Dr. Shayla Salzman

Mentoring Philosophy:

The central philosophy of my lab is to provide a safe, inclusive environment where students can become the best versions of themselves personally and professionally and to produce rigorous science of broad impact based on a foundation of mutual respect. I believe people work best, learn best, and produce their best work when they are in an environment of acceptance and support, where they can participate as their whole selves, and their intellect is valued and recognized.

I pride myself on building a diverse lab space where all members and visitors truly feel welcome regardless of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or political beliefs. It is a priority for me to create a comfortable accessible environment and I have sought out training on diversity, equity, and inclusion as a teacher and a research mentor through courses focusing on critical pedagogy, effective mentoring of identity groups including students with disabilities and students who identify as LGBTQ+, and building an inclusive online space. In my career, I have mentored women, students from marginalized backgrounds, students who are following alternative paths, and students who identify as LGBTQ+. In each case made it clear from day one that their whole self is accepted and supported to succeed. I am committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive environment at the institution and in my laboratory.

In addition to being able to comfortably bring one's entire self to the table, it is important to feel as though your contribution to the group is valued. I create a community of learning in my lab group by including all members of the lab in the development, analysis and writing of all projects in the lab. This is done through inviting feedback at all stages of research from conception to presentation in the informal lab meeting setting, including of my own writings and proposals. One particularly helpful component of community research is what I call a data dump where we put up on a white board all the data generated on a project so far and have the whole lab discuss what they see coming out of the results and suggest follow up experiments. In this culture of 'no stupid questions or ideas' I have found a number of brilliant suggestions brought forward from mentees who are not directly on the project. This community of learning builds an interconnected and supportive lab group.

An extension of feeling valued is for mentees to be treated within the larger scientific community as peers. I do this through connecting mentees with my network of collaborators both on individual projects as well as in informal presentations to the lab group. I believe strongly in the power of networking and collaboration and have a large network of international collaborators and their students with whom we meet with over Zoom in lab meetings, sharing research and making connections across continents and across UGA.

Mentoring plan:

Everyone's mentorship needs are different; therefore I tailor mentoring plans to each individual. Mentees are initially provided with a six page lab expectations document that outlines my expectations for a successful grad student/post doc experience and provides the expectations they should have for me. This seeks to demystify the grad school/post doc experience and set clear expectations right at the beginning of the relationship. It is also my goal to establish a culture of self-reflection early in the mentoring relationship in the understanding that individual needs may change over time. In this way, I work with my mentees early in their training to determine an Individual Mentoring Plan (IMP) that includes personal and professional goals. Mentees are asked to complete a National Postdoc Association Core Competences assessment[1] to determine what they consider to be their strengths and areas for growth and a North Carolina

State University Learning Style Assessment[2]. Initial meetings then discuss the mentees professional goals, their ideal mentoring style, and how best we can build on their strengths and work on their growth areas with their professional goals and work-life balance in mind. The IMP is reevaluated on an annual basis with a review of their self-assessment and discussion of what is working and what could be improved.

I ask mentees at all levels to complete the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity's Mentor Map[3] with themselves in the center. This tool seeks to establish an individual within a larger community of support and highlights the multiple aspects of success, including often overlooked components such as emotional support, access to opportunities, safe spaces, and accountability. While I build a strong community within my lab and the department, it is important to me that mentees know that their support network is personalized and should incorporate all aspects of self. I encourage mentees to print this out and to view it as a fluid document that will grow and change over time.

I provide weekly one on one meeting opportunities for all mentees that I make clear is 'their time' that they can structure as they deem most suitable. This time is often used for planning and troubleshooting; however I make it clear that this is not an evaluation but a time where my attention is completely focused on their needs be it research or professional development related.

Weekly lab meetings are a time to build community within the lab and advance individual projects. Lab meetings alternate between strictly scientific meetings and professional development or network building meetings. In the former, mentees present papers of interest or their ideas, plans, data and/or results in a safe environment. When all stages of the scientific process are presented and shared in this environment, lab members build trust with each other and confidence in their abilities. I make a special effort for mentees to see the entire process of producing and dissemination rigorous science and include them in all stages so that they can see that everyone, myself included doesn't always get it right the first time. In that vein, we also use this time to review lab manuscripts and grant proposals so that mentees benefit from the larger groups feedback as well as from witnessing project development. Other network building lab meetings include visiting with different resources across UGA to connect with the opportunities and resources available to mentees.

I believe strongly in integrating mentees in the larger scientific community. In addition to supporting travel to two conferences annually, I have also established a Plant-Insect Group (PIG) at UGA as a forum for an intellectual community with shared interest and network building. These PIG meetings often engage visitors from other labs and Departments at UGA and beyond. This most often looks like guest speakers from my larger network presenting their results or graduate students/ postdocs from other labs presenting their research plans or preliminary data. This is a time to engage with scientists across the career spectrum in a colloquial setting. In this way, mentees leave the lab with a large network of colleagues and an awareness of methodologies even if not used directly in the lab.

[1]https://www.facultydiversity.org/ncfddmentormap; [2]https://www.webtools.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/;
[3]https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/page/CoreCompetencies