**Mentoring and Scholarship Statement**

Adolescent and Young Adult Development Lab

Dr. Diana “Di” Samek

\*This document is meant to provide prospective graduate and undergraduate students with information on my approach to training and mentoring. I (Dr. Samek) am happy to answer any questions you have by email or phone ([drs0032@auburn.edu](mailto:drs0032@auburn.edu), 334-844-3173).

**Research Objectives of the Adolescent and Young Adult Development Lab at Auburn University**

The Adolescent and Young Adult Development lab seeks to identify precursors and consequences of problematic substance use and related psychopathology during the developmental window they are most likely to occur (i.e., ages 18-25). Much of the research we focus on concerns the interplay between aspects of the person (e.g., personality traits) and their social relationships and context as predictors of problematic substance use and related externalizing or internalizing symptoms in adolescent and young adult populations. One area of focus is on the experiences that college students have as they transition into and out of college, as such transitions are thought to represent sensitive turning points in the development or progression of the substance use and internalizing symptoms. I am open to exploring alternative research topics on adolescent and young adult development and working with students to take advantage of the increasing amount of fantastic data available for secondary analysis (e.g., the ABCD Study, the National College Health Assessment). Recently, we have focused on identifying novel risk factors for internalizing symptoms (depressive, anxiety, somatic) as they are increasingly common in adolescence and young adulthood.

**Principles of Antiracism, Equity, and Inclusion**

As humans, the members of the Adolescent and Young Adult Development lab are affected by issues including but not limited to race, ethnicity, class, sex, gender, physical or mental abilities, nationality, age, and religion in various intersections and degrees of historical privilege and oppression. The degree to which each individual lab member experiences these influences vary, as do each person’s interrogation of how these issues might affect them. I aim to foster an environment where we can learn from one another and grow in our understanding of these issues, including their relevance to the adolescents and young adults we study. As a scientist and educator, I am actively interrogating these issues and my role in perpetuating the status quo vs. making “good trouble” and advancing AEI principles. As we learn, we make mistakes. I appreciate it when students, lab members, and colleagues hold me accountable; I intend to do the same. Students can expect to engage with me and other lab members on these topics and help promote these principles in the work that we do.

**Goals for Graduate and Undergraduate Students**

In general, the Adolescent and Young Adult Development lab is an ideal fit for undergraduate and graduate students that would like to learn more about how a research project is run on a day-to-day basis, as well as advanced students who would like to gain experience and expertise in statistical analyses and/or scientific writing.

Undergraduate students: Many undergraduate students who work in lab are interested in furthering their education post-Bachelor completion (e.g., applying for a professional master’s, doctoral, or other graduate programs in HDFS, psychology, counseling, pharmaceutical sciences, as well as medical school). Undergraduate students predominately help with participant recruitment and management of cases and gain ample experience in managing large databases, protecting participant confidentiality, and disseminating findings via social media platforms. After working at least one semester in the lab, students have the option to take an advanced research assistantship, where they continue to assist the study in terms of recruitment and participant management, as well as pursuing their own paper wherein they analyze data collected from the lab and complete a research paper. Such work may result in presenting their work at local or national conferences, which is highly recommended for those interested in exploring post-secondary education and a potential career in research. Other students may not elect this option and continue to grow in their office and project management skillset; both types of students are highly valued in the lab and result in skilled experiences that often improve students’ resumes.

Graduate students: M.S. and Ph.D. students working in my lab will complete their thesis/qualifying exam/dissertation and potentially other projects using data collected in the lab (e.g., from the AU College Experiences and Beyond Study) or via secondary data sets data collected outside of the lab (e.g., the ABCD Study, the National College Health Assessment). Doctoral students admitted into our program are expected to be working towards an academic career (e.g., becoming a professor themselves one day), though I am willing to help students navigate alternative career goals wherein the skillset gained in our program will be of use (prior students have gone on to work in government and non-profit positions, for example). In fact, exploring this is a good idea as there are limited tenure-track positions available compared to the number of doctoral students enrolled in programs preparing them for such positions. I encourage all graduate students to create a five-year plan early on in their graduate experience to determine what they need to accomplish (and when) to meet their education and occupation goals.

In the lab, graduate students may work with undergraduate students in training and supervision, as well as part of a team in data collection efforts. Doctoral students are expected to lead at least one research project each year they are in the program. I encourage students to work with me in a secondary role on projects that I or another student is leading to gain ample experience and a healthy publication record by the time of graduation. Graduate students are encouraged to consider additional projects outside of the lab, but that they should carefully consider the time needed to efficiently complete each project and not over-commit themselves to the detriment of not finishing any one project in an efficient time frame. Graduate students are also expected to attend lab meetings at least once a month (or when invited) to provide updates on project progress and read and discuss research relevant to the lab.

