OSCAR
Mentoring Excellence Award Nominee

Name: Jatinder (JP) Singh
Department: Global Affairs
Number of Nominations: 1
Previous Years’ Nominations: 2015

1. What characteristics make the nominee an exceptional mentor?

- Approachability - He is extremely approachable despite his eminent status as an academic and researcher. Depth of understanding - He is knowledgeable and wise, able to listen to our unique situations and proscribe suggestions or guide us to figure out things ourselves. Positivity - Even in the depths of despair natural to the research process, his positive presence guided us along.

~ Mentee

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

- He was my research mentor for my Global Affairs Honors in the Program course. He guided us throughout the year to challenge our assumptions and to develop independently research papers tailored around our interests. I met with him many times outside of class during this time to discuss not just my research project but also where I was going and how my participation in his course fit with the general direction of my academic and professional life. His suggestions and encouragement have led me to pursue my current studies at IHEID in Geneva Switzerland. Were it not for his profound influence, I would have not only missed out on this opportunity to grow as a person and academic, but I would have missed out on the heightened level of awareness of international relations he transmitted during our many discussions and throughout his assistance during the research process. I am forever indebted to his brilliance and guidance.

~ Mentee
Mentoring Research

J.P. Singh, Global Affairs Program, George Mason University

Research mentorship for me is an inspiring task in encouraging the ‘research imagination.’ The ‘imagination’ taps into the scholars’ commitment and creativity, while the research component allows them to move toward excellence in a methodological fashion.

Commitment:
The undergraduates I have mentored in research at George Mason have been either in my two-semester GLOA Honors in the Major sequence, or as research assistants through Mason’s Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research (OSCAR). These students have a record of academic excellence, and they are already excited about undertaking research. Students in the GLOA Honors must have a 3.5 GPA and the process is highly selective. Similarly, OSCAR allows faculty mentors to choose research assistants from several applicants – last year I almost chose a first year Mason student because of his enthusiasm and commitment.

I find these scholars’ dedication to research to be inspiring -- it reminds me of my own original commitment to the world of scholarship. They have questions about the world and, often, a sense of ethics and responsibility. One of my RAs this year has led Mason students to Guatemala, and the other two are involved in various community and university activities. They want to make the world a better place.

Creativity:
The belief that research will make the world better is important. It provides the motivation and social context (reflexivity) for the research imagination. Consider the types of Honors theses the students are writing this year: the role of political mobilization and ethnic representation in access to healthcare in Sub-Saharan Africa; impact of women’s mobilization and differential government capacity in gendered violence in Latin America; role of civil society groups in democratic consolidation; explaining (lack of) global efforts to address migration crises produced through climate change. The honors students often speak to how much it means for them to be in an environment where research excellence and scholarship are highly valued. This year's honors students have formed a study group, which meets several times a week.

Methods:
Methods demystify research and, I believe, inspire students toward further excellence. Our undergraduate scholars have engaged with research, but mostly as outsiders. Research methods allow them an insider's view. Mentorship, therefore, involves step by step guidance toward puzzling about the world, thinking of the importance and generalizability of their questions, guiding them through literature reviews and gathering evidence. These are, of course, well-known steps. Nevertheless, one of the most gratifying parts of being a research mentor comes from noticing the growing confidence in students as they begin to provide their own guidance and critiques of each other’s hypotheses, literature reviews, and evidence. My three RAs from OSCAR started the year with readings on content analysis and telecommunications infrastructures in the developing world. Next month, the four of us will be presenting a research paper on a participatory content analysis methodology that we have collaboratively developed.

I am fortunate to have received caring and meaningful mentorship in my life and strive toward a similar ideal myself. A commitment to a life of the mind becomes ever more rewarding witnessing dozens of undergraduate scholars who are striving with their research imaginations. One of my honors students this year works closely with undocumented migrants, another grew up African-American in a poor inner-city neighborhood. It is both humbling and inspiring to know that these scholars believe in the academic ideals of research.
Evidence of mentoring experience
J.P. Singh, Global Affairs Program, George Mason University

The following activities provide an overview of my mentoring experience at George Mason University.

