

Mentorship awards go to Drs. Frederick 'Erick' Matsen and Florian Mair

Student-Postdoc Advisory Committee honors two Hutch scientists

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Dr. Frederick 'Erick' Matsen [left] received the McDougall Mentoring Award and Dr. Florian Mair [right] the Hutchison Mentoring Award.
Photos by Robert Hood / Fred Hutch News Service

After a one-year break due to COVID-19, two of Fred Hutch's most admired scientists are being honored for their mentorship by a committee of grateful mentees.

Dr. Erick Matsen was named by the **Student-Postdoc Advisory Committee** as winner of the 14th annual McDougall Mentoring Award, and Dr. Florian Mair received the 3rd annual Hutchison Mentoring Award.

Both awards recognize these two recipients for their dedication and enthusiasm for mentoring others in the Hutch community. Their excellence was appreciated across more than a dozen categories, including research skill development, hypothesis generation skills, job search networking, sensitivity to diversity issues, and for "the human side" of mentoring — exemplifying living life as a scientist and citizen.

In keeping with tradition, the two awardees were honored at a SPAC award ceremony on Dec. 10, during a COVID-constrained, virtual holiday party; and after organizers overcame a worldwide bobblehead supply chain crisis, they each received a custom-made bobblehead look-alike.

McDougall award winner: Erick Matsen

Established in 2007, the McDougall award honors the late Dr. James McDougall, who was internationally renowned for his research on the role of DNA viruses in cancer. At the Hutch from 1987-2003, he was an early member of the Basic Sciences Division who was also had appointments in the Public Health Sciences and Human Biology divisions.

The award recognizes Fred Hutch professors who demonstrate, as did McDougall, a “dedication to and enthusiasm for mentoring their graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and/or medical fellows.”

A PHS division professor as well, award-winner Matsen is also associate program head of the Herbold Computational Biology Program, and earlier this fall he was named a **Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator**.

Matsen’s research involves the development of computer algorithms that can speed up the process of analyzing enormous quantities of biological data. His specialty is the use of a mathematically rich statistical technique known as **“Bayesian inference.”** It accounts for uncertainties that are inherent in using gene sequencing data to build phylogenetic trees, which describe the evolutionary relationship of the sequences.

He also is a devoted mentor, lauded by younger researchers for his teaching skills. Below is a sampling of excerpts from Matsen’s nomination letters, which were provided by current or former graduate students.



Each mentorship award came with a traditional bobblehead for award winners Mair [left] and Matsen [right].

Photo courtesy of the Student-Postdoc Advisory Committee

- *"Even when COVID-19 turned the entire world upside down, Erick was there for me. He is, quite simply, the most caring person I know. I can't imagine my time in graduate school without his mentorship."*
- *"Erick holds his trainees to high standards, but also makes us feel completely supported at every turn. 'We are humans, not science robots,' he says. He prioritizes the happiness and well-being of each trainee and has created a training environment in which lab members from very different backgrounds productively and supportively engage in research and learn from each other."*
- *"Erick has helped me to grow, act, and understand more fully, my role as an advocate and ally for DEI in the scientific community. For each position Erick has posted during recruitment cycles, he has been clear and transparent about his commitment to hiring a diverse group of members who may further help our group grow both within and outside of scientific research."*
- *"Whenever I was struggling, he somehow knew, and he provided me with the encouragement and affirmation I needed to continue. Likewise, when it became time for me to start thinking more critically and independently, Erick provided the space I needed to challenge myself. This experience is not unique to me. Erick is constantly thinking about how he can improve and best mentor each of his trainees. He maintains a list of qualities he hopes to possess as a mentor and frequently asks for feedback on whether he is meeting these goals."*

"I've had this amazing string of trainees come through my group, and each one has had their own superpowers!" Matsen said of his award. "My job has just been to provide a supportive environment and line those superpowers up with interesting directions."

Hutchison award winner: Florian Mair

Named after Dr. Nancy Hutchison, the Hutchison Mentoring Award was established in 2018 to honor the mentoring leadership that she personified at the Hutch's **Science Education Partnership**. She co-founded the organization and led it from 1991 until her retirement in 2016. The award recognizes non-faculty employees or trainees who "demonstrate a similar dedication to and enthusiasm for mentoring others within the Fred Hutch community."

Mair is a staff scientist in the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Division lab of **Dr. Martin Prlic**, where he is a highly regarded expert in high-parameter flow cytometry, a technique for sorting and evaluating traits of individual cells. He has **helped to develop** faster, more efficient and less expensive tools in this field, which shed light on how the immune system works.

His mentorship was praised by colleagues, including past and present graduate students. Below are excerpts from some of the letters sent in support of his nomination:

- *"When we had finished all our proposed work, Florian asked the most empowering question as a mentor: 'What else can I help you learn while you are still here?'"*
- *"When presenting papers or our own data, Florian is eagle-eyed, identifying flaws in flow cytometry data and providing advice as to how to overcome it. It's important to note Florian brings this level of attention to all our trainee-led meetings, including those in which the presenters aren't from our lab or division."*
- *"Florian has sought to build community for non-U.S. citizens as well as make information helpful for international employees [like visas, taxes, and all the things I take for granted] accessible. Through this, he strives to make the Hutch more inclusive for trainees regardless of nationality."*
- *"Florian has earned himself an outstanding reputation not only in VIDC, but also the greater Hutch community for his stellar expertise in single-cell analysis approaches, his generosity, and kind, helpful and outgoing nature."*

"This is a great honor," Mair said. "To do research in life science, one needs not only an intrinsic interest in biology, but also a thorough understanding of the complex instruments we use to study biology. Teaching and mentoring others how to best use some of these complex machines is something I enjoy, and I am glad if it helps other scientists do better research."

Learn more about Fred Hutch's Student/Postdoc Advisory Committee (SPAC) mentoring awards on the Hutch Mentoring Awards [page](#).

Past McDougall Mentoring Award Recipients:

- 2019** Dr. Jesse Bloom
- 2018** Dr. Harmit Malik
- 2017** Dr. Paul Lampe
- 2016** Dr. Adam Geballe
- 2015** Dr. Stephen Tapscott

- 2014** Dr. Polly Newcomb
- 2013** Dr. Sue Biggins
- 2012** Dr. Michael Emerman
- 2011** Dr. Anne McTiernan
- 2010** Dr. Andrea LaCroix
- 2009** Dr. Johanna Lampe
- 2008** Dr. Julie Overbaugh
- 2007** Dr. David Fredricks

Past Hutchison Mentoring Award Recipients:

- 2019** Dr. Molly OhAinle
- 2018** Dr. Dara Lehman

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?



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