Tufts IRACDA Research Guidelines – v10.10.21

RESEARCH AND CAREER MENTORING GUIDELINES FOR IRACDA SCHOLARS
10-10-21

The goal of IRACDA is to prepare talented postdoctoral scientists for productive academic careers that involve research on a biomedically relevant problem. Young professors must develop many talents to be successful on such a career path. These include the abilities to independently design and execute a rigorous research program, to effectively present findings in written and oral formats, to write compelling and well-argued proposals for research funding, and to enthusiastically and skillfully mentor younger scientists who are working on the lab’s projects. They must also be adept at the other responsibilities assigned to faculty, such as teaching and university service. Consistent with the emphasis on research training, IRACDA scholars are expected to spend 75% of their time on research activities, under the mentorship of one of the faculty of Tufts University. This document describes the mechanisms by which IRACDA hopes to facilitate this training and the respective roles of the Research Mentor and the Scholar Mentoring Team. The following topics are covered:

- Research expectations
- The research mentor
- The Scholar Mentoring Team
- The research seminar
- Spring research retreat
- Support for research conferences
- Evaluation of research progress
- Participation in activities outside of the lab
- Balancing teaching and research
- Mentoring students in research
- Making the transition and developing a research project of your own
- Grant writing
- Citing the IRACDA grant in publications
- The Mentoring Team Summary Report Form

The general training plan for IRACDA is outlined below, so that you can see how the research, teaching and enrichment components interweave with each other.
**Research Expectations**

The IRACDA Program expectations are that you will have developed and mastered the skills in research, scientific presentations, grant-writing, mentoring and time management that you will need for a successful academic career. Specifically, by the end of your second year in the program, we expect that you will have published a paper and presented at one or more national/international conferences and begun to think about directions of research for an independent faculty position.

**The Research Mentor**

The Research Mentor is the Tufts faculty member who is directly supervising the scholar’s research. The choice of Research Mentor has usually been made before the application to IRACDA is submitted. This decision is based on enough communication between the prospective mentor and mentee to give confidence that a mutually beneficial relationship can be established. Part of this process involves deciding on a research project that can be started quickly once the scholar arrives at Tufts. A proposal describing this project is a required part of the IRACDA application package, in order to show that a clear and feasible plan has been developed for the research training.

We anticipate that the Research Mentor, in addition to supervising the scholar’s research, will also coach the scholar in and provide opportunities for developing the other skills that make for a successful principal investigator. These include mentoring students in the lab, the writing or reviewing of grants and manuscripts, and the presentation of results at both local and national or international conferences in the field.

**The Scholar Mentoring Team**

Because of the demands of the IRACDA training, we have the scholars set up meetings with a Scholar Mentoring Team (SMT) **twice each year** to provide guidance. The goals of the SMT are four-fold:

1. **To serve as a resource for the scholars as they plan and carry out their postdoctoral research and to ensure that the scholars will have developed a project that will result in first-author publications and can be used to establish an independent research program.**

2. **To help the scholars develop skills in scientific writing and presentation by providing feedback on the written research reports, manuscript and grant drafts, oral research presentations, and practice job seminars.**

3. **To provide guidance on issues that arise regarding mentoring or responsible conduct of research.**

4. **To help the scholars develop the time management and prioritization skills critical for academic success.**

In consultation with the research mentor, each scholar should form and meet with the SMT within four months of joining the program. The team will consist of the research mentor and two other faculty. It is helpful if these faculty have expertise relevant to the project, but they need not be members of the scholar’s home department. Many scholars have found it useful to bring additional experts onto their team from outside of the department, or even Tufts, as their research evolves in new directions. Some find that having a faculty from a primarily undergraduate institution (PUI), such as an IRACDA alumna, is helpful if a PUI position is the career goal. If your research mentor has never had an IRACDA scholar, it can help to have an experienced mentor on your SMT who can help reassure or explain things to your mentor about your time in lab or workshops. Having someone on your SMT with experience serving on search committees or faculty mentoring teams can also be valuable. As the SMT works best if meetings are held on a regular basis, we ask that the SMT meets every six months, or more often if the research is approaching a critical decision point. **Fall meetings must be held & reports submitted by January 1. Spring meetings must be held and reports submitted by June 1.** Scholars who do not meet these dates and have not made other arrangements with the program directors may have their supply and travel budgets frozen until the reports are submitted.
Before each meeting, the scholar should answer the questions on the Scholar Mentoring Team Form (available for download on the IRACDA Canvas site) and distribute to the SMT several days before the meeting. After each meeting, the scholar should complete Question 18 on the SMT form describing what was discussed during the meeting and send the completed form to the team members and also submit it to the Tufts IRACDA Canvas site by the designated deadlines. It is important to remember that you are the driver of these meetings, so it is worth thinking carefully about what you want out of each meeting, especially in terms of how to reach your career goals.

