

# The Digest

VOLUME 55, NO. 2 • SUMMER 2020

## Research

a dietetic practice group of the  
**eat right** Academy of Nutrition  
and Dietetics

### IN THIS ISSUE



#### Article:

A Story of Success –  
the Power of Mentorship

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 2019-2020 Budget                       | 4  |
| Member Spotlight                       | 5  |
| Chair's Message                        | 6  |
| Student Spotlight                      | 7  |
| Research Career Options<br>for MS RDNs | 8  |
| Original Research Article              | 12 |
| ACEND Updates                          | 18 |
| Note from HOD<br>Delegate              | 21 |
| Awards                                 | 22 |
| Letter from the Editor                 | 22 |
| Policy and Research                    | 23 |
| 2020-2021 RDG Roster                   | 25 |



## A Story of Success – the Power of Mentorship

Chen Du, MS, RDN, CNSC, LD

*Doctoral Candidate, Michigan State University*

[duchen@msu.edu](mailto:duchen@msu.edu)

*Conflicts of Interest: None*

*Author's Note: Dear readers, my name is Chen Du. I am currently a doctoral student studying Human Nutrition at Michigan State University, working in Dr. Robin Tucker's lab. I would not have had the opportunity to study under an amazing mentor nor gained understanding about progressing in academia without joining the Research Dietetics Practice Group (RDPG) Mentoring Program. So, I would like to share the story of how I met and built the relationship with my current mentor through the Mentorship Program. I hope my story will encourage you to join the RDPG Mentorship Program if you are seeking professional or academic mentorship, have questions about your future career direction, feel lost, or just want to build professional and academic relationships.*

### The Beginning

In the summer of 2018, I was admitted into a PhD program but was struggling with the process. I felt helpless and lost, not sure if I should continue. I still remember the feeling of my world turning gray. I am a high achieving person and had not had such struggle previously nor did I know how to handle it. Receiving rejections from a couple of grant funders certainly did not help at the time but pushed me towards wanting to quit or transfer to a different program. I started to wish "if only I can talk about my struggles with someone who can understand me...if only someone could give me some guidance."



*Continued on page 2*

During my struggles, I attended my first Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo™ (FNCE®) in 2018. I was not intentionally seeking a mentor at the time but just wanted to know what other dietitians were doing and to network. While attending the vendors' exhibition, I stopped by the RDPG booth where I first met Dr. Tucker. She was working at the booth and said, "hello," as I stopped by. We started our first conversation, and at the time, I would not have expected this conversation to change my life. After learning I was a graduate student, Dr. Tucker introduced me to the RDPG and the RDPG Mentorship Program. We exchanged contact information at the booth.

Once I got home from the conference, I thought more about how I was struggling and how I needed some guidance. Thinking I should try this Mentorship Program, I reached out to Dr. Tucker. She got back to me within 24 hours and told me that she already emailed my contact information to the mentoring and volunteer coordinators of the RDPG. On top of that, she volunteered to be my mentor. I was really touched by her email and was impressed with how fast she responded which, to me, indicated how much she cares about students. After receiving her email, I could not wait to start the Mentorship Program and to learn from Dr. Tucker.

### **During the Mentorship Program**

Under the organization and with the help of Dr. Whitney Linsenmeyer, the Mentorship Chair for the RDPG, Dr. Tucker and I officially "enrolled" in the Mentorship Program. The program is well organized and structured. Both the mentor and the mentee first review an article by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics on Mentoring 101 to help them understand what mentoring is, what the process looks like, and what the responsibilities of mentors and mentees are.<sup>1</sup> Then, both the mentor and the mentee will need to sign a Mentorship Agreement, which outlines the responsibilities and roles of mentors and mentees. Signing this document made me feel that this is a well organized and established program and that I needed to take this opportunity seriously and get the most out of this program. One other thing that really impressed me about the program was that the mentee completes a Mentee Development Plan in which the mentee writes down a primary vision, mission, and goals including short-term, near-term, and long-term goals. Working through this document really helped me think through what I want to accomplish with my life and my career. It also helped me realize that I have been making progress even though I felt like I was stuck and not making enough progress. I emailed my Mentee Development Plan to Dr. Tucker prior to our first mentorship meeting.



