

**CSI 2025 Inaugural
Gillian E. Wu Mentorship Award
Congratulations / Félicitations**



**Gillian E. Wu, PhD
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Inaugural Gillian E. Wu Mentorship Award 2025 Recipient

All of us have had mentors and all of us are mentors. Think back to your lives. Who are in your “bios”, and how do you remember them? These are mine.

I was born in London during WW2, but my formal education I was totally in Canada. In high school, Miss Pew challenged me to understand how the eggs I ate, turned into muscles. And Mr. Lewis, led me to question exact measurements and thus what “+ or –“ meant and why it was needed. McMaster was a mix, (1963-1967) more fun than work. Dr. Dingle took me on as a summer student investigating “flagella development”, and Dr. Takahashi revealed DNA, RNA and Operons which I was then sure should become my life (rather than UofT meds). Mentors encouraged me to apply to “the best research department in Canada” (their view), Medical Biophysics at UofT. Housed in the top two floors of the old Princess Marget Hospital, the Department was led by Dr. Harold Johns whose work led to using radiation to treat cancer. As a mentor, Dr. Johns was a challenge, but Dr. Bob Phillips was the opposite - guiding me in this totally male grad student world, with the “*I would be loath to have a female student in my lab*” stem cell leader. I survived thanks to the mentorship of microbiologist Dr. Rose Shenin, Dr. Rick Miller and Bob. I learnt Immunology and in 1969 earned an MSc, the first female grad. Then a break from formal education. I left for UC Berkeley with my husband, Dr. Alan Wu. While in the USA, I worked at the UC Donner Laboratories as a Biophysicist, and half time as a Lab Assistant in an Immunology lab at NIH (via recommendations from mentors Bob, Rick and Dr. Howard Mel) and gave birth to two sons. During this time, I mentored as a La Leche assistant leader and by “running” a Picnic Group. A time away from full time Academic Science meant I learned first-hand the other “important things” needed for a good life in Science.

In 1976, we returned to Toronto where at first I worked in UG labs Sept to May (for pay) before joining again Medical Biophysics as a PhD student in Molecular Immunology using Lambda Phage as vectors to carry and thus clone genes. And again, mentors were crucial. Dr. Nobu Hozumi and Dr. Marc Shulman had my back - somehow, I by-passed the “classification exam”, which helped me complete a solid PhD in four years. And this record led to the Basel Institute for Immunology where Drs. Neils Jerne, Charley Steinberg, and Chris Paige mentored and smoothed out some rough edges. The years in Basel led to a tenure track position in 1986 in the newly formed Department of Immunology at UofT. An old mentor, Dr. Hardi Cinader was welcoming! I became graduate co-ordinator early on, before tenure! I do not recommend taking on huge administrative, yet important positions, early in one’s career! I simply loved mentoring. Grad students in my lab, grad students across the Research Institutes, grad students in other Universities in Canada and the US.

In 2001, I became Dean of the Faculty of Pure and Applied Science at York University. Those were challenging times. York undertook reorganization (and hiring) from the one Faculty of P&AS to three Faculties - Science, Engineering and Health. A lot of change and a lot of need for mentoring of re-placed and newly hired faculty. Staff were especially important mentors, keeping it all on track. Jennifer Lavigne, Cheryl Colman for two; and forward seeing faculty, Imogen Coe, Bob Prince, for two. After five years as Dean, I served two as “advisor to the President” and then spent a sabbatical year in Cambridge. I stayed connected to UofT immunology and combined my York lab and grad students with Vivian Saridakis until 2015 when I retired. A wonderful life in Immunology - V(D)J, diversity, mentored and mentoring. I was so lucky.

An award for Mentorship in the Canadian Society for Immunology was proposed because all of us recognize the critical role of mentors in our lives. Mentoring as Grad Co-ordinator in Immunology were among the most enjoyable years of my science life. The ability to encourage, help, guide – what could be better. (And yes, I am still asked to write reference letters.)