



Mentoring Program 2024-2025

Mentor Bio's

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

Monday Morning Circle

Center City, Old City, Fairmount

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.

Jennifer Hope

Assistant Professor (TT), Drexel University (College of Medicine)

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Challenges as a working parent

**** Please note that this circle will meet in the morning (9am-12pm) with specific meeting times to be determined by all circle members**

Monday Evening Circle

Virtual: Fully Online Meetings

Battuya Bayarmagnai

Senior Medical Writer at AbbVie Inc.

Mentoring Interests: Professional development

Bio: Battuya earned her PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics from the University of Illinois at Chicago, after which she completed 5 years of postdoctoral research at Temple University, Dept of Bioengineering. Then, Battuya transitioned to the pharmaceutical industry and worked as a Senior Research Scientist, Analytical Development, at WuXi Advanced Therapies for 3 years. Battuya is currently a Senior Medical Writer at AbbVie Inc.

Kayla Socarras

Postdoctoral Fellow, Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT

Mentoring Interests: Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Career Transitions, Professional Development

Bio: Kayla Socarras is a postdoctoral researcher at the Broad Institute, where she works within the Translational Genomics Group of the Medical and Population Genomics Platform. Her current research focuses on developing a federated network for variant matching and enhancing pipelines for rare disease analysis. Prior to joining the Broad Institute, Kayla earned her Ph.D. in Garth Ehrlich's lab in the Department of Microbiology & Immunology at Drexel University College of Medicine. Her doctoral research involved creating a nationwide surveillance platform for vector-borne diseases, developing microbiome analysis pipelines, and identifying biomarkers for tick-borne diseases. In addition, her master's research at the University of New Haven centered on the pathogenesis of *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacterium responsible for Lyme disease.

Beyond her research, Kayla is actively involved in science communication, mentorship, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. She is affiliated with the NextGeneration Association as a board member at the Broad Institute and the Black Microbiologist Association as a programming officer.

Sudha Moorthy

Assistant Professor of Biology, Arcadia University

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

Bio: I completed my Ph.D in Bacterial Genetics in India and moved to the US for my post-doctoral training at Tufts and later, at Rutgers. Before I started teaching full time, I did a short stint at a biotech start up. I love teaching! I have taught a variety of courses in microbiology and microbial physiology. My research interests include ecological and evolutionary aspects of bacterial infectious diseases particularly host-pathogen interactions. When I'm not teaching or working in the lab, I like to experiment with cooking and gardening. I also enjoy singing and participating in community choirs. This is my first time as mentor for AWIS PHL. I look forward to sharing my experiences in industry, and in academia, my challenges in maintaining my work-life balance and networking with women scientists in Philadelphia.

Tuesday Evening Circle

Hybrid Suburbs (Virtual and In-Person meetings in King of Prussia/Conshohocken)

Cheryl Paes

Global Head of Product Management & 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.

Mary Barnette

Retired scientist from pharmaceutical industry

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, 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. This is my 3rd year participating in the mentoring program.

Akshata Almad

Senior Scientist, Merk

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

**** Please note that this circle will meet in hybrid format with some virtual meetings and some in-person meetings at the discretion of circle members**

Wednesday Evening Circle

Center City, Old City, Fairmount

Eileen Collyer

Research Associate at Thomas Jefferson University

Mentoring Interests: Challenges as a working parent, Professional 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 five-year old daughter and trying to achieve the always elusive life-work balance.

Sandy Saouaf

Immunologist, Scientific Consultant, Grant Consultant, Medical Writer, and Scientific Writer at 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.

Hager Mohamed

Research Scientist, Emergex Vaccines

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

Bio: I work in the Immunology Department at Emergex Vaccines, where we perform preclinical research to develop our T cell-based vaccine technology and evaluate the immunogenicity of vaccine candidates. I manage Virology and Immunology research projects in our group and help develop junior staff and interns. Before my current role in Biotech research, I worked in the Microbiology and Immunology program at Drexel University College of Medicine, where I completed both my PhD and postdoctoral research.

Wednesday 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.

Laura Ohl

Staff Scientist

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

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 social 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 attend Drexel. 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 my thesis defense, the job-hunting process, and settling into post-doc work, I can offer detailed tips (and encouragement) to anyone navigating this stage of their career.

Thursday Evening Circle

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.

Amy Ott

Assistant Professor; Drexel University College of Medicine; Department of Microbiology and Immunology

Mentoring Interests: Challenges as a working parent, Mid-career development, Professional development, Careers in Academia

Bio: Amy Ott is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at Drexel University College of Medicine, and currently divides her time between graduate education and research in a basic science malaria vaccine lab. She directs courses including Vaccines and Vaccine Development, Introduction to Infectious Disease, and Clinical Correlations in Infectious Disease. She also conducts research in the laboratory of Dr. Jim Burns, with a focus on the development of multi-stage, multi-antigen vaccines for Plasmodium parasites using both recombinant protein and mRNA platforms. She mentors graduate students within the Drexel community and participates in the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) Philadelphia chapter mentoring program. Prior to her current work, she earned a PhD from Drexel University in Microbiology and Immunology, and a MS from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She lives in the Philadelphia area with her husband and two children.

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. 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.

