





GSCN Mentoring Program:

Fancy a career? But which one?

Do you know how your professional career will continue? Do you have a firm plan - or rather some ideas and a lot of uncertainties? The GSCN offers an annual mentoring program dedicated to supporting and advising career development. Experienced scientists make their expertise available to young scientists in order to jointly develop solutions and perspectives. In addition to meetings with the mentor, there are workshops/trainings on career development paths and meetings with other and former mentees.

The GSCN Mentoring Program has been in place since 2021 and the experience reports are very positive. Not only for the mentees, by the way.

MENTEES



Nina Graffmann

I was keen to take part in the GSCN mentoring for two reasons. Firstly, I hoped that the discussions with my mentor would give me more clarity about my career path and show me how to set up my own research group. On the other hand, this was a unique opportunity for me to exchange ideas and experiences with other young scientists from the stem cell field and to establish a network within the GSCN.

The discussions with my mentor were always very helpful for me. She shared her experience of setting up a research group and the distinct roles within this group with me and she was able to give me valuable tips on setting priorities and developing strategies. Through her questions and comments, I have become more aware of my goals so that I can now work more systematically towards them.

We met three times online and talked for about an hour. The workload was manageable for me. The topics we discussed generally kept me busy all the time, so our meetings were welcome occasions to organize my thoughts. I kept a short log after each meeting so that I didn't lose sight of our results.

Overall, the year was very successful for me, even if my long-term goal is still a long way off. It motivated me during this time to know from my mentor's feedback that I am on the right track or how to get there.

The meetings of the Mentee Club were also an enrichment for me. We meet online every 6-8 weeks with mentees from all years to discuss problems and progress. A senior scientist from the GSCN is also invited to each meeting to report on his/her career path. This, as well as the mid-year workshop, has shown me how much everyone struggles with difficulties that can eventually be overcome if you trust yourself and know where to look for support.

I very much hope that the network of the mentee club will continue to grow in the future and that we can regularly exchange ideas online and at the conferences.

I can only recommend mentoring to everyone and think that it is a good support, especially at the end of the doctoral period or at the beginning of the postdoc phase.



Katia Mattis

After having successfully obtained a PhD from the University of Oxford in 2019 and gained valuable postdoctoral research experience in both biotech and academic environments, I had reached a point in early 2022 where I had to make a key decision regarding my future career. Back then, the GSCN mentoring program came at exactly the right time. The Career Development Team helped me a lot in choosing my mentors; in the end, I even had the privilege of working with two mentors from an international biotechnology company. Even though our quarterly meetings mainly took place online, I always experienced the time with my mentors as extremely productive and motivating. With their support, I redefined my scientific goals and dared to try something new professionally: At the beginning of 2023, I moved from stem cell research in academia to a federal institute where I now perform risk assessments of food. Without the support of my mentors, this step would have certainly not been so easy for me. The openness of my mentors, the mutual appreciation, the commitment and confidentiality, the motivating and encouraging words as well as the impulses, ideas and their feedback have made our mentor-mentee relationship something special for me. I am also very grateful for the many enriching contacts I have made during the mentoring program. I am already looking forward to expanding this network in the future.

In conclusion, I enjoyed the mentoring year so much that I have already applied for a new mentoring program at my current institute. Therefore, to everyone who has the opportunity, take it and participate in the GSCN mentoring program.



MENTORS



Sina Bartfeld

I enjoy being a mentor. For me, being a mentor means that your mentee can come to you with problems, curiosities, and questions, of course in full confidentiality, and we can try together to find solutions that fit for the mentee. Often, this will of course entail that I share my experiences, but not necessarily, we mainly try to find out what is best for the mentee. Does she want to be a group leader, a professor, or lead in an industry position? What are the different paths to being a group leader in Germany? What is the difference in being at a University, Max Planck, Fraunhofer, Leibnitz or Helmholtz Institute? What are the most important assets and skills needed for which path? How will I be evaluated when I apply? What are funding schemes in which I could apply for a grant? But also, personal problems can be a topic. Work-life balance? How does one manage a family and a career in science? Or maybe there is trouble in the team or an issue with the supervisor. With every mentee, there are new topics to discuss. I enjoy being a mentor for three reasons. First, it is simply fantastic to be able to help. Second, the reflection makes me learn and grow as well, knowing the problems, maybe I can contribute better to improving the system. Third, it is payback to my mentors – without them I would not be where I am.



Claudia Waskow

It was a great pleasure to be able to accompany and support a doctoral student over the course of a year in a non-scientific capacity! In the last year of the doctorate, many decisions have to be made: how do I write my thesis, which experiments will be included in the doctoral thesis to make a concrete scientific statement, but also - and of course this is the primary focus of the GSCN mentoring program - what comes next, how can I prepare for it, how and when do I apply, where do I want to go in my career? Dealing with these questions made me aware of their urgency for scientists at this career stage and has (hopefully) led to improved mentoring of the scientists in my department. At the same time, I became more aware of the weaknesses of the life sciences career path in academia, and this led to reflections on how it can be improved at laboratory, institute, national and international levels. I very much hope that my mentoring has helped the doctoral student in important decision-making processes. For me, a learning process has taken place that I would not want to miss. I would be delighted to mentor other scientists in a non-scientific capacity in the future and support their careers.

The one-year GSCN mentoring program is preferably available to GSCN members and BIH scientists who are active in stem cell research and could become members of the GSCN.

Application deadline:	annually end of May
The application includes:	– a letter of motivation – a curriculum vitae – a brief description of your research project – Selection of a mentor from the GSCN mentor list (online) and justification of their choice
Information on acceptance:	early July
Program start:	GSCN Conference
End of program:	GSCN Conference the following year
Any questions?	Mail to stefanie.mahler@bih-charite.de