Supporting and Mentoring Pre-tenure Faculty

Local context and motives: Ample evidence of uneven understanding among recently hired faculty of tenure processes and expectations; hesitancy about “bothering” busy chairs with teaching problems or other questions; wish for “one experienced go-to person” in addition to chair.

National context: “Heeding New Voices,” study (Rice, Sorcinelli, Austin, 2000) funded by the American Association of Higher Education. Findings emphasize the importance of “intellectual, social, and resource support from senior faculty, chairs, deans and other campus administrators” in relation to “attracting, developing, and retaining faculty.”

Best practices for supporting early career faculty cluster around 3 categories of need:
1. Clarity regarding tenure processes and expectations
2. Sense of community with colleagues
3. Sense of balance and interconnectedness among the different facets of one’s professional life

Supporting pre-tenure faculty is a shared university responsibility, not solely the responsibility of departments and chairs. University sources of support include:

- OFD:
  o New Faculty Orientation/teaching workshops (with CIT)
  o Tenure/4th yr review workshops
  o Junior Faculty Research Seminar
  o TEAL Fellowships
  o Publishing forums
  o Provost’s Book Party
  o Peer writing group support
- CIT: Junior Faculty Seminar; teaching forums
- ORSP Grant-writing workshops
- IT workshops
- College-specific initiatives
Department-based pairing of pre-tenure faculty with senior mentors enables a kind of support not easily accomplished at the University level:

- Tenure expectations can be discussed in personal and nuanced ways that reflect an individual faculty member’s gifts and the history of a particular department; CVs and personal statements can be provided as examples.
- AFR reviews can be discussed by mentor and protégé and used for planning and problem solving in a way that brings the faculty member into the University community and builds trust.
- Checking-in and planning with a mentor through the pre-tenure years can help new faculty make good career decisions that bring a sense of control, coherence and balance to their professional lives.

Good mentoring plans have:

- Structure
- Forms of accountability
- Service recognition for the senior mentor
- Department approval

(Adapted from “Heeding New Voices,” Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin)

Good mentoring includes the following*:

- Advocacy - the mentor should be willing to argue in support of the junior faculty member for space, funds, students.

- Accessibility - the mentor must make time to be available to the mentee. The mentor might keep in contact by dropping by, calling, sending e-mail, or inviting the mentee to lunch. The mentor should make time to ask questions and to read proposals and papers, and for periodic reviews of progress. The mentor should be willing to constructively criticize errors and to recognize and praise excellence,

- Networking - the mentor should have enough experience and contacts to be able to help establish a professional network for the mentee

- Independence - the mentor must not be in competition with the mentee; the mentee's intellectual independence from the mentor must be carefully preserved

- Excellence - the mentor should help the mentee set high standards for her work and assist where possible in allowing her to achieve these goals; assist in helping the mentee evaluate herself realistically.
• Every mentor should ask:
  • what should the professional profile of the mentee be?
  • where should the mentee be in her career during the first 3 years
  • how can the mentor facilitate this?

• Mentors explain department’s typical or general criteria for promotion and tenure; impart any flexibility that exists in the promotion/tenure schedule; the mentor should be aware that there is no rigid set of requirements for junior faculty, but that there are acceptable ranges of performance in various categories (e.g. scholarship, publications, supervision of graduate students, presentations at conferences, funding, changing the field, teaching, administrative duties, consulting, collaborations with colleagues)

Shorter term goals:
• help sort out priorities: budgeting time, publications, teaching, obtaining appropriate resources, setting up a lab or experimental work if appropriate, committees
• networking, introductions to colleagues, identification of other possible mentors for the mentee
• help get research support
• compliment mentee’s achievements, inform colleagues of mentee’s achievements
• show how to say no to certain demands on your time

3. Changing mentors

• a mentee should consider changing mentors if the mentor is clearly and consistently uninterested in her, if the mentor consistently depresses the mentee by undervaluing her abilities or questioning her motives, if the mentor displays any other signs of undermining the relationship (e.g. racial, sexual, ethnic or other prejudice), or if there is simply incompatibility

* From: University of Oregon Women Faculty Resource Network Mentoring Program
To adapt some of these practices to the UMB context, a mentor might:

- Assist the protégé in understanding the 4th year review and tenure processes by reviewing materials together (e.g., FSU Guide to the Tenure Process, Redbook, sample personal statements, sample tables of content, etc).
- Set goals for major reviews.
- Meet with protégé and read AFR comments by DPC, Chair and Dean; identify areas that need strengthening and work on a plan.

With a mentoring plan, what are the responsibilities of the Chair in relation to pre-tenure faculty?

- Acts as primary contact for newly hired faculty, providing assistance in the transition to campus
- Oversees scheduling of classes, service assignments, etc.
- Assigns a senior mentor to new faculty and meets with them for an initial orientation and planning discussion
- Meets once or twice a year with new faculty member to check-in, address issues that the mentor and protégé have prepared, and to raise issues relevant to new faculty member’s progress that the mentor can help to support.
- Organizes social events or info sessions that include all department mentors and protégés.

What is an alternative to the mentor/protégé model?

- Multiple Mentoring: Flexible networks of support are emerging in the literature as an alternative to the single-mentor-who-does-it-all model, due in large part to the complexity of the academic environment. This is especially important for non-majority faculty who often face the biggest challenges in academe.
- Both models can be used. One need not choose.
- Mentor can acknowledge limits of a one-mentor system. The mentor and protégée can discuss benefits of professional and personal support networks within and beyond the University that address both academic and emotional needs.
  - Mentor can invite protégé to draw his/her networks of support, including peers, and describe them, making them more real as resources.
  - Mentor can then refer to the network and help to expand it in support of new faculty member.