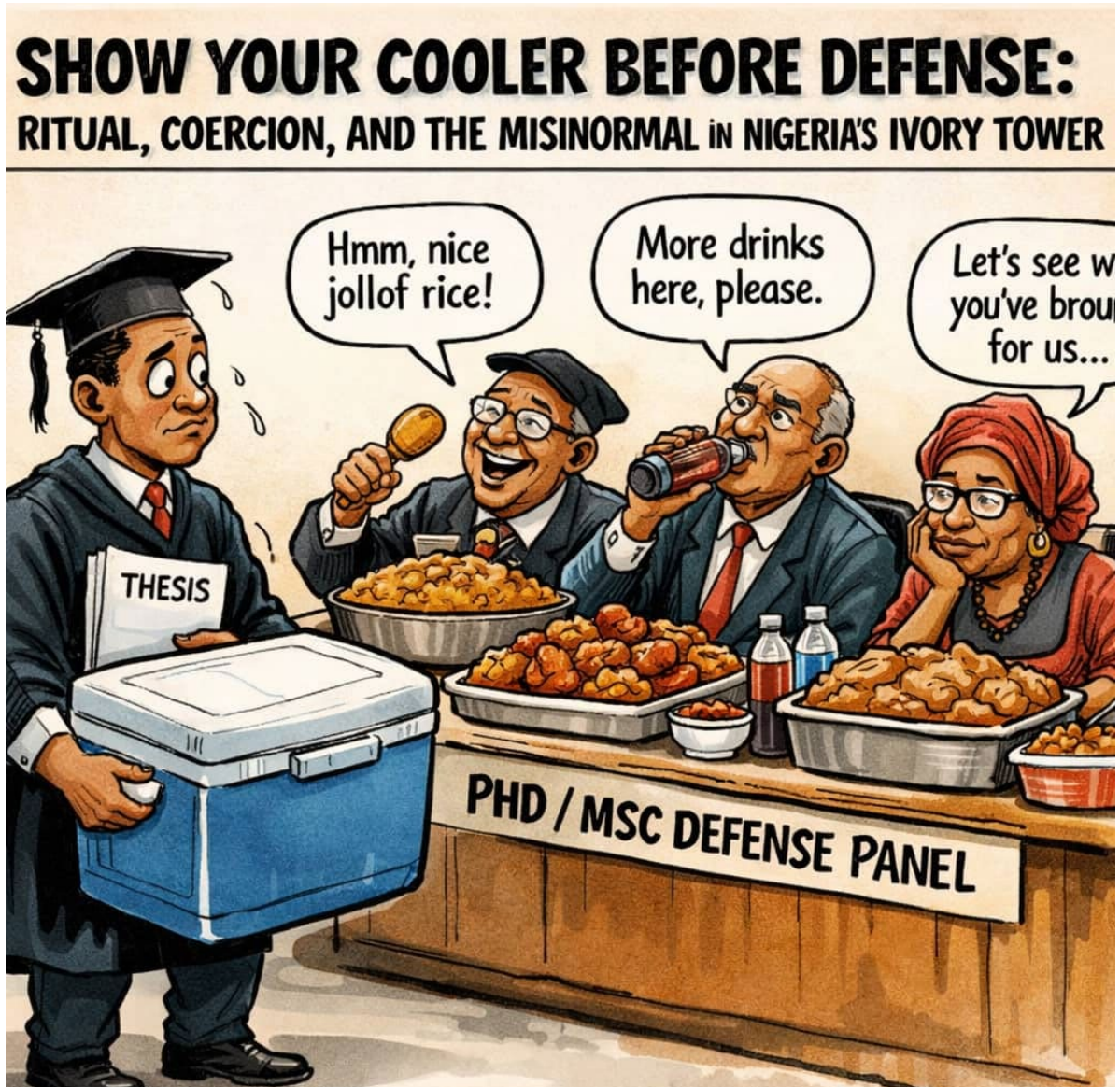
University of Ibadan
NIGERIA'S PREMIER UNIVERSITY

Mentoring and fostering a global research career for early career researchers working in Africa

Ogugua Charles Aworh, FNIFST, FIAFoST, FAAS
Emeritus Professor of Food Technology,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Immediate Past President, International Academy of Food Science and Technology

- Academic mentorship or guidance provided by an experienced senior academic (mentor) to a younger colleague (mentee) is one of the defining universal features of universities that is crucial to the growth and development of the university system.
- Mentoring by senior colleagues is essential for the professional development and career advancement of young academics and for imbibing the qualities of excellence in line with academic traditions, academic code of conduct, university policies and practices, ethics in research, good character and other universal academic values.

Collapse of Mentoring and Eroding of University Traditions in Nigerian Universities



The Academic Mentor:
A Shoulder to Stand On

“Standing on the shoulders of giants”

- An academic mentor is a “shoulder to stand on” that enables you to see further and benefit from their previous work, knowledge, experience and connections to achieve greater heights. He or she is also much more than that.

