



Mentoring Program 2023-2024

Mentor Bio's

Please contact Megan Wright at
mentoring@awisphl.org if you have questions or
concerns

Monday Evening Circle

Center City, Old City, Fairmount

Ankita Patil

Scientist (Analytical Development), Passage Bio

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development, International trainee issues

Bio: I completed my Master's and Ph.D. in Neuroscience from Drexel University, where I worked on cytoskeletal organization in neurons. Since graduating, I have been employed as an Analytical Development Scientist at Passage Bio, a gene therapy company that focuses on developing viral gene therapies for rare diseases. As someone who recently moved from academia to biotech/industry, I am happy to share my insights on this transition. I am originally from Mumbai, India, and can speak to some of the issues that international trainees might have to navigate. I have been part of the AWIS Philadelphia Chapter and the Mentoring Program for 7 years (both, during grad school and after!) and have benefited profoundly from the connections I made here. I hope to be able to pay it forward and help new mentees as best as I can!

Roshell Muir

Director of Urban Health Equity, Education and Research & Assistant Research Professor, Drexel College of Medicine

Mentoring Interests: Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Challenges as a working parent, Professional development

Bio: Roshell Muir, PhD is an Assistant Research Professor at Drexel College of Medicine (DUCOM) in the Department of Family, Community and Preventive Medicine, with expertise in immunology studies and project management that straddle the fields of basic science and applied clinical research focused on how specialized cell subsets in the follicles can be targeted for novel vaccines against HIV, and other viral infections. Dr. Muir is also the Director of the Office of Urban Health Equity, Education and Research at DUCOM and is interested in identifying factors that contribute to the low recruitment and retention of a diverse healthcare and scientific workforce. Dr. Muir has served on the board of various organizations and committees and is and is the current President of the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) Philadelphia Chapter. Dr. Muir was the 2022 recipient of the National AWIS Meridian Award, which recognizes mid-career professionals who are strong leaders, innovative thinkers and are committed to inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

Ji Hyun Lee

Associate Scientist, WuXi Advanced Therapies

Mentoring Interests: Diversity, equity, and inclusion

Bio: Hello, I'm Ji Hyun Lee, currently working as an associate scientist in the field of gene therapy. Within my brief but impactful years in industry, I've gone through a multitude of experiences that would lend insight to any young professionals looking to start their own career. Whether it is regarding cultural differences with colleagues, work as an entry level employee, or supervisor changes, I would love to listen to and share stories with each other. I hope that through this mentorship, we would lead meaningful discussions that everyone can take something away from.

Tuesday Evening Circle

South Philadelphia

Allison Cote

Senior Computational Biologist at Altius Institute for Biomedical Sciences

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development, Challenges of working with chronic illness

Bio: My name is Ally, I graduated with my PhD in 2020 from UPenn in the Cell Biology, Physiology, and Metabolism subgroup of Cell and Molecular Biology program. I started out as a purely wet lab focused biology graduate student, and switched over the course of my grad school years and the pandemic to be purely computational (and now I hope I don't have to go back!). I worked on a variety of projects throughout grad school, with a focus on RNA in different contexts (cartilage tissue engineering and splicing/nuclear diffusion). I now work entirely remotely as a computational biologist at a hybrid academic/industry non profit called Altius. My research now focuses on investigating regulatory DNA elements via sequencing. Between graduating and my current position I worked as a pharmaceutical scientist at a small biotech/pharma startup. I am happy to discuss career transitions, as well as discuss coping strategies for working while having chronic illnesses.

Helen Mach

Senior Research Associate

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Professional development

Bio: I am currently a Senior Research Associate with a social sciences background, and I conduct evaluations of programs at the Center for Policing Equity. I was previously a speech-language therapist working in schools and in various healthcare settings with adults. My Ph.D. is in Rehabilitation Sciences, and my research is primarily focused on psychosocial challenges in people with communication disabilities and their caregivers/family members. I also have a strong interest in the knowledge translation and implementation science field and ways to bridge the research to practice gap. I integrate these skills into my current role evaluating programs that are designed to reduce risk for racially biased policing. Finally, I am very interested in integrating these skills into the international sector/international development. My experiences transitioning into different sectors may be valuable to mentees looking to pivot.

