Syracuse University

Faculty Mentoring in a Networked World

Section 3:

Supporting as a Mentor

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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Supporting as a Mentor

Defining the role

So, You've Been Asked to Mentor

Cho et al. (2011) studied the qualities of exceptional mentors from the mentee's point of view. Outstanding mentors, it turns out, are also leaders in mentoring. Great mentors:

- Are enthusiastic and compassionate.
- Act as a career guide using an individualized plan for the mentee grounded in a larger vision of what is needed for career success.
- Make strong time commitments with regular, frequent and high-quality meetings.
- Support career/life balance.
- Drive future mentoring by being a role model and impacting policies/procedures.

However, you don't have to meet all the characteristics of an outstanding mentor. You can be a great mentor if you understand your role, are genuinely interested, practice strong interpersonal skills, set aside time, avoid conflicts of interest, and have core information to share.

Managing Expectations

Mentoring is just one resource that faculty members can use to support their development and career success. It is not a panacea for all things however. There are certain expectations about what a mentor can/should do or not do. These include:

- Provide advice not answers
- Encourage independence not dependence
- Participate in an agreement not a contract
- Mentors are guides not authorities
- Mentors are responsible *to* the mentee not *for* them

Performance Review vs Mentoring

There is some debate on whether or not people in a leadership position (chair, review committee members, Dean, etc.) can also be mentors. Undoubtedly, many leaders offer great advice and may even be an advocate. However, there is potential for conflict of interest (Zellers et al, 2008) because the primary role of a leader is relaying performance criteria and providing performance feedback as a representative of the organization/department. Consequently, the mentee may feel the need to be circumspect about the information they provide.

If it is not possible to separate out the roles of mentor and reviewer, the mentor is obligated to point out potential conflicts of interest and to be honest in the mentoring relationship of any performance concerns that may place the mentee in jeopardy. While a reviewer is a good source of information and advice, it is preferable that they be considered just a portion of the mentoring picture.

Wondering what skills make you a good mentor? The Mentoring Readiness Inventory in the *Tools* portfolio may be a great way to explore your potential. Also, review the mentor roles information and the Developmental Domains in Section 2 to get a sense of where you might be the most help.

Supporting as a Mentor

Best practices

Your Role

- Interact with respect and professionalism.
- Build trust by articulating and fulfilling expectations.
- Self-reflection about mentoring. Consider what you believe about mentoring and your assumptions about developmental growth.
- Learn about unconscious bias and how it may misdirect mentoring.
- Mentoring is a service to the department, university, and discipline. Be honest about common concerns such as having enough time, the number of concurrent mentees that is reasonable and the external reward/ recognition for this work.
- Follow up and initiate conversations about what worked and what didn't.
- Give substantive feedback as appropriate on proposals, articles, curriculum and talks. Provide examples of successful proposals, etc.
- End each mentoring conversation with an opportunity to discuss next steps, if needed.
- Share news events, grant opportunities, articles, and encouragement.
- Be honest if you believe you can no longer be helpful. Have a plan for a graceful exit.

Ideas for Fostering Career Advancement

- Encourage self-awareness.
- Support mentee in creating a developmental plan that identifies and supports strengths and challenges in goals. Includes reasonable benchmarks and dates. (See the *Tools* section of this booklet and information in Section 2)
- Learn about and consider mentee's career and research trajectories. Help plan a few years ahead.
- For tenure and promotions, review the portfolio with deep thought and care. Understand the tenure and promotion requirements and processes.
- Advise on time allocation and prioritization for key faculty responsibilities, especially service.
- Direct mentee to the most advantageous service commitments or those that open doors to other resources. For example it is sometimes advantageous to take the lead with a colloquium because it allows the individual to develop a relationship with another researcher for future collaboration or letters for the tenure package.
- Help them to say "no" effectively to additional work or disadvantageous service opportunities.
- If appropriate, collaborate on research projects, manuscripts and presentations.
- Find out what awards have been received and what is advantageous to receive. When they are ready, consider nominating them for an award.
- Facilitate connections with colleagues on other campuses who can invite your mentee to present.

