

# Syracuse University

## Faculty Mentoring in a Networked World

# Introduction



The complete version of the toolkit, each section and individual forms are available to download at <http://suadvance.syr.edu> (look for Mentoring Resources). The complete printed version of the toolkit is available for order also at the website.

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# Project Background

## What contributes to faculty success?

First, some context. Since the SU ADVANCE project began in late 2010, the nature, availability, and quality of faculty mentoring has been a key component of the project's *Networking Initiative*. The overarching goal in that initiative is to ensure that women STEM faculty are connected within professional networks, as such connection avails faculty members of the information and other resources needed for success at any given career stage. Strong network connections also contribute toward retention. We soon learned (Mergel, 2012) that while connections exist for SU women STEM faculty, especially with regard to support networks or for information on career-life balance topics,

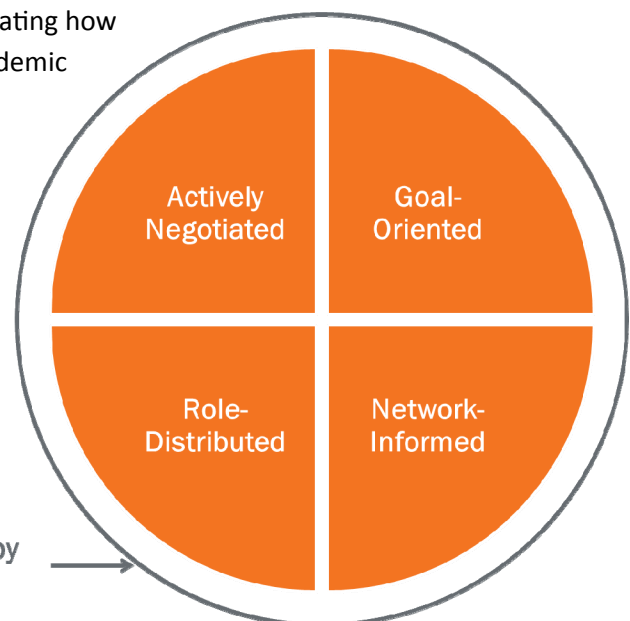
instrumental connections (those related to developing toward specific career goals) were sparse. Moreover, interviewees reported persistent gaps in their understanding of how best to achieve their goals. Hence, we reinforced our efforts to support mentor network development, including the production of this guide: tips, ideas, and information about how to get, give, and lead mentoring from the perspective of *developmental networks*. In preparing these resources, we explored the deep and wide literature on mentoring as a form of faculty development and coordinated with and learned from other NSF ADVANCE programs. Below are the key principles that have animated our work.

## Mentoring works best when:

**Individuals drive the process.** Informal mentoring is the most meaningful, comfortable, and enduring (Johnson, 2002). Self-initiated mentoring is a better predictor of career success than participation in an assigned mentoring relationship (Blickle, et al., 2008). Female faculty in STEM at Syracuse University attribute more importance to informal mentoring than male STEM faculty do when assessing factors they believe are connected to career success (Brandes, et al., 2013). See Section 2, in particular, for tips and strategies.

**The mentoring relationship is open to negotiation.** The concept of “mentoring”, that is, what constitutes a helpful developmental interaction, is culturally specific and should be negotiated by individual pairs (Harley, 2005). However, there are some “best practices” for negotiating how that interaction can and should evolve over time in the academic context (Luz, 2011; see Sections 2 and 3) and how the interaction can be respectful of gender and cultural differences (e.g. Thomas, 2001; see especially Section 5).

**It is goal oriented.** Mentoring relationships are most productive when the goal is clear (Latimer, et al., 2012) and when the goals are aligned with critical developmental domains important to all faculty (Yun and Sorcinelli, 2008; Goodwin, 2013). Goals may or may not be derived from key career transitions, such as achieving tenure or promotion. Information on goal setting is included in Section 2.

