

EDITORIAL

Mentorship: The Bond that Brings Us Together

Gary L. Dunbar

Program in Neuroscience and Department of Psychology, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

By the time you read this, the 37th annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience will be underway, or will have come and gone. This year also marks the 16th anniversary of Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience (FUN), the parent organization of JUNE. Like many of you, I look forward to the SfN meeting, not just to learn more about neuroscience and how to teach neuroscience more effectively, but also to network with old and new friends, and especially, to meet up with colleagues like you at the FUN Social. This event is filled with colleagues who share many of the same values, primarily, a commitment to undergraduate teaching and research in neuroscience. There is a unique connection and sense of empathy between FUN members because we share many of the same problems and concerns (e.g., funding for interdisciplinary programs) as well as the same joys and triumphs (e.g., the outstanding poster presentations by our undergraduates). But more than anything else, the critical bond between colleagues in FUN is our shared passion to be an effective mentor. **There is no greater feeling of satisfaction in our profession than to watch our students grow and develop into outstanding scholars and citizens.** To share with them the joy of discovery when supervising their first research project and to watch with pride when they lucidly explain the complex concepts underlying their research when they are presenting at SfN and/or the FUN poster sessions is a peak experience for any mentor.

It is hard to deny a sense of “parental” satisfaction when we are able to take a student who may be floundering in his or her studies, or lacking direction or motivation in the early part of his or her college experience, and be able to provide the guidance and nurturing that allows them to blossom into energetic and highly-productive scholars. In many cases, mine included, this stems from a sense of “giving back,” because we, too, were the lucky recipients of the care and guidance of a mentor who made a huge difference in our lives. One such person who helped me in this way was Don Stein, who was my mentor during the four years I was a graduate student at Clark University.

Don was like a strict parent, who demanded the best of his students, and yet, could not disguise his genuine concern and compassion for them. It was easy “going the extra mile” for this man, because he gave of himself in so many ways. Don forced his students to “think outside the box,” and encouraged us to explore new explanations for even some of the presumably “solved” problems in neuroscience. Don taught by example, constantly challenging accepted explanations and paradigms in his writings and in his talks and comments at open forums. He was also an exemplary role model for mentoring students.

A glimpse of Don Stein’s career can be gleaned from a

recent cover story in the September 26th issue of the *Wall Street Journal*. It aptly portrays his struggles as a neuroscience researcher and his subsequent triumphs. However, “the rest of the story” could have been about the lasting influence his mentorship has had on undergraduate neuroscience. To some extent, all of us associated with FUN and JUNE have benefitted indirectly from Don Stein’s influential mentorship. More specifically, I am referring to the impact his mentorship has had on the founding President of FUN and the founding Senior Editor of JUNE, Julio Ramirez.

Julio often expresses publicly the profound influence Don Stein’s mentorship has had on his career. Julio’s strong motivation to be politically active on behalf of undergraduate neuroscience is, to a large extent, the fruits of seeds planted long ago by Don Stein. Those of us who have attended all 16 FUN meetings (often identifiable by being a hair or two higher on the gray scale) realize how critical Julio’s initiative was in the formation and development of FUN, and, subsequently, JUNE. It was the type of thing his mentor has done, albeit under different circumstances.

Mentorship is extremely important to Julio. Nothing speaks louder about his commitment to mentorship than the extraordinary time and effort he has put into making SOMAS (Support for Mentors and their Students) such a successful program, especially for underrepresented minorities in neuroscience. He has “given back” exponentially, primarily because the genuine sense of fulfillment he gets by helping others succeed.

I have enormous respect and admiration for Julio, and for my other fellow FUN colleagues, all of whom have a genuine passion for mentoring undergraduate students. Mentorship is the bond that brings us together. Like many of you, I am looking forward to seeing my FUN colleagues at this year’s Social. I will miss those of you who cannot make the meeting this year, but I know your heart will be with us and that the mutual bond we share will always keep us close. FUN has served as a great lifeline for those of us who strive to be good mentors for our students. Whether our motivation is to “give back” or simply to help others, our efforts, like those of Don Stein and Julio Ramirez, often have a profound effect, not only on an individual basis, but over time, they can produce a ripple effect that helps make our world a better place to live.

Address correspondence to: Dr. Gary L. Dunbar, Program in Neuroscience and Department of Psychology, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859. Email: Gary.Dunbar@cmich.edu

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