For the first meeting, the scholar should give a brief presentation of the research project and goals for the next six months, describe the career goal, and work with the SMT to develop a postdoctoral timeline that can be revisited periodically. For the second meeting (but not for subsequent meetings), the scholar should prepare a written research proposal (~6 pages suggested + 1 page specific aims) that describes the background of the project and the long-range goals (1-2 pages) and the experimental design, expected results, and alternative approaches (3-4 pages). It can include preliminary data. Scholars will be able to work on this proposal during the Spring Writing Workshop. This report should be distributed to the team members several days before the meeting and also submitted to the IRACDA Canvas site. The SMT will discuss the proposal with the scholar and provide feedback on the research project and whether the best experimental approach is being taken. The team will also provide feedback on the clarity and style of the written report to assist scholars in fine-tuning their writing skills. Research and career goals for the next 6 months should also be discussed.

Preparing scholars for the job market

We ask that scholars explicitly discuss plans for transition to a faculty position with their SMT beginning with the spring SMT meeting in Year 3 and answer Question 8 on the SMT form. This question asks for a plan to use the final year
- to bring publications to completion
- to develop the research into a project that the scholar can continue after obtaining a faculty position and that is suitable for the type of academic position that the scholar is seeking.

If the scholar plans to spend an additional year in the mentor’s lab beyond the IRACDA appointment, this discussion can be postponed to the following spring. The focus instead can be on possible funding sources to cover the extra postdoctoral year. In addition to the coaching that will be provided by IRACDA, we hope that the SMT members will also be willing to mentor the scholar through the job search process.

The research seminar

After the first year, the scholar is expected to present a research seminar once each year to an audience that is broader than that of the mentor’s laboratory. Most departments and programs at Tufts have seminar series in which postdocs can participate, and many fields have Boston-area groups that meet on a regular basis. Either of these venues is appropriate, but a poster presentation or short talk at a research conference would not satisfy this requirement. The scholar is responsible for arranging a time for this presentation and informing the SMT members, the Program Research Administrator, and the IRACDA Program Directors. The Program Directors will then notify the other IRACDA scholars, so that they can also attend and provide feedback. In the fall in which the scholar is conducting a job search, one of these seminars can be a rehearsal for the interview talk.

Spring research retreat

Each year in late spring (usually in May), all the IRACDA scholars come together for a day-long research retreat. Typically, this retreat utilizes a “chalk talk” format, in which scholars present their current research (and potentially their future plans) without any PowerPoint slides. Because many faculty job interviews now include chalk talks, this is a good way for you to practice this type of presentation.
Support for research conferences

The IRACDA Program has funds for Years 2-4 to help cover the costs for the scholar to attend one research conference in an area relevant to the scholar's research. The research mentor should send an e-mail to Dr. Claire Moore, the Director of Research Activities, describing why this meeting is an appropriate one for the scholar. Once this request is approved by the Director, the scholar can work with the Program Research Administrator to make reservations for travel and accommodations, and to pay the meeting registration fee. Please note: In order to get reimbursed for IRACDA-sponsored travel, you must have an account in the Tufts eExpense system. The IRACDA Program Research Administrator can help you set this up.

Evaluation of research progress

Each year, the Program Directors will review the scholar SMT forms and check in with the research mentor. Tangible progress such as generating results that lead to presentations at national meetings and publication in peer-reviewed journals will be another major benchmark for evaluating research progress. Scholars will also be expected to play a major role in designing the theoretical and technical aspects of the work and as training progresses, become fully independent. The overall goal of the training is to develop independent scientists who will successfully compete for faculty level positions. If a scholar fails to make research progress, the Program Directors, in consultation with the IRACDA Advisory Committee, will consider dismissing the scholar from the program. The Advisory Committee is a panel of Tufts faculty who advises the Program Directors on best practices and helps in the evaluation of candidates to the IRACDA Program.

Participation in activities outside of the lab

Throughout each year, the scholar will be participating in various career development activities that will require them to be away from the lab. As part of accepting an IRACDA scholar, the research mentor has agreed to this arrangement, which averages during the time of the training to be about 75% of the time in research and 25% in other activities. In addition to periodic one or half-day workshops, there are three times when the scholar will be away for more than a day:

1. **Tufts Graduate Institute for Teaching (GIFT).** Towards the end of May, second-year scholars take part in GIFT, which is an intensive, three-week course on the Medford campus that will prepare the scholar for the teaching assignment in the third or fourth year. During the GIFT course, the time that the scholar spends in lab will be limited.