Wednesday Evening

Center City, Old City, Fairmount

Sandy Saouaf

CEO, Science Answers, LLC

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development, Non-traditional science career paths

Bio: I am an immunologist, Scientific Consultant, Grant Consultant, Medical Writer, and Scientific Writer at Science Answers, LLC. My immunology PhD is from the University of Pennsylvania Perleman School of Medicine where I studied immune tolerance mechanisms. During my postdoctoral fellowship in the oncology department at the Bristol-Myers Squibb Pharmaceutical Research Institute in Princeton, NJ, I studied cell signaling pathways through oncogenic src family proteins, discovering relevant oncology targets for therapeutic intervention. I then held research and supervisory positions in the Glaxo SmithKline department of protein biochemistry and the University of Pennsylvania department of pathology and laboratory medicine. Later, I was CEO and founder of Atlantic Bio Sci, LLC, a biopharmaceutical company developing drugs to treat autoimmune disease. Currently, I am the CEO and founder of Science Answers, LLC, a scientific consulting company I founded in 2007 that strategically advances therapeutics, diagnostics, and devices. Through the years I have adjusted my scientific career to fit my life as a parent, spouse, and daughter. I look forward to continuing to support scientists through mentoring and sharing strategies and mindsets that align with life and excellence in science.

Jacqui Simonet

Visiting Assistant Professor at Arcadia University

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Challenges as a working parent

Bio: I got my PhD in Cell and Molecular Biology from Penn Med. My graduate work was in neurodevelopment. I then I did a postdoc at Fox Chase Cancer Center in a molecular biology/biochemistry laboratory working on cell metabolism and cancer. I am currently a visiting assistant professor in the Biology Department at Arcadia University where I teach various courses in general biology, molecular biology, and microbiology and have a lab working on basic cell metabolism research using fruit flies as a model system.

Jani Bilchak

Post Doctoral Researcher at University of Pennsylvania

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development

Bio: I earned my PhD in Neuroscience from Drexel University and am now a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Pennsylvania. I am currently studying the role of the neurofibromin protein in regulating sensory neuron activity and how this relates to cognitive and sleep deficits in neurofibromatosis and other autism-associated syndromes. I was born in the US but spent most of my life moving around Europe before moving to Philadelphia to do my PhD. So, I'm very happy to share insights about Philadelphia living with anyone who's new to the city or the US! Also, having recently gone through the thesis defense and job-hunting process, I can offer detailed tips (and encouragement) to anyone navigating this stage of their career.

Sharon Kirk

GSK Investigator - Process Chemistry

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion

Bio: I am currently working as a process chemist in the drug substance development group at GSK in Upper Providence. My previous work experience was in fine chemicals process/manufacturing and a short time in a medicinal chemistry group at a biotech startup. My PhD is in organic chemistry from Univ of Utah, with a Penn post doc focusing on process chemistry and I have a passion for solving really challenging reaction problems. I have been a part of four mentor circles as both a mentee and a mentor, which were very uplifting experiences. Holding community in a group like this makes handling challenges in work and life less solitary.

Wednesday Evening Circle

Fully Remote, Online Meeting Only*

Cheryl Paes

Head of Marketing, Meridian BioScience

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Challenges as a working parent, Professional development

Bio: Cheryl Paes has over 20 years of experience in the pharma/biopharma industry with 15+ of those years in B2B marketing of platform and professional services. Cheryl started her career in the lab working in product and platform development for diagnostics and therapeutic antibody development and then transitioned into commercial functions both in sales, business development and marketing. In her commercial roles, she has built marketing teams from the ground up and has led brand transformation initiatives for both small and large organizations, aligning messaging and marketing activities to the business strategy and commercial goals. She has diverse B2B commercial experience in the life sciences space working in diagnostics, therapeutic Mab development, medical devices and pharma intelligence services. Cheryl currently leads the marketing and product management function for the life sciences division of Meridian Bioscience- a diagnostics reagent manufacturer. Prior to Meridian, Cheryl built the marketing team for a cell and gene therapy CDMO (contract development and manufacturing organization), Center for Breakthrough Medicines (CBM). Prior to that Cheryl led the integration of the orthopedic IVD business into the core reconstructive implant portfolio at Zimmer Biomet. She also has experience in the pharma intelligence space, leading product marketing for the Life Sciences division at Thomson Reuters (now Clarivate). Cheryl was one of the founding team members of Integral Molecular, a Philadelphia start-up MAb discovery company, contributing initially in a technical capacity leading platform development and then transitioned to lead the marketing and commercial strategy for the organization.

