

# BSCIP

IN TOUCH WITH

B I O M E D I C A L S C I E N C E C A R E E R S P R O J E C T

## Mentoring: A First-Person Account

**BY DR. MARY FRANCES LOPEZ,  
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Mentorship has played an important role in shaping my career as a scientist. The first time I realized the importance of having a mentor was when I was an undergraduate at the University of California, San Diego. No matter how hard I studied, I could not excel in my classes. I did not take advantage of opportunities provided by the University because I did not know they existed. Why? Because no one told me. And my background had not prepared me to find help on my own.

I am a Mexican-American female from a family of six children. My father had only three days of formal schooling in his life; my mother had three years. Despite their lack of education, my parents always stressed the importance of education to get ahead in life. I was the first person in the family to attend a university in the U.S. — so no one in my family could offer me guidance. Being poor, Hispanic and a woman added more challenge to my education. Late at night, as I sat studying for exams, the phrases, "A good and decent daughter does not leave her parents' house unless it is to marry;" and "It's time for you to find a job and help the family" came into my mind. I wanted to succeed, but I did not know how!

Finally, during my senior year, I met Dr. Willie Brown, an African-American professor who was willing to spend time with me to show me how to succeed in college. I worked in his laboratory for a year. During this time I gained a better insight into the relationship between theoretical and experimental aspects of biology. For the first time, I began to understand how scientists designed experiments to determine how various biological processes occur. These experiences convinced me that I should pursue a career in science.

I attended the University of California, Santa Cruz for my Ph.D. training. My mentor there, Dr. Frank Talamantes, trained and advised me throughout my graduate work. Under his tutelage, I presented my first abstracts in international scientific symposia and published my first scientific papers. After I earned my Ph.D., Dr. Talamantes encouraged me to carry out my post-doctoral work at Harvard.

Dr. Lydia Villa-Komaroff, my mentor at Harvard, embodied everything I had dreamed of — a successful Latina scientist from whom I could learn. She provided me with the environment that I needed to grow as an independent investigator. She under-

**I attended the Biomedical Career Development Conference sponsored by the BSCP. I did not know that this one-day meeting would shape my future.**

Winter 1996 Volume 2 Number 2

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### Special Thanks To

Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky  
and Popeo, P.C. for its financial support and the  
design and layout of this newsletter

and to the  
Massachusetts Medical Society  
for their support in printing this newsletter

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# Mentor Profile

## **Lynda Jordan, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Chemistry, North Carolina A&T State University**

For Lynda Jordan, Ph.D., the road to higher education was longer than for some. And it began, ironically, when she ducked into the auditorium at Dorchester High School to avoid the hall monitor. "I was cutting class and smoking cigarettes," Jordan recalls with a laugh, adding that in 1971, when she was a high school sophomore, those activities occupied much of her school time. "When I went into the auditorium, a man was talking about the Brandeis University Upward Bound program and looking for people to participate." The man was Dr. Joseph Warren, director of the program.

Had it not been for that chance encounter, Jordan's life might have taken a very different turn. Until that point, she had been labeled by her teachers as a student who would not further her education. But after listening to Dr. Warren, she asked her guidance counselor for an Upward Bound application. She was accepted into the program, and for the next three summers Jordan left her inner-city home, which she shared with her mother, stepfather and 13 siblings, to live and study on the pastoral campus of Brandeis University, in Waltham, Massachusetts.

"When I first got to Brandeis, it was the first time I had been out of the city, in a place where there were trees and grass," she says. "And, for the first time in my life, I was challenged—mentally and physically. It was a beautiful experience."

At Brandeis, Jordan and her peers participated in a rigorous program that included English, math and science study, as well as early-morning exercise. It was divided into two three-week semesters. After the first semester, students were allowed to spend a week-end at home.

When they returned to Brandeis, there was an award ceremony to recognize the top achievers of the first semester. Amazingly, to Jordan, "I was one of the top six achievers. It was the first inkling, outside of my home, that I had the capability to be a smart child," she recalls. "That was the turning point of my life." Over the next two summers Jordan made such progress in Upward Bound that by her senior year the program hired a private tutor to teach her Organic Chemistry.