Honors in the Major
As the primary lead for Global Affairs Honors in the Major, I guide a committed and highly qualified group of undergraduates in senior standing through a two-semester sequence that results in an original Honors thesis and research presentations at our University and at regional/national conferences.

The Honors theses traverse interdisciplinary topics in global affairs: informal non-governmental networks and global governance (an award winner at Mason’s 2013 CHSS Undergraduate Research Conference), forms of deliberation at the UN Security Council, role of media frames in humanitarian interventions, role of local institutions in participatory development effort, and conditions under which developing world coalitions succeed in international negotiations.

This year, twelve of my Honors students, and another research assistant from OSCAR, have been selected to present at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. This will be nearly one-third of Mason's delegation to the NCUR. I am also consistently overwhelmed by the positive feedback and evaluations from the Honors students. The average rating for my teaching/mentorship for the Honors sequence is 4.83. This year, I wrote seven letters for my honors students to prestigious graduate schools. Two have heard back already: Stephanie Cassidy has been offered admission at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins, and Alan Williams has agreed to join Columbia University's master's program in Human Rights Studies. Alan Williams had underrated his abilities, I think, and when he asked me for a recommendation, I encouraged him to apply to Columbia University.

Here is a list of Honors research projects that I have mentored at George Mason:

- Leslie Auceda: Humanitarianism, Political Mobilization, and Acceptance of Undocumented Migrants: The Case of Migrant Children in the United States
- Stephanie Cassidy: Participation in Development: The Impact of Local Institutions on Sustainability and Equity in Latin America
- Maura Conte: Strategic Framing and Humanitarian Interventions: The study of Kosovo, Somalia and Syria
- Justin Hall: Informal Networks of Individuals, Collaboration, & Global Governance: Case Studies from Wikipedia & Microfinance
- Collin Mosley: Developing Countries’ Advantage in Trade Negotiations; Coalition Building as an Effective Force for the G20 at the Cancun Ministerial
- Onive Okolo: Interventions in Sex Trafficking: Assessing the Effectiveness of Counter Measures
- Salimatou Cristal Ouedraogo: Environmental Degradation and Human Security: The case of Climate Refugee Policies at Global and Local Levels
- Mason Pazhwak: Economics and State Building in a Fragile Context: A Case Study of Afghanistan and Iraq
• Umer K. Raja: Deadlocks in Environmental Negotiations: A Case Study of Climate Protocols
• Naila Rafique: Religious Edicts and Gender Roles: Case study of Women’s Mobilization in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan
• Danielle Salanitri: The Media and Civil Society: Gay Rights in Uganda, Mexico and South Africa
• Harveen Singh: New Networks/Old Practices: Globalization and Rigid Cultural Norms for Arranged Marriages in Asia
• Stephanie Tran: Foreign Direct Investment and Social Networks: Chinese Trade Diasporas in the United States
• Alan Williams: Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation: Cases - Yemen, Tunisia, and Egypt

Research Assistants
George Mason’s Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research (OSCAR) graciously provided me with three assistants for a project on participatory development, under book contract from Oxford University Press. I have worked with these RAs to create an innovative content analysis methodology, which is unique in being participatory. We will present our methodology at a faculty workshop at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research next month. Here is the abstract for this paper:

Developing a Participatory Research Methodology: Doing Content Analysis with Student Scholars
J.P. Singh, S. Cristal Ouedraogo, Naila Rafique, and Corina Solorzano, George Mason University
This paper will report the results from a participatory content analysis coding undertaken by the first author at George Mason University along with three undergraduate research assistants. The three research RAs helped the faculty mentor develop a coding scheme and then coded technical reports on over 250 World Bank projects. Generally, scholars provide "camera ready" code books to research assistants. This project attempts to code participatory development initiatives from the World Bank, and thus a participatory approach to developing the coding instrument was itself necessary. Specifically, we report on two kinds of issues: (1) faculty-RA relations including fostering a research culture, accepting feedback from RAs, and issues of trust, and (2) improving research methodologies through participation.

Global Affairs Research Designation and Scholarly Inquiry Efforts
GLOA Director asked me to lead the effort toward turning in our program’s application to Mason’s Students as Scholars office for obtaining the prestigious research designation for the Honors Research Project. I also suggested that we obtain a Scholarly Inquiry designation for the Honors Seminar in Global Affairs. If granted, these prestigious designations will be noted in our catalog and in the transcript for the students. The applications for the two Honors courses were turned in on 18 March 2015.

