

# The NICHD Connection

## Meet a Mentor with Dr. Chad McCormick



*Left to right: Roxana Taginya, Chad McCormick, Rachel Zemel, and Monil Ghodasra*

### October 2015

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#### EDITOR IN CHIEF

Shana R. Spindler, PhD  
Shana.Spindler@gmail.com

#### LAYOUT & DESIGN

Nichole Swan

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

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Sampley)

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Chad McCormick, PhD  
Yvette Pittman, PhD

Have you ever wanted to hear your mentor's thoughts? Understand what drives his or her passion for mentoring? Well, so did we. And whose better mind to peek into than the 2015 Fellow Mentor of the Year, Dr. Chad McCormick, postdoctoral fellow in the Zimmerberg lab. Dr. McCormick studies Type II Diabetes, specifically how insulin resistance develops in human and mouse fat cells. While he develops new microscopy methods to study adipose tissue, he also finds time to be an exemplary mentor. Dr. McCormick was gracious enough to steal a few more minutes of his time to offer his mentoring perspectives in a Q&A with *The NICHD Connection*:

#### ***In one or two sentences, can you sum up your mentoring philosophy?***

Every mentee's needs are different, so understanding his or her needs is a crucial part of the mentoring process. As a mentor, my job is to give the mentee every opportunity to thrive and share with him or her the excitement I bring to my work.

*(continued on page 3)*

## Letter from the Editor

Was Yoda a good mentor? Take a brief moment to really think about this question. Did Yoda, one of the most recognizable mentors in the *Star Wars* storyline, do a good job at mentoring?

Please don't hate me when I say this, but probably not. He may have produced some of the most memorable quotes—like EVER—but how many times did his mentorship philosophy fail? Yoda's approach to mentorship consisted of pointing out a "Padawan's" flaws before declaring that he or she shouldn't be a Jedi. That didn't turn out so well for young Anakin Skywalker, who ultimately became... SPOILER ALERT...Darth Vader.

I already know what you're thinking: *Anakin's actual mentor was Obi-Wan Kenobi*. Good ole' Ben Kenobi doesn't fare so well on the mentorship scale either, I'm afraid. When stuck in the Dagobah system, Obi-Wan proclaims that if Luke Skywalker leaves his training session with Yoda to save his best friends from certain death, Obi-Wan won't be there to help. You're on your own, kid. Probably not the greatest of mentoring moments, Obi-Wan.

Joking aside—because I really do enjoy the Yoda and Obi-Wan characters in *Star Wars*—is it up to the mentor to decide who would

make a good scientist, or how a student should proceed through a career? I would argue: not at all. I think a good mentor can identify and strengthen the qualities within a student that will help him or her succeed in the sciences, or with any career choice the trainee makes.

Our 2015 Fellow Mentor of the Year, Dr. Chad McCormick, has several ideas to offer on this topic. Check out the [Q&A featuring Dr. McCormick's mentoring perspectives](#) on the front page of this issue.

To help reinforce the mentor-mentee relationship within the NICHD Division of Intramural Research, fellows will soon have access to a new Annual Progress Report system for mentees and mentors to complete each year online. For more information, Dr. Yvette Pittman, associate director of the NICHD Office of Education, describes the initiative on [page 5](#).

To mentors past, present, and to be: For your help, we thank you. (yeah, you know what voice to use)

Your Editor in Chief,  
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Please send questions, comments, and ideas to [Shana.Spindler@gmail.com](mailto:Shana.Spindler@gmail.com).

## Meet a Mentor with Dr. Chad McCormick

*(continued from page 1)*

### ***What motivates you to be an active mentor?***

As a first generation college graduate, I believe a strong influence for me was the interaction with numerous mentors in the past and present. I used to pride myself on the fact that I “did it all on my own” until I realized the impact that parents, family, friends, advisors, and colleagues had on my career. I am also passionate about teaching and addicted to seeing mentees connect the dots on observations based off of their hypotheses.

### ***How do you keep trainees excited and on track with their research, even during data ruts?***

Every failure brings us one step closer to success. Having had data ruts in the past (a prerequisite for obtaining a PhD, I believe), I knew it was all about attitude and the long objective. I remind the mentee about the big picture and how important his or her input is to the final goal of the project.

