



UF/IFAS CALS Launches Academy to Promote a Culture of Effective Mentoring

Many academics do not receive formal mentorship education. Yet, when students receive effective mentoring from a faculty member or adviser, this can have positive impacts on the student's productivity, creativity and mental health, according to a 2018 article in *Ecology and Evolution*.

After attending a national leadership program for faculty called Lead21, University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) faculty members **Samira Daroub** and **Heather McAuslane** began working on an idea to strengthen faculty-student mentoring.

This fall, the UF/IFAS College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) launched its inaugural CALS Mentor Academy with McAuslane and Daroub as program leaders.

"Through the CALS Mentor Academy, we are helping faculty members gain the tools and confidence they need to successfully mentor graduate students," said McAuslane, the program's co-director and CALS assistant dean. "The program is designed to elevate the discussion of mentoring and promote a culture of effective mentoring within departments, starting with the faculty."

As part of the CALS Mentor Academy, 23 participants from various disciplines in the college met eight times during the fall semester to improve their graduate student mentoring skills. Guest presentations featured fellow CALS teaching faculty as well as facilitators from the UF College of Education and UF Health. Faculty participants were

nominated by their unit leaders for this opportunity.

Topics the facilitators address in the CALS Mentor Academy include: establishing expectations and aligning goals, fostering independence, communication, addressing diversity, ethics, mentoring philosophy, and how to have difficult conversations. The faculty-led curriculum is adapted from the Wisconsin Project for Scientific Teaching.

"CALS has held an annual 'Teacher's College' for new teaching faculty since 2007," said CALS Dean **Elaine Turner**. "We're excited to add the CALS Mentor Academy to our professional development initiatives for faculty. We look forward to seeing the further strengthened relationships between students and faculty that come out of the CALS Mentor Academy."

The graduate student population is more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety compared to the general population, according to a study published in 2018 by *Nature Biotechnology*. This serves as another motivation for implementing the CALS Mentor Academy.

"Having a good mentor is one way to help reduce the stress and anxiety our graduate students face, and in CALS, we realize that is critical for their success and mental health," said Daroub, a soil and water sciences professor at the UF/IFAS Everglades Research and Education Center in Belle Glade, Florida.

Daroub mentioned that the rise in mental health issues among graduate students demonstrates the need for additional career development

guidance as well as a shift in culture for faculty to model an appropriate life balance for mentees.

Zoe Bowden, an agricultural education and communication master's student, thinks the CALS Mentor Academy proves that UF/IFAS CALS faculty truly care about their students. She hopes additional faculty will become involved.

"I'm so lucky that teachers in my department invest in graduate students like me; they have a genuine concern for our wellbeing and truly want us to succeed personally and professionally," Bowden said. "Our faculty serve as models for us as the next generation of professors and industry leaders, so it helps graduate students learn how to be mentors as well."

Several UF/IFAS units foster peer-to-peer mentorship among graduate students. Both the Agricultural and Biological Engineering Department and the Agricultural Education and Communication Department facilitate mentor-mentee pairings among Ph.D. students and master's students through their respective graduate student associations. Bowden said she has found this peer mentoring to be valuable.

"In my first semester, I was paired with a Ph.D. student, and now we've completed published research and attended conferences together," Bowden said. "I can ask him all kinds of personal and professional questions, like what life is like balancing school and a spouse. Our relationship has grown, and we've mutually benefited from the mentor pairing."



UF/IFAS Breaks Ground on New Graduate Student Housing in Immokalee

When **Ibukun “Timothy” Ayankojo** moved from Ibadan, Nigeria, to Immokalee, Florida, the difference in population from 3 million to about 24,000 was an adjustment. With that difference in population, Ayankojo saw graduate student housing availability in southwest Florida was low while costs were – and still are – high.

Ayankojo struggled to find affordable housing in the area as a CALS doctoral student in soil and water sciences at the UF/IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center (SWFREC). He was grateful that SWFREC had on-site housing for graduate students.