Supporting as a Mentor

How to be most helpful when needed

Tips for Building a Relationship

- Clarify common interests and work values.
- Clarify the mentee's expectations and needs related to career development.
- Be sensitive to differences and the lens with which you see your mentee's performance.
- Be honest about your ability to help and any limitations or conflicts of interest.
- Be able to identify and address weaknesses in the mentoring relationship.

Initial Meetings

- Prepare: Learn about your mentee by reviewing their credentials, website and other sources of information. Make a list of questions to ask.
- Seek clarity about your role and mentee's goals and action plans.
- Openly discuss the ground rules.
- Consider a **Mentorship Agreement** (see the **Tools** portfolio). It can be unwritten and/or used for discussion.
- After the meetings think about -
  - ♦ What insights have you gained ?
  - ♦ What are the similarities and differences between you? Experiences? Learning styles?
  - ♦ What approaches could have an impact on the relationship?

Building Trust: What Advisors Expect from Mentees and Vice Versa

	Mentor Expects from a Mentee	Mentee Expects from a Mentor
Competence	Intelligence, drive, interpersonal skills.	Mentor is capable of helping (skills training, contacts, organization knowledge, influence, empathy).
Reliability	Can be depended on to accomplish agreed upon tasks and to help the mentor if needed (and appropriate).	Mentor can be depended on to help and to not betray the mentee's confidences.
Commitment	Mentee is committed to her/his own success: to the mentoring relationship and to the University.	Mentor is interested in the mentee as an individual and in helping them to succeed; has the mentee's best interest in mind.
Honesty	Mentee is willing to take reasonable risks: will be honest about needs and concerns: will seek help and feedback.	Mentor will give honest and constructive feedback and help the mentee to learn; will not belittle or judge them for what they do not know.
Character	Work ethic; strong confidentiality ethic; understanding each other's professional goals; speaking and acting with consistency; understanding faults without exploiting them; valuing the differences in perspective or cultures; avoiding public criticism; revealing and discussing conflicts of interest, addresses conflicts of interest, inquiring about unknowns rather than relying on assumptions, and willingness to address sensitive topics especially relating to implicit bias.	

Initiating and Leading Discussions as a Mentor

Conversations that facilitate goal setting and achievement

The most effective way to start a mentoring relationship is to reflect on the Developmental Domains outlined in Section 2. If you are a developmental network coach (DNC) or feel that the individual's current status requires that you function in this capacity, you may wish to start at the point of discussing the developmental networks model, the skills for networking, and SMART goal setting. If the individual has already gained this information and developed a plan, discussions are centered on the goals/objectives with which you will be assisting, and what role (navigator, sponsor, coach or confidant) will you play. Based on the developmental domains, the following list represents potential discussion starters.

Domain: Navigating the University

- What is your understanding of the policies and procedures of the department?
- Is there anything I can add to your understanding of the program/center/department/college/university?
- Would you like to talk about establishing and/or elevating your on-campus visibility and reputation?
- What are your perceptions of service requirements and how to choose those most advantageous to your plans?
- There are many campus offices and other resources that can help you. Which ones have you identified so far?
- If jointly appointed, do you have any questions about your role and responsibilities?

Domain: Excelling at Teaching

- Walk me through your teaching assignments for the next year or two. Do you need help preparing? What kind of resources would be most helpful to you as you do so?
- Do you have any questions about course design, teaching methods and or using technology in course management?
- Do you have any questions about fostering and managing a productive, respectful and inclusive classroom or teaching lab?
- Do you have any questions about engaging and supervising teaching support personnel?

Domain: Excelling at Research/Scholarly Productivity

- Walk me through your research plans for the next year, three years, etc. Do you need help developing this plan?
- Do you have questions regarding setting up, managing and/or maintaining what you need for your research (for example, your lab, equipment and facilities? Purchasing? Human subjects review?)
- Have you identified colleagues within the department and in other departments that are a good match for your research direction? Is there anyone I can put you in touch with?
- Do you have any questions about engaging and supervising research staff (undergraduates, graduates, post docs and research associates)?
- Have you connected with the Office for Research and the Office of Sponsored Programs for help in identifying and applying for funding? Taken any training that they have provided?
- Do you need help with grant writing or management?
- Do you need help with writing/editing articles and publication?