### ***How do you balance the time between research, writing, service, and mentoring activities?***

I can honestly say that I don't. This is why I have built a support network during my time at NIH to try to better balance all these activities. This network includes, but is not limited to: my wife Kelly and our kids Connor and Caleb, my advisor Joshua Zimmerberg, my “professional mentor” Staff Scientist Paul Blank, my collaborators, my labmates, and my friends. I used to forgo sleep to try to balance these things until I realized an important fact of life: “good enough and completed” always beats “perfect and incomplete.”

### ***What's the hardest part about being a good mentor? How do you overcome it?***

Mentee apathy. We all remember being teenagers and going through a phase where we couldn't care less about X or Y. But everyone cares about “something.” I try to find that “something” as a bridge to sharing what gets me excited about science/research and what good we can do for a lot of people if we work together.

*(continued on page 4)*

## Meet a Mentor with Dr. Chad McCormick (continued from page 3)

### ***Tell us about a time when a mentor helped you.***

I can't tell you the number of times I have called Paul Blank at around 10 PM to ask practical questions about "what is the next step I should take on this experiment given surprising result X." Everyone deserves a Paul in his or her life—someone who has gone above and beyond to help mentees for so long that it becomes a reflex. I hope that years of active mentoring will help me to be able to mentor so naturally and effectively that the process becomes a reflex.

### ***If you could give one piece of advice to other mentors, what would it be?***

Equality is not fairness. Equality of opportunity is. Meet every mentee at his or her level and provide an environment to let him or her shine.

### ***On the flip side, if you could give one piece of advice to mentees, what would it be?***

Be greedy. Get input from as many mentors as possible. The recommendations I give to mentees are based on my personal bias about the importance of the biological and biophysical sciences in and out of the clinic. As an example, I was privileged to have a student this summer who was not sure if he wanted to pursue biomedical engineering or medicine in the future. I am not an engineer, nor am I a medical doctor, so I made sure to develop connections with people on campus that fit the student's criteria, to allow him the opportunity to hear and experience firsthand what made him passionate about science. It NEVER hurts to ask someone you admire for a few minutes of his or her time; that person's experiences can help guide you in your career decisions. That, and if you are in NICHD, talk with Yvette Pittman. She is amazing at her job and will help guide you through career options better than anyone I have ever met!



# NEW Annual Progress Report for NICHD Postdoctoral Fellows

By Yvette Pittman, PhD

The Division of Intramural Research will soon launch an online Annual Progress Report (APR) system for intramural trainees at the postdoctoral level. As we think about the importance of effective mentoring for scientists earlier in their careers, with the encouragement of our scientific director, we created this electronic system with a specific goal in mind—to facilitate strong training relationships between fellows and their mentors. The APR will provide a platform to focus on scientific, career, and professional development while ensuring that all training goals are being met while fellows are at NICHD.

Each year as part of the reappointment process, all postdoc fellows must complete the annual progress report. The report will document postdoc progress, help set goals for the coming year, and encourage postdocs to develop the professional skills necessary for their chosen career paths. We designed the online system to go beyond a fill-in-the-blank approach so it can be used a career planning tool. For example, the system interface provides ideas for professional activities to consider and prompts fellows to think about their areas of interest and future goals.

**COMING YEAR Research and Career Development**

**Publications**

Please list PROPOSED titles and authors of any projected publications for the coming year

**PROPOSED Title**

1.

**PROPOSED Author(s)**

Add Additional Publications

---

**Conferences and Meetings**

Provide the names of conferences/meetings you would like to attend during the coming year

**Meeting Name:**

**Proposed Presentation Title:**

1. **Date:**

oral presentation     poster presentation     no presentation required

Add Additional Conferences and Meetings

---

**Grants and Fellowships**

Provide the names of grants/fellowships you are applying for in the coming year

1. **Funding Mechanism:**

**Application Deadline:**

Add Additional Grants and Fellowships

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**Job Searching Plans**

Check all that apply.