Hager Mohamed

Research Scientist, Emergex Vaccines

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Mid-career development, Professional development

Bio: I'm currently in the Immunology department at Emergex Vaccines, working on both the development of our T cell based vaccine technology as well as on experiments to understand its mechanism of action. I am a Microbiologist and Immunologist by training and the majority of my research background has focused on therapeutic interventions against infectious diseases.

Kirsten Copren

Director of Analytical Development, Resilience

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development, Professional development

Bio: Dr. Copren, a translational geneticist and applied genome scientist, has over 15 years of experience in the development of *in vitro* and *in vivo* biotechnology and pharmaceutical product development for nucleic acid testing. She recently accepted a position as Director of Analytical Development in cell therapy at the national CDMO startup, Resilience. Prior to this role she lead a team of laboratory specialists providing novel methods in next-generation sequencing (NGS) for gene therapy at the University of Pennsylvania as the Director of Nucleic Acid Technologies. Previously, she worked in cancer genomics as the Technical Director of the Genome Analysis Core at the University of California, San Francisco where she led a team developing genomic biomarker assays for tumor profiling. During a brief stint in the private sector, she launched her first commercial product in 2018 for the veterinary market, a direct to consumer (DTC) microbiome analysis test for AnimalBiome. She is passionate about innovation in genome science and technology, equity and inclusion in science, and creating a work environment where you can be your authentic self.

Kayla Socarras

Postdoctoral Fellow, Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT

Mentoring Interests: Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Early career development

Bio: Kayla is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT. She did her PhD in Microbiology and Immunology at Drexel University under the tutelage of Dr. Garth D. Ehrlich. For her PhD Kayla created a nationwide microbiome platform for vector pathogens and established a family-level pangenome for Borrelia spirochetes. These projects established pipelines to identify novel biomarkers that can now be used for the development of diagnostics and therapeutics. Currently, Kayla is at the Broad Institute establishing a federated platform for variant-level matching to help researchers and clinicians alike accelerate the process to finding the cause of rare human diseases.

Thursday Evening

Suburbs: Arcadia University, Glenside

Megan Wright

Professor of Biology, Arcadia University

Mentoring Interests: Professional development, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Challenges as a working parent,

Bio: I earned my Ph.D. in Neuroscience at Drexel University and completed my postdoctoral training Neurology department at Johns Hopkins. I have been a faculty member at Arcadia University since 2010 and teach a variety of courses in Neuroscience, Physiology, and Pathophysiology. My area of research expertise is in central and peripheral nervous system regeneration. I was recently promoted to full professor at Arcadia and enjoy teaching and training undergraduate students in my research lab. This is my 5th year as a mentor for AWIS PHL and my third year as the co-chair of the mentoring program. Participating in this program has been rewarding on so many levels and I look forward to meeting with new mentees and offering support as they continue in their career paths.

Michelle Cicchini

Investigator in Oncology-Synthetic Lethality and Project Leader, GSK.

Bio: After completing a Ph.D. in Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey studying the role of autophagy in mammary development and tumorigenesis, I did my post doctoral training at the University of Pennsylvania's Abramson Cancer Center studying the role of Mitogen Activated Protein Kinase signaling in lung cancer development and progression before transitioning to industry. As a Research Scientist at a CRO specializing in acute toxicology I was a Study Director, developed protocols, SOPs and validated GLP assays. In my current role at GSK, I am an investigator in Oncology within the Synthetic Lethality Research Unit and a Project leader with experience leading validation stage projects through to early discovery.

