

***Mentored Experiences in Research,
Instruction, and Teaching Program***



2011-2012 Handbook

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I. MERIT Program Overview

A. Primary Goal

To provide postdoctoral scholars with outstanding research and teaching experiences while improving the recruitment of underrepresented minorities into the field of biomedical research

B. Objectives

1. short-term objective:

- to enhance the research backgrounds and teaching experiences of developing scientists to conduct high quality research in an academic environment

2. long-term objectives:

- to enhance research-oriented teaching at partner institutions
- to further promote interactions between research-intensive universities and partner institutions that will lead to collaborations in research and teaching
- to increase the number of well-qualified underserved students entering competitive careers in biomedical research

C. Mission of the MERIT Program

To provide experiences in both teaching and research that will permit a diverse community of postdoctoral scholars to become tomorrow's leading academicians

D. Partner Institution

Stillman College: Located less than an hour's drive (52 miles) southwest of UAB in Tuscaloosa, AL, Stillman College is a minority-serving, liberal arts institution founded in 1876. Its average enrollment is 1200 students with more than 75 percent of the student body originating from the US Southeast. Stillman College is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and is also approved by the Alabama State Board of Education to offer teacher education programs. Stillman College offers Bachelor Degree programs in three academic divisions, including the Arts and Sciences. Within the Division of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Natural Sciences provides a curriculum and support to students majoring in the sciences and non-majors; approximately 200 students are enrolled in this department at present. It offers a challenging curriculum in biology that leads to a Bachelor of Science degree. Biology majors are prepared for positions in industrial, academic, or government laboratories; medicine, dentistry, optometry, pharmacy, physical therapy, public health, veterinary medicine, nursing, and other allied health professions.

II. Summary of Expectations for MERIT Scholars

A. Research

MERIT Scholars are expected to engage in a program of high quality research in their respective Research Mentors' laboratories. They are expected to publish their research at least annually in abstracts submitted to scientific meetings and/or research articles in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals. Scholars are required to submit an updated '*Personal Research Skills Development Plan*' (described below) annually to the Co-Program Director for Research Training.

B. Teaching

MERIT Scholars are expected to carry out a teaching program that includes scheduled meetings with the Co-Program Director of Teaching Instruction, their respective teaching mentors, and students. They are also expected to complete required coursework, participate in MERIT Program workshops, and attend the annual MERIT Program Retreat and IRACDA Meeting.

C. Community

MERIT Scholars are expected to be professional in their relationships within the MERIT Community, which includes MERIT Scholars, Research and Teaching Mentors, Co-Program Directors, the Director, and their students. Scholars should perform their research and teaching in an ethical manner, and should conform to the University's Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Scholarship and Research (<http://www.uab.edu/handbook>) as well as the UAB Postdoctoral Handbook (<http://postdocs-uab.infomedia.com/Postdoctoral%20Handbook.pdf>). Scholars are strongly encouraged to seek timely, appropriate support for scientific, teaching, social, or personal problems should they arise.

III. Research Instruction

The research training component spans three years and incorporates laboratory - based instruction; *research training accounts for 75% of the MERIT Scholars' total efforts.*

A. 'Personal Research Skills Development Plan'

At the start of the research training component, each MERIT Scholar must formulate a '*Personal Research Skills Development Plan*' together with his/her research mentor. The purpose of this plan is to initiate a discussion between the scholar and mentor regarding the goals for the research project and the development of research-related professional skills. Throughout the research training, this plan serves as a template for the scholar's annual review of progress toward the stated research goals. A copy of each MERIT Scholar's initial plan and annual updates must be sent to the Co-Program Director for Research Training for evaluation.

