Faculty Advancement & Research Mentorship (FARM) is a college-wide training and mentorship program for junior faculty at Weill Cornell Medicine. FARM was established in 2015 to train and mentor our junior faculty towards establishment of fully funded, sustainable, and independent research programs. FARM provides junior faculty with longitudinal support over a period of 6-24 months. To date, more than 60 junior faculty from 25 Departments, Divisions, and Institutes, across Weill Cornell Medicine have participated in the program.

Each FARM cycle starts with a two-day workshop in the fall and continues with monthly meetings scheduled around the NIH grant submission cycles. On the first workshop day, the Directors of Harvard-GRASP faculty program, Steven Freedman, MD, PhD, and Camilia Martin, MD, discuss how to determine “readiness” to apply for R01 grants, review the NIH review process and scoring parameters, discuss career timelines, funding strategies beyond NIH, and help faculty develop an effective 60-second elevator speech. On the second day, Dr. Peg AtKisson, dissects the R01 mechanism, and provides tips and strategies on how to write a competitive R01 application. The program continues with monthly group meetings, or sometimes bi-weekly (closer to the submission deadlines) where FARM instructors, Dr. Paraskevi Giannakakou, Ph.D. and Dr. Joe Scandura, MD/Ph.D., review individual grant components (Specific Aims, Significance/Innovation, Research Approach, Rigor & Transparency etc.); provide personalized feedback; and outline important grantsmanship elements for each grant component. At the meetings, we start discussing each proposal by having the two junior-faculty FARMees discuss strengths and weaknesses of the proposal followed by input from Drs Giannakakou & Scandura. This peer-review module is an important component part of the overall FARM training. It is often through the review of peer grants that FARM participants learn to identify the critical importance of presentation, or “grantsmanship”.

FARM’s peer group learning approach promotes empowerment, sense of community, exposure to multiple research fields. In this group environment, our junior faculty participants are able to understand a grant’s gaps and shortcomings, beyond narrow fields of expertise, improve their grantsmanship and better manage their application process.

FARM’s funding success rate for R01 or equivalent grant submissions is 63% in comparison to the NIH national average of 19% for early stage investigators. In the period 2016-2019, FARM participants have received 27 awards (including fourteen R01s, one NIH innovator Award DP2, four Department of Defense award etc.). The personalized,
longitudinal support provided to FARM participants transforms the junior faculty development paradigm and presents a vital recruitment and retention tool.

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