

Clinical Research Fellowship Fosters Mentorship, Teamwork, and Productivity: Our 11-Year Experience With a Craniofacial Research Fellowship

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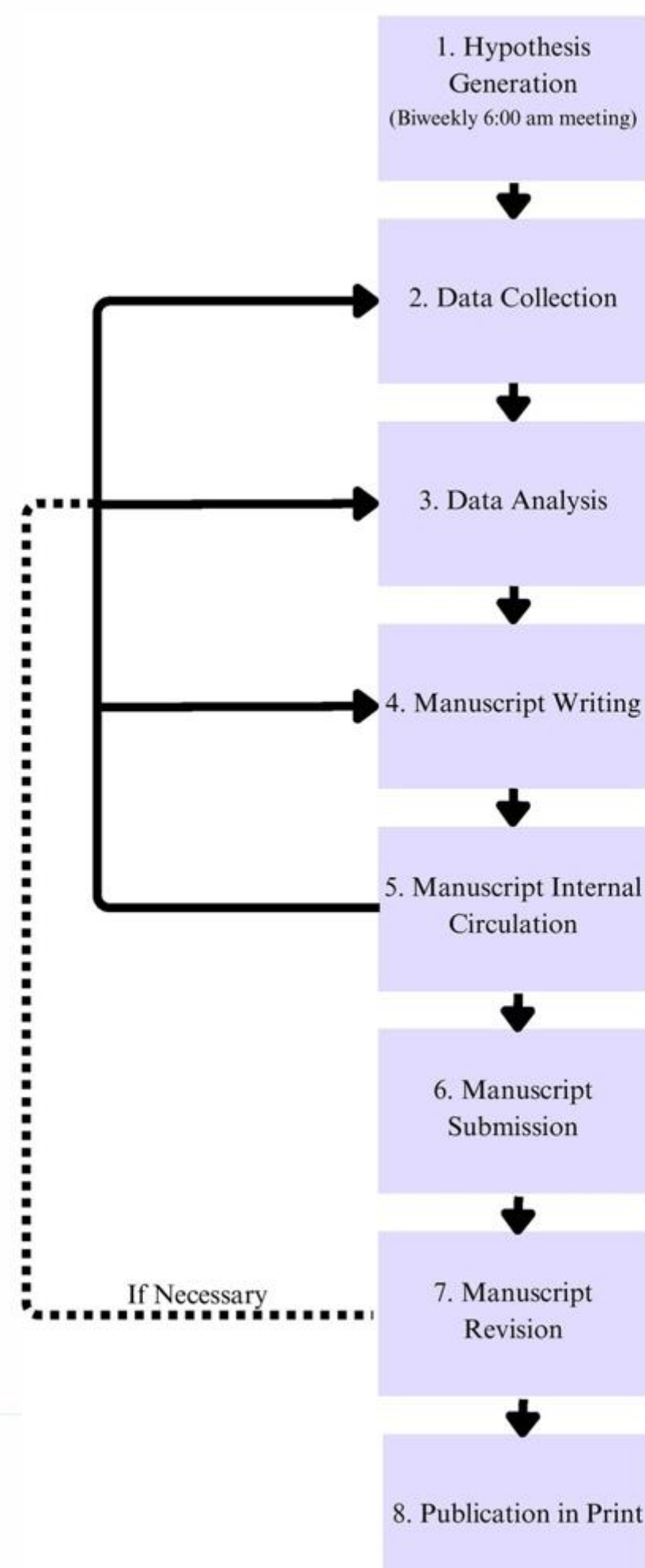
Introduction

This study describes the development and explores the academic impact of a cleft and craniofacial research fellowship.

Methods

Research and career outcomes from 3 cleft and craniofacial surgeons, 14 clinical fellows, and 25 research fellows between 2010 and 2023 were examined. Academic productivity was measured by the number of peer-reviewed publications indexed in PubMed and podium presentations at national/international meetings. Residency match statistics were recorded for eligible research fellows.

