

Faculty often think of our role in mentoring as teaching young scientists how to get to where we are, as PIs in our own labs. How to plan and run experiments. How to publish results. How to write a grant. How to prepare a job talk. How to navigate the path to tenure.

But we need to stop and remember that it's not just about where we and they are **going**. We happen to **be** somewhere already and it's vital to think about what brought us each to this point and incorporate that into our plans moving forward.

This was one of the central messages I took from a phenomenal workshop on Culturally Aware Mentoring that a group of us participated in this spring. My thanks to Rainbo Hultman for identifying the opportunity and arranging for the INI to be involved.

Led by Dr. Angela Byars-Winston, Professor of Internal Medicine at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, this training is the first evidence-based program training specifically for scientific mentorship. The methods have been demonstrated to be effective and are tailored for scientific researchers. Our cohort was part of an NIH-funded study about different formats and effectiveness. We met via Zoom for two sessions, each three hours. We also committed to doing some preparation in advance, including reading, viewing videos, and preparing our own [Culture Box](#), which is an exercise in identifying and sharing defining elements from your life history or family culture.

I could go on at length about what I took away from this training. But I also wanted you to hear from some of the INI faculty who participated.

### **Dorit Kliemann, assistant professor of psychological and brain sciences**



It was helpful for me as a junior faculty member to have this training with colleagues: I could hear how other colleagues already approach culturally aware mentoring, hear about the challenges and learn new strategies. I particularly enjoyed discussing how we plan to use these new tools and insights. I have five new students joining the lab in the summer (e.g., through the [BSURP](#) program). Before the workshop, I would have probably not addressed cultural backgrounds up front. Now I am planning to set aside time for this discussion. It is essential not just for new lab members to feel welcomed and included but for everyone in

the lab to be open and aware of how our backgrounds influence us. I am very grateful for the opportunity to attend the workshop! We need to create mentoring space that is culturally aware and consider the potential impacts on personal and scientific development. This workshop equipped me better to do so.

*Recommended resource:* [Culture Box](#)

### **Andy Frank, associate professor of anatomy and cell biology**



I thought it was an excellent two-session training. The challenge now? We need to figure out how to incorporate some changes in our mentoring. The CAM training raised my self-awareness about what it means to be a mentor who is supportive of a diverse and inclusive workplace. It also raised my awareness of what a diverse and inclusive workplace means to different people. We do not often broach personal subjects with coworkers because we feel like it is not professional. But the truth is, none of us shed our personal identities in lab – and there are definitely ways to be open to those types of conversations. Letting trainees know who you are (or where you come from) opens space for them to express who

they are and where they come from. That can facilitate a more inclusive environment. I think today's trainees are far ahead of where my graduate school cohort was in terms of cultural awareness. The fact that we are having these uncomfortable conversations is a positive development. The same issues that negatively impacted diversity, equity, and inclusion were around in the past, but they were never addressed adequately. So, they persisted. Sometimes the place where we need to get is on the other side of serious or uncomfortable conversations. *Recommended resource:* [A Tale of "O"](#) video

**Joyce Goins-Fernandez, Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics-Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics**



The overall take-away was that students manifest racism in the lab and mentors should not be afraid to address this difficult topic. It's important for PIs to become aware of their own internalized biases. Then you can have more positive interactions with students of color and you're less likely to use offensive language. Being open and honest about your own journey also opens the door to address complicated topics. You can acknowledge that this is not simplistic. Tell your students "I may make mistakes but I want you to know I'm here for this, doing the work." Being a Person of Color in this country means inheriting a narrative of prejudice, regardless of personal accomplishments. I wish my colleagues had a better understanding of how racism impacts People of Color outside of and inside the research lab. This workshop included useful strategies for how to address race and racism in the research lab.

*Recommended resource:* [Origins of Race in the USA](#) video

**Rainbo Hultman, assistant professor of molecular physiology and biophysics**



I was fortunate to get great training during my postdoctoral studies in mentoring students of different backgrounds, but I don't always have the language and resources to talk to colleagues and to be on same page in terms of advocating for students. I think this training brought our community much closer when it comes to inclusion. Being evidence-based, this training is different from the kinds of trainings many of us had had before; it engaged people cognitively and emotionally, and we role-played some challenges many of us may not necessarily face in everyday academia but are nonetheless critically important. There's such a broad spectrum in the academic community of where people come from on these topics. I think this training more than any other I've experienced helped people to understand and engage in productive ways to support an inclusive environment, especially with regard to racial diversity. It's important that we keep the conversation and the learning going, and that's exactly what we're planning to do.

*Recommended resource:* I am sharing a piece written by a mentor of mine and a companion article provided during the trainings:

[For Black Scientists, the Sorrow Is Also Personal](#) (Cell, July 23, 2020)

[Racism's Psychological Toll](#) (New York Times, June 24, 2015)

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As mentors, we owe it to ourselves and our trainees to keep learning and growing and expanding our vision for mentorship. I encourage you to connect with the resources our colleagues have shared here and consider what your next step is on the journey to inclusion and belonging for everyone in our labs.

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