“To have housing that is readily available and at a lower cost than what you’re going to get from surrounding towns makes me so thankful,” Ayankojo said.

The need for graduate student housing at SWFREC has increased, and the center has now received enough donations to build a second facility. The groundbreaking was held Sept. 23, and construction will begin early in 2020.

Currently, the center has one unit built in 2007 that has space for eight students, a mobile home that houses four students, and a rental home for three students. The new facility will have enough space for eight additional rooms, allowing for 23 students to live at the center while working on their research.

“We don’t just provide housing to make it convenient for our students,” said **Kelly Morgan**, director of SWFREC. “This is a true need because local housing is in short supply and living on center property allows our students to complete a greater amount of research in a shorter period of time to earn their degrees from CALS.”



UF/IFAS CALS Lecturer Named UF Undergraduate Teacher of the Year

Students won’t find monotonous lectures with rote memorization assignments in **Laura Acosta’s** dietetics courses. Instead, dietetics majors find themselves engaged in memorable, meaningful learning experiences, such as conducting mock nutrition interviews, creating educational videos and debating nutrition “hot topics” with international students.

Acosta, a lecturer in the UF/IFAS Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, was honored for her teaching acumen by being named the 2019 UF Undergraduate Teacher of the Year this spring.

“I absolutely love what I do, and being able to have the opportunity to work with students and foster the knowledge of the next generation of dietitians brings me so much fulfillment,” Acosta said. “To be recognized for that is just icing on the cake. More than anything, I feel humbled and so grateful.”

Acosta is well-known for her innovation in the classroom. Her interactive lessons and assignments incorporate new technologies, field trips and service-learning projects, such as shadowing clinical dietitians and practicing nutritional assessments at local high schools. Acosta credits her lesson-plan creativity to professional development opportunities within CALS.

“Mrs. Acosta has many strengths, but I feel the most valuable is her ability to motivate students to learn and grow both in and outside the classroom,” said **Amanda Young**, one of Acosta’s former dietetics students and a CALS graduate. “Many assignments utilized multiple learning styles, and often incorporated technology.”



CALS Graduate Students Utilize “Skype in the Classroom” to Teach the Science of Mosquitoes, Careers in Entomology

Mosquitoes are one of the deadliest animals in the world. Last spring, middle and high school students across the globe heard directly from scientists at the University of Florida about how they are working to prevent mosquito-borne illnesses.

Utilizing “Skype in the Classroom,” The Science of Mosquitoes project was part of the Prevent and Protect Program developed by the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources. The Skype in the Classroom activity, funded by the Florida Department of Health, is one of the many ways students at UF are helping to share science with younger students.

“We intend for one of the main takeaways [for the students] to be a greater understanding of the biology of mosquitoes,” said **Rachel Atchison**, an entomology and nematology master’s student.

The Science of Mosquitoes presentation was available to global audiences six times throughout April lasting 30-45 minutes each. The “digital field trip” included an overview of mosquitoes and mosquito research conducted through UF/IFAS as well as an opportunity for questions.

“The Skype in the Classroom or Skype a Scientist programs are great ways to reach outside of our immediate Gainesville community and provide opportunities for dialogue between scientists and classrooms,” Atchison said.

Jamie Loizzo, an associate professor in the UF/IFAS Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) Department, will be continuing to offer Skype a Scientist programming. The content will be produced by AEC students and will be focused next on marine biology and water management.

CALS Honors Alumni at UF/IFAS Dinner of Distinction



CALS Offers Online Gardening Class; Includes Gardening Kits and a 24/7 GardenCam

If IKEA furniture can be designed in Sweden, produced in China and assembled in Florida, then so can a garden. This was the thinking behind CALS lecturer **Gerardo Nunez's** creation of gardening kits to mail to his online students as a teaching tool.