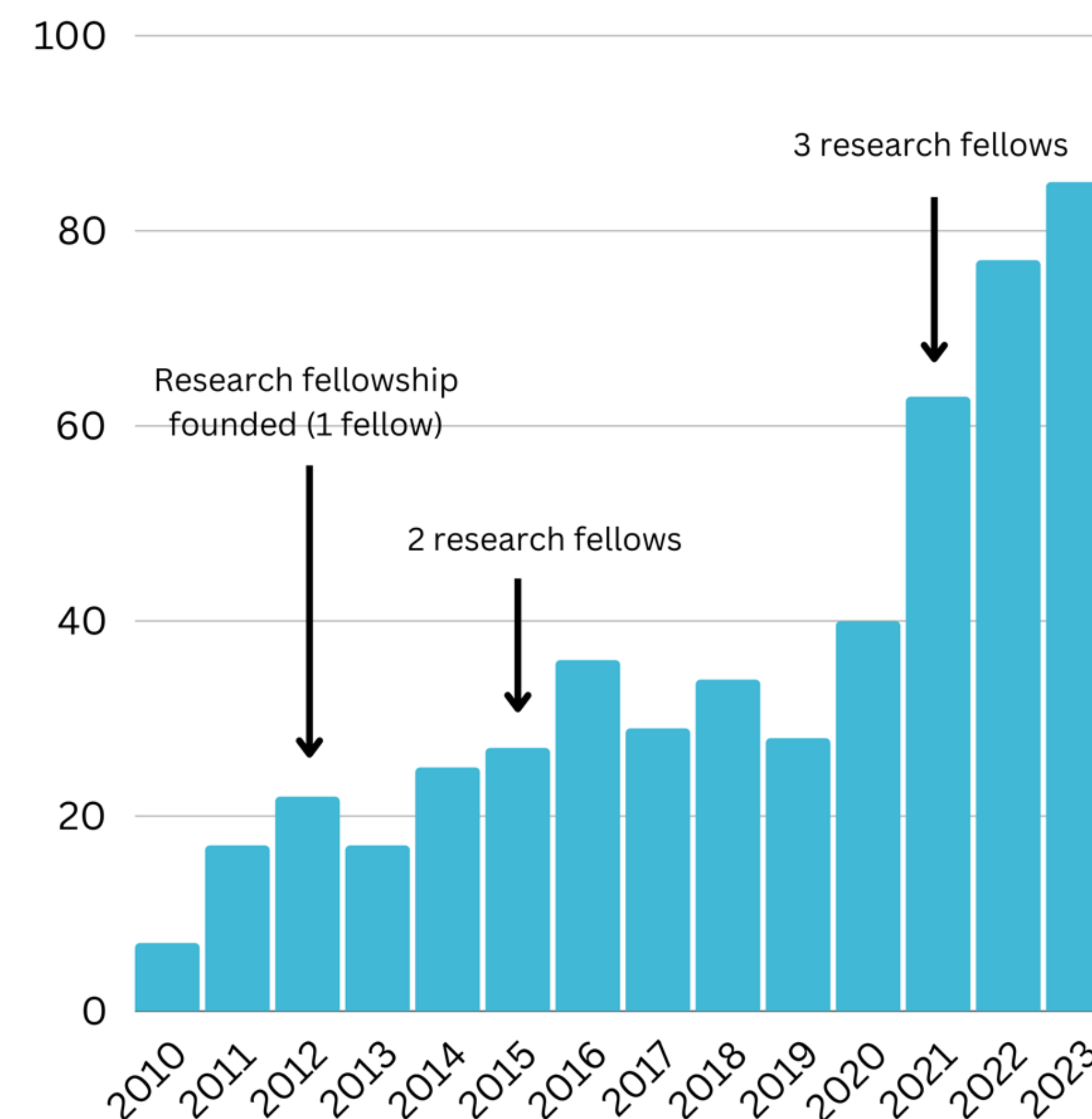
Figure 1. 8-Step Clinical Inquiry Process



Results

Over this 14-year period (11 with research fellows), the team produced 500 publications in 96 peer-reviewed journals, with 153 (31%) in Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, 117 (23%) in the Journal of Craniofacial Surgery, and 32 (6%) in The Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Journal. Yearly publications increased from 15.3 ± 7.6 per year (before fellowship) to 23.0 ± 5.3 (with 1 fellow) to 38.3 ± 12.9 (2 fellows) to 81.0 ± 5.7 (3 fellows; $P < 0.001$). There was a strong annual linear growth in publications since the beginning the research fellowship position ($r = 0.88$, $P < 0.001$). All (100%) clinical research fellows developed strong relationships with senior surgeons, and all who applied to plastic surgery residency matched a significantly higher success rate than the national average ($P < 0.05$).