- A mentor is a role model, coach, guide, enabler, motivator, advisor, advocate, supporter, critic, amongst others.

These days, an academic career normally begins with the acquisition of the PhD degree and the doctorate programme of three or more years offers a unique opportunity for mentoring and must not be seen merely as the supervision of a research project but the building of a life-long relationship in which supervisors bring their knowledge and experience to bear in positively transforming their PhD students. I graduated with MS (1976) and PhD (1978) from Cornell and I am still close to my PhD supervisor, Prof. Emeritus C. Y. Lee, and my MS supervisor, Dr. Patrick Brecht, who left Cornell for the industry as I was completing my MS. They are still my mentors. I have tried to build the same life-long relationships with my own former PhD students.

Why a Global Research Career?
The Ideal University Setting

- Emphasis on creation and dissemination of knowledge
- Well funded; great capacity to attract external funding and internal revenue generation
- Excellent research environment
- Well equipped laboratories, clinics, libraries, internet facilities and other infrastructure
- High quality staff; high quality students
- Good remuneration and reward system
- Strong industry-academia partnership
- Not ivory tower; works in collaboration with government, industry and other stakeholders
- Enjoys academic freedom and autonomy

Mindset and Attitude in a Resource-Constrained Setting

- Passion for research is critical for a young researcher working in a resource-constrained setting who wants to make a difference and who believes in research for the generation of new knowledge and ideas as well as new products and services to drive the economy and improve the general well-being of the society. Without that mindset and attitude, the challenges, frustrations, distractions and temptation for an easier way to earn a living may simply be overwhelming.
- In a sense, there will always be limited resources and no one can solve all the problems. The young researcher must have a focus ab initio; capacity for imaginative thought (thinking outside the box) and to improvise and adapt; and, ultimately, develop expertise and gain experience and recognition in that area of study.

Mentorship and Networking

This is crucial for young researchers to overcome the challenges and frustrations of working in a resource-constrained setting.

- Actively seeking and cultivating working relationships with reputable scholars in the research area both nationally and internationally. **You need global mentors.**
- Getting involved in competitive research grant applications led by senior researchers to develop the necessary competencies and exposure.
- Active in professional associations and learned societies.
- Attendance at conferences even if it involves making personal financial sacrifices.
- Belonging to academic and scientific networks.

International Research Fellowships

There are many international research fellowships that African Early Career Researchers can benefit from and that global mentors can facilitate. These Fellowships support visits to well-equipped laboratories abroad. Some may even provide equipment support to continue the work in the home country.

- Alexander von Humboldt Foundation
- Fulbright Fellowship Programmes
- German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)
- Commonwealth Professional Fellowships
- Japan International Cooperation Agency
- MacArthur Foundation
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Royal Society and Nuffield Foundation

I had the privilege of being mentored by renowned, world-class scientists through such fellowships including:

1. Late Dr. H. G. Muller of the University of Leeds: UK Royal Society and Nuffield Foundation Fellowship

2. Late Prof. Emeritus Shuryo Nakai of the University of British Columbia: Canadian Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Fellowship

3. Late Prof. Dr. Volker Kasche of Technische Universitat Hamburg-Harburg, Germany: Alexander von Humboldlt Research Foundation

Open Science and Fostering a Global Research Career

- A global research outlook is consistent with the principles and practice of Open Science that promotes democratization of knowledge production (research) and dissemination (journals, books). Open Science; Open Access
- Open Science aims to make scientific research from all fields accessible to everyone for the benefits of not only scientists but the society at large.
- Open Science also seeks to make the production of that knowledge inclusive, equitable and sustainable.

Benefits of Open Science

According to UNESCO, the benefits of Open Science include:

- Increases scientific collaboration and sharing of information (often we talk about north-south collaboration; but south-south collaboration is also very important).
- Makes multilingual scientific knowledge openly available, accessible and reusable for everyone (The principle of FAIR Data- Findable, Accessible, Interoperable or intermix different datasets, Reusable).
- Opens the processes of scientific knowledge creation, evaluation and communication to societal actors beyond the traditional scientific community.

My Seven Guiding Principles for ECR

1. Be determined to contribute to solving societal problems through research.
2. Realise that local solutions can be of global relevance and importance.
3. Recognise that resources are always limited, more so in Africa.

4. Take advantage of prestigious international research fellowships that provide opportunities and resources to work with reputable globally renowned scholars in first rate institutions.

5. Seek, cultivate and appreciate mentors, recognizing that mentoring is a life-long relationship.

6. Build networks that last.

7. Make hard work and excellence your hallmark, striving for the best always.

On 16th September, 2025, I popped in at the Global Cold Chain Alliance (GCCA) Convention in San Antonio, Texas at the invitation of Dr. Patrick Brecht, Founder & President of PEB Commodities Inc.

Dr. Brecht (2nd from right with his wife) was my MSc Supervisor at Cornell from 1974-1976, and is a Scientific Advisor of GCCF Council. On my right is Prof. Emeritus Michael Jahncke of Virginia Tech.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING