Graduate Student
Peer Mentor Awards
Awards Ceremony - May 6, 2015
Graduate Student Peer Mentor Awards

The Graduate Student Peer Mentor awards provide graduate students the opportunity to be recognized for stellar mentorship qualities. These graduate students are selected based on their ability to mentor undergraduate and/or graduate students in their departments. Selected mentors are honored at an award ceremony with family, friends and colleagues celebrating their accomplishments.

Qualities of a good mentor:

- Willingness to share knowledge, skills, and expertise
- Provides guidance and constructive feedback
- Personal interest in the mentoring relationship
- Values the opinions and initiatives of others
- Motivates through setting a good example
- Looks for ways to improve mentoring skills

Ceremony Agenda - May 6, 2015

4:30   Networking

5:00   Welcome
LaRuth McAfee, Graduate School Assistant Dean for Diversity, Inclusion and Funding

5:05   Keynote Address
Janet Branchaw, Assistant Professor, Kinesiology - see biography, below

5:20   Presentation of the Awards

6:00   Refreshments

JANET BRANCHAW is Assistant Professor of Kinesiology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the Director of the Wisconsin Institute for Science Education and Community Engagement (WISCIENCE), the Associate Director of the NIH-funded Mentor Training Core of the National Research Mentoring Network, and the Chairperson of NSF’s Biology Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) Leadership Committee. Branchaw directs a NSF-funded REU Site program, the Integrated Biological Sciences Summer Research Program, and has developed training curricula for research mentors, Entering Mentoring, 2nd ed., and undergraduate research mentees, Entering Research. Her scholarship focuses on the development, implementation, and evaluation of innovative approaches to undergraduate science education, with a special emphasis on undergraduate research, assessment of student learning and broadening participation in science among underrepresented groups. She holds a B.S. in Zoology from Iowa State University and a M.S. and Ph.D. in Physiology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
Richardson
Addai-Mununkum
Curriculum and Instruction

“Throughout my stay at UW-Madison, I have been actively involved in helping colleague students get all the information need to be successful in their programs.”

Biography:
Richardson Addai-Mununkum is a Ph.D. candidate of Curriculum & Instruction. In 2007, he earned an M.A. in Environmental Management & Policy from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Prior to coming to UW-Madison, Richardson worked as a high school teacher, and a project manager for a non-governmental organization in Ghana. As an educator, Richardson is constantly disturbed by the regrettable abundance of religious conflicts in the world and the effects of such skirmishes on women, children and innocent victims. His ultimate career goal is the development of curriculum and pedagogical tools to help schools foster religious deliberation, and improve dialogue while preparing students to live in a religiously diverse world. Consequently, his current research is focused on religious misrepresentations in schools and their connections to suppression, resentment, insensitivity, and incitement to hatred. Richardson is hopeful that the product of his research will ultimately promote the building of communities that would celebrate religious differences and abhor religious exclusion, marginalization and fanaticism.

Majid Aksari
Computer Sciences

“I enjoy teaching and I enjoy helping students succeed. This is not only personal interest ... I believe that mentoring is morally very valuable.”

Biography:
Majid Aksari is a graduate student in Computer Sciences. His interests include databases and human-computer interaction. Majid obtained a M.S. in Industrial Engineering from UW-Madison. Currently, Majid is working on a project to help analysts perform better when they are dealing with data. His focus is in manufacturing and production systems, specifically real-time optimization of production system scheduling. Majid has always enjoy teaching and mentoring – for him, these activities constitute part of his moral values and provide a concrete way for him to contribute to society. Majid formally started teaching Mathematics and Physics when he was an undergraduate student. In his graduate career, he has served as teaching assistant in many courses. For Majid, his relationship with his students has always been a central focus in his career as a teaching assistant.
Hsun-Yu Chan
Educational Psychology

I have dedicated my graduate student career to my research and mentoring undergraduate and graduate students in different settings.

Biography:
Hsun-Yu Chan is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology. He previously earned a B.Ed. in School Guidance and Counseling from National Changhua University of Education in Taiwan, and Ed.M. in Human Development and Psychology from Harvard Graduate School of Education. Through his fieldwork, Hsun-Yu became fascinated by the delicate yet complex strategies adolescents use to manage peer and family relation. His research interest ranges from teenagers’ peer information management strategies in conversations with parents, the development of depressive symptoms in adolescence and its relation to family processes, to community college students’ learning experiences and academic success. Findings from several of Hsun-Yu’s collaborative research projects have been published in academic journals and presented in international conferences. In his dissertation research, Hsun-Yu studies how teens strike a balance between the needs of peers and parents by managing peer information, and if this process would differ by one’s gender, age, friendship quality, and adherence to family value.

Angela Forgues
Sociology

I have a wonderful network of mentors and advisors ... my only hope is that I may have a similarly positive impact in the lives of my students and peers.