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After graduating in 1974, Jordan headed south, to North Carolina A&T State University, where she teaches today. "I had to get out of the city," she says. "Everyone I knew who stayed in Boston did not make it through college. I also knew I needed to be around strong black women." And there were plenty of role models for her at A&T.

After college, Jordan attended Atlanta University, earning an M.S. in Chemistry. Next, she went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she received her Ph.D. in Chemistry with a concentration in Biological Chemistry. She completed a two-year post-doctoral program at the Institut Pasteur in Paris, then returned to North Carolina A&T State, to begin her teaching career in 1987.

From the time Jordan first discovered her love for and facility with chemistry, she single-mindedly pursued that interest. But it wasn't always easy. She paid for her education through a combination of work study and regular jobs, loans, fellowships and scholarships. Further, she says, "My family could never understand why I had to go to school all the time, which was very difficult for me. I hope they understand it now."

Recently, Jordan was one of six women in the United States profiled in the Public Broadcasting System's "Discovering Women: Women in Science" series. "None of us was paid for our participation in the series," she says. "I did it as a public service," so other women who come from a background like hers will see that the future is wide open for them, even if it doesn't appear that way at present. ♦

# News

## **BSCP Names Executive Director**

The Biomedical Science Careers Project is happy to announce that Lise Kaye, RN, has been named Executive Director. In that capacity, she has full operational responsibility for the Program, including arranging conferences and working closely with BSCP Board members.

Prior to joining BSCP, Kaye was director of Community Relations for Staff Builders Home Health Care in Rockland, MA. This local branch of a national organization serves Plymouth and Norfolk counties. Kaye has also been a nurse at New York Cornell Medical Center and the French and Polyclinic Hospital, both in Manhattan. At the French and Polyclinic Hospital she taught OB/GYN classes, including prenatal and postpartum courses.

In addition to her professional responsibilities, Kaye is active in community affairs in Boston and Brookline. In 1990, she implemented the first alcohol- and drug-free after-prom party at Brookline High School. The party has been held every year since then. She also has been involved with different community health centers in Boston and has been indirectly involved with Pro-Tech, a program through which Boston-area hospitals, banks and other businesses offer educational and employment opportunities to local high school students. ♦

### **Mentoring...continued from front page**

stood my past and present struggles and was willing to guide me. She was not only my post-doctoral mentor but will be my lifelong role model.

One year ago, I attended the Biomedical Science Careers Conference sponsored by the BSCP. I did not know that this one-day meeting

**Who What Where**

  

### **Biomedical Science Careers Conference**

The BSCP will hold its third annual Biomedical Science Careers Conference on Saturday, February 3, 1996, from 7:00 am to 4:30 pm at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel. Seventy-five advisers from six New England states, and 50 speakers and panelists will be available to talk to the high school, college, medical and graduate students who attend.

Woodrow A. Myers, Jr., MD, MBA, Director of Health Care Management at Ford Motor Company, will be the keynote speaker. Myers is the former Commissioner of Health for the City of New York, former Health Commissioner for the State of Indiana and Secretary of the Indiana State Board of Health. Other opening panelists include Kenneth Edelin, MD, Associate Dean and Professor of OB/GYN at Boston University Medical School; Gail Maderis, Vice President, Genzyme Corp; H. Richard Nesson, MD, CEO of Partners HealthCare Systems, Inc.; Wendell Knox, President and CEO, Abt Associates; and Yvonne Maddox, PhD, Deputy Director, National Institutes of Health.

Panel topics will include: What is the Future of Biomedical Science?, Constructing Your Career Agenda, Getting Into College and Succeeding, How to Get a Job, and How to Use Professional and Trade Organizations. For information on registration, call the BSCP at 617-432-0552.

would shape my future. The conference included a panel of speakers talking about how to succeed as a scientist at Harvard. The meeting also provided a mentor for the day. Does a scientist at the post-doctoral level really need a mentor? Yes.

Dr. John Potts, a well-known endocrinologist from the Massachusetts General Hospital was assigned as my mentor that day. During our conversation, I found out that he was not only an intelligent man, but a sensitive and caring individual. I told him I was about to finish my post-doctoral work and that I was looking for advice as to what to do next. We discussed my research interest and data. He had many suggestions for me, including names of people for whom I might want to work.