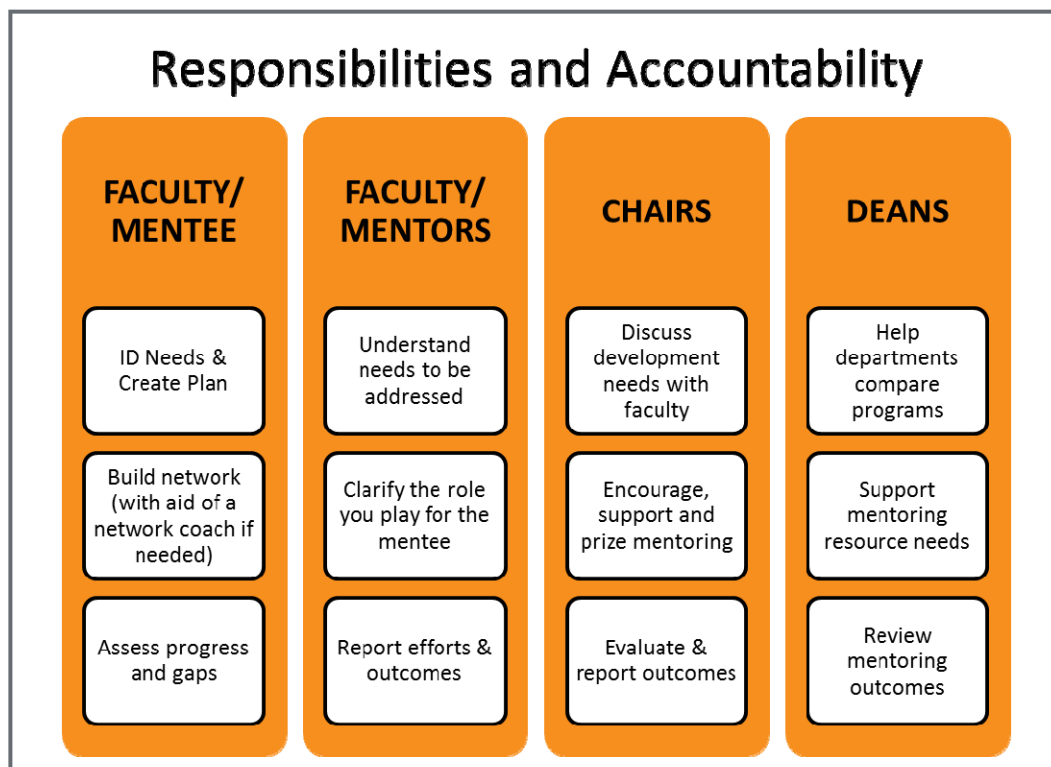


**There are multiple kinds of support.** There are at least three roles filled by successful mentors. Mentors are at once advisors, coaches, and sponsors (Dinolfo & Nugent, 2010), but mentors commonly cannot serve all roles well. In addition, many faculty turn to a mentor for interpersonal support which may result in conflicts of interest if mentors are then in a capacity to review the mentee's performance. The mentor role is better served by multiple individuals. See especially Section 1 for more information about these roles.

**Mentors exist in a defined, well managed network.** Mentoring consortia, which can include individuals from across the University, from multiple academic institutions, and those outside of the academy contribute to productivity (Girves et al, 2005). The mix of strong and weak ties in a developmental network, as well as the density and diversity of the network itself determine the kind of information and support available (Higgins and Kram, 2001). Ensuring a developmental network has grown to meet individual needs is aided by the perspective of a

developmental network coach (although one can conduct this assessment for oneself). Information about dimensions of developmental networks is in Section 1; more detail on the connection between social network theory and developmental networks is in Section 6.

**It is acknowledged as a valuable and important activity within the institution.** All faculty and academic leaders have an important role to play in supporting a culture of continued professional development. While mentoring is highly individualized on one hand, it is a communal responsibility on the other. Perceived support for mentoring initiatives by organizational leadership - for example by department chairs - plays a significant role in a mentor's satisfaction with the activity (Parise & Forret, 2007). Support can include engaging mentors in program development, arranging for training on being a good mentor, and/or public recognition of the mentor's contribution to a unit's goals through mentoring. Ideas for supporting mentoring are in Section 4.



*Graphic adapted from Wright State University, College of Science and Mathematics' Faculty Mentoring Policy & Resources, version 2.1 – 7/16/2013, prepared and edited by Dr. Stephanie Goodwin.*