



# MENTORING STATEMENT

This statement was inspired by [Dr. Emily Sessa](#), who has been a role model for much of my journey at the University of Florida.

## **Mentoring philosophy**

My mentoring philosophy rests upon three pillars: individuality, respect, and support. **Firstly**, I understand that every trainee is unique and, as such, our mentoring relationship will be a product of the interaction between our two sets of traits. I impose very few top-down restrictions on how our relationship will develop, and the path through academia which is best for you. **Secondly**, I have the utmost respect for my lab members as people and as scientists. We each have our own experiences and expertise, and we learn from each other. I recognize the inherent power dynamic in mentor-mentee relationships, but try to use that power to instill in my trainees a feeling of independence and confidence. **Lastly**, I am unconditionally supportive of my lab members. Cordiality, support, and inclusivity are more important than scientific productivity. I care more about my lab members feeling welcome, happy, and supported than I do about their output. Science is fantastic, but not at the cost of your wellbeing. All members of our lab must feel safe and welcome in the laboratory, in the field, and at conferences. I consider my lab to be my academic family, and we should all support each other accordingly. Disrespectful behavior is not tolerated under any circumstances. I try my best to support my trainees regarding hardships that I have never experienced, providing unique resources for underrepresented and underserved groups, neurodiverse trainees, and those who are taking a non-tradition academic path.

It is important to remember that your lab mates are not your competitors – you should be just as happy about their successes as they are of their own, and vice versa. The “nice people finish last” trope might suggest that there is a negative relationship between friendliness and productivity. There is not. Many of the most successful scientists flourished because of collaboration, cooperation, and altruism. Sure, there are some parasites at the top, but that doesn’t mean it is a behavioral strategy we should emulate.

## **Mentoring style**

I invite my graduate students to study any research question they desire, as long as it involves some aspect of animal behavior and/or infectious diseases. My job is to help you discover the unique set of research questions and expertise that will demonstrate your individuality as a scientist and your value to the field. Then, together we will discover what path through academia (research, teaching, training, collaborations, etc.) will lead you to your desired career. I strive to set an example of positive work-life balance for everyone in my lab. I listen to heavy metal, I read comic books, I juggle. We are all unique people with our own hobbies and interests, and that should be celebrated. I meet weekly with my trainees one-on-one, and we have a weekly lab meeting to discuss papers, current events in the field, present practice talks, etc. I make it very clear that our lab meeting is a judgement-free safe space. There is no reason to be embarrassed for not having learned a topic yet. Questions are encouraged, especially dumb questions.