HHMI Distinguished Mentor awards recognize excellence in undergraduate mentoring. Seven awardees were selected in the 2010 competition. These came from dozens of nominees and applicants from numerous different colleges and units at the University of Florida representing ranks from junior faculty to distinguished professors.

Dr. Lise Abrams is an associate professor and undergraduate coordinator of the Psychology Department at the University of Florida. After earning her Ph.D. in cognitive psychology from UCLA, she came to the University of Florida in 1997, where she established the Cognition and Aging Laboratory. Her research investigates memory and language processes in young and older adults, specifically the processes involved in comprehending and retrieving words and the changes in these processes that occur with normal aging. Specific areas of interest include: (1) memory retrieval failures such as the tip-of-the-tongue states, which are naturally-occurring retrieval failures characterized by a temporary inability to recall a known word; and (2) language errors that occur in writing, such as the production of spelling errors and homophone substitution errors. Dr. Abrams has supervised over 80 undergraduates in research, 12 of whom have conducted senior honors theses in her laboratory, and she has published articles with 10 undergraduate co-authors in peer-reviewed journals. Supported by the National Institute on Aging and the National Institute of Mental Health, her research has been recognized by Sigma Xi, who awarded her the 2007 Young Investigator Award. Also known as an inspiring and dynamic teacher, Dr. Abrams has received recognition for her teaching and mentoring, earning a teaching award from the university’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and mentorship awards from the American Psychological Association Division 20 as well as the organization Women in Cognitive Science. Most rewarding to her is recognition from the students themselves, who have twice designated her as the Psi Chi / Psychology Club Professor of the Year. abrams@ufl.edu

Dr. Dan Hahn is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Entomology and Nematology at the University of Florida. Work in the Hahn lab integrates ecology, physiology, biochemistry, and genetics to understand the mechanisms underlying adaptation and biological diversification. In other words: 1) how do organisms deal with the stressful world they live in, 2) how can shifts in life history timing lead to reproductive isolation and the formation of new species, and 3) can studying insects living at the extremes of environmental stress tell us anything about humans? The Hahn lab works to educate undergraduates by incorporating them in research and outreach. Our goal is to integrate undergraduates into our research team keeping them long enough that they build into budding scientists that can play a critical role in all aspects of their research project and feel a sense of intellectual ownership over their work. This has lead to students receiving university-wide and national fellowships, presenting their work at local and national venues, participating in events that disseminate our work to the general public including high school teachers and students, and inclusion as co-authors on publications. Former Hahn lab undergraduates have gone on to medical and dental schools, graduate schools, and careers in teaching and industry. The above picture is of our lab group at the 2010 annual meeting of the Society of Integrative and Comparative Biology in Seattle, Washington. From left to right are Diana Jordan and Genevive Ochs (undergrads), Sharon Clemmensen and Frank Wessels (grad students), Dr. Dan Hahn, and Dr. Greg Ragland (postdoctoral associate). dhahn@ufl.edu
Dr. Chen Liu is currently an endowed professor at the University of Florida College of Medicine, in the Department of Pathology, Immunology, and Laboratory Medicine. He is also the director of the GI/Liver Pathology section and fellowship training program. He received his medical degree from China and his PhD degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He did postdoctoral training at The Scripps Research Institute. He completed pathology residency training at the Medical College of Pennsylvania and completed a surgical oncologic pathology fellowship at the MD Anderson Cancer Center. Dr Liu is board-certified in both Anatomic Pathology and Clinical Pathology. In 2000, he was recruited to the Department of Pathology at the University of Florida. Dr. Liu's areas of research are pathology, virology, immunology, and cancer biology. One of his main research programs is to investigate the innate and adaptive immunity in hepatitis C viral infection, mainly focused on the role of the innate antiviral molecular network in liver cells and the T cell response. He is also studying the molecular pathogenesis and biomarkers of liver cancer. His group is actively searching for novel targets for liver cancer therapy. Most of his research programs are funded by NIH or other research foundations. Dr. Liu is a well established investigator in liver disease research. He has published more than 112 research articles. He is actively involved in training young investigators, physicians, graduate students, medical students, and undergraduate students. Many of his trainees have received research awards, such as University Scholar, HHMI Life for Science, and American Cancer Society awards. liu@pathology.ufl.edu