1. Apply to an academic faculty position(s)

Teaching-Intensive

Research-Intensive

Combined Research and Teaching Careers

2. Apply to a non-academic position(s)

<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Science Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Science Writing
<input type="checkbox"/> Consulting	<input type="checkbox"/> Government Administration
<input type="checkbox"/> Patent Law/Technology Transfer	<input type="checkbox"/> Government Research
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify: <input type="text"/>	

*(continued on page 6)*

## NEW Annual Progress Report (continued from page 5)

### HOW THE APR WORKS

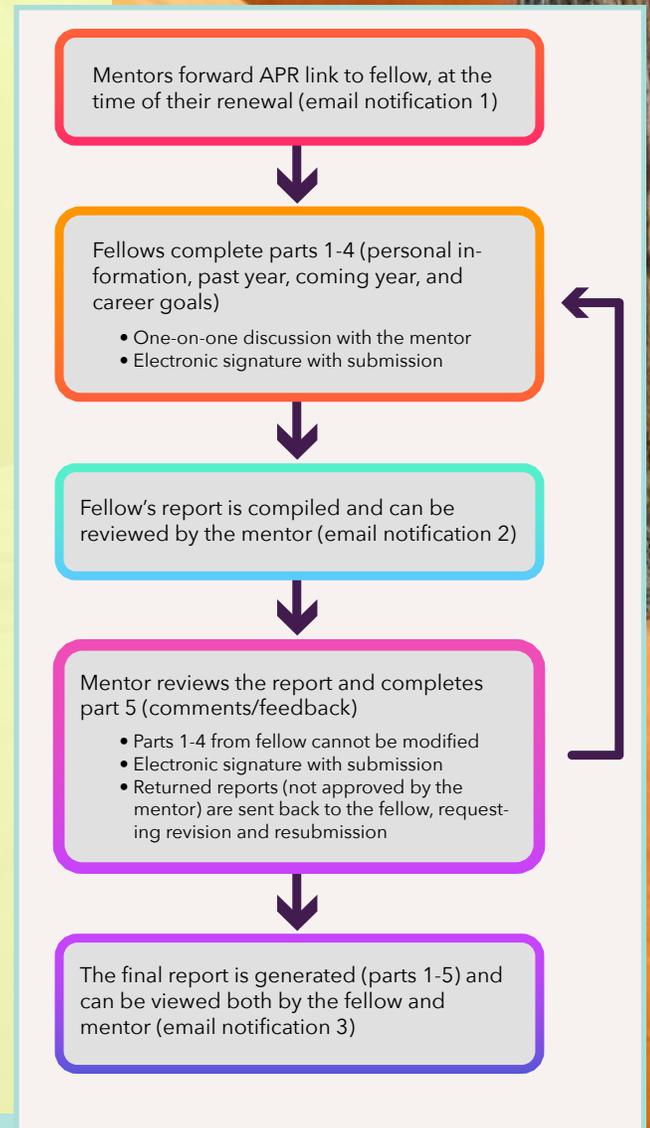
At least two months before your renewal date, your mentor will electronically initiate the process. Communication within the system occurs by email notifications. To access your personal APR portal, please use your NIH login credentials.

The APR includes four sections:

1. Personal information
2. Past year research and career development activities
3. Coming year research and career development activities
4. Career Goals

After completing all four parts, your mentor must confirm that he or she has had a one-on-one discussion with you about your career development, performance, and progress for the past year, and expectations for the coming year. The APR program will compile your information into a report that is sent directly to your mentor for review. After your mentor adds a narrative assessment of your performance over the past year (fifth part), the final report with electronic signatures will be available to view in both the fellow's and mentor's system portal.

It is our hope that this new online APR system enhances your training experience while at NICHD. Please feel free to contact me at [yvette.pittman@nih.gov](mailto:yvette.pittman@nih.gov) if you have any questions.



As you think about your next career move, it is important to know what will make you competitive on the job market. In parallel with your APR, we **strongly encourage** you to explore myIDP Science Careers (<http://myidp.sciencecareers.org>). The myIDP site helps PhD scientists match individual skills, values, and interests to various career opportunities. Fellows at universities around the country now use this tool to plan for the future.

