

*Invited Editorial***The mentoring cycle: A two-way exchange**<https://doi.org/10.21633/jgpha.6.2s1>

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This special supplement for the Journal of Georgia Public Health Association (jGPHA) features student-mentored research. The manuscripts that you are about to read include credible evidence-based research from some of our most talented and energized public health students throughout the state who have gone the extra mile to share their scholarship with the public. All of these student authors have spent many hours learning the foundational basics of the research process, primarily in the classroom but also from faculty and community mentors who kept them “in the fence” (to borrow a phrase from one of my academic mentors) as they expanded their knowledge and skills to produce credible scholarly work.

They have not settled on simply finishing the research project, which may have been a course assignment, an independent capstone project, a practicum/internship summary, a master’s thesis, or a doctoral dissertation. They have pursued peer-reviewed publication to disseminate their work to an audience of public health professionals. Every student author can now add his or her publication in this issue to their resume/CV, reflecting the fruits of productive and successful academic work. For many of these student authors, this is their first scholarly publication. Seeing their name in print for the first time when the journal is produced will be a special moment, one filled with memories for the journey that was traveled to get to that final point. They will reflect on their mentors who were influential in their path to publication.

Behind every student author who is published in this issue, there is one or more public health professional who is proud to see their student’s hard work rewarded and recognized among their peers. Whenever I am asked what I like best about my job as a public health college professor, my response is easy: I enjoy mentoring students. Nothing is more rewarding than to foster a student’s professional growth during their academic studies and beyond after they graduate. As public health professionals, we *all* have a personal story to tell about how we progressed through school, influenced by a cast of many along the way. We can reflect on influential teachers, professors and community professionals who taught us new knowledge and skills, encouraged us, and inspired us to create

the tapestry for who we are today. I fondly reflect back along my own career path and appreciate the diligent guidance of various mentors in the personal, academic, and professional chapters of my career.

The lessons learned along the way have influenced my passion to mentor my students today. It is rewarding to watch students mature in their professional growth during their undergraduate or graduate program of study, blossoming into dynamic public health leaders for the future. As a student mentor, it is also important to recognize that we are also constantly learning new ways to better serve our students. In one of the classes I taught earlier this semester, I required the MPH students to complete a leadership style self-assessment as one of the assignments. These were students who were one semester away from graduating, so they were definitely a mature cohort in terms of academic preparedness at this point in their studies. The one trait that was unanimously recognized by every student in the class as an area they wished to strengthen for future career development was the acquisition of more self-confidence. It was helpful to learn this in order to reinforce existing course and programmatic activities, as well as plan new types of engagement to help students reach this goal. In essence, mentoring can be viewed as a reciprocal relationship. We serve our mentees, but they also serve us with feedback to strengthen our abilities to be effective mentors. They learn from us *and* we learn from them.

One tactic that contributes to my mentoring strategy is to create awareness among my students that they serve as mentors to other students, especially students who are not as far along in their program of study. They may not be aware of how they fit into the mentoring cycle. An incoming student who is new to a program looks to the more senior students as role models because they exemplify academic maturity with the completion of many more courses. It is likely that some of the student authors who have contributed to this issue have worked in this capacity as either the more junior or senior student on the research team whose collective work is being presented. Everyone works as a team to help each other.

The Georgia Public Health Association has a section dedicated to Career Development. This particular section is in place to meet the needs of public health students and recent graduates as they prepare to enter the work place. While I have the privilege of serving as the section's faculty chair for this year, it is truly the panel of student officers who manage the section's contributions to GPHA. The current student chair, vice chair, and secretary work diligently to promote student membership within the organization, reaching out to campus liaisons in public health schools and programs across the state to engage students in activities that will ultimately provide ongoing benefits to their future career path. These student officers exemplify being good mentors.

Every year at the annual GPHA conference, students and recent graduates of public health schools and programs are in the rich mix of attendees. For many of the students, this is their first experience with a professional conference, similar to the way in which some of the student authors in this issue are experiencing the joys of a first publication. I can proudly say that students who have attended GPHA meetings from my institution, Armstrong State University in Savannah, have always received a warm welcome and quickly acquired a new group of professional mentors among conference attendees. They have discovered that public health professionals are eager to provide assistance, sometimes in the form of overall career advice, and other times helping them get connected with employment opportunities.

In closing, as you continue on and read the student-sponsored manuscripts in this issue, if you are a student, I hope what you are about to read inspires you to realize the power you can create through your research and course work endeavors, contributing to the credible body of peer-reviewed evidence in our professional literature. You have been well-mentored to reach this point, and you, in turn, are a valuable mentor to your fellow students. If you are an experienced public health professional, whether an academician or a practitioner, I hope you take a moment to realize the impact you make every day when you serve as a mentor and positive role model for your students, an impact that will potentially serve to support them for their entire professional career.

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