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Fast Five with the TFSC

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## Fast Five with the TFSC, April 2023

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Wally Cordes Teaching and Faculty Support Center

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# Fast Five with the TFSC

A Newsletter for First Year Faculty at the University of Arkansas

## APRIL 2023 THEME: THE VALUE IN MENTORING HONORS STUDENTS

This month we'll share information from professors who are known throughout campus for their commitment to mentoring honors students. We have a bonus entry this month!

### 1. Dr. Molly Rapert, Associate Professor, Marketing, Sam M. Walton College of Business:



I have loved the Honors thesis process from the very first year that it was in Walton. I typically advise seven students and challenge them to develop a rigorous piece of research that they will be proud of for years to come. I am delighted to say that last year, four of the seven were awarded research grants, one was selected as the recipient of the Walton Outstanding Thesis Award, and another was selected as the recipient of the Walton Outstanding Poster Award. I say this not as a point of pride but rather as an encouragement that the Honors

process is one that can bring you joy, a sense of accomplishment, and a chance to make a difference in the lives of students. There are numerous benefits to faculty, but I'll limit this to discussing three. First, it is an **opportunity to get to know a student more deeply than the classroom often allows**. These relationships can be impactful for both the student and the faculty member, most often producing friendships that last for decades. Second, helping a student through the research process, teaching them to bring together disparate pieces of unstructured data in a **meaningful way is a skill they can take with them for life**. I have a former thesis student pursuing her doctorate at the University of Chicago now ... and students working in analytical jobs across the marketing spectrum ... and I find joy in knowing that I played a role in making the research process meaningful and fun. Third, I do not require the student to pursue research in my particular area of interest. I let them pick their own topics and I focus on teaching them the process of doing research. This means that every year, **I get to learn something really fun about seven areas that are new to me**. While I guess this might be viewed by some as inefficient, for me, it keeps me energized. If I am asking my students to have a lifelong enthusiasm for learning, what better way to ask than having them play a role in my own lifelong learning. I strongly encourage you to jump into this opportunity: the deep relationships, the chance to make research fun, and the exposure to new topics are just the beginning of all the benefits to be gained.

### 2. Dr. Paul D. Adams, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology, Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences:

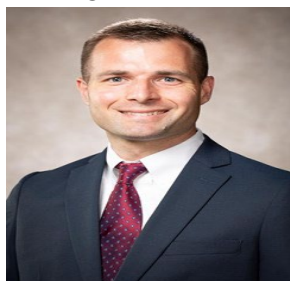
As the Honorable Shirley Chisholm stated so eloquently, "*Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth...*". My view on service has always been one in which I should progress in all aspects of my career in a manner that may benefit humankind. I can think of no greater aspect of "*Service*", then to serve my students through my role as mentor to them, not only in the classroom, but outside it as well. But what can be the impact of mentoring? First, my philosophy on mentoring is that it is more than just providing occasional help. The impact of mentoring can be seen by it being an ongoing (*Hopefully Lifelong*) relationship of learning, dialog, challenge, and love



between an older and younger individual. This aspect of my philosophy is what has translated to the development of personal relationships between myself and many of my students, as I have tried to guide them through their professional growth, and it has also helped me by developing relationships with several older individuals in my life who have and continue to help me with my professional growth. It is also important to note that as a mentor does not have to look like his/her mentee. As I reflect on my professional journey, I consider my strongest mentors to have been people such as Mary D. Barkley, Distinguished University Professor Emerita, M. Roger Clapp University Professor Emerita of Arts & Sciences, and Professor Emerita of Chemistry, Case Western Reserve University, and Robert E. Oswald, James Law Professor of Molecular Medicine, who served as my Ph.D. Advisor and Post-Doctoral Advisor, respectively. Neither of these individuals looked like me, however, they provided something for me that very few older people in my professional life gave me...they showed that they CARED about my professional, as well as my personal growth as a biochemist. However, I would be remiss if I did not point out the fact that it is important, as an African American biochemist, to understand that to have younger people who DO look like me, see me in my professional capacity can be impactful from a mentoring standpoint. This is reflected prominently as recently as the 2021 data from the National Science Foundation survey of Earned Doctorates which shows that only ~2.3% of earned doctorates in chemistry are earned by African-Americans (<https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf23300/data-tables#group3>). Therefore, it has, and will remain my philosophy to continue to do good science, while fostering an environment that ALL my students feel comfortable in terms of their critical-thought development, professional growth, as well as an “Open door” so that they feel that they can be mentored/advised through their successes and challenges. However, this is particularly important for my mentees who do look like me because it cannot be argued that the lack of diversity in STEM disciplines is rooted in the foundation that many students do not feel like they “belong” when they are in competitive academic environments and see so few faculty members who look like them. Another aspect of mentoring has been to help guide/advise mentees on potential opportunities, through STEM disciplines, can be available to them as they move beyond undergraduate, as well as graduate education. In my case, I did not realize that I could have a career as a scientific researcher until I met Dr. Barkley, whom I met as an undergraduate student at Louisiana State University. She is the mentor who explained to me that I could use what I was learning in my organic, analytical and biochemistry classes to learn how to ask scientific questions that had yet to be answered. I want to continue to let those students whom I engage know that they too can accomplish goals that they never thought possible for themselves. I firmly believe I have a responsibility to help guide my mentees’ development, as well as educate them on all possibilities. I feel a responsibility to continue to motivate my mentees and encourage them to work through the challenges they may face and to understand that short-term challenges can lead to long-term successes.

