

Biology Department Faculty Mentoring Program Revised May 2026

Overall Goals:

The Biology Department has a faculty mentoring program tailored to each incoming junior faculty member. Each newly hired faculty member is assigned a mentoring committee consisting of a senior faculty member who chairs the committee, along with two additional faculty members. The junior faculty member is also mentored by the Department Chair. Through this structure, junior faculty are guided in practices that promote success in establishing productive research programs and effective teaching, as well as in building networks of secondary mentors within the University and beyond.

The mentoring program supports the professional development of junior faculty and promotes their integration and inclusion in the culture and activities of the Department and the University through the following:

- clarifying Department and University expectations, particularly with respect to the fourth-year review and tenure;
- providing guidance and support to help faculty achieve professional goals, including balancing professional responsibilities and identifying strategies to promote excellence in research and teaching;
- helping junior faculty build connections within the Department and across the University;
- providing information about campus resources and opportunities and assisting faculty in navigating University and Departmental systems and processes.

At a broader departmental level, the mentoring program also enhances climate and transparency, promotes communication among faculty, and encourages the sharing of ideas. The program is intended to nurture a strong and collaborative departmental community.

Specific Components of the Mentoring Plan:

Assignment of mentoring committee: Upon the arrival of junior faculty, and in consultation with them, the Department Chair matches the junior faculty member with a primary mentor and two additional committee members. Selection of mentors may be based on overlap in research or teaching interests or on other points of affinity. The committee composition may change depending on mentoring outcomes and the preferences of the mentee. Faculty mentors report this effort in their AFRs and receive service credit for their contributions to the mentoring program. In addition to this committee, department members who are especially effective teachers are encouraged to coach and advise junior faculty on teaching activities.

Mentoring expectations: Informal meetings and conversations between mentor and mentee are expected to occur regularly. At a minimum, mentors are expected to meet with their mentees two to three times per semester during the first year, and then at agreed-upon intervals in subsequent semesters, with at least one meeting per semester.

Role of the Department Chair: All mentoring activities are overseen by the Chair. In addition to assigning mentors, the Chair serves as a general point of contact for new faculty, ensuring that they have adequate space and resources; helping them connect with faculty, staff, and resources in the Department and University; responding to questions; assisting with problem-solving; and overseeing the mentoring process. This includes suggesting changes in mentor–mentee assignments as needed or desired.

The Department Chair meets with each junior faculty member regularly (at least monthly) during the first year and as needed in subsequent semesters. Along with the mentor, the Chair discusses available resources and helps guide the faculty member’s transition into their role.

Establishment of research program and lab management: Mentors support the mentee in learning how to establish and manage a research program and research group. Mentors discuss research activities, publications, grant opportunities, and effective strategies for developing a productive and successful research program at the University.

Balancing research, teaching, and service: In addition to the areas above, mentors provide guidance on broader professional integration into an academic career. Mentors help mentees address questions such as: How do I balance teaching, research, and service commitments? How do I develop multi-year plans across these areas? A mentee might develop a multi-year teaching plan with a teaching mentor and a multi-year research plan with a research mentor, if these are different individuals. Mentors also help mentees make informed decisions about service commitments. In the Biology Department, junior faculty are encouraged to focus on establishing their research programs and teaching, as the first five to six years in a faculty position are critical for developing a sustainably fundable research program. The Chair and mentors carefully consider service expectations to help junior faculty avoid overcommitment.

Mentorship in teaching: Mentorship in teaching is provided by experienced tenure-track faculty who have taught similar courses and/or who have particular expertise in pedagogy. The Chair of the Curriculum Committee and the Graduate Program Director also provide guidance in developing new undergraduate and graduate courses, respectively, as appropriate. Teaching mentorship encompasses all aspects of instruction, from course content to student-related issues. Mentors, the Chair, and experienced instructors inform junior faculty of available campus teaching resources (e.g., the Center for Innovative Teaching, the Office of Faculty Development). Class visits are encouraged, and co-teaching opportunities may be provided as appropriate.

Assistance in lab setup: Biology Department staff assist new faculty members with purchasing laboratory supplies and equipment (including advising on options, suitability, and pricing) and general lab setup.

Student advising: Junior faculty members are assigned undergraduate advisees beginning in their second year. New faculty receive training in student advising from the Director of Advising and the Academic and Professional Development Specialist in the Biology Department, who provide information on the Biology major, University curricular requirements, and the degree audit system.