**Figure 1.** Dr. Robin Tucker, PhD, RD, FAND, Assistant Professor at Michigan State

Within the Mentorship Program, mentors and mentees are required to meet once a month, in any format that works for them, for six months. Dr. Tucker and I communicated through phone calls and emails, well in excess of the minimal requirement. The guidance and advice that I got from Dr. Tucker through those conversations not only helped me through my "academic depression," but was also a treasure for life. I often sent a list of questions, sometimes with more than ten questions, to Dr. Tucker. She answered thoroughly with rationales to all of my questions. I learned building skills to write effective grant proposals, how to transition from a graduate student to faculty, the most important skills to build in academia, how to identify the right journals to publish in, pre-doctoral fellowship and research opportunities, and most importantly, taking some time for myself to prevent burnout, etc.

What I learned from Dr. Tucker and how I interacted with her helped me realize the power and the importance of mentorship. After nine months of being mentored by Dr. Tucker, I was motivated to continue my academic journey with a clearer vision and goals as well as a better understanding of how to be successful in graduate school. I was energized and delighted. More importantly, through this experience, I learned what caring means. Dr. Tucker's willingness to spend time teaching me, chatting with me, listening to me, and responding to my emails, all showed that she cared. She cared about my growth and students' growth in general, and she cared about building up the future of the academic world. She is a tremendous mentor, and demonstrates an example of what a good mentor should look like.

*Continued on page 3*

## The Success

After realizing the power and the importance of mentorship, I decided that I want to study with Dr. Tucker for my doctoral degree. I emailed Dr. Tucker on a Sunday afternoon and told her I wanted to work in her lab and to study under her mentorship. She got back to me in two hours and said that she was honored and would love for me to join her lab. At the time, she did not have the funding to support me and she told me about that, but she was in communication with her mentors and the department chair and worked very hard to make this happen for me. With Dr. Tucker's continued involvement and support, I was admitted into my current program at Michigan State University with the support of a university-level graduate fellowship. Once again, this process really showed me how much Dr. Tucker cares about students and how much she is willing to go above and beyond for students. She is a true advocate for students as well as a role model for me and other students who want to work in academia in the future.

## Success to be Continued...

I have been in Dr. Tucker's lab for six months now, and I am already working on a research publication and a systematic review publication. Dr. Tucker and I have submitted two research proposals to the Human Research Protection Board for approval. I no longer feel stuck and am very thrilled with my progress under Dr. Tucker's mentorship. I am looking forward to the years to come as well as the research projects that we will develop and conduct. I am also looking forward to continually building each other up through this mentorship, and I hope to see more successful mentorship relations like ours. Once again, without the RDPG Mentorship Program, I could not reach the stage I am at right now. I might have given up on my PhD or might not have been able to overcome my "academic depression." I want to thank the RDPG Mentorship Program and thank all the board members for making this happen. Last but not least, I want to thank my mentor – Dr. Robin Tucker.



**Figure 2.** Dr. Robin Tucker's Lab Picture, G.M. Trout Food Science and Human Nutrition Building, Michigan State University. From left to right: Srishti LNU, Chia-Lun Karen Yang, Clare Feldpausch, Dr. Tucker, Sara Folk, Suzy Gadd, Chen Du, Shefali Merchant, Xinyi Zhang, and Juman Almotawa. Not pictured: Hanah Parag

## Reference

- Lipscomb R, An S. Mentoring 101: Building a Mentoring Relationship. *J. Acad. Nutr. Diet.* 2010;110(7):1008.  
doi:10.1016/j.jada.2010.05.017