

Mentoring Policy for SEAS

Office of the Deputy Dean

Oversight: The Deputy Dean will be responsible for overall management of the faculty mentorship program. Information about the mentoring program will be given to each incoming faculty member as well as to each mentor, and will be posted on the School's website