

The Social Scientist – providing STEM career guidance from global mentors



The Social Scientist is a revolutionary mentorship programme for the STEM community. The online platform enlists mentors from around the world to provide guidance and career advice to students and professionals in STEM fields. Here, Dr Danielle Tomasello, Founder of The Social Scientist, tells us how her own experiences as a STEM graduate led her to create a platform that is changing the face of mentorship across STEM fields.

What are the main goals and strategies of The Social Scientist?

I created The Social Scientist as a mentorship platform for the STEM community. We enlist enthusiastic mentors from around the world who are dedicated to helping others with career advice and guidance. We offer one-on-one personal mentorship regardless of where you are in your career, from students to professionals. The Social Scientist is a nonprofit online organisation that everyone can take part in.

Could you tell us a little bit about your background? How did you come to create this initiative?

I obtained my BS in Biology, with a concentration in Developmental Biology and Genetics, from The

Pennsylvania State University. After undergrad, I joined the lab of Dr Laurie Read at The State University of New York at Buffalo (UB) as a technician. I was hard-working, but naïve and not thinking critically about my experiments. Laurie was tough on me, but very fair and caring. I stayed at UB and went on to complete my PhD in Neuroscience. I am currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Laurie and I became close friends after I left her lab to start my PhD, and she has greatly shaped my science career with her amazing mentorship and advice.

When I was at my first conference as a postdoc, I put an immense amount of

pressure on myself to network, learn more on academic careers and discuss my research. The workshops and career panels told the same stories as all other conferences and I did not make any good connections. We are told how important networking is for our future careers and to cold call professionals to inquire about opportunities. I felt I failed at this conference and was extremely frustrated. I thought about how Laurie has been the most helpful and consistent person in my science career, and how thankful I was to have her in my life. I realised my friends and colleagues have been amazing mentors for so many people and I wanted the world to know there are professionals out there ready to help. I contacted colleagues and other

The Social Scientist provides an avenue to connect with STEM professionals who are devoted to mentorship.

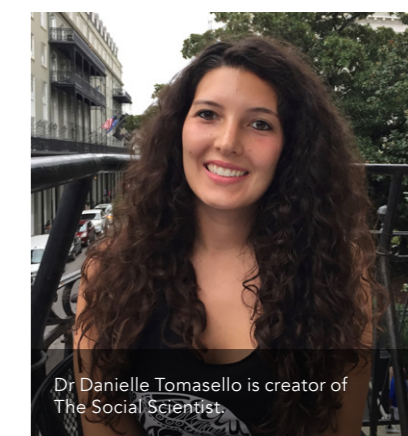
thought leaders I've encountered throughout my career to start The Social Scientist in 2018. From there, it has grown immensely and will continue to grow to provide mentorship across the STEM fields.

What, in your experience, are the main challenges a researcher might face when pursuing their career in academia or industry?

In STEM, there is a clear problem right from the beginning. What careers are available and how do we get there? As young students, we generally know of the careers as a scientist, doctor, engineer, astronaut and so on. After undergrad, it is not very

straightforward. Graduate school and available fellowships are becoming increasingly competitive. Structures for laboratories and degrees are not the same in each county and vary widely in the US compared to Europe and Asia. Many are unaware of positions, such as becoming a consultant, medical liaison or science communicator.

With an engineering bachelor's degree, some companies or government agencies will both hire you and pay for your master's degree. Someone interested in working at a pharmaceutical company may have a better option with a master's degree than going through the lengthy



Dr Danielle Tomasello is creator of The Social Scientist.

process of obtaining a PhD and doing a two-year postdoc. We are told of some opportunities, but not all. Equal opportunity is not provided everywhere. We need to know there is no right career track and there are people are willing to help. With The Social Scientist, you can speak first-hand with mentors on their education, how they secured their position, moving to a new location and the atmosphere at their company or university. It is never too early to ask for help.

Find Mentorship from our STEM Professionals

We aim to break down barriers for STEM career development and open opportunities to all those interested

- Take a look at our awesome STEM professionals on our *Meet the Mentors* page. If you are interested in a specific field, topic or location, please use the search bar above.
- When you have found a mentor you are interested in contacting, send a direct message on their *Bio Page*.
- You will be contacted to set up a time for your informal talk (phone/chat platform or email conversation).
- Ask the questions that will be beneficial for your interests, including:
 - Position • Career Tract • Field • Atmosphere • Career Opportunities
- Find long-lasting mentorship to facilitate opportunities in STEM.