B. Evaluation of MERIT Scholars' progress in research training

To ensure that all MERIT Scholars receive successful research training experiences, the *Co-Program Director of Research Training*:

- meets with each MERIT Scholar together with his/her research mentor at the beginning of the fellowship in order to review programmatic requirements and the 'Personal Research Skills Development Plan'
- performs a 6-month review and assessment of each MERIT Scholar's progress toward completion of programmatic requirements
- assesses each MERIT Scholar's annual review, which will be provided by the respective research mentor, and the scholar's progress toward stated research goals; specific measurements will include the number of publications and presentations at local and national scientific meetings

IV. Teaching Instruction

The teaching skills component of the MERIT Program spans three years and includes experiences at each of the participating schools, including UAB and Stillman College; these experiences are described below. Throughout these experiences, MERIT Scholars are expected to balance the demands of their teaching instruction with those of their research training; *teaching instruction accounts for 25% of the MERIT Scholars' total effort.*

A. First Year

During the first year of teaching instruction, MERIT Scholars are required to complete teaching-related coursework, observe on-going classes at participating schools, select a teaching mentor, and mentor an assigned undergraduate student.

1. 'Personal Teaching Skills Development Plan': At the start of the teaching training component, each MERIT Scholar must devise a '*Personal Teaching Skills Development Plan*' together with the Co-Program Director for Teaching Instruction. The purpose of this plan is to determine the scholar's teaching-related goals and professional skills needed. Upon selection of the MERIT Teaching Mentor (described below), the MERIT Scholar will discuss his/her '*Personal Teaching Skills Development Plan*' together with the Mentor. Throughout the teaching instruction component, this plan serves as a template for the scholar's annual review of his/her progress toward the stated teaching goals. A copy of each MERIT Scholar's initial plan and annual updates must be sent to the Co-Program Director for Teaching Instruction for evaluation.

2. Completion of Teaching-Related Coursework: During Year 1, each MERIT Scholar must complete the following teaching-related coursework:

Fall Semester:

- **GRD 707: Giving Professional Presentations Workshop.**

This one-day workshop examines elements necessary for giving effective professional presentations. Topics include analyzing audience and purpose, assessing environment, differences between speaking and writing, nonverbal communication, characteristics of effective delivery, controlling nervousness, visual aids, and handling questions.

Spring Semester:

- **GRD 705: Teaching at the College Level and Beyond.**

This course provides an overview of many important aspects of teaching at the college level and beyond. Topics include designing a course, writing an effective syllabus, writing learning objectives, enhancing lectures, testing and grading, dealing with challenging students and situations, and accessing appropriate learning strategies.

Summer Semester:

- **GRD 716: Developing a Teaching Portfolio.**

This hybrid course guides participants in developing a Teaching Portfolio for improving teaching practices and enhancing job search potential. The web-based curriculum introduces essential elements of the portfolio, provides tools for gathering necessary documentation, and through individual feedback from the instructor, assists participants in drafting a personal *Philosophy of Teaching*, upon which the Portfolio is built.

3. Observation of On-going Classes: During Year 1, MERIT Scholars observe on-going classes at Stillman College 1 - 2 days per week. The purpose of this observation exercise is three-fold: i) to introduce the MERIT Scholars to each participating minority-serving institution; ii) to familiarize the MERIT Scholars with the respective undergraduate student bodies; and iii) to assist each MERIT Scholar with his/her selection of a teaching mentor (described below).

4. Selection of MERIT Teaching Mentor: During the spring semester of Year 1, each MERIT Scholar selects a MERIT Teaching Mentor at Stillman College. The Co-Program Director for Teaching Instruction will meet with each MERIT Scholar to discuss his/her selection and to assist in the decision-making process. The selected faculty member requires approval by the Co-Program Director for Institutional Liaison at the respective institution.

5. Assignment of Undergraduate Mentee: During the Summer semester of Year 1, each MERIT Scholar is assigned to an undergraduate student intern who has been accepted into either the UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) Summer Enrichment Program or the McNair Scholars Program. In conjunction with the MERIT Research Mentor, MERIT Scholars work

together with the assigned summer undergraduate intern on research projects, related course material, and poster presentations.

B. Second Year

In Year 2, each MERIT Scholar must participate in on-going, established courses at Stillman College, prepare a course that he/she will teach in the third year, and continue mentoring an assigned undergraduate mentee.