Connecting Undergraduates to Research Networks
I believe it is important for academic scholars to connect with undergraduate scholars and vice versa. Here are five recent activities that have allowed me to further these connections:

Efforts to present undergraduate research at the International Studies Association
I am in preliminary discussions with the officers of the International Studies Association to create an undergraduate research conference as part of its annual convention. The ISA brings together over 8000 researchers from around the world and this would be tremendous exposure for undergraduate scholars. If all goes well, the proposal will be presented to the ISA Governing Council for a vote at the April 2016 Annual convention with the first undergrad research conference taking place in 2017.

Presenting my research to undergraduates at other institutions
I strongly believe that presenting academic research at undergraduate forums is useful for scholars. Simply put, if we can convey our ideas to undergraduates we make them
accessible, and, in turn, inspire undergraduates to do the likewise. In the last year, I have presented my research to undergraduate classes at George Washington University (Prof. Susan Aaronson), Mary Washington University (Prof. Surupa Gupta), and University of Maryland, College Park (Prof. Virginia Haufler). Next month, I have been invited by Prof Anne Cubilie (cubiliea@cwu.edu), Director of Williams O. Douglas Honors College at Central Washington University to speak to their undergraduate honors students and staff about undergraduate research in the context of globalization.

I also edit a book series for Stanford University Press. George Mason has made available some funds to bring authors to campus, and the itinerary includes having these authors present their findings to our Honors and GLOA 101 students. The first two authors are scheduled to visit our campus during Fall 2015.

**Council on Undergraduate Research**

As a result of getting 13 students accepted to the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, I am looking forward to attending its annual conference next month. I have also been asked to be a reviewer for the *Proceedings of the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research* for 2015. I have agreed to undertake this task.

**Past Recognitions**

I have mentored Senior Honors Projects since my first year of teaching at Scripps College, California (1992-93). I received an award for excellence in teaching during that first year. Most recently, at Georgetown University, where I taught 2000-12, I was involved in a digital narratives project with my students called "Development Remix" -- which won a high commendation from the International Studies Association for innovative teaching. I have been asked to present the project at several places, latest in February 2015 at the International Studies Association for one of its 'innovative panels' titled "Using Digital and Social Media in the Classroom" (http://www.isanet.org/Conferences/Archive/Innovative-Panels). In 2012, when I first presented the Development Remix project at the ISA, I took along three students with me. The pedagogy I developed in this project is also now published: J. P. Singh. "Development Remix: Representing Poverty, Culture, and Agency in the Developing World." *International Studies Perspectives*. Volume 15:3. August 2014.

**Undergraduate Contacts**

Many undergraduates seek me out from other institutions, either through their faculty mentors or through the International Studies Association. I enjoy these contacts. I paste an e-mail from earlier this month:

**From:** Ari Rickman <rickmanari@gmail.com>  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 3, 2015 2:25 AM  
**To:** JP Singh <jsingh19@gmu.edu>  
**Subject:** One further question

Hello, my name is Ari Rickman and I attend the University of Maryland. You lectured to my politics of hunger class recently and I asked you a few questions after.

In the rush there wasn't enough time to ask the most fundamental question that I wanted to, so I hope you don't mind my asking it now...

My question is what does the US as a whole gain from trade relations in which it has to supply the capitol used to purchases its own products? Do these relationship result from business lobbying? Lastly, would it not be a win win if these countries were to be developed and were able to use their own capitol to purchases US goods?

I know that your time is valuable so I thank you.
March 15, 2016

RE: Letter of support, JP Singh nomination

To Whom It May Concern:

I am delighted to write this letter in support of my colleague JP Singh's nomination for the OSCAR Mentoring Excellence Award. As the Undergraduate Director of the Global Affairs Program, I have been able to see the impact that Professor Singh has had on our students and I can think of nobody more deserving.