## More Thoughts on Mentoring

Want to read more about mentoring? Check out these mentoring-related posts on the NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) Careers Blog:

[How to Talk to Your Mentor about a Career Change](#)

[Is Your Mentor Opposed to Your Career Development?](#)

[Two Part Series: Part I – Identifying Mentors: Why it Matters](#)

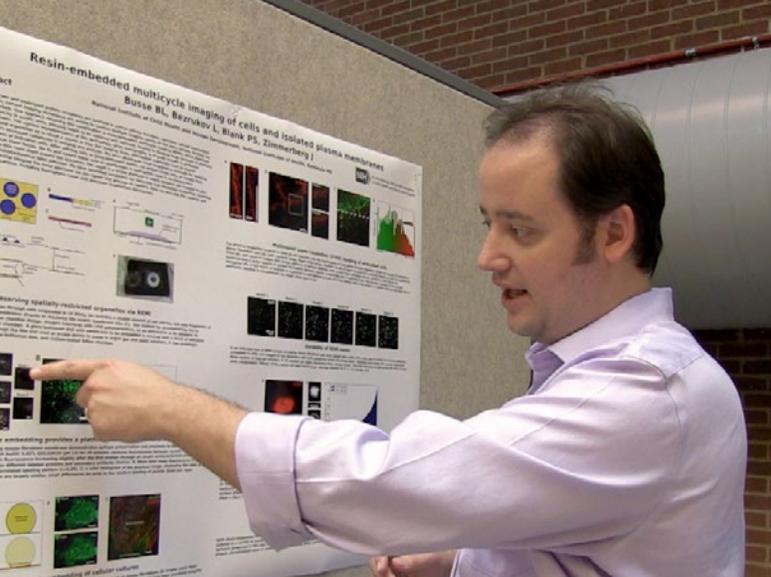
[Two Part Series: Part II – Getting the Most out of Mentoring Relationships](#)

[How a Mentor Helped Me Succeed and How I Now Get to Help Her](#)

[Good Mentoring Guidelines](#)

[Make the Most of Your Mentoring Relationships](#)





Brad Busse / Zimmerberg Lab



Apratim Mitra / Pfeifer Lab



Fabio R. Faucz, left, and Giampaolo Trivellin / Stratakis Lab

**Life Outside Lab**  
ANNUAL NIH RESEARCH FESTIVAL  
September 16-18, 2015

Research Program  
Changes Lives

Jennifer Lippincott-Schwartz, left, and Michael Gottesman



## October Announcements

### SAVE THE DATE! LUNCHTIME SESSION

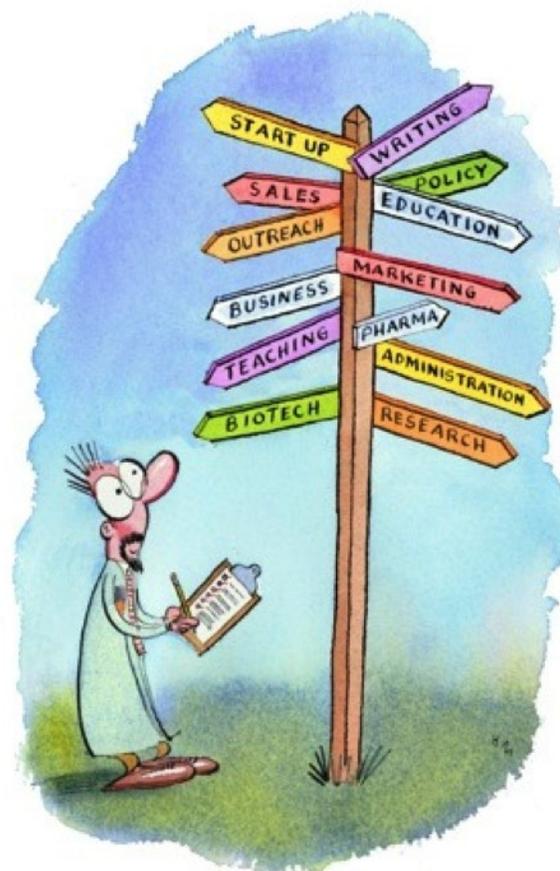
Individual Development Plans (IDPs): Enhancing Your Productivity and Career Satisfaction

**November 16<sup>th</sup>, from 12 noon to 1 pm**

Please save the date for a lunchtime IDP session specifically for postdocs, graduate students, and postbacs who are interested in the PhD track.

An IDP is a must-have item that can guide you into a fulfilling and productive career. Come and learn about how they can be used to set personal goals and identify careers paths that align with your interests and values. With interactive group exercises, we will discuss the importance of self-assessment while taking a closer look at the “myIDP” site, which is an online portal that helps PhD scientists to create an IDP.

Please contact Yvette Pittman ([pittmanyv@mail.nih.gov](mailto:pittmanyv@mail.nih.gov)) to register.



## October Events

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 10 AM – 12 PM**

Interviewing Workshop  
with Scott Morgan

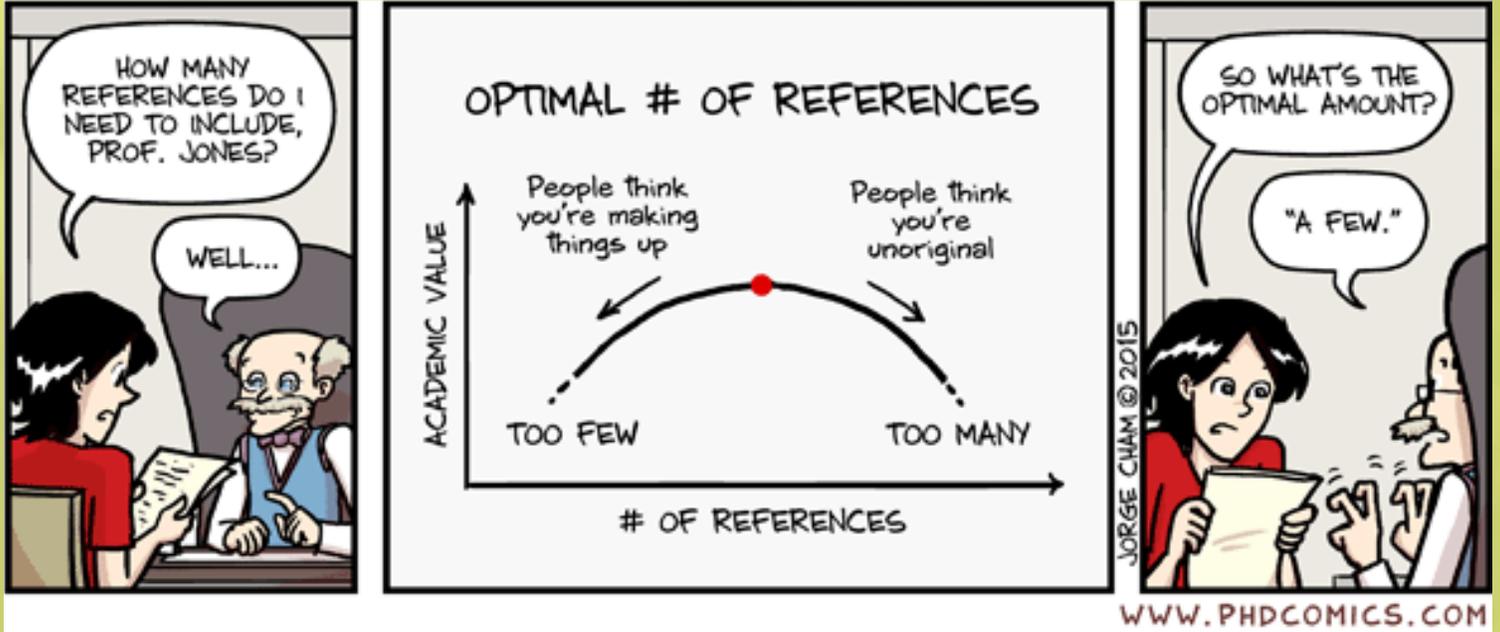
The workshop will use singular examples to identify strategies to help answer questions, and more importantly, increase your overall confidence at job interviews. We will use interactive exercises and peer review to analyze expected questions, themes, dilemmas, and demeanor. Please contact Yvette Pittman ([pittmanyv@mail.nih.gov](mailto:pittmanyv@mail.nih.gov)) for more info.

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1 – 2:30 PM**

Time Management Workshop  
led by Brenda Hanning

What time of day are you most productive? How do you prioritize your to-do list? Do you have a list...? Consider ways to maximize your efficiency, based on who you are and how you like to work. Please contact Yvette Pittman ([pittmanyv@mail.nih.gov](mailto:pittmanyv@mail.nih.gov)) for more info.

# PhD Comics



<http://phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comid=1821>