1. Participation in On-going, Established Courses: During the Fall semester of Year 2, MERIT Scholars participate in on-going, established bioscience courses that are instructed by their respective MERIT Teaching Mentors; Scholars' participation should be limited to 1 - 2 days per week. It is anticipated that MERIT Scholars, together with their MERIT Teaching Mentors, introduce fresh scientific topics generated from their research efforts and apply new pedagogical approaches learned during the coursework completed in Year 1 to enhance the content of the existing courses. In addition, it is expected that MERIT Scholars give guest lectures in these courses and assist with exam grading and/or tutoring.

2. Preparation of Course / Laboratory for 3rd Year Teaching Experience: During the Spring semester of Year 2, each MERIT Scholar must prepare a course or laboratory that he/she will teach in Year 3; preparation should be done under the direction of the MERIT Teaching Mentor. This course or laboratory may include expansion and/or redesign of an existing bioscience course / laboratory or present a novel topic that will complement existing curricula. Preparation should include construction of a syllabus, lectures or laboratory sections, quizzes and exams, and course / laboratory evaluations; each of these elements must be reviewed and approved by the MERIT Teaching Mentor. During this preparation process, MERIT Scholars will meet monthly in a group format together with Co-Director for Teaching Instruction in order to exchange ideas and critique one another's plans.

During a one-day workshop at the end of the Spring semester, each MERIT Scholar must present his/her prepared course or laboratory to the entire MERIT Community, including the MERIT Program Executive Committee, MERIT Teaching Mentors, MERIT Research Mentors, and all MERIT Scholars. Following this workshop and throughout the summer semester of Year 2, MERIT Scholars should incorporate the MERIT Community's suggestions and gather or create elements needed for the execution of the course in Year 3.

3. Continuation of Mentoring Undergraduate Mentee: In the Summer semester of Year 2, MERIT Scholars continue the mentoring of summer undergraduate interns who are enrolled in the MHRC Summer Enrichment Program, the McNair Program, or pursuing a senior research thesis as described above.

C. Third Year

In Year 3, each MERIT Scholar is expected to teach his/her prepared course or laboratory and secure an academic teaching position.

1. Instruction of Prepared Course or Laboratory: In the Fall semester of Year 3, MERIT Scholars must teach their prepared courses or laboratories in a format that meets 2 days per week; the respective MERIT Teaching Mentors must attend each class / lab to assist the MERIT Scholar and to provide immediate feedback. Periodically throughout the semester, the Co-Program Director at the respective institution and the Co-Program Director for Teaching Instruction will attend a class or laboratory to observe the MERIT Scholar in a class setting; this observation is integral to the teaching evaluation of each MERIT Scholar. As constructed by the MERIT Scholars, each course and

laboratory should include a student evaluation of the course / laboratory and the individual MERIT Scholar; these evaluations will also be included in the teaching evaluation of each MERIT Scholar.

2. Job Search and Placement: Early in the Fall semester of Year 3, MERIT Scholars meet as a group together with the Co-Program Director for Teaching Instruction to discuss the following job search-related topics: i) searching for available academic positions; ii) responding to advertisements for academic positions; and iii) constructing curriculum vitae, resumes, and teaching portfolios. The group will meet again during the early Spring semester to discuss and practice interviewing skills and presenting job-related seminars.

D. Evaluation of MERIT Scholars' progress in teaching instruction.

To insure that all MERIT Scholars receive successful teaching training experiences, the *Co-Program Director for Teaching Instruction*:

- meets with each MERIT Scholar together with his/her teaching mentor at the beginning of the fellowship in order to review programmatic requirements and the 'Personal Teaching Skills Development Plan'
- performs a 6-month review and assessment of each MERIT Scholar's progress toward completion of programmatic requirements
- assesses each MERIT Scholar's annual review, which will be provided by the respective teaching mentor, and the scholar's progress toward stated teaching goals; specific measurements will include use and awareness of teaching tools and enhanced lecturing skills

V. Training & Professional Development

A. Required Ethics Instruction

During the first year of research training, each MERIT Scholar must complete the following instruction in ethics:

- *Principles of Scientific Integrity (GRD 717: Harold A. Kincaid, PhD)*. A survey of ethical issues and principles in the practice of science. Topics include the nature, extent, and causes of fraud in science; UAB policies on fraud; ideals of good science; responsibilities of authorship and peer review; bias and sloppy practices; potential problems raised by the commercialization of research; scientists as public policy advisors; and ethical issues involved in animal experimentation and in clinical trials.
- *IRB training*: MERIT Scholars who perform research on human subjects must complete an approved training course on human subjects protection and will update their training annually. There are a number of avenues for fulfilling this training requirement, including on-line opportunities and seminars. For example, MERIT Scholars may fulfill this requirement via completion of the web based training program *Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI)*.
- *IACUC training*: MERIT Scholars who are involved in research that utilizes animals must complete IACUC training via on-line coursework combined with individualized instruction from IACUC veterinarians. Specifically, IACUC training will review the humane use of animals in research together with related ethical issues.

B. Professional skills development

Throughout their training experiences, MERIT Scholars are encouraged to receive training in new skills that differ from and/or complement those that they learned as graduate students. Each MERIT Scholar will also be encouraged to interact with the mentor's research team, including other postdoctoral scholars, graduate students, and collaborators, through laboratory meetings, journal clubs, and departmental seminar series. In addition, each MERIT Scholar will be provided with opportunities to develop professional skills, including presentation and publication skills, workshops and seminars offered through the UAB Office of Postdoctoral Education.

C. MERIT Program Workshop Series

The MERIT Program Workshop Series provides additional teaching experiences for MERIT Scholars and to promote interactions between members of the MERIT Community. MERIT Scholars will be involved directly in the planning of these workshops. The MERIT Workshop Series are held quarterly throughout the academic year; the location of each workshop rotates between institutions.

Each workshop includes an hour-long presentation on a research- or teaching-related topic followed by an informal social gathering over refreshments. These workshops include presentations by each MERIT Scholar, together with his/her Research and Teaching Mentors, as well as invited speakers. Topics should be of interest to the greater MERIT Community; example topics include use of technology in the class-room, establishing a research program at the undergraduate level, and teaching research ethics.

D. MERIT Program Annual Retreat

Each year, the MERIT Program holds a retreat for the entire MERIT Community. It includes an invited, key-note speaker, who gives the plenary address on a topic that is fundamental to the mission of the MERIT Program. In addition, the retreat includes presentations by MERIT Scholars and MERIT Teaching and Research Mentors as well as 'break-out' sessions that discuss policy and organizational matters related to the MERIT Program.

It is a day-long event at a venue that is central to the participating institutions. All members of the MERIT Program Community are expected to attend; attendance is required for all MERIT Scholars.

E. Annual IRACDA Conference

MERIT Scholars together with members of the MERIT Program Executive Committee are expected to attend the Annual IRACDA Conference each year. Because this conference brings together the greater IRACDA community, it provides MERIT Scholars and program administrators an opportunity to share experiences and challenges with those that share similar career goals in research and science education.

VI. MERIT Scholar Compensation

A. Salary & Fringe Benefits

Each fellow will be supported for a maximum of three years. The annual amount of each stipend is based on the recommended stipend levels for individuals receiving support through institutional or individual **National Research Service Awards (NRSA) at Fiscal Year 2011 levels** <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-11-067.html>. In addition, UAB offers a comprehensive benefits package. A summary of these benefits that are generally available to postdoctoral fellows may be found at <http://www.postdocs.uab.edu>. These include, but are not limited to, health care plan, dental plan, vision plan, parking/transportation, retirement benefits, disability insurance, life insurance, and auto/home owner/renters insurance. Many of the benefits can be paid for on a before-tax basis. Please contact UAB Employee Benefits at (205) 934-3458 for eligibility requirements.

B. Travel Allotment

There is an allotment in the grant of \$750 per MERIT Scholar for allowable travel expenses: transportation, hotel registration, and meals. It is expected that fellows spend the \$750 on travel to scientific meetings. **Scholars should notify The Office of Postdoctoral Education if costs exceed the \$750 allotment.** As a general policy, second or third year Scholars should present a poster or talk at each meeting they attend. First year Scholars are encouraged to attend appropriate scientific meetings for professional development and may also submit abstracts for posters or presentations.