Domain: Maximizing Your Tenure, Promotion and Evaluation Results

- Do you feel confident that you understand how your work will be judged? Do you have questions about critical evaluation points—annual review, Three-Year review, etc.
- How can I help you maximize your chances of getting tenure or being promoted? How can I help you target your outputs for the next advancement or review opportunity? Do you know what gets rewarded and what doesn't within your department?
- How can I help you to develop an exceptional tenure and/or promotion dossier?
- Do you need help with staying efficient—setting realistic standards and avoiding over-preparation?
- You've been promoted to Associate Professor or Professor, what are your next steps and who/what will help you get there?

Domain: Creating and Maintaining Work-Life Balance

- What are your thoughts about integrating your work day and life needs and responsibilities?
- What are your core values and goals that will impact the balance you are seeking?
- Can I help you locate resources that support skills in the area of time management, communication, negotiation, organization, etc.?
- Can I point you to campus resources that help with quality of life issues such as child care, dual career needs and affordable housing?
- Are you aware of the Universities policies, procedures and programs regarding wellness, family and research leaves, and other relevant topics?
- How do you manage the daily interactions with colleagues regarding family responsibilities? Can I point you towards someone who has successfully negotiated similar work-life issues?

Domain: Developing Professional Networks

- Do you need help identifying effective mentors (coaches, sponsors, navigators, confidants) within your current social network?
- How can I help you expand your network on campus and off campus?
- Are you aware of the committees and other service opportunities that will help you expand your network?
- Have you been able to establish career-enhancing relationships with faculty and researchers that share similar interests in research/teaching?
- You think you have identified a potential collaborative opportunities; what are your first steps?
- Do you know what it takes to be a mentor? Have you assessed your strengths and challenges as a potential mentor to others? Do you feel you are ready to mentor others?

Domain: Acting Within Your Discipline

- What are your core strategies for developing your national and international reputation?
- Have you developed an awards and recognition plan for your career? How can I help you develop such a plan? Are there particular awards or honors you are pursuing?
- Aside from (primary disciplinary conference), what other conferences or events are important to your advancement and networking?
- Effective self-promotion is critical; can I help you in this area or point to resources for that? Do you need any help in developing an effective online presence and deciding upon/learning the tools necessary to do so?
- What are your thoughts about leadership within disciplinary associations and what role you want to play?
- What skills/knowledge do you have regarding entrepreneurial skills (patents, intellectual property, industry) and how can I help?

Example domains

Since different mentors (or mentor roles) help an individual in different ways (see Section 1), the questions they ask or the advice that they give might vary depending on the role they are fulfilling. The following example falls within the domain of *Excelling at Teaching*.

Mentoring Role	Areas of Assistance
Developmental Network Coach	Helps identify master teachers (for example, connects a faculty member with a Meredith Professor); ensures that mentee knows where to go for technical or policy assistance (for example, tips for using course management system or how religious absences are processed); can recommend who might be willing to help in negotiating teaching assignments, etc.
Navigator	Typically someone who has successfully taught the course (or similar course) the mentee is developing. Can advise about what to expect in terms of typical student preparation, common obstacles, how students might react to assignments, etc.
Sponsor	Someone who can speak up for the mentee during the time teaching assignments are being decided (for example, if the mentee was just awarded a large grant, developing two new courses might not be an ideal arrangement).
Coach	Someone who can provide guidance on concrete skills such as classroom management, presentation style, use of technology, or providing feedback to students.
Confidant	Someone who can be trusted to listen about classroom challenges and offer support. Someone in the mentee's "corner."

Documenting Your Efforts

Its easy to lose track of all the assistance one provides that might be considered "mentoring" when such activity is informal. The *Documenting Mentoring Activities* sheet (in the **Tools** portfolio) may be helpful in tracking your overall service to a particular mentee. Using it on a regular basis, or some other log, will help refresh your memory when speaking with your chair, or when writing an annual review, award nomination, or service report.