Thursday Evening Circle

Virtual: Fully Online Meetings

Ankita Patil

Scientist II, Passage Bio

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development

Bio: Ankita is a bioassay scientist at Passage Bio, a gene therapy company working on therapies for neurological diseases. In this role, she develops biological assays to assess different aspects of the efficacy of viral vector therapeutics. Originally from Mumbai, India, Ankita moved to Philadelphia for her graduate studies. She completed her Master's and Ph.D., both in Neuroscience, from Drexel University College of Medicine. Her research focused on the cytoskeleton and structural organization in neurons. Ankita is committed to empowering women in STEM fields and is actively involved with AWIS-PHL. She has participated in several cycles of the Mentoring Circle Program, both as a mentee and a mentor. She has also held multiple Board positions within the Chapter, and is the current Chapter President for 2024-25.

Anne Flanigan

Executive Director, Head of Global Medical Information, Merck & Co., Inc.

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

Bio: Received MS Degree in Molecular/Cellular Biology at Long Island University (LIU) in NY, then became Assistant Professor at LIU. Went on to receive PhD in Pathology at Drexel U. in Philadelphia. Research concentration/doctoral dissertation focused on the role of inflammatory cells in Inflammatory Bowel Disease and colon cancer. Transitioned to the Pharmaceutical Industry in Medical Affairs positions at Merck & Co., Inc., primarily in the Scientific Content, Medical Information, Medical Review, Compendia Submissions spaces. Has been at Merck for 22 years. Currently leads Merck's Global Medical Information group of 70+ advance-degreed professionals, working cross-functionally worldwide with many stakeholders including other functions within the Medical Affairs area, Commercial, Marketing, Legal, Compliance, Clinical Development, Safety, Publications, and Manufacturing. Finds great happiness in leading, teaching, coaching, developing, and helping others grow and succeed in their educational and career aspirations.

Roshell Muir

Assistant Research Professor, Drexel College of Medicine

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

Bio: Dr. Roshell Muir is a Research Assistant Professor and Director of Health Equity Research and Innovation at Drexel College of Medicine (DUCOM), with over 14 years of expertise in systems immunology research and project management that straddle the fields of basic science and applied clinical studies. She completed her PhD in Medicine at Queen's University Belfast and a Masters in Virology from Imperial College London. She has authored many publications in her field with a focus on how specialized cell subsets in the follicles can be targeted for novel vaccines against HIV, and other viral infections. In addition to her basic science pursuits, Dr. Muir's research interests span gender, racial and ethnic disparities in science and medicine. She has published several articles on well-being, equality of opportunities for underrepresented groups in academic medicine, and equality of patient access to clinical trials and her work has been covered by multiple media outlets, including U.S. News and Healio. Through the Office of Health Equity Research and Innovation, she continues to drive strategy and lead scholarship on issues of health equity in the community, and currently serves as an advisory committee member for a 5-year extramural NIH R01 on gender inequity in the biomedical field. Dr. Muir is actively involved with the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) organization, and currently serves as the immediate Past President of the Philadelphia Chapter (AWIS-PHL). She has held several other leadership positions on the Executive board for the past 5 years, including President, Vice President/Chair of Programs, and Secretary- and has brought valuable speakers, programs, and resources to the local professional community for women in academia and industry at all career levels. Dr. Muir was a recipient of the 2022 AWIS Meridian Award which recognizes professionals who are strong leaders, innovative thinkers and are committed to inclusivity, equity, and accessibility, and has been a part of the last 3 AWIS-PHL boards that received AWIS National "Shooting Star" Awards for strategic vision, best overall chapter and excellence in member recruitment and retention. Dr. Muir was also named as an emerging staff leader in 2021 by the DUCOM Office of Faculty and Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which identifies deserving internal professional staff and faculty leaders.

Thursday Evening Circle

Center City, Old City, Fairmount

Sharon Kirk

Process Chemistry Investigator and US Sustainability Lead

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional Development

Bio: My current role is as a process chemist at pharmaceutical company GSK where I am also the small molecule sustainability lead for our US sites. After completing my PhD in natural product synthesis at University of Utah, I studied medicinal chemistry at my postdoctoral position at the University of Pennsylvania. I have had three jobs since leaving academia and believe removing the stigma of finding a role that fits your passion is pivotal for success. I have been part of the AWIS mentor circles as a mentee and mentor over the past six years, finding them a great place to connect, network, provide support and space for others to express shared challenges.

Denise Femia

Associate Professor of Chemistry, La Salle University

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

Bio: Denise Femia is an associate professor of chemistry at La Salle University. She uses equity-minded teaching practices in her organic and inorganic chemistry classes. She received her undergraduate degree from SUNY Geneseo and her Ph.D. from University of Southern California. Her Ph.D. advisor was Prof. Mark Thompson. She worked as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Colgate University for two years before securing a tenure-track position at La Salle. She involves undergraduates in her organometallic chemistry research.

Nicolette Heinsinger

Senior scientist, Merck

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development

Bio: I've been a Senior Scientist at Merck in the Neuroscience Early Discovery department for the past 3 years. As a senior scientist, I build and characterize both in vitro and in vivo models of neurodegeneration, as well as execute and lead in vivo PK/PD studies. Before Merck, I was a PhD student at Jefferson University studying spinal cord injury and neuropathic pain. I'm happy to chat about navigating life as a grad student as well as career transitions or careers in industry.