Professor Singh's letter describes his contribution to undergraduate mentorship better than I can, so let me simply provide some programmatic context. Professor Singh is, as he notes, the faculty member solely responsible for our Honors in the Major sequence. This is a two-semester sequence attracting some of our very best students (and with well over 600 students, it is sometimes hard to choose the only 15 or so students we can accommodate in this program). It is an immensely successful program with several of our students having presented their work at national and international conferences. I know that Professor Singh works very hard indeed not only to make sure their research is top notch (it is!) but also to secure funding and opportunities to enable these experiences.

In addition, Professor Singh recently took the initiative on a novel model of involving undergraduates in the scholarly process. As part of the book series he edits, he has invited the authors' to Mason. While, in his material, Professor Singh discusses asking honors students to serve as moderators, what he does not address is that he opened this up to all students in GLOA 101. Working with me and another instructor of GLOA 101, Professor Singh organized a workshop where GLOA 101 students read a draft of the book, submitted structured feedback, and held a discussion with the author. This made for a very unusual glimpse into the scholarly process.

Finally, I should also point out that Professor Singh is one of the key professors in our MA program. While this award is for undergraduate mentorship, many of our MA students are accelerated MA students and they take Professor Singh's class while still undergraduates. In a sense, the mentorship he provides in this course is an invaluable bridgehead into graduate student life and research for these undergraduates.

In short, Professor Singh has shown himself to be a tireless mentor to the students, an important contributor to the internationalization of a culture of undergraduate research in GLOA and at Mason. I speak for all my colleagues when I saw that we support his nomination with great enthusiasm.

Sincerely,

Niklas Hultin
Undergraduate Director
I’m writing in support of Professor JP Singh’s application to OSCAR. I am JP’s colleague right now, involved in two of the programme’s he works for (Global Affairs and the Cultural Studies PhD programme). I was also the chair of the search committee that brought JP to Mason and have regularly been on the committee that evaluates his annual performance. So I know him and his work pretty well.

JP seems to me an ideal professor to get involved in OSCAR. He already supervises almost a dozen Honors theses every year, works with undergraduate research assistants, involves students in his own research, sometimes even coauthors papers with undergraduate students, as well as involving students in the book series he edits for Stanford University Press.

He has good networks across the profession and has used them to guide students to schools and to disciplines they might not otherwise have thought much about. For example, I know that he recently helped one student get in to the human rights program at Columbia University and successfully pushed another student to a Masters in international public health at Georgetown.

JP is a chronic champion of the research function of universities. He passionately believes in research. Part of what we wanted when we hired JP was someone who could take a lead in scholarship and research in GLOA and he has filled that role in multiple ways, including at the undergraduate level. I am also on the committee that has evaluated his performance each year and JP has earned an "excellent" for his research each year he has been at George Mason. This commitment to his own research shows up in his mentorship. His student evaluations for the Honors sequence are much higher than the department and University averages.

There seems to me little doubt that JP will be a useful and conscientious mentor in OSCAR and it would be foolish not to take advantage of his eagerness to be part of it.

Don’t hesitate to contact me if you need any other input.

Yours.

Paul Smith
Professor, Cultural Studies
George Mason University

703 993 2851
http://mason.gmu.edu/~psmith5
March 15, 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

I have been working with Dr. JP Singh for almost two years now and have gained an abundance of knowledge from him. He is immensely experienced in the Global Affairs and Cultural Studies field and has worked on so many of his projects and has allowed students to become a part of these projects and throughout the way has helped so many students gain a new perspective on the fields themselves as well as research. Because of him I now know what it takes to become a researcher, the thought process, and difficulty researchers go through. It’s not always easy but it’s not impossible, and through brainstorming, especially in teams and from experts, an issue can be easily solved.

Dr. Singh has highly encouraged all his students and research assistants to continue with their fields and continue their education. Because of him, I have applied to graduate school here at George Mason, and am seeking further research opportunities. Dr. Singh has been a mentor, not just in research, but in my academics. If I ever have an issue or question, I always knew I could go to Dr. Singh, especially when struggling with the research project we are currently working on. As a result of Dr. Singh’s encouragement, our team was able to attend the National Conference of Undergraduate Research in Spokane, Washington last year, even furthering and supporting our love for research. Dr. Singh has opened doors for his past students, and is continuing to do so, while simultaneously working on his own work.

Warm regards,

Corina Solorzano