Students taking the HOS 1014 Vegetable Gardening one-credit course offered through CALS grew their own gardens while they completed internships, work or classes from their hometowns across the U.S. this past summer.

While the course has been taught for at least 10 years, Nunez redesigned the format to be offered online and added the gardening kits to the curriculum last year. The kits reached students in three states and across 13 counties in Florida. Enrollment in the course is up this year and Nunez expects a similar or larger geographic footprint.

"I wanted to present gardening in a context and format the students are familiar with," said Nunez, a faculty member in the UF/IFAS Horticultural Sciences Department. "I wanted to allow the students to garden at home and have web-based tools to support their learning."

One of these web-based tools is a 24/7 live video stream of a garden managed by the course teaching assistant. Nunez believes students can learn more from a garden they see instead of only through email correspondence with him.

"My personal goals as an instructor are to help students appreciate that their garden can feed, engage and entertain them," Nunez said.

Experiencing the farming and ranching industries at a young age, both **Michael Joyner** and **Tory Moore** developed their passions for the agricultural community and serving others.

With an interest in public policy as well as agriculture and natural resources, Joyner transferred to UF to major in food and resource economics. Joyner has held positions at Florida Farm Bureau and the Florida Forestry Association. He now serves as president of the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, representing farmers when policy is being made at the local, state and national levels.

Tory Moore found her home in the UF/IFAS Agricultural Education and Communication Department (AEC). Prior to her new position as a public relations specialist for UF/IFAS Communications, Moore served as the director of marketing for Farm Credit of Central Florida.

At the UF/IFAS Dinner of Distinction on Sept. 27, Joyner was recognized as the recipient of the 2019 CALS Alumni and Friends Award of Distinction for his outstanding contributions to the agriculture industry and his loyal support of the college. Moore was recognized as the recipient of the 2019 CALS Horizon Award for her contributions and potential as a leader in agriculture, natural resources and related industries as well as her service to the college.

"Two of our college's core values are service and collaboration, and these two alumni have been wonderful role models for our current and future CALS students as people who give back to both their alma mater and the agriculture industry in many ways," said CALS Dean **Elaine Turner**.

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CALS Offers New Horticultural Therapy Course and Certificate Program

As a psychology junior at the University of Florida, **Emily Fradet** looked for ways to gain more hands-on experience in clinical psychology, counseling and therapy treatment of patients. She stumbled upon a new fall 2019 introductory course in horticultural therapy while searching for intriguing electives.

“I’m interested in alternative forms of therapy, so I thought this course would be a perfect mix for me,” Fradet said. “In psychology, we learn about the process of mental illness, but not the treatment; this course is more about therapy and treatment.”

The ORH 4932 Introduction to Horticultural Therapy course has been in the works for several years, said **Leah Diehl**, a lecturer in the UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Department. The fully online course was offered for the first time this fall.

Horticultural therapy uses plants and gardening as a vehicle for people to work toward goals or improve skills. For example, patients with Parkinson’s disease utilize this therapy method for maintaining fine and large motor skills

while also managing depression, which can accompany the disease.

The introductory course is the first in a series of four classes offered as part of a new horticultural therapy undergraduate certificate through CALS. The online certificate program is aligned with the requirements for professional registration with the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA). The program has received certificate accreditation with AHTA. Diehl said she looks forward to bringing personal experiences of horticultural therapy to the students through virtual field trips.

“What’s also really exciting about our horticultural therapy certificate program that makes us different is that we are associated with both the UF College of Medicine and UF/IFAS CALS,” Diehl said.

Class of 1969

Each year, the university recognizes alumni on the 50th anniversary of their graduation from UF in a “Grand Guard” celebration. We had the pleasure of reminiscing with our Class of 1969 graduates and learning valuable words of wisdom!

Pictured are: Reggie Brown, Ron Hamel, Chip Hinton and his wife Jemy, George Pickhardt and his wife Jean, Larry Reese and his wife Susan

