DON’T MISS OUT ON RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The Student Science and Technology Online Research Co-op Program provides mentors, including myself, an opportunity to further develop their mentoring skills, and to play a role in educating the next generation of scientists. This semester, I am mentoring my third student through the Co-op Program in the area of genetics and neuroscience. I have always loved teaching, especially teaching genetics, and have been thrilled to pass on my enthusiasm and knowledge to students by guiding them through their research projects.

Mentors play a critical role. They can pass on their passion about the subject, promote curiosity and questioning, and offer the right balance between constructive criticism on projects, and words of encouragement. I am fortunate to have had (and continue to have) superb mentors throughout my science education and career who fit the above criteria, and I strive to be like them as a mentor in the Co-op Program.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of early exposure to research opportunities. My own educational research experiences had a profound effect on me choosing to pursue a career in research. For example, in my last year of undergraduate studies, I received offers to pursue three diverse pathways: optometry school, a Masters of Teaching Program, and a research-based graduate program. I had several early exposures to research; one of which, was an independent research project in Grade 12 Biology on the relationship between height and stride length in human adults compared to measurements from the fossil record of Homo sapiens’ predecessors. Another research experience was during my fourth-year of undergraduate studies when I participated in an undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. I investigated parent-of-origin expression bias, which assesses whether a gene inherited from one parent is expressed more often than the gene inherited from the other parent, in a set of genes related to a rare neurodevelopmental disorder. It was these positive experiences with scientific research that led me to a research-based graduate program and career in statistical genetic research as a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Michigan.

The articles in this issue demonstrate the skills, knowledge and passion gained by these Co-op students in specialized and interdisciplinary fields of research. The Student Science and Technology Online Research Co-op Program provides students with a wonderful opportunity to get exposed to the research and publication process, gain scientific literacy, as each field of science has its vocabulary to be mastered, and also hopefully instill a desire for lifelong learning.

Dr. Gagliano is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Michigan. Her research as a statistical geneticist involves studying genetic risk factors in a statistical learning framework. She began her role as a dedicated mentor for the Student Science and Technology Co-op program in early 2015 as a PhD student at the University of the Toronto. Dr. Gagliano has been the recipient of a Weston Brain Institute International Fellowship and a Stanley Center Fellowship.

Sarah Gagliano, PhD