several undergraduate students become an integral part of the STRiDE group. A number of these students are now implementing their conceptualized research projects, including being successfully funded by URSP due to a successful collaboration established with Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. These results demonstrate the positive impact, support, and engagement of students as scholars through my mentorship and my leadership of the STRiDE group. I am very excited about the progress of the students as well as the future student scholarly pursuits, as it not only aligns with my professional mission, it also strongly supports the University’s strategic plan to promote Students as Scholars.

In summary, I have strived to be a conscientious and successful mentor; the efforts I have undertaken to foster a culture of student scholarship at Mason, the list of students mentored and accomplished work, and more importantly the excitement that I have working with students and observing their growth are the most rewarding aspects of being a faculty and promoting Students as Scholars at Mason.