WE PROVIDE MENTORSHIP AND ENLIST VOLUNTEERS REGARDLESS OF RACE, ETHNICITY, CULTURE, SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND GENDER IDENTITY



Thought Leader

Providing career guidance from global mentors is an essential component in facilitating collaborations across academic fields.

What support services do you offer, and for whom?

We provide one-on-one virtual mentorship for everyone interested in STEM. You can search for mentors on our 'Meet the Mentors' page, or use the search bar for a specific field or company. Once you have found a mentor you are interested in speaking with, you can directly message them on their bio page.

We encourage our mentors to schedule their chat within two weeks, and I check in with all mentees to ensure they had a productive and helpful conversation. Many mentors have continued their relationship with their mentees, such as helping with fellowships and CVs. Students have generally contacted our mentors to learn more about their education and background, while professionals are widely enquiring about various positions and how companies are run.

How do you reach out to volunteers?

I have found the best way to enlist new mentors is the dissemination of the site through articles, social media and career resource pages. We do not individually recruit mentors as we are looking for dedicated volunteers

that reach out to us. If someone is committed to our cause, potential mentors can fill out our form on the 'Interest in Joining' page. There are a few questions that we require to ensure the mentor is a good fit for our initiative. Dedicating a few minutes of your time is a significant help to others!

In which specific ways are you trying to improve networking and communication within STEM fields?

There is a lack of resources for inspiring an interest in STEM for young students and facilitating their career options. Further, not all professionals excel in mentoring. Due to the nature of the work culture and the structure of our industry, fields are severely segregated and networking is impersonal. The Social Scientist provides an avenue to connect with STEM professionals who are devoted to mentorship and implementing a supportive community that has been lacking across fields in STEM.

How do you aim to facilitate interdisciplinary cooperation?

By enlisting mentors in all STEM fields, we are facilitating an interdisciplinary environment. Some of our mentors fall under numerous categories, such as

Dr Georgios Konstantinou. Georgios is the Chief Technology Officer and Head of Research and Development at Multiwave Imaging. He falls under several fields in STEM, including science, engineering, industry, and technology. Fields in STEM are meant to be collaborative and interdisciplinary, and yet they remain quite segregated. Speaking with the mentors across and outside disciplines in STEM will help to create a well-rounded career trajectory and allow ease of sharing ideas.

We provide mentorship and enlist volunteers regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic background and gender identity. Providing career guidance from global mentors is another essential component in facilitating collaborations across fields. We need to inspire young minds that they can achieve their goals without bias.

Additionally, we have several collaborators that share similar goals to improve the STEM community. Working with other initiatives is imperative to help foster ideas. I work closely with Letters to a Pre-Scientist, a snail mail pen pal programme that connects middle school students in low-income

communities in the United States with STEM professionals. Letters to a Pre-Scientist aims to spark an interest in science for kids, and we aim to guide their careers.

Is there a certain project or learning experience that you'd like to tell us about?

My favorite part of this initiative is the ability to check in with the mentees. It is incredibly rewarding to hear how our amazing mentors are helping others from around the world:

"Thanks so much for reaching out! I've chatted with her [Claudia Willmes] on the phone and gotten feedback on a resume draft from her – she's been so responsive and extremely helpful!"

Thank you so much for organising this resource in the first place. I'm really glad I heard about it!"

"In particular Dr [Suraj] George was very helpful in going over the different roles and requirements for a clinical scientist working in research and development and/or conducting clinical trials for industry. He even sent me some links for courses through NIH that I could do which would more formally introduce me to this role. He also advised me on my CV and resume and how I can approach individuals on LinkedIn."

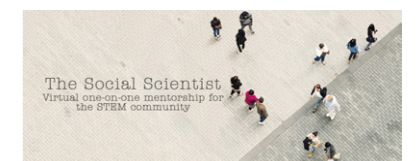
"Thank you so much, Danielle! It was great meeting with you a few months ago. I used our meeting as an idea

for my college essays and it worked out awesome! I got accepted into 10 schools and finally chose BU because it was my dream school. Once again, thank you :)"

How do you picture The Social Scientist in a few years' time?

My goal is to continue to grow The Social Scientist. This involves enlisting mentors from around the world and across the STEM fields. Disseminating information on my initiative is quite a difficult process and a large hurdle for a new platform. Sharing with friends and colleagues is immensely helpful in reaching new mentees! I picture the initiative to become a standard resource for everyone interested in STEM across the globe.

Speaking with mentors across and outside disciplines in STEM will help to create a well-rounded career trajectory for young researchers.



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