If you have travel funds available, Scholars can make the travel arrangements yourself; costs will be reimbursed following completion of the trip and the filing an expense report with Alana Townsend. The cost of side trips, first class, and late purchase fees will not be reimbursed. Registration costs for meetings will be charged to the \$750 allotment. Any unspent travel money will be lost as of June 30th; travel allotments do not 'roll over'.

Travel to/from and parking at teaching related activities will be reimbursed out of the travel allowance pool of the grant and not debited to the specific MERIT Scholar.

C. Research and Teaching Allowance

Newly recruited First Year MERIT Scholars receive a \$750 laptop computer allotment. Second and Third Year MERIT Scholars are provided \$750 each year (grant fiscal year is July 1 – June 30) to spend on research and teaching related items; allowable expenses include books, and laboratory and teaching supplies. All purchases against the annual allowance must be made through Office of Postdoctoral Education. All purchases should be made by June 30th.

VII. FAQ

- ***When do we receive our annual increase?***

Annual increases are given at the end of the current grant period which is normally June 30 each year.

- ***What is the best way to handle travel expenses?***

Ultimately you are responsible for the bill; however, upon returning from your conference, bring all your receipts to the Office of Postdoctoral Education and fill out a *Travel Reimbursement* form. This way your reimbursement to pay your travel expenses should be in your account by the time the bill arrives.

- ***How do we purchase items with our research and teaching allowance?***

All items purchased with the research and teaching allowance should be ordered through the Stillman College and/or Alana Keith. This includes computers or other large ticket items, particularly high ticket items priced over \$1499. These items must be purchased through the Office of Postdoctoral Education or you will not be able to get reimbursed. High ticket items must go through the University Purchasing Department for their approval. Smaller items such as software or books may be purchased by you individually, however, **please check with the office to make sure you still have funds available and that these expenditures are allowed.**

- ***What is the deadline to spend the research and teaching allowance?***

June 30th of the each calendar year is the deadline for ordering equipment and supplies with your research and teaching allowance. Any unspent money will not carry forward to the next year and ultimately will be lost.

- ***Who can I contact to find out how much money I have left in my account?***

Alana Keith (975-7021) can be contacted to find out exactly how much money you have left in your account.

- ***How many conferences can I attend?***

Fellows are given \$750 to spend for travel. This will generally cover one or possibly two scientific meetings depending on the location.

VIII. Directory of MERIT Scholars, Mentors, and Important Contacts

A. Current MERIT Scholars

Name	Email	Phone	Department
Hope Amm, PhD	hopeamm@uab.edu	205-996-5133	Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery
Tabitha Hardy, PhD	tabhardy@uab.edu	205-934-4573	Biology
Marla Hertz, PhD	mihertz@uab.edu	205-996-7100	Microbiology
Keri Mans, PhD	kayaybee@uab.edu	205-934-1859	Neurobiology
Robert A. Mans, PhD	rmans@uab.edu	205-934-3524	Neurobiology
Latoya Paul, PhD	lpaul08@uab.edu	205-975-5573	Neurobiology
Jessica Perez, PhD	perez@uab.edu	205-934-0919	Cell Biology
Christine Sestero, PhD	csestero@uab.edu	205-934-2473	Rheumatology