Elise Lewis

Principal Director, Toxicology at Charles River Laboratories

Bio: Dr. Lewis is a native of Alabama, and she received both her Bachelor's and Doctorate degrees from The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. As an undergraduate, she was patterning herself to be a medical professional, particularly an Obstetrician. However, she diverged from this path and literally embarked upon a road that is less traveled, the field of toxicology. While in graduate school she was recipient of a Future Faculty Fellowship for minority students, and through her training in the field of toxicology, Dr. Lewis found a way to marry her interests in the medical field with a passion to prevent birth defects from intentional or unintentional exposure to drug products or chemicals. Simply put, she spends much of her time researching human health hazards that could cause embryo-fetal death, birth defects, growth retardation, or functional deficits. Today, Dr. Lewis is employed by Charles River Laboratories, Inc., a contract research organization that focuses on improving human and animal health by advancing the search for drugs from discovery through market approval. Dr. Lewis joined Charles River Laboratories, Inc. in 2001 as a Study Director in the area of Reproductive, Developmental, and Juvenile Toxicology. In this role, she had the opportunity to oversee the technical conduct of nonclinical laboratory studies that are critical to environmental safety and the health care industry, and are necessary prior to consideration of new compounds for regulatory approval as drug products, medical devices, vaccines, pesticides, and other products to which humans might be exposed. Dr. Lewis has authored or co authored multiple publications, books, and book chapters in various areas of developmental, reproductive, juvenile toxicology. She is a member of the Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention, the European Teratology Society, the Society of Toxicology, the American College of Toxicology, the Mid-Atlantic Reproductive Toxicology Association, and the Association for Women in Science (Philadelphia Chapter). She is also the President for the Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention. As a leader, Dr. Lewis has a great interest in investing in the next generation of students who are eagerly pursuing education in the area of STEM. She believes that mentors can play an important role in the success of young scientists, and she views herself to be in a unique position to provide career advice to those can benefit from learning about her unique career journey. She has had the opportunity to collaborate and engage with and be trained by a number of amazing individuals along her journey. However, she credits many of her scientific achievements to the women who empowered, coached, nurtured, and challenged her to persevere, be a visionary, and excel in science.

Thursday Evening Circle

University City/CHOP

Ariel Myatt

Grants and Contracts Specialist I, CHOP

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion

Bio: Hello! I have a Masters in Biomedical Sciences, which I earned at Thomas Jefferson University. I moved into Philly to earn this degree and decided I loved it. I currently work at CHOP as a Grants and Contracts Specialist. I have experience transitioning from a bench role to a research administrative role. I also have several seasons of mentoring experience and love to help young scientists find their place in this field.

Mary Barnette

Retired scientist from pharmaceutical industry

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development, Professional development

Bio: Retired from a 30+ year career in the pharmaceutical industry with experience in drug discovery, clinical development and translation medicine. Areas of research include gastrointestinal disorders pulmonary disease and oncology. Lead both small and large groups and developed strategic plans for senior management. Enjoy discussing both science and organizational skills.

Caroline Schauer

Associate Dean, Research Enterprise, College of Engineering Drexel University

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development, Professional development

Bio: I am currently the Margaret C Burns Chair in Engineering. My career path has not been linear and I encourage other to embrace their own unique skills. I am the instructor for a graduate course called the Art of Being a Scientist which outlines all that graduate students need to know to navigate graduate school and beyond.

Thursday Evening Circle

Northwest Philadelphia (East Falls/Manayunk)

Sheri Lordi

Director, Laboratory Sciences at Charles River

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Challenges as a working parent

Bio: . Dr. Lordi has been working for Charles River, a contract research organization, for the past 10 years in their Drug Safety division. In her current role as Director of Laboratory Sciences, she leads teams responsible for drug formulation, in vitro toxicology and various analytical, molecular and bioanalytical assays required for supporting successful execution of pre-clinical toxicology studies. She is proud to be part of an organization that helps to bring over 85% of the new drugs to market each year which has a direct impact on improving patient lives. Prior to Charles River, Dr. Lordi worked for Schering-Plough in their Biotechnology Development group and was responsible for developing and validating cell based bioassays and immunoassays to support process development, preclinical and clinical studies. She held a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and obtained her Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the University of Western Ontario, in London, Ontario, Canada. Dr. Lordi has served as the Treasurer for the Philadelphia AWIS chapter for the past three years and has also participated and led in the AWIS-PHL mentoring circles. Additionally, she has been a co-leader of her daughter's high school level Girl Scout troop. She enjoys helping them to grow as young leaders and realize their potential through outdoor adventures.

