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Statement of mentoring philosophy

Nicolas DiLorenzo

Professor, University of Florida

Undoubtedly, one of the most rewarding aspects of my profession is to have the opportunity to mentor some of the brightest minds in our field, and to have the privilege of watching students grow and develop professionally. Nowadays, in order to be an efficient teacher and mentor, an educator needs to resource to many techniques and opportunities that not always present themselves in the most formal setting, such as the classroom. The ability to identify certain situations to be able to create a “teaching moment” is one of the skills I have always admired in some of my greatest mentors. Thus, I am a firm believer that teaching and mentoring extends well beyond the classroom. I always take advantage of teaching opportunities when they arise, whether formally as guest lecturer, participating in short-term graduate courses taught overseas or informally in day-to-day interactions with my graduate students and interns. For the more formal teaching approaches, I envision the classroom to be a place of thinking, discovery and life-long learning. During my college years, I was fortunate to enjoy the expertise of some excellent teachers. Since then, I realized the impact that teaching techniques can have on the learning experience, and how much influence the teacher can have in the future of a student, not only from the professional, but also from the personal standpoint.

One of my main educational goals when lecturing in the field of animal science is to relate theory with practical applications that students encounter in their day-to-day work experience. I like to initiate students with the practical aspects of animal nutrition and eventually take them to the biochemical principles. This connects subjects such as physics and chemistry with daily observations. My teaching objectives are to be able to transmit my passion for the animal sciences and agriculture, to connect all the segments of these disciplines in a holistic approach, and to provide the students with the tools needed to become the leaders of the animal agriculture industry in the future.

While mentoring graduate and undergraduate students is highly rewarding, the responsibility that comes with contributing to the professional and human development of the next generation of scientists is great and should not be taken lightly. Mentoring goes far beyond providing guidance in terms of research projects, data analysis or reviewing dissertations and manuscripts. The impact that a mentor has on his/her mentees shapes the future of that person, not only professionally, but it can also impact personal life decisions and the future ability of the mentee to become a successful mentor. My mentoring philosophy involves a full commitment from both mentor and mentee to partner towards the common goal of providing a round education that goes beyond the discipline of study. There is nothing more rewarding in my current profession, than witnessing that moment

in which the mentee becomes a peer, and begins develop a reputation in his/her field. In my opinion the best recipe for success in a mentor/mentee relationship is to never lose sight of the fact that the student being mentored will, eventually, become a peer, thus a good balance of respect and guidance is constantly needed.

The amount of time and effort involved in the training and mentoring of students and interns is significant; however, this plays an important role in their development as future scientist. Every student and intern is different; thus, there is no “one size fits all” approach when it comes to effective mentoring. I have personally realized that the mentoring experience provides ample of opportunities for continuous improvement. If the mentor is receptive enough to the feedback of the mentee, the more opportunities one experiences, the better the mentor becomes. During my tenure at the University of Florida, I have been fortunate to be involved in the graduate committee of 36 PhD students (14 as chair or co-chair) and 29 MS students (15 as chair or co-chair), of which a total of 48 have graduated already. Several of them are already in academia and it is even more rewarding watching them grow and develop their own graduate program. In addition to my mentoring activities with graduate students, I have established an internship program to attract undergraduate students interested in a career in Animal Sciences. I have found this to be a very effective way to recruit future graduate students, and increase the international collaborations. Since my arrival to UF in 2010, I have mentored 61 short-term scholars, student interns, and visiting scholars from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, and the U.S. The enriching experiences and memories gained in each one these mentoring experiences are some of my most cherished treasures. They are a continuous source of motivation, and a constant reminder of the impact that effective mentoring can have on the lives of young professionals.