Biography:
Angela Forgues is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology, a NIA pre-doctoral trainee, a student member of the Center for Demography and Ecology, and a M.S. student in the Department of Population Health Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her current research interests sit at the nexus of demography, chronic disease epidemiology, health, aging and life course studies, psychology, biology, and policy. She previously earned a B.A. from Brandeis University where she double majored in Psychology and Health: Science, Society, and Policy (HSSP). Angela’s current research seeks to incorporate social as well as biological measures into studies of health and aging. In her M.S. thesis, Angela uses a gene-environment interaction framework to identify the potential moderating influence of immune system genetics on the effect of psychosocial stress and biological stress on cognitive function and decline in a population enriched for family history of Alzheimer’s Disease.
Stacey Kigar

Molecular and Cellular Pharmacology

"I believe mentoring is a critically important aspect of one’s development as a citizen scientist; it has been my passion to instill a sense of both the “big picture” and self-confidence in individuals seeking a STEM education."

Biography:

Stacey Kigar is a Ph.D. candidate in the Molecular and Cellular Pharmacology Training Program, where she studies epigenetic (gene x environment interactions) programming of juvenile social behavior by the early neonatal environment. She is also the current Vice President of Graduate Women in Science (GWIS), a national organization promoting the advancement and visibility of women in STEM fields. Stacey earned her B.A. in Biology from the University of Chicago, where she studied focal adhesion assembly and peptide therapeutics in leukemic cell lines. Stacey has recently published peer-reviewed work in Brain, Behavior, and Immunity, as well as a review for a special issue of the Journal of Neuroendocrinology discussing the epigenetic programming of mental health risk and resilience. Currently, her research is centered on understanding how adverse early life experiences lead to deleterious outcomes in a rodent model, with special attention to biological sex as a risk factor in the etiology of neurodevelopmental disorders. Stacey uses a variety of molecular and behavioral techniques to explore this topic in terms of epigenetic programming of gene expression in areas of the brain responsible for the formation of social development.

Mark Mederson

Journalism and Mass Communication

“...I returned to school after working for more than 25 years. ...I am pursuing my Ph.D. with the goal of becoming a teacher. There is nothing I enjoy more than helping a student to succeed in the field of study that I love."

Biography:

Mark Mederson is a Ph.D. student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication specializing in media history. Using qualitative content analysis, Mark’s research focuses on U.S. media coverage of the sport of boxing historically, with an emphasis on the presentation of African-Americans and journalism ethics. Mark worked in the television and film industry for more than 25 years before returning to school. During his previous career, Mark was a television sports reporter and anchor for several years where he covered two Super Bowls and the NCAA football national championship. Mark also produced a number of award-winning documentary films which have screened at film festivals across the country and were broadcast on state public television stations, including Wisconsin Public Television.
**Kristin Michels**

Botany

*Mentorship is a key component of my teaching philosophy.*

**Biography:**

Kristin Michels is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Botany working with Dr. Sara Hotchkiss in the Spatial and Temporal Ecology Laboratory. Prior to completing her M.S. in Environmental Studies from San Jose State University where she studied recovering Sequoia sempervirens plant communities following clear-cut harvest in Mendocino County, California, Kristin earned a B.A. in English at the University of Minnesota focusing on Non-Fiction Creative Writing and Cultural Studies. In her dissertation research, Kristin studies the impacts of adjacent land use on the Sylvania Wilderness in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. To estimate these edge effects, Kristin is implementing a novel approach, which combines observations in forest communities over space, using vegetation surveys in transects that cross the Sylvania Wilderness border, and evaluating historic rates of change over time using paleorecords (e.g., pollen, charcoal, carbon) in lake sediments. She hopes her work will inform long-term conservation efforts to maintain biodiversity in wilderness preserves.

---

**Claudia Pereira da Conceição**

Economics

*I learned that international students, like me, might need extra mentorship and I wanted to help them to build a support net far from their home countries.*

**Biography:**

Claudia Pereira da Conceição is a graduate student at the Master’s program in Economics. Her research focus is in Applied Econometrics and Industrial Organization. Claudia also works part-time at the consulting firm Christensen Associates. As a Staff Economist, Claudia conducted economic research and statistical modeling for the litigation and energy practices. Before joining Christensen Associates, Claudia worked on campus at the McBurney Disability Center, where she facilitated Braille translations and software training to assist a Ph.D. student with visual impairment. In May 2014, Claudia co-founded the Economics Masters Student Association (EMSA) to provide students in her program with career development and networking opportunities. In her free time, Claudia enjoys traveling, and learning new languages. She has visited almost 30 countries and she can speak Portuguese, English, Italian, French and Spanish.
Irene Ann Resenly
Curriculum and Instruction

One attribute that stretches across all aspects of my scholarly identity is building strong, sustainable, deep, and thoughtful relationships with others.