Sharon Willis

VP Sales and Customer Relations, Integral Molecular

Mentoring Interests: Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development, Professional development

Bio: Sharon is a co-founder of Integral Molecular and has led the company from a research-based start-up to a trusted provider of biotechnology solutions with hundreds of customers world-wide, including all the top pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies. Sharon spearheads all aspects of sales from product development, through manufacturing, quality control, sales, and customer support. As a science ambassador and mentor, Sharon is committed to helping train the next generation of scientists. She organizes Integral Molecular's participation in student and community outreach engagements, including the Biomedical Technical Training Program (Wistar), Building an Understanding of Lab Basics (BULB, Science Center), Workforce Solutions training (Community College of Philadelphia), and FirstHand STEM learning initiatives (Science Center). Prior to joining Integral Molecular, she was a post-doc at the University of Pennsylvania where she researched membrane-enveloped viruses and solved the crystal structure of the cellular receptor for herpes simplex virus (HSV). Sharon earned a Ph.D. in Chemistry from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and a B.A. from Gettysburg College.

Eileen Collyer

Research Associate at Thomas Jefferson University

Mentoring Interests: Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development

Bio: I got my PhD in Physiology from the P. Catholic University of Chile working on axonal collateral sprouting after spinal cord injury. I moved to the US to pursue a postdoc at UCSD where I combined stem cell grafting with rehabilitative paradigms after spinal cord injury. After that I moved to Philadelphia to continue my postdoctoral training at Drexel University working on autonomic dysreflexia after spinal cord injury. I'm currently working as a Research Associate at Thomas Jefferson University focusing on the regional differences of astrocytic response to stroke. In my spare time I enjoy running after my four-year old daughter and trying to achieve the always elusive life-work balance. I have participated in the Mentoring circles for the last 4 years and look forward to share my experience (the good, the bad and the unexpected!).

Friday Morning Circle

*** Virtual, No in-person meeting***

Heather Harlin

Senior Associate Scientist; Janssen R&D

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development

Bio: Hi! I'm currently a mid-career scientist in oncology drug discovery. I am a first generation high school graduate (and college) who moved 3,000 miles from home to chase a dream in STEM. My grades in college were mediocre outside of STEM courses, and that had an affect on my graduate school prospects. Instead, I spent time getting experience in a number of science-based employment and mentorship opportunities. Now that I am comfortably and challengingly working in drug discovery with a group of lovely people, I have decided to go back to school and obtain a MS in Drug Discovery. I have a daughter who is 8 years old and she enjoys when we talk about science and what women are capable of. My path was not straight forward or traditional but it led me to the greatest people and to the best place I could find myself.

Jen Marcy

Senior Associate Scientist, Solid Tumor Targeted Therapy, Janssen

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development

Bio: I was a stay-at-home mom for 20 then repeated my undergrad and went on to receive my master's in Molecular and Cellular Biology and Genetics from Drexel in 2018. I have worked briefly at GSK and now at Janssen I'm Oncology R&D for 3 1/2 years.

Katelyn Miller

Scientist - Janssen R&D

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development

Bio: Research Assistant - High school through college; Phd from UPenn in cell and molecular biology; Postdoc at Wistar in cancer metabolism; Scientist at Janssen January 2022

Jennifer Connors

Postdoctoral Fellow, Janssen

Mentoring Interests: Mid-career development, Transitioning from PhD to Career

Bio: Hi, my Name is Jen Connors, and I am a postdoc in oncology translational research. I research how combinations of drugs already in the clinic can have synergetic effects on T cell activation and killing. I am working to gain industry-specific knowledge and skills that will allow me to contribute to innovative research that directly impacts patients. In my spare time, I love to read! I have recently joined the book club here at Spring House and it is absolutely fun to engage with my colleagues in that way.