Mentoring Program 2025-2026

Mentor Bio's

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

Tuesday Evening Circle
Virtual: Fully Online Meetings

Laura Ohl
Scientist and Content Developer, Non Profit

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development, Early Career Discovery, Stewardship

Hager Mohamed
Scientist, Gylden USA Corporation

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.

Kayla Socarras
Senior Scientist, Industry

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

Bio: Kayla Socarras is senior scientist at Eurofins working within the pharmaceutical industry. Before, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the Broad Institute within the Translational Genomics Group of the Medical and Population Genomics Platform. Her researched there focused on developing a federated network for variant matching and enhancing pipelines for rare disease analysis. Prior to her post-doc, Kayla earned her Ph.D. in Garth Ehrlich's lab in the Department of Microbiology & Immunology at Drexel University College of Medicine. There she created 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.

Wednesday Evening Circle
Virtual: Fully Online Meetings

Ankita Patil

Senior Scientist, Johnson and Johnson

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development

Bio: I received my Master's and PhD in Neuroscience from Drexel University, after which I decided to transition from academia to industry. I am currently a senior scientist in bioassay method development at Johnson & Johnson, working primarily in oncology. Prior to this, I was an analytical development scientist at Passage Bio, a biotech focused on gene therapy for neurological disorders. I have been a part of AWIS-PHL for nine years, and have held numerous Board positions during this time. AWIS-PHL's Mentoring Circle Program is particularly close to my heart, having participated both as a mentee and a mentor. I am happy to discuss aspects of professional development, such as career transitions and networking.I have also learned a lot from the mentors and mentees I have interacted with over the years, and I am excited to bring those shared insights to this upcoming program cycle.

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.

Roshell Muir

Program Director for Faculty Development, Wake Forest University School of Medicine

Mentoring Interests: Professional development, Mentoring relationships, Work-Life integration, Career transitions.

Bio: Dr. Roshell Muir is the Program Director for Faculty Development at Wake Forest University College of Medicine (WFUSM), where she leads strategic initiatives to enhance faculty excellence through program innovation, mentorship, and research engagement. Dr. Muir brings over 15 years of experience in immunology research and academic leadership to this role and is a national leader in supporting academic medicine professionals at all career levels. Her accomplishments—including spearheading the publication of several impactful publications in medical and biomedical journals across specialty areas, mentoring trainees, and launching career development programs for early careeresearchers—reflect a strong dedication to fostering faculty growth, scholarly productivity, and institutional impact. Before coming to WFUSM, Dr. Muir was an Assistant Professor with dual appointments in the Department of Family, Community, and Preventive Medicine and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, and the Director of Research in the Office of Community Health at Drexel College of Medicine. She has been an AWIS member for the past 8 years and is currently a member of the AWIS Chapter Advisory Committee and the Mentoring Committee of the AWIS Philadelphia chapter, where she has served in multiple leadership roles, including President. Dr. Muir was
also a recipient of the 2022 AWIS Meridian Award which recognizes STEM professionals whoare strong leaders and innovative thinkers.

Wednesday Evening Circle
University City/CHOP

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.

Samar Chehimi
Reserch Specialist D, University of Pennsylvania

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

Bio: I am a Brazilian-Lebanese researcher currently working as a Research Specialist D at the University of Pennsylvania. I have a PhD in Human Genetics from the University of São Paulo and completed my postdoctoral training in Molecular Neuroscience at UPenn. In my current role, I lead multiple lab projects, run wet lab experiments, validate new protocols, mentor undergraduate students (and soon graduate students), and write scientific papers. I have been a member of AWIS for three years and currently serve on the board as Social Media Chair. This will be my first year as a mentor, and I am excited to share my experiences as an international researcher in the U.S. I am especially happy to discuss academic career paths, both within and outside the PI track, and support others navigating their own journeys in science.

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. She 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 has participated in the AWIS-PHL mentoring program as both a mentee and mentor. Prior to her current work, she earned a PhD from Drexel University in Microbiology and Immunology, and an 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
Center City, Old City, Fairmount

Sharon Kirk
Senior Principal Scientist, GSK

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.

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.

Eileen Collyer
Associate Health and Safety Specialist, Biological Safety, Temple U

Mentoring Interests: Career transitions, Professional development

Bio: I earned my PhD in Physiology from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, where I studied how axons sprout new branches after spinal cord injury. My scientific journey then took me to sunny San Diego for a postdoc at UCSD, where I mixed stem cell grafts with rehab strategies, and later to Philadelphia for more postdoctoral work at Drexel University on autonomic dysreflexia. At Thomas Jefferson University, I dove into the astrocytic response to stroke, while also running the lab as lab manager.

After some soul-searching, I traded my pipettes for safety goggles and moved into the biosafety and regulatory world. I now work at Temple University as an Associate Health & Safety Specialist, helping researchers keep their labs (and themselves) safe.

Outside of work, I'm usually off on adventures with my six-year-old daughter and still chasing the mythical "work–life balance." I've been part of Mentoring Circles for six years and love sharing my journey: the good, the bad, and the wonderfully unexpected.