Biography:
Irene Ann Resenly is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction department focusing on Social Studies Education. Prior to coming to Madison, she earned a B.A. degree in German Language and Literature, a certificate in Modern Foreign Language (German) Secondary Education, and a Master’s degree in Holocaust Education. She worked as the staff coordinator for a Holocaust survivor, a museum educator at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, and a humanities teacher in Radom, Poland. At UW, she is proud to supervise teacher candidates, work alongside teacher educators in the School of Education, and design and teach the Holocaust course in the College of Letters & Sciences. Her research interests include memory studies, Holocaust education, and teacher education. Irene Ann’s dissertation research will take her to Germany, where she will study how classroom teachers and memorial site educators can collaboratively work to construct meaningful Holocaust curriculum designed for teaching with historic sites of memory. Irene Ann plans to explore what this process of collaboration looks like and how it shapes student learning.

Douglas Ryddner
Mechanical Engineering

...I help the new graduate students in the group adjust to the graduate school lifestyle. One such way is helping get them understand what goes on when beginning a project, how to find relevant research papers, teaching them how to use the programs and formats, which are important to successful research practices.

Biography:
Douglas Thomas Ryddner is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He previously earned a B.A. in Physics, Math, and Astro-Physics as well as a Master’s degree in Mechanical Engineering from UW-Madison. Doug’s research is now focused on boiling bubbly flows and numerical methods, focusing on micro-channel flows. His Master’s degree research was published in the inaugural issue of Emission Control Science and Technology, titled ‘Modeling Urea-Water Solution Droplet Evaporation’. This research was also presented at the CLEERS conference in Michigan, and the ILASS conference in Texas, where it won the Simmons Award for best student presentation.
Jake Walsh

Zoology

I believe that supporting and encouraging people to achieve the goals that they care about is one of my primary callings in life.

Biography:
Jake Walsh is a Ph.D. candidate at the UW Center for Limnology researching the ecology and management of aquatic invasive species. Using the invasive spiny water flea in our own Lake Mendota, Jake has investigated how invasive species’ impacts interact with existing ecosystem stressors. He has applied these investigations in predicting abundance and impact of invasive species, and has used these predictions to develop long-term management solutions, and to estimate the overall economic impact of invasive species. Jake earned the Certificate in Research, Teaching, and Learning from the UW Delta program based on a role-playing game he developed for an upper-level limnology course called World of Watershed Management. Marrying two of his favorite subjects - freshwater ecosystems and Dungeons & Dragons - Jake placed students in the roles of ecosystem stakeholders. This exercise illustrated the complexities of socio-ecological problems and the people involved in solving them; it also gave students confidence in applying the knowledge they had gained in the course to real-world problem solving.

Kegon Teng Kok Tan

Economics

I strongly believe in the benefits of mentoring for undergraduate and masters students who are interested in pursuing doctoral studies.

Biography:
Kegon Teng Kok Tan is an economics graduate student at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, a member of the Human Capital and Economic Opportunity Working Group, and a graduate fellow of the Institute for Research on Poverty. In 2010, he earned his B.S. in Mathematics with Economics at the University of Chicago (2010) and my M.S. in Economics at the University of Wisconsin - Madison (2013). My interests are in the formation and inter-generational transmission of human capital. I study a broad range of human capital measures including cognitive and non-cognitive skills, investigating their impact on socioeconomic outcomes such as education, health, wages, and crime. I also work on inter-generational inequality, examining issues regarding measurement, mechanisms, and trends.
Yi-Cheng Wang
Biological Systems Engineering

Yi-Cheng Wang has a keen interest in mentoring members in the laboratory. He has been actively guiding new coming laboratory members as well as collaborating with them.

Biography:
Yi-Cheng Wang is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Biological Systems Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was also the recipient of CALS Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellowship. His research focuses on synthesizing nanomaterials and applying them to solve food safety issues. Yi-Cheng has been instrumental in developing nanotechnology-based thermal history indicators, which can be used to access the temperature abuse of food and other biological materials. He has brought this technology and led a student team to become one of the finalists and won a ‘People’s Choice’ award in the 2014 Agricultural Innovation Prize competition. This contest was hosted in 2014 by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation to reward innovative plans that address social and agricultural challenges within food systems. As the team leader, his team also became one of the Discovery to Product (D2P) award winners from UW-Madison. His research findings have been published in several of peer-reviewed journals and also helped him win poster awards at the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) annual meeting.

Kaitlin Whitney
Zoology

Mentoring is at the core of my professional interests, a passion that I have actively pursued and set of skills that I’ve worked to hone.

