

VCU School of Medicine

WISDM Professional Achievement Award

Sarah Spiegel, Ph.D.



It is uniquely appropriate that Dr. Sarah Spiegel is being honored in the spring of the year, because her arrival as department chair in 2001 ushered in a new season of growth and warmth at VCU's Department of Biochemistry.

"Dr. Spiegel's leadership has effected a change that is nothing short of miraculous," said Associate Professor Suzanne E. Barbour. Dr. Spiegel brought in new talent and re-energized existing staff and researchers. She was instrumental in securing funding to totally renovate the department's aging research space. And, in less than five years, she took a department ranked 103rd in NIH funding and drove it to 32nd.

"This is the infusion of a rising tide of energy and achievement that is 'raising all the boats' in our School and University," explained Associate

Dean for Graduate Education, Dr. Jan F. Chlebowski.

Her strong leadership and mentoring abilities have created a nurturing environment for both faculty and students. "Sarah takes a sincere interest in each and every one of us on her faculty," said Robert F. Diegelmann, Ph.D., Professor of Biochemistry, Anatomy and Emergency Medicine. "She makes us feel like we are her sole focus, and she is highly supportive to help us succeed."

A world-recognized pioneer in the study of sphingosine-1-phosphate, Dr. Spiegel's interest in sphingolipid research is positively infectious. "It is a wonderful privilege for me to share her knowledge of sphingolipids and to learn the 'spiegelian' way to do high quality science, where information flows and collaborations are strongly encouraged," added one of Dr. Spiegel's protégés, Carole Oskeritzian, PhD.

While the NIH may not refer to her methods as "spiegelian," she receives equally glowing praise from those outside VCU. "With the extraordinary qualities of Dr. Spiegel both as a mentor and as a scientist, her keen intelligence, her organizational skills, her driving force, her talent to visualize what is critical and the quality of her scientific work, it is not surprising she has forged an extremely successful career and become a corner stone leader and an authority in the field," wrote NIH scientist Ana Oliver.

Her leadership, research and mentoring skills are widely known and respected, but they, alone, could not merit the WISDM commendation. To understand what she has meant in the lives of the women she has worked with, one needs only to listen to their words: "She is strongly supportive of and effective in advancing the careers of women and particularly the faculty whom she has a direct role in mentoring." "She is not only an outstanding expert and pioneer in her field of research, but also a passionate promoter of the professional development of women." Dr. Spiegel "...demonstrates the difference that one person can make in an organization."

The research. The mentoring. The publications. The leadership. Dr. Spiegel's worthiness as a WISDM Professional Achievement Award winner can be summarized in a simple sentence, penned by a colleague. "Without a doubt, Dr. Spiegel is the model of a successful, dedicated and motivated woman in science and medicine."