

Mentor Training

Workshop & Panel October, 2004

GOOD MENTORS

Offer Support

Validate the experiences of new faculty. Provide praise and positive feedback on accomplishments. Regardless of how competent a new faculty appears to be, allow for a slow transition into faculty roles so that new faculty can get acclimated to the new environment.

Offer Guidance & Advice

New faculty will most likely need information regarding departmental and university structures (e.g., who to go to in what office and when, what the chain of command looks like, and how to contact necessary unions). Give advice regarding teaching and course loads, committee membership, and other departmental responsibilities. Assist mentees with time management and duties and help them access resources. Assist new faculty in determining whether or not assigned responsibilities make sense and help new faculty set boundaries if necessary. This is particularly true for faculty of color or women in traditionally male dominated fields who may be sought out by many underrepresented students and be asked to serve on many committees.

Share resources and equipment when necessary, nominate new faculty for awards, be on the lookout for potential funding, and offer to proof/edit proposals. Refer new faculty to campus resources (e.g., IDP, ADVANCE).

Advocate for Rights

Educate new faculty re: contractual agreements and their rights. Senior faculty may have more prestige and power than junior faculty and may need to support the rights of junior faculty (e.g., in fulfilling contractual agreements for space and resources). Intercede at administrative levels on behalf of new faculty when necessary.

Educate Departments

"Good mentors are sensitive to the experiences of marginalized groups and the extra responsibilities/expectations often placed on these individuals." Junior faculty, particularly those from underrepresented groups offer unique contributions to the overall university climate. Additional education may need to occur regarding the importance and the logistics of recruiting and retaining faculty from underrepresented groups. Help administrators take responsibility for their role in creating a healthy climate and make sure departments are aware of "chilly climate" issues involved in subtle race and gender discrimination. Spread the wisdom of investing in new faculty and foster a collaborative model rather than reinforcing the individual, "lone scholar" model.

Help Establish Relationships

"It takes a village..." A single mentor should not be expected to fulfill all the needs of a particular mentor. Perhaps the best thing a particular mentor can do for a new faculty member is to help him/her network and build social and professional connections. These connections will be invaluable for personal and career goals.

Appreciate the Multi-Dimensional Nature of Mentoring

Understand that your roles will be multidimensional (e.g., counseling, coaching, cheerleading, editing, advocating, etc.). Make sure all areas of mentoring are covered, if not by you, then by additional mentors or other supportive relationships. Also, active mentoring should extend beyond an initial adjustment period, and relationships may evolve over a number of years.

Practice & Encourage Direct Communication

Initially this may mean simply getting to know the new faculty member and his/her personality. Let the mentee know your philosophy on mentoring, your mentoring style, and your personality. Discuss expectations and responsibilities in the mentoring relationship as soon as possible and evaluate whether or not these expectations are being met throughout the relationship. Communicate that this is a reciprocal relationship in which both parties are willing to learn. Anticipate possible conflicts ahead of time by discussing possible mentoring pitfalls (e.g., the mentee feels s/he is not getting what s/he needs). If for some reason the mentoring relationship is not working, don't be afraid to discuss your perception of the relationship and encourage the mentee to do the same. Offer CONSTRUCTIVE feedback on job performance, papers, research, teaching, etc. Ignore gossip and rumors about situations that may arise and instead ask mentees about potentially harmful situations (e.g., poor teaching evaluations). If necessary, differentiate between when to be a friend and just listen and when to give concrete advice. Understand boundaries of a mentoring relationship. Fully discuss potential boundary violations (e.g., romantic/sexual relationships). Seek support from department chairs and/or other administrators when necessary.

Take the Mentoring Role Seriously

Mentoring is not a responsibility that should be taken lightly. Research demonstrates that effective mentoring is crucial to the success of new faculty members. Mentors should be persistent and active in their roles.