B. MERIT Research Mentors

Name	Email	Phone	Department
Anupam Agarwal, MD	Agarwal@uab.edu	(205) 996-6670	Pathology
David Allison, PhD	DAllison@uab.edu	(205) 975-9169	Biostatistics
Namasivayam Ambalavanam, MD	ambal@uab.edu	(205) 996-5419	Peds - Neonatology
Shannon Bailey, PhD	sbailey@uab.edu	(205) 934-7070	Environmental Health Services
Scott Ballinger, PhD	sballing@uab.edu	(205) 934-4621	Pathology
Scott Barnum, PhD	sbarnum@uab.edu	(205) 934-4972	Microbiology
Dave Bedwell, PhD	dbedwell@uab.edu	(205) 934-6593	Microbiology
Mary-Ann Bjornsti, PhD	Bjornsti@uab.edu	(205) 934-4579	Pharmacology and Toxicology
David Briles, PhD	dbriles@uab.edu	(205) 934-4579	Microbiology
Dan Bullard, PhD	dcbullard@uab.edu	(205) 934-7768	Genetics
John Chatham, PhD	jchatham@uab.edu	(205) 934-0240	Med - Cardiovascular Disease
Jim Collawn, PhD	jcollawn@uab.edu	(205) 934-1002	Cell Biology
Tim Garvey, PhD	garveyt@uab.edu	(205) 934-6103	Nutrition Science
Eugenia Kharlampieva, PhD	ekharlam@uab.edu	(205) 934-0974	Chemistry
Kevin Kirk, PhD	klkirk@uab.edu	(205) 934-3122	Physiology & Biophysics
Robin Lorenz, PhD	rlorenz@uab.edu	(205) 934-0676	Pathology
Mary MacDougall, PhD	macdouga@uab.edu	(205) 996-5122	Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery
Lori McMahan, PhD	mcmahon@uab.edu	(205) 934-3523	Physiology & Biophysics
Tim Nagy, PhD	tangy@uab.edu	(205) 934-4088	Nutrition Sciences
Chandar Raman, PhD	craman@uab.edu	(205) 934-2472	Immunology/Rheumatology

Sasanka Ramanadham, PhD	sramvem@uab.edu	(205) 996-5973	Physiology and Biophysics
Rosalinda Roberts, PhD	rcusidor@uab.edu	(205) 996-9373	Psych - Behavioral Neurobiology
Rosa Serra, PhD	rserra@uab.edu	(205) 934-0842	Cell Biology
Harold Sontheimer, PhD	Sontheimer@uab.edu	(205) 975-5805	Neurobiology
David Sweatt, PhD	dsweatt@uab.edu	(205) 975-5196	Neurobiology
Trygve Tollefsbol, PhD	trygve@uab.edu	(205) 934-4573	Biology
Qin Wang, PhD	qinwang@uab.edu	(205) 996-5099	Physiology & Biophysics
Scott Wilson, PhD	Livvy01@uab.edu	(205) 975-5573	Neurobiology
Mike Wyss, PhD	jmwyss@uab.edu	(205) 934-6086	Cell Biology
Qinglin Yang, PhD	gyang@uab.edu	(205) 996-6022	Nutrition Sciences
Brad Yoder, PhD	byoder@uab.edu	(205) 934-0994	Cell Biology

C. MERIT Teaching Mentors

Name	Email	Phone	School
O'Neal Wright, PhD	owright@stillman.edu	(205) 366-8914	Stillman College
Rosianna Gray, PhD	rowgray@stillman.edu	(205) 366-8898	Stillman College
Mary Jane Krotzer, PhD	mkrotzer@stillman.edu	(205) 366-8929	Stillman College

D. Important Contacts

Name	Email	Phone	MERIT Role
Julia Austin, PhD	jaustin@uab.edu	(205) 975-6539	Co-Program Director for Teaching Instruction
Charlotte Carter, PhD	ccarter@stillman.edu	(205) 366-8951	Co-Program Director at Stillman College
Bryan Noe, PhD	bnoe@uab.edu	(205) 975-8852	Program Director
Lisa Schwiebert, PhD	lschwieb@uab.edu	(205) 934-3970	Co-Program Director for Research Training
Scott Snyder, PhD	ssnyder@uab.edu	(205) 934-8475	Program Evaluator

IX. Useful Links

UAB MERIT Program

www.iracda/meritprogram.uab.edu

UAB Office of Postdoctoral Ed.

www.postdocs.uab.edu

National Postdoctoral Assoc.

www.nationalpostdoc.org/

NIH IRACDA Program

www.nigms.nih.gov/Training/CareerDev/MORE

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www.uab.edu