I took note of everything Dr. Potts said and acted on it. One of the people on his list was Dr. Joseph Maj-

zoub, chief of the Endocrine Division at Children's Hospital-Harvard Medical School. After one conversation with Dr. Majzoub, I knew I wanted him to be my next mentor — to help me direct the next phase of my career.

I am happy to say that I am now working as an instructor in the Endocrine Division at Children's Hospital-Harvard Medical School, and that Dr. Majzoub is my new mentor and supervisor. I am glad to share with you how important it has been for me to have mentors during the different stages of my career. I am looking forward to having new mentors in the future and also to being a mentor to young men and women who are in need of mentorship. But I am especially interested in acting as a mentor to Latina women who are struggling to accomplish the goal of one day becoming a scientist. ♦

## **Affirmative Action and You**

As health care service providers, corporations, academic institutions and other organizations develop their own approaches to Affirmative Action, everyone in the job market will be affected. Recently we spoke to some leaders in the field about their views on how changes in Affirmative Action may affect underrepresented minorities pursuing careers in the biomedical sciences. Following are summaries of their responses:

### **MARTHA FIELDS, CONSULTANT FIELDS CONSULTING**

I am seeing many organizations abandoning Affirmative Action programs and replacing them with Diversity programs — which I believe takes a larger, more global view of the issue. At the same time, there are shifting demographic trends that will affect women and minorities. By the year 2000 it is estimated that 85% of new entrants to the job market will be women and minorities.

Moving forward, people will have to be multi-skilled, as well as expert in at least one area, to get and keep jobs. This is particularly true in the sciences and health care. I think the outlook is good for anyone, regardless of color or ethnic background, who has the necessary skills and who continues to keep abreast of changes in technology.

### **JAMES HOYTE, ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR DIVERSITY AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ISSUES HARVARD UNIVERSITY**

There are very few minorities and relatively few women in the sciences now. I believe the key to changing

## **Scholarship Opportunity**

The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Inc. has \$2,000 summer research scholarships available for underrepresented minority high school seniors interested in pursuing a Biomedical career. The grants-in-aid, which will be awarded in July, 1996, form part of an NKF program designed to encourage an early interest in science and scientific research. They provide opportunities for students to work alongside experienced researchers at a major area university medical center during the summer months before college classes begin. The deadline for applications is Friday, April 5, 1996. For information, call Julie Clinton at 617-326-7225 or 800-542-4001.

that is to increase the pipeline of qualified people feeding into the field. In order to do that, it is important to encourage and nurture participation of minorities and women in the sciences at an early age.

Affirmative Action means acting affirmatively — reaching out and identifying talented people and nurturing their development. There aren't enough programs out there now to make a significant impact. I would advise students, as soon as they identify their interest in science, to rigorously pursue those interests outside the classroom, as well as in school. There are lots of established scientists who are interested in working with promising students. Your teachers/professors and guidance counselors would be a good place to start to look for these people.

### **SYLVIA SALLAS, DIRECTOR NELLIE MAE FUND FOR EDUCATION**

There is not enough being done very early on to promote the sciences. The number of undergraduate and graduate degrees earned by women and minorities in engineering, for example, is still very low and I haven't seen much change in those numbers.

There is a lot of change, however, in

the number of women entering the field of medicine. I believe Affirmative Action is still important because it is the only way many underrepresented minorities will get help.

### **DR. ALVIN POUSSAINT, CLINICAL PROFESSOR OF PSYCHIATRY, FACULTY ASSOCIATE DEAN OF STUDENT AFFAIRS HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL**

Affirmative Action has been important in getting minority students in medical, biomedical and science careers largely because it stimulated programs like the BSCP, which help increase the number of minority students in the pipeline.

Diversity, particularly in medicine and the sciences, overtook Affirmative Action, and I think the outlook is still very promising for minority students in the sciences. In medicine, there is growing recognition of the need for care givers from different backgrounds to take care of people from diverse backgrounds. What may change in the future is the increasing number of qualified minorities in the applicant pool, so the competition may be tougher. But I see this development as a plus. ♦