Figure 2. Number of publications over time



Results

Figure 3. Publications by Journal

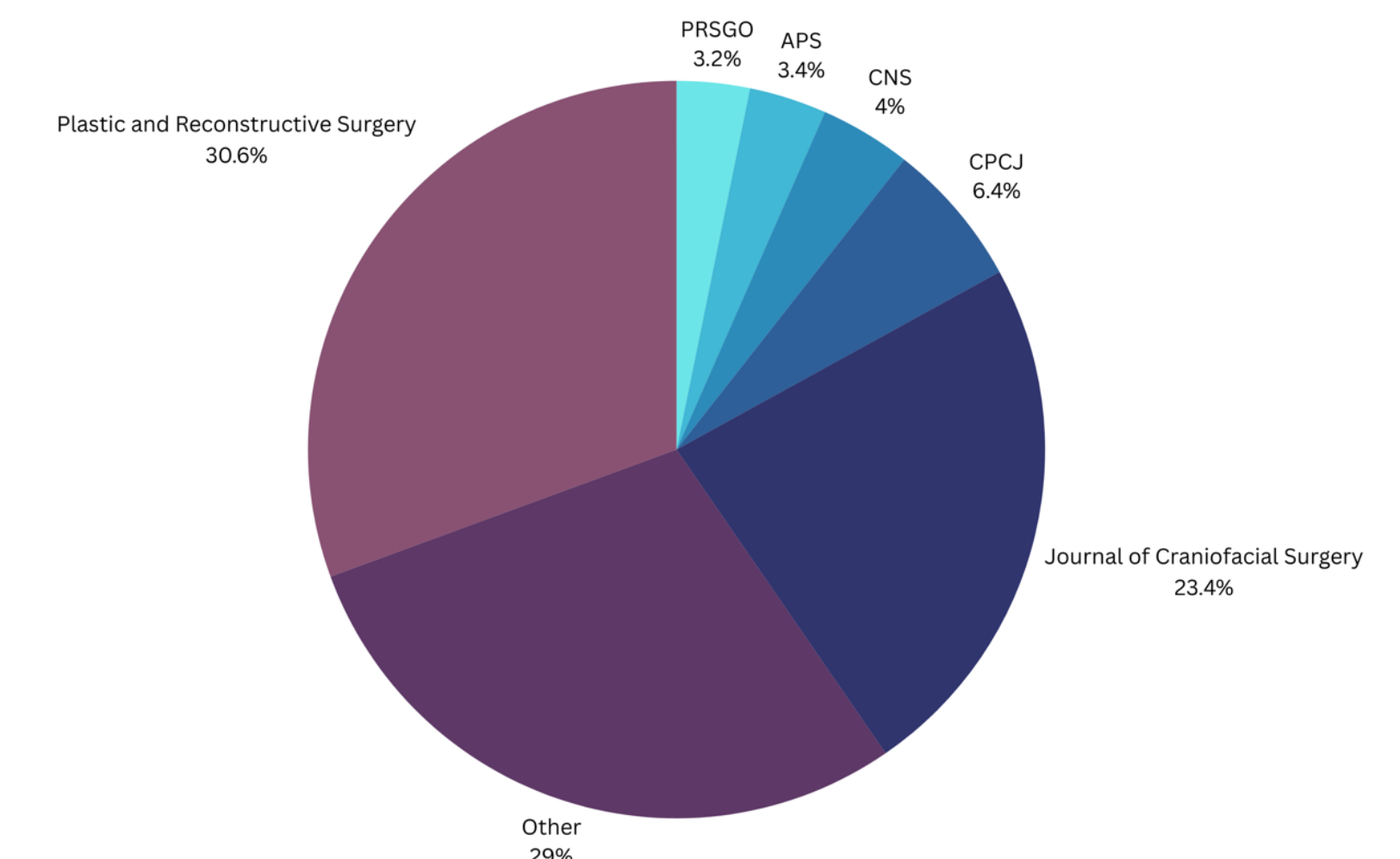
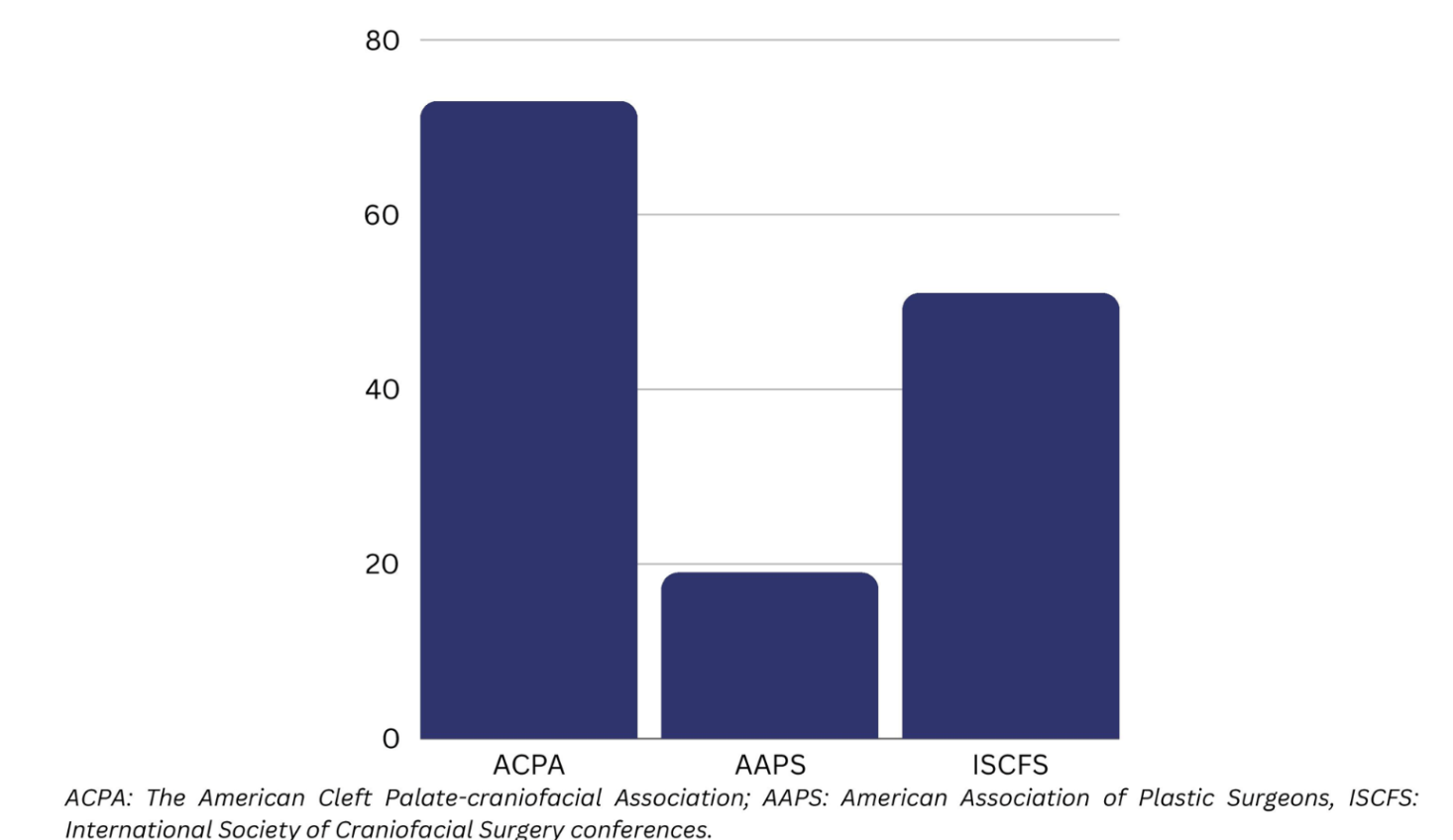


Figure 4. Podium Presentations at Major Conferences



Conclusion

Implementing a structured cleft and craniofacial clinical research fellowship was associated with a broad impact across all cleft and craniofacial team members, as reflected by increased academic output and high match rates among fellows. The fellowship also strengthens the talent pipeline into plastic surgery by fostering meaningful mentor/mentee relationships and provides a model that can be adopted in both surgical and nonsurgical fields.