

@UlowaNeuro Notes

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We often say that trainees represent the future of neuroscience. The truth is that many of the most significant advances in science come when postdoctoral fellows and early career faculty ask questions that no one has thought about before or develop novel experimental or therapeutic approaches. They actually represent the *present* of neuroscience as well as the future.

I have been so impressed with two of our early career faculty, **Sarah Ferri** and **Banu Gumusoglu**, who have stepped up to create spaces for trainees and faculty to support and learn from one another, and identify and reach their goals.



As neurodevelopmental scientists and members of the [Hawkeye Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center](#) (Hawk IDDRC), they are active within the national network of IDDRCs and are working on a set of initiatives here at Iowa to create community among trainees and provide opportunities for development in key areas.

The first program they launched is a monthly Grants Club which discusses ideas for new projects, successfully funded awards, and specific aims for grant submissions. Grants can be a make-or-break factor in so many scientific careers. This format was modeled on their experiences as trainees, including a similar initiative spearheaded by Banu while she was a student in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. Inspired by the renowned Iowa Writers Workshop, writers submit their work in progress and members of the group review and provide direct, line-level feedback. A unique element of the IDDRC Grants Club is that it draws a diverse group of investigators from all career levels and many corners of our campus, including the Colleges of Engineering, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Public Health. This is fostering connections and expanding mentorship across campus.

Sarah and Banu have also conducted listening sessions for IDDRC trainees to discuss their opportunities and challenges, and to inform ongoing and future trainee programming. It is so important to keep these lines of communication open, and to make sure that the trainee initiatives we develop reflect what our trainees tell us matters to them.

Their next plan is to develop a “mentor in the cloud” program in concert with the national IDDRC Early Career Working Group. This program will match trainees with mentors across the national network. This is a terrific opportunity to expand mentorship across universities and disciplines, giving today’s trainees access to a broader pool of knowledge and experience than is realistic to expect at any single university. This broader mentorship is vital as we seek more interdisciplinary approaches to span from bench to bedside and back.

Already, Sarah and Banu are receiving inquiries from colleagues outside Iowa in the IDDRC network who want to develop programs modeled on theirs. I am so proud of their work to keep Iowa at the forefront of trainee development.

The opportunities and challenges these IDDRC colleagues are discussing are also relevant among our broader pool of trainees in the Iowa Neuroscience Institute. That’s why I have asked INI Associate Director **Seth Tomchik** to focus on this as a member of the INI leadership team. We are all committed to building community among our early career faculty, fellows and students, listening and offering support to set the stage not just for outstanding careers but also for fundamental advances in our understanding of neural circuits, development, behavior and brain disorders.

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