Dr. Peng Jiang is an assistant professor of Chemical Engineering in the College of Engineering at the University of Florida. He received his PhD from Rice University in 2001 and joined the faculty at UF in August 2006. He was a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Chemical Engineering at Princeton University from 2003 to 2006 focusing on electrokinetically induced assembly. He also gained industrial R&D experience when he worked at Corning and GE. His research focuses on the development of new chemical, physical, engineering, and biological applications related to nanostructured materials. His current research interests include ultrasensitive plasmonic biosensors, nanofluidic bioanalytical systems, biomimetic materials for efficient solar cells and sensors, and self-healing materials. He is a recipient of the NSF CAREER Awards. During the last 4 years, 14 undergraduate students have worked in the lab. Many of them have coauthored in peer-reviewed publications and presented their research results at regional and national conferences. 11 students have been awarded various fellowships, including UF/HHMI Science for Life Research Award, University Scholars Program Award, and UF Undergraduate Research Program Award. pjiang@che.ufl.edu

Dr. Connie J. Mulligan is an associate professor of Anthropology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. She is also an Associate Director of UF's Genetics Institute. She received her PhD from Yale University in 1990 and joined the faculty at UF in 2000. After her PhD, she held postdoctoral fellow positions at the Smithsonian Institution in the República de Panamá and Washington DC, where she analyzed DNA from modern and ancient human populations to explore human migration patterns, and at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, where she investigated the genetic basis of alcoholism. Current research efforts are funded by two main NSF grants and are focused on 1) the genetic and socio-cultural basis of hypertension in African Americans and related diseases that also show racial inequities and 2) human dispersals in the region of Arabia and the Horn of Africa as well as colonization of the New World. These projects are directed at a better understanding of human evolution from a broad anthropological perspective as reflected in our population history (e.g. migrations) and adaptations to our environment both positive and negative (e.g. human disease). During the past 5 years, 16 undergraduate students, 5 graduate students, and 3 post-doctoral fellows have worked in the lab. Undergraduate students have received various NSF and NIH grants, have presented at 3 international conferences, and co-authored 8 abstracts and 4 publications. cmulligan@ufl.edu
Dr. A. Mark Settles is the Vasil-Monsanto Associate Professor of Plant Cell and Molecular Biology in the Horticultural Sciences Department, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, at the University of Florida. He received his Ph.D. in Genetics from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and completed post-doctoral training at the University of Florida. The Settles laboratory studies the molecular genetics of seed development in maize. Using both visual and near infrared reflectance spectroscopy screens, the laboratory identified seed mutants for molecular cloning. A subset of cloned mutants revealed that RNA splicing has an important role for plant cell differentiation as well as a greater understanding of central carbon metabolism. Currently, the laboratory is funded by grants from the NSF Plant Genome Research Program, the USDA-CSREES, and the Vasil-Monsanto Endowment. As part of the NSF-funded project, Dr. Settles initiated an undergraduate summer internship program that trains pre-professional students from Florida A&M University in genomics research. In the past five years, Dr. Settles has mentored 12 undergraduates with 3 undergraduates co-authoring peer-reviewed publications. Nearly all undergraduates received competitive awards from the HHMI Science for Life, University Scholars, McNair Scholars, and Plant Molecular and Cellular Biology programs for their research training. settles@ufl.edu

Dr. Weihong Tan is a V. T. and Louis Jackson Professor in the Department of Chemistry and the Associate Director in the Center for Research at the Bio/Nano Interface at the University of Florida. His laboratory has developed internationally recognized interdisciplinary research programs in chemical biology, bionanotechnology, bioanalysis and biomedical engineering. Currently, his group is working on synthesizing a variety of DNA probes for biomedical studies and for single molecule DNA nanomotors, in developing new nanomaterials and bionanotechnology for bioanalysis, molecular imaging and drug delivery, and in elucidating molecular foundation of diseases such as cancer using a chemical biology approach. His work is at the forefront of scientific research and has been recognized by many awards, including the Pittcon Achievement Award in 2004. During his 14-year professor career in UF, he has mentored more than 40 undergraduate students and put in tremendous efforts to inspire their independence in research, which has resulted in the extensive success of his undergraduate students. In the last five years, the undergraduate students in his laboratory have published three first-author papers in high-impact chemistry journals (Journal of the American Chemical Society, Small and Analytical Chemistry) and are the co-authors on 14 other publications. Students are encouraged to take active roles involving in different research projects and interdisciplinary topics. The majority of the undergraduate students have contributed to at least one experimental publication during the time they stay in his group. As an advisor, Dr. Tan is highly committed to provide undergraduate students with the sufficient resources for their training and independent research experience. Undergraduate students from his lab have learnt various research skills and have done independent research, and have developed cooperative spirit and leadership ability. Undergraduate students in Dr. Tan’s lab have the freedom to carry out research topics of their interest and receive sufficient support. Furthermore, students under Dr. Tan’s mentoring have also received quite a few research awards, including the well recognized award such as Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship, which led them to other prestigious academic and professional opportunities. tan@chem.ufl.edu