2. **The annual National IRACDA Conference.** This is a 3-day national meeting of scholars from all the programs like IRACDA and happens usually in June or July. Scholars are expected to attend this meeting and present their research there.

3. **The teaching assignment.** This involves being responsible for a full-semester course at one of the IRACDA partner institutions. It is likely that not much research will be done during this semester, and the mentor and scholar are encouraged to discuss ways in which the project can be kept moving, albeit at a slower pace. (Please see the next section.)

   The scholar is expected to inform the research mentor of the times when he or she will be out of the laboratory for IRACDA activities.

Balancing teaching and research

Depending on the type of course the scholar is teaching and the class hours, s/he may not be able to spend a lot of time in lab during the teaching semester. The scholar should plan as to how to keep things going. They should discuss their schedule with the research mentor so that they know that you are planning, but perhaps not to expect to see much of you. Some scholars have felt that it was an advantage to be mentoring a student or post-bac scholar at that time, so that the student could help keep the project moving forward. Most everyone has found that it is possible to keep their research moving at least a little, and the
periods of the GIFT training and the teaching semester provide a great opportunity to practice the time management skills that will be needed as a new professor. It is not impossible but takes focused effort and determination. The topic of balancing teaching and research will be formally addressed in the fall planning meetings by scholars who completed their teaching in the previous year.

**Mentoring students in research**

Mentoring skills are critical for any faculty position, and there are several ways to find students to mentor:

- Contact the Program Coordinators at our partner schools to help identify students or let students in the class you are teaching know that you are looking.
- Volunteer to mentor a student in the Tufts Bringing Diversity to Biomedical Research Program, the Tufts Summer Scholars Program or the Biology Department's NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates Program.
- Contact Tufts IRACDA Director Mitch McVey, who is on the Medford campus and can recommend Tufts students to you.

Before making a commitment to a student, please confirm that this will be okay with your research mentor.

**Making the transition and developing a research project of your own**

By the third year, the scholar needs to start thinking about what might form the basis of an independent research program as a new faculty member. It is a good idea to bring this up on a regular basis with the mentor and solicit the input of faculty on the SMT as well as senior IRACDA scholars or recent IRACDA alumni. Here are some questions that might help plan for the transition:

- Will you continue with the same model system? Is that feasible at the type of institution where you would like a position, or do you need to think about modifications or developing collaborations that will continue once you leave Tufts?

- If you want to go to a PUI, can the research engage undergraduate students? Have you tried this out by mentoring a student at Tufts?

- What do I need to do to get publications from my work, as this supports the premise that I can do it on my own? If you have not yet published a first author paper from your postdoctoral research, it could raise the question with a search committee as to whether you can carry a research project to completion, a task that is much more difficult if your future lab's progress relies on the efforts of undergraduates. So, focus on getting the key experiments done and/or find ways to enlist the help of people who could become co-authors. Decide what the "minimal publishable unit" is and what experiments might provide the extra push to a higher-tier journal. Set a deadline for determining which way to go.

**Grant writing**

There will be several opportunities during the IRACDA training for workshops on grant writing. One, offered every other year, is a multi-part series that will involve writing a proposal in the form of a grant application, which will then be reviewed by the faculty leading the workshop and the workshop participants. This proposal can serve as a basis for obtaining support for an extra year of postdoctoral training, or for applications to obtain research support as a new faculty member. Scholars who obtain support other than IRACDA are encouraged to continue to participate fully in the IRACDA Program.

**Citing the IRACDA grant in publications**

Each publication, press release, or other document that cites results from IRACDA grant-supported research must include an acknowledgment of NIH grant support and disclaimer such as “The project described was supported by Award Number K12GM133314 from the National Institute of General Medical
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Sciences. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences or the National Institutes of Health.”

IRACDA scholars are also required to comply with the NIH Public Access Policy. Upon acceptance for publication, an electronic version of the final peer-reviewed manuscript resulting from research supported in whole or in part, with IRACDA funding must be submitted to PubMed Central (PMC). The author's final peer-reviewed manuscript is defined as the final version accepted for journal publication and includes all modifications from the publishing peer review process. In each of our annual progress reports to NIH, we will need to provide a list of any publications resulting from IRACDA support, along with the PMCID number. For additional information, please visit http://publicaccess.nih.gov/.

Please contact the Program’s Directors, Dr. Mitch McVey (mitch.mcvey@tufts.edu, 617-627-4196) or Dr. Claire Moore (claire.moore@tufts.edu, 617-636-6935) if you have any questions regarding these guidelines. Dr. Moore will oversee Research Activities for this year.