When describing each of your activities be sure to consider:

- Did the service you provided support faculty within your department, college, university or your profession?

- Was the activity initiated by you or your mentee?

- Providing a short description including goal being addressed, strategies including the role you played (Developmental Network Coach, Navigator, Sponsor, Coach or Confidant), and the outcome.

- Include a short statement describing any additional resources from department/college/university you used or would have liked to have available in support of your mentoring.

Constructive Feedback

Listening and providing feedback

The most useful feedback:

- **Is descriptive,** not blaming, judgmental or evaluative thus reducing defensiveness.

- **Is specific.** To be told one is "dominating" is not as useful as "in the conversation that just took place (specific what), you did not appear to be listening to what others were saying (observed behavior), and I felt forced to accept your arguments (your felt response)."

- **Stays focused on behavior** not the person; refer to acts not character. Calling someone a "know-it-all" vs. saying "you talked more than anyone else at the meeting." The latter allows for the possibility of a change. The former implies a fixed trait. In other words, direct feedback toward behavior which the receiver can do something about.

- **Promotes reflection and articulation** of their own thinking, decisions and solutions through questions - "Can you tell me more about what you mean?" or "How would (*act/ solution)* make a difference for you?" or "Is there anything more you can add?"

- **Is about what** is said **or how** it is said or done. The "why" takes us from the observable to the inferred and involves assumptions about intent. Why questions will often invoke defensiveness.

- **Is solicited.** Feedback is most useful when the receiver has a question that can be answered.

- **Is relevant to the needs of both** the receiver and the giver of feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs and fails to consider those on the receiving end.

- **Is well-timed.** In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior. Excellent feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.

- **Shares information** rather than gives advice. By sharing information, we leave a person free to decide. When we give advice, we are telling them what to do.

- **Includes the amount (of information) needed** rather than the amount we would like to give. Overloading a person with feedback reduces effectiveness.

- **Is checked to insure clear communication.** One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback to see if it corresponds to what you had in mind. No matter what the intent, feedback is often threatening and subject to considerable distortion or misinterpretation.

- **Is checked to determine degree of agreement** from others. Is this one person's impression or an impression shared by others?

- **Takes time to learn.** Feedback can greatly improved by becoming aware of the effects of giving feedback and improved skills.

- **Is authentic.** Constructive feedback opens the way to a relationship that is built on trust, honesty, and genuine concern.

Mentoring Across Differences

Tips and strategies

As in all aspects of work in the academy, the lens we use to view our world deserves careful consideration. Everyone brings their culture, experiences and values to the mentoring relationship. Purely instructional mentoring is not enough. Mentees need to feel connected and trust is critical, especially in cross-differences mentoring. The ability to discuss openly the impact of gender, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability and other differences on career success is essential to mentoring across differences. We strongly recommend that you read section 5 on Sensitivity to Differences. However, the following tips and strategies are particularly helpful in light of the discussion of your role as a mentor.

- **Practice strong interpersonal relationship skills.** Talk about individual experiences, offer emotional support and behave ethically.

- **Discuss the explicit and implicit rules** in the department. How does culture impact rules?

- **Encourage your mentee to include mentors of similar background** in their developmental network.

- **Motivate mentees to find "safe space"** where they can receive the emotional and intellectual support that helps them to thrive.

- **Facilitate connections** through service assignments, research collaborations, and department and community projects. Cross-differences mentoring relationships and strong networks often arise from shared experiences.

- **Openly endorse mentee's ideas**, signaling to others that they should also value them.

- **Help mentees gain the cultural capital that will help them succeed.** Advantage mentees with an understanding of strong collegial relationship and reputation building skills, organizational citizenship practices, and other forms of cultural capital that will help them gain support for advancement.

- **Ensure mentees have opportunities** for feedback, encouragement, and public support from multiple sources.

- **Use open ended advice,** for example, qualifying statements such as "This might not work for you but from my experience…" and then invite discussion rather than assume you're on target.