Biography:
Kaitlin Whitney is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Zoology in association with the Holtz Center for Science & Technology Studies. Kaitlin’s interest in the natural world was inspired by experiences in the wetlands and on the beaches of eastern New York, where she grew up. Her desire to bridge environmental science and policy led Kaitlin to earn a degree in international agriculture and ecology from Cornell University. She subsequently conducted research in a wide range of landscapes, including Alaska, India, and Uganda. Before coming to UW-Madison, Kaitlin worked for the USDA Farmer-to-Farmer program in Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. She also worked as a staff scientist for the US EPA Office of Pesticides, focusing on pollinator protection and environmental justice. Her current research examines ecological and anthropogenic drivers of change in insect communities in agricultural landscapes across Wisconsin -- mixing quantitative ecology, conservation biology, ecoinformatics, and science studies.
Dallas Wulf

Physics

In addition to being rewarding and enjoyable, my mentoring experience as a graduate student will help prepare me for my future goals of working as a professor at an undergraduate institution.

Biography:

Dallas Wulf currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Physics Department at UW-Madison, where he studies astrophysical X-ray emission from the Interstellar Medium (ISM). The ISM constitutes all the gas, dust, and fields that fill the space in between stars, and plays an important role in the evolution of our galaxy. This research has two main components: observational and experimental. Observationally, Dallas study the ISM using X-ray detectors launched above the atmosphere on-board sounding rockets in collaboration with NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center. His is also working on an experiment being conducted at Oak Ridge National Laboratory that aims to study the atomic processes thought to be responsible for some of the observed X-ray emission. Here at UW, Dallas has an interest in undergraduate physics education, and has been actively involved in the Delta Program’s teaching and learning community. His future goals include an academic career at a four-year college that will provide a good balance between research and teaching at the undergraduate level.

Hong Yan

Chinese

…it is your peers who know exactly what is going on at your stage and who are the right people to ask for help. Three years have passed and now I am the one who mentors others.

Biography:

Hong Yan is a third-year Ph.D. student in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She previously received her B.A. degree in Chinese Language and Literature at Beijing Normal University, and M.A. in Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Before she came to UW-Madison, Hong was a lecturer at Brandeis University, where she taught Pathways for Chinese Literacy and Contemporary Chinese Literature. Focusing on linguistic typology and language diversity, Hong’s research analyzes languages from different language families, generalizes the rules of each language, compares the rules presented by different languages, and draws the similarities and differences among these languages. She is also interested in endangered language documentation and preservation, and is engaged to protect the disappearing languages and cultures. Her dissertation focuses on the phenomenon of ‘reduplication’, which occurs in many languages, and aims to provide the linguistic field with a deeper understanding of the structure of the world languages. Hong plans to conduct the fieldwork for her dissertation in Southwestern China in near future.
Trevor Young-Hyman
Sociology

"Over the past four years, I have organized the graduate student-led Economic Sociology weekly workshop, providing peers with an opportunity to exchange ideas, share work-in-progress, and develop professional relationships."

Biography:
Trevor Young-Hyman is a Ph.D. candidate in Department of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Trevor is currently conducting research in organizational sociology and the sociology of work. His primary interests center around knowledge-intensive work, power, professional services firms, innovation, teams, and employee ownership. Trevor uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, mixing ethnography with statistical analysis of archival administrative data. His current research examines how varied distributions of ownership and governance rights within firms shape the outcomes of micro-level learning and innovation processes. Trevor has received funding from the National Science Foundation and Employee Ownership Foundation, and his dissertation has been recognized with an Organization Science/INFORMS Dissertation Award.

Megan Zuelsdorff
Population Health

"That very feeling of trust and support has carried me through the very hardest times of my graduate career, and creating that same sense of security for other students is incredibly meaningful to me."

Biography:
Megan Zuelsdorff is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Population Health Sciences at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, where she studies biopsychosocial determinants in aging processes. After earning a B.S. in Zoology and Psychology at the UW-Madison, Megan spent several years as a researcher, first at the Alzheimer’s Disease Center at Northwestern University and then in the UW’s Department of Family Medicine, before returning to earn her graduate degree. Her academic training has been heavily focused on the epidemiology of aging and brain health, and her dissertation research explores sociobehavioral and psychobiological factors in cognitive function and age-related decline, with a particular focus on the identification of modifiable risk factors across the adult life course. As her graduate work draws to a close, Megan looks forward to expanding her research agenda to include socioeconomic and ethnic disparities in aging, cognitive health, and Alzheimer’s disease.
Graduate Student Peer Mentor Awards are sponsored by the Graduate School Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Funding; the Office of Professional Development and Communications; and the Multicultural Graduate Network.

Special thanks to Graduate School Project Assistants Jess Clayton and Miao-Ching Marjorie Liu for contributing their talents, creativity, and passion for serving fellow graduate students.