### **3. Dr. Kelly Sullivan, Associate Professor, Industrial Engineering Department, College of Engineering:**

Working with honors students is one of the most rewarding parts of my job. Given that my own



experience as a University of Arkansas honors student and undergraduate researcher was impactful in leading me to pursue an academic career, I find it especially fulfilling to be able to provide similar experiences to honors students while introducing them to research and graduate school opportunities. Since 2012, I have mentored 10 honors graduates and worked closely with over 40 other honors students through my *Honors Research Experience* courses, which seek to equip students with skills for a successful undergraduate research experience. Working with these students has proven

to be a great way of attracting skilled graduate students to our department, and it has also offered some

immediate benefits to my research program. Whereas a more conventional approach to mentoring honors research might be to engage students in pre-structured tasks within ongoing research projects, I have found it especially enriching to advise honors students on research efforts that are a bit more explorational in nature and driven by the student's own interests (yet also connected to my expertise). Both approaches can benefit the mentor: Whereas pre-structured tasks may contribute more immediately to scholarship output, guiding students on more explorational topics has also inspired new ideas and generated new collaborations that led to longer-term research efforts.

**4. Dr. Kelly Way, Assistant Director of the School of Human Environmental Sciences and Associate Professor, Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, and Life Sciences:**

I believe that mentorship starts with students viewing me as a person and not just a faculty member who is teaching their class. I start my classes by introducing myself via a "me sheet". I put together a PowerPoint slide of pictures, quotes, memes etc. that represent who I am, so students get to know me and understand what makes me who I am. I share this with them and ask them in class: based on this, what do you think I value as a person? It's a great way to start discussions and have them realize I have a life and am not in my office answering emails at 2am! I then assign the "me sheet" as their first assignment of the semester, so I can get to know each of them and really customize my lectures and examples to their lives and interests. If the class isn't too big, I have students share their me sheets so they can start building peer relationships. Relationships pave the path to mentorships, so we have to start with building strong relationships with our students. My last bit of advice is always make time to meet with a student and listen to their ideas and thoughts. We never have enough time in the day, so invite them to walk around campus with you or walk with you to your next meeting or class, go get a coffee or tea, meet outside on a nice day, but by all means, make yourself accessible and set that example for our leaders of tomorrow.



**5. Rachel Glade, Clinical Assistant Professor and Program Director for Communication Sciences and Disorders, College of Education and Health Professions:**

Caution, working with Honors students may lead to increased productivity and improved job satisfaction!



In truth, working with Honors students is one of the highlights of my job here at the University of Arkansas. I began working with Honors students several years ago because I really needed help with data collection. Initially, I had no idea what I was doing on the Honors side of things; I just knew I needed help and I was willing to dedicate some time to try to figure it out. My initial fear of commitment to Honors students quickly transitioned to feelings of motivation and optimism and now I look forward to working with Honors students each year. Benefits to faculty include opportunities to:

- Collaborate with the top students on campus
- Network and brainstorm with faculty across campus
- Be more productive through presenting and publishing with Honors Students
- Secure grant funding (e.g., faculty equipment and technology grants and research team grants) for projects and activities that can contribute to promotion and tenure
- Assist students to secure grant funding for research, travel, and conference/workshop presentations

- Receive Mentor stipends for student grants which can be used for things such as hardware, software, faculty/student travel, reference materials, supplies, labor, and publication fees (e.g., the mentor stipend for Honors College Research Grants is \$1,500)

The benefits listed above are not exhaustive. However, faculty should know: the joy of seeing a student understand a new concept they initially thought was out of reach; the pride of supporting a student while they present their work at a conference; the thrill of knowing that you are positively impacting the future of your profession through the work completed; the opportunity to be there when a family member proudly watches their student present their work; and the gratitude you feel for the opportunity to be one small part of each amazing Honors student's journey, is nothing short of priceless.

**6. Noah Billig, Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture, Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design:**



The Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design is quite student focused—most faculty have substantial teaching loads and teach intensive design studios and seminars. Mentoring honors students is a natural extension of this student-centered culture in our School. However, I think there are several distinct benefits for faculty mentoring honors students regardless of one's department or college. I find students' projects often connect to my scholarship and teaching interests. This allows both the students and me to dive deeper into topics than we can in a studio or seminar. I find the best students also push me into new literature and modes of inquiry. They often ask excellent probing questions as they research topics and develop their projects. This results in not only rich conversations, but new learning for me. Students also produce valuable outcomes. Their honors theses and capstones have been presented at conferences and public venues and published in peer-reviewed and professional journals. Of course, there are also the broader benefits of contributing to the larger intellectual campus community.