

## **Mentoring of Junior Faculty**

Mentoring is a key component of the professional development of junior faculty, one of the keys to making sure that new faculty become well-integrated into Boston University and follow successful career paths here. The College of Arts and Sciences mentoring policy requires that all new faculty members have at least one identified senior faculty member from whom they can seek career advice and information and who will proactively offer such help. Departments may vary in many specific aspects of their mentoring systems, but this document, outlining the mentoring policies and standards of the College of Arts and Sciences, provides the framework and expectations within which departmental programs will operate.

While the formal mentor has the most defined role in the mentoring processes, all senior departmental colleagues should participate actively in the mentoring of junior faculty. Although most departments will choose to assign one senior faculty member as the formally designated mentor for a new assistant professor, some departments may assign a mentoring committee to a new assistant professor. In the case of very small departments, or departments without an appropriate colleague to be assigned to a new assistant professor, the department may seek mentoring assistance from a faculty member from another department or even another school. The Dean's Office can help with this process.

The most appropriate mentor will thus not necessarily be a senior faculty member in a very similar field. It is essential, however, that assigned mentors be demonstrably able to assist the junior partner in the mentoring relationship with the kind of advice and knowledge that is necessary to fulfill the purpose of the program. Senior colleagues who are not research active or not professionally active in their discipline or who do not fulfill our standards of excellence in teaching and mentoring students are not likely to be appropriate to help our newest faculty members forge their paths to excellence in research and scholarship, teaching and mentoring, and professional engagement.

The Dean and the Chair will provide assistance in clarifying the mentor's role as the junior faculty member moves toward tenure, and the Dean or the Associate Provost for Faculty Development will periodically host mentoring workshops for Chairs, junior faculty members, and mentors. It is essential that mentors make time for participation in this process.

### Responsibilities of the Dean in the Mentoring Process

The Dean of the College will be responsible for overseeing the mentoring program of the College, and will annually seek updated information identifying the mentors for all junior faculty. The Dean will also ensure that participants in the mentoring program receive appropriate information and professional development to maintain a high quality and successful program, and will conduct periodic assessment of the program at the individual, departmental, and College-levels.

## Responsibilities of the Department Chair in the Mentoring Process

The Department Chair will assign a mentor as soon as, or ideally before, a junior faculty member arrives on campus. The Chair should communicate this assignment to both the mentor and the junior faculty member, provide all parties to the relationship with materials that clarify the responsibilities and opportunities involved, and encourage them to make arrangements for an initial meeting as soon as the new faculty member arrives. The Chair should also ensure that all other faculty, senior and junior, understand that they have an important role to play in the mentoring process.

The Chair's most important responsibility is to provide mentors and junior faculty with clear, up-to-date information about the expectations for faculty duties and professional and career success, and the assessment processes that faculty experience through their professional careers at Boston University, including the annual merit exercise, the mid-tenure review, and tenure and promotion processes. The Chair should clarify expectations for tenure in terms of the University's and College's official policies, and should explain any field-specific expectations. The Chair should ensure that the department develops, updates, and makes available a faculty expectations document that complements University and College policies by explaining departmental policies, procedures, and standards. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that departmental policies are applied transparently and consistently. The Chair is similarly responsible for sharing information on current University-wide policies with both mentors and junior colleagues to ensure consistent information is made available to all faculty.

The Chair should coordinate other aspects of the overall mentoring process including soliciting regular feedback on teaching performance, particularly class visits from a range of senior faculty members. It is essential that such visits begin early in the faculty member's time at BU, so that clear feedback and advice can be provided well in advance of both the mid-tenure and tenure reviews, allowing time for the junior faculty member to implement suggestions that emerge from the peer feedback process.

The Chair should also provide guidance on service expectations for junior faculty, and should ensure that junior colleagues are engaged in the department and wider University, but are not over-burdened with assignments. Service for junior faculty should focus on assignments that will contribute to career development, such as a focused committee where a junior faculty may be able to contribute specific expertise, and where the work burden is not excessive. Chairs should be especially careful to avoid major service burdens in the first year, when teaching is likely to place particular demands on newly-arrived faculty.

The Chair should also systematically use appropriate assessment strategies to make sure that the mentoring partnerships are functioning and constructive, and should take steps in cases where they are not.

## Responsibilities of the Mentor(s)

The mentor's role will inevitably vary depending on the needs of each individual faculty member, and on the availability of other mentors within the department and wider University.

However, it is important that the mentor be pro-active in establishing and maintaining a constructive relationship with the junior faculty member. The mentor should seek a first meeting at the earliest possible time and should initiate a conversation at an early stage to explore an appropriate way to proceed over time. Each mentoring pair will establish its own rhythm and structure, but an early first meeting is highly advisable. Some mentoring pairs prefer to schedule regular periodic meetings while others develop a preference for a more informal arrangement. Mentoring pairs will also differ in the style of meeting they prefer, from formal in-office meetings to sharing a meal or other arrangements. The “right” way to function as a mentoring team is the way that is most helpful to the junior partner and most satisfactory to both. However, mentors must make proper time for the mentoring process, rather than just relying on chance, brief encounters in the corridor or the occasional email. It is also essential that mentors follow up on commitments made: if a junior faculty solicits feedback on a paper or grant proposal, or if a mentor asks to see such materials, the mentor should provide proper, timely feedback rather than simply accepting materials and setting them aside.

While some mentoring relationships may focus exclusively on the traditional triumvirate of teaching, research, and scholarship, other mentors may provide, or be asked to provide, advice on a wider range of issues within and beyond the university. This may particularly be the case for junior faculty members who are new to the area. Some faculty members may seek advice on personal or life matters – whether or not these are directly career-related – and discussion of such issues should only take place when agreeable to both mentor and mentee. The mentor may in some cases wish to guide the mentee towards other parts of the University for advice on such matters; the Chair, administrative staff, Dean’s Office, Associate Provost for Faculty Development, or the Faculty and Staff Assistance Office may be able to assist in identifying appropriate people to speak with.

The mentor should be prepared to serve as a source of practical information, and to assist the junior faculty member in navigating the large and frequently confusing bureaucracy of the university. In the first weeks and months issues such as classroom support or grant applications may overwhelm a junior faculty member. If your department has a manual or a list of useful numbers, ensure that junior faculty members are provided with a copy of these documents, and familiarize yourself with offices and initiatives that may be of interest to faculty members in your department.

Staff members will frequently be an important source of practical information about the support services that are available to faculty, and they will have contacts throughout the university. Suggest that junior faculty speak to administrative staff whenever appropriate, but don’t simply offload responsibility to staff members when your assistance is being sought.

In the first year or two, advice on teaching is likely to be critical to most junior faculty members, who may find their initial classroom experiences daunting. The mentor may offer advice about teaching or may refer the mentee to other faculty in the department, or to the Center for Excellence in Teaching (<http://www.bu.edu/cet/>) if appropriate. Junior faculty may also wish to observe more experienced colleagues in the classroom, and the mentor can play a useful role in facilitating this. Guidance on teaching may include a discussion of course development and creation of syllabi, assignment structure, and fostering discussion in the classroom. The mentor

may play an especially helpful role where junior faculty are developing new courses that will be reviewed at the College's Curriculum Committee. Mentors can also be helpful in reinforcing the message that teaching performance will be an important consideration in faculty performance reviews, and ultimately in the tenure review; it is a key component of work rather than a secondary consideration.

Finally, the mentor can provide advice on preparing for individual class sessions so that junior faculty members have a better sense of the quantity of information needed for each contact hour. This will help to ensure that class preparation does not consume all available hours. Allied with this, junior faculty may seek advice on dealing with student requests for meetings outside classroom hours, and when it may be appropriate to say no to student requests for additional meetings.

Regarding scholarship, the mentor's primary role will be to provide guidance on how to focus efforts on achieving both short- and long-term scholarly goals. Indeed, mentors can often be most useful in helping junior faculty members design realistic scholarly goals and strategies. They can be a key source of advice as junior faculty make decisions about research strategies, the process of applying for grant funding, or the pace, quantity, and location of publications. Mentors who are in the same research area can provide valuable feedback by reading grant proposals or papers.

Mentors can also help their colleagues respond to and seek opportunities for professional engagement and service, and with the inevitable issues of finding the right balance among the various demands and opportunities. Above all, mentors should listen and be good sounding board, and always remember that the choices and strategies they chose for themselves are not necessarily right for someone else. There are many ways to run a professional career.

Although the logic of a mentoring relationship is that there is a more senior and experienced partner, and a more junior and less experienced partner, the faculty mentoring relationship is also defined as a partnership between accomplished professionals. The senior partner must never regard the junior partner as his or her student, and must always realize that advice is just that.

### Responsibilities of the Junior Faculty Member

While the mentoring relationship implies that there is a more senior and experienced partner, and a more junior and less experienced partner, the faculty mentoring relationship is also a partnership between accomplished professionals. Junior faculty members should be proactive in exploring and defining their professional needs, in seeking assistance and counsel, and in developing the appropriate mentoring relationship.

Junior faculty members should make proper time to develop a mentoring relationship, and follow the same advice offered above to the senior faculty partners about establishing the style and ground rules of the partnership.

The junior faculty member should take advantage of every opportunity to meet colleagues within and beyond his or her department: informal gatherings, offers of lunch, receptions at the College level. All of these will provide opportunities to develop a wider network of contacts and colleagues. Junior faculty members should also ensure to introduce themselves to staff members: again, being familiar with the support resources in advance of a crisis will smooth the process of dealing with any difficulties. They should also participate in meetings and programs in their discipline and professional associations, seeking a wide network of professional contacts. It is important that all faculty members realize that the ability and willingness to seek needed assistance is a strength, not a weakness.

### Disengagement from the mentoring relationship

The mentoring partnership, like any other relationship, is likely to evolve over time. Sometimes, it is a good idea for mentoring partners to reflect on these changes.

If either partner comes to believe that the mentoring relationship has serious flaws, the first step, if possible, is to address it together. If that does not resolve the problem, the next step is to discuss any problems with the department Chair. Sometimes the match needs to be changed; this need not imply any negative judgment or “fault” on the part of either partner but simply a mismatch. In the event of a more serious difficulty with the mentoring process, either party may contact the CAS mentoring coordinator, Gareth McFeely ([garethmc@bu.edu](mailto:garethmc@bu.edu)), to discuss the best approach to any problematic situations. Faculty are strongly encouraged to report any difficulties at the earliest possible moment, and such matters will be handled in strict confidence.

### For further information and assistance

#### *At Boston University*

CAS mentoring coordinator: Gareth McFeely, [garethmc@bu.edu](mailto:garethmc@bu.edu)

Associate Provost for Faculty Development: Julie Sandell, [jsandell@bu.edu](mailto:jsandell@bu.edu)

Boston University Faculty and Staff Assistance Office, <http://www.bu.edu/fsao/>

CAS Faculty Expectations: <http://www.bu.edu/cas/faculty-staff/forms/expectations/>

#### *Other Sources*

*Giving and Getting Career Advice: A Guide for Junior and Senior Faculty* (ADVANCE at the University of Michigan): <http://www.umich.edu/~advproj/career%20advising.pdf>

This document incorporates feedback from CAS faculty members and draws on mentoring materials from the following institutions: The University of Pennsylvania, Duke University, University of California, San Diego, Yale University, Emory University, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan.

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