BEST MENTORING PRACTICES FOR URI DEPARTMENTS

Based on ADVANCE Mentoring Workshop

- Search committees should appoint a mentor to all new faculty BEFORE they come to URI and before they sign a formal contract in order to assist in negotiations. This mentor can also assist the new faculty member in setting up and getting acquainted with the area (e.g., housing, child care/school districts, recreational activities, etc.).
- Assign new faculty at least two mentors, one inside the department and one outside the department. Attempt to match these mentors based on research interests and/or expressed needs of the new faculty. Assign mentors that have been successful in their careers and are currently productive.
- Make initial mentoring relationships temporary or on a trial basis so if mismatches do occur, it is easier to get out of them. Try meeting a designated number of times, then evaluate whether or not the relationship should continue.
- Each department should develop a list of “need to knows” for new faculty that are unique to each department. Included in this list should be contact info for people who can fulfill these needs. Mentors can share this list with mentees.
- Formalize the responsibilities of mentors/mentees. Again, make a list of mentoring responsibilities specific to particular departments and/or particular mentoring relationships.
- Encourage the whole department to recognize climate issues that may interfere with faculty success (e.g., gender/race discrimination—subtle or overt) and encourage the department to take responsibility for eliminating “cool climates.” Encourage the department to look beyond individual cases, to larger collective/societal issues and not to generalize based on demographic characteristics (e.g., “women who have children are not serious about their careers”). Consult with special offices across campus such as Disability Services, the Multicultural Center, Affirmative Action, and ADVANCE as needed.
- Build a village. Know who to refer your mentee to for specific needs and seek support yourself if you have questions about mentoring and your roles.
- Acknowledge that good mentoring takes training. Work with experts in the field of mentoring in order to develop a mentor training program.
- Assess the need for mentoring in your department and the outcome of mentoring relationships.

HOW TO INITIATE A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Based on ADVANCE Mentoring Workshop

- Get to know them: take them to lunch, ask them how you can be helpful.
- Define Roles: assure them that you are not a spy for the department. Set the structure for what is expected from each member of the relationship, and how long the relationship will last.
- Provide Networking: find people for them to talk to—help them build both formal mentoring relationships and informal relationships/contacts. Encourage them to initiate their own relationships and not be discouraged if an initial mentoring relationship does not work. Introduce them to people who can assist with their research interests. Help to integrate them into the larger community. Organize social gathering outside the department.
- Provide Information and Resources: pass along departmental information and information regarding the larger university/city/state community.
- Offer Guidance: assist them in teaching, how to set limits, provide ways to navigate the different personalities in the department and what interpersonal approaches work best for whom. “Protect the new faculty from negative people in the department and people who are not as productive.” Understand that new faculty may be reluctant to bring up work/family balance issues, but, without prying, make sure they know you are willing to discuss this. Spend time addressing work/family balance and going over relevant policies (e.g., parental leave, dual career partners, etc.). Help them find a balance between work and family life and model this yourself.
- Offer Practical Assistance: act as sponsors for grants, proposals, research, etc, and provide motivation to submit national level grants. Proof/edit proposals. Help find space and materials.
- Listen: act as a sounding board when necessary. Role play different scenarios if requested. Provide a safe place—give advice if asked; if not, just listen.

WAYS TO OVERCOME POTENTIAL OBSTACLES

Based on ADVANCE Mentoring Workshop

- Acknowledge if a mentoring relationship is not working and ask why both parties are not getting more out of the relationship and what the next steps should be. As faculty become settled, their issues/needs may change.
- Acknowledge gender and race issues. Some may feel more comfortable taking advice from a colleague from the same gender and race (particularly women of color). “Understand the pressure to appear ‘perfect’ for male colleagues” and address this as a part of a larger climate issue.
- Anticipate obstacles ahead of time and discuss them during initial mentoring meetings. Each party should identify his/her own comfort level and boundaries. For instance, if a mentee is not happy at URI, is this an appropriate conversation to have with a mentor? If not, who should the mentee approach? Are there certain topics that either party is uncomfortable discussing (e.g., work/family, gossip within the department, etc.)?
- Acknowledge that the transition for new faculty can be difficult professionally and socially, especially if they are new to the area and/or are without personal/family support networks. Provide added structure and guidance in the beginning or refer new faculty to additional mentors that can help and understand that mentoring relationships are dynamic and evolve.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITHIN MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS & AT DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL

- Is mentoring for the transition period only? not successful, it is a failure of mentor? (how do we define success)?
- Is the mentor expected to help in my career, not just getting settled?
 - Current mentoring is variable and informal?
- What is the process? Are there vastly different expectations?
 - What is the history of mentoring at URI?
 - What is the process of assessing mentoring at URI?
- Is there an expectation that if the new faculty member is