My approach to mentoring graduate students is hands-on. I reserve one hour each week to meet with each student to discuss progress on research projects, assist in data analysis, plan for future conference presentations, etc. After their first meeting, I ask graduate students to create an agenda for each meeting and lead us through it. I aim to help students learn by first showing them how to complete a task then observing and assisting as they attempt to complete the task themselves. I teach students to write scientifically though assigning articles to read, providing feedback on drafts, and co-writing during weekly meetings. I also provide students with a manual on how to work with me, which consists of topics and materials that I find myself repeating to students, such as how to complete a quality literature review, instructions to create a five-year plan, how to use a google calendar to manage many ongoing projects, advice on achieving a healthy work-life balance, and other advice.

**Expectations for Joining the Adolescent and Young Adult Development Lab**

Students will be most likely to fit and grow in my lab if they are interested in the type of research questions I study. Additional qualities/skills/traits that will serve students well in their work with me include, but are not limited to:

* Being self-motivated.
* Having excellent organizational and time management skills.
* Having a strong attention to detail.
* Having a growth-based mindset, meaning a strong desire to learn and grow even when it is uncomfortable.
* Additionally, graduate students must have the ability to read and absorb ample research articles, chapters, and materials relevant to their courses and research interests. I provide tips and materials to help students read research articles, track and synthesize research findings, and outline their major ideas - and it does get better with practice, but students must want and commit to spending ample time reading and writing about their research interest topics if they are to succeed in the program and under my supervision in the lab.
* Graduate students should expect to work 40-45 hours per week on all graduate student tasks (coursework, homework, teaching/research assistantships). It is to be expected that at least some of your weekends and evenings will be devoted to work necessary for the program (e.g., readings for class and related assignments), but with good time management skills and practice, it should average out to a manageable load (i.e., mostly done via the 8am-5pm, M-F schedule). Graduate students are strongly encouraged to strive to reserve and spend time with those outside of graduate school (i.e., family, friends), get 8 hours of sleep per night, and manage their health (e.g., exercise, attending necessary medical appointments, including therapy if needed).
  + As graduate students will learn, the standards for the number of publications necessary for an academic position (including a post-doc) are increasingly absurd, yet the quality of each publication matters greatly. This creates a stressful context for those seeking an academic career. As your major professor, I will attempt to prepare you for this career track to the best of my ability, but it will require extremely hard work on both our parts. Graduate school is not for everyone, as much as I would like it to be.
  + To produce great work, stress management is key, as well as being able to take time off and enjoy that time off. I expect graduate students to take time off throughout the year, including at least 2 weeks over winter break, 2-3 weeks over summer break, and as requested. I model such expectations myself.
* Undergraduate and graduate research assistants taking credits with me are expected to work 3 hours per week for each credit they sign up for (e.g., it is typical to sign up for 2-3 credits and manage 6-9 hours of work per week). Graduate students are expected to work their paid full time equivalent (if awarded to .50 FTE research assistantship, they should work 20 hours/week). Please note that the max graduate assistantship available to graduate students is a .50 FTE (with a 20 hour/week stipend). That means your paycheck will pay you for part-time hours for your assistantship work and in the remaining hours of a traditional 40-hour work week, you must fulfill all coursework and lab requirements as well as extracurricular student activities.

**What to expect from Dr. Samek:**

It’s helpful for students to know what to expect of me and consider my potential strengths and weaknesses. In my work with you as a student, you can expect me to:

* Have and hold you to high expectations. The key is that students demonstrate their hard work and that they are progressing, no matter where they start from. I will meet students where they are and help them get to the next level, but this only happens with hard work.
* Provide timely feedback. Dr. Samek typically replies to emails within 24 to 48 hours and returns manuscript drafts within a week of receiving them.
* Provide A LOT of feedback on writing. The purpose is to help students improve their writing via the presentation of arguments, logic, and flow. We all seem to learn how to write through feedback and revisions – many, many revisions.
* Help you progress through the program and find a job at program exit. Dr. Samek has ample experience managing research projects, publishing manuscripts, and disseminating research findings. She will train you how to do these things, as well as help you navigate the job market and emphasize your skill set when you graduate.

These are all strengths. It’s important to know her potential weaknesses, as well:

* Rely on Department funding. I have been funded internally and externally in the past and am busy applying for grants to fund the lab and graduate students in full. Nonetheless, funding (e.g., NIH) is scarce and highly competitive. Thus, at least for the immediate future, graduate students working under my supervision will likely have to rely on funding from the department, college, or university to fund their studies (including tuition, stipends, and conference travel). In recent years, graduate students under my supervision have typically relied on teaching assistantships from the department to cover tuition and stipends (ideally, by working with me as my graduate teaching assistant, then teaching such courses as an instructor of record in the summer or subsequent terms). There also may be opportunities to have funding through other labs and professors in HDFS, which can be great experience. Graduate students can also ask the department to help fund conference travel (the amount provided is evaluated annually, as of today, up to $650 per year given authorship on a presentation at such a conference). Believe me, as I apply for grants, I include .50 FTE assistantships year-round, tuition coverage, and generous conference support. I want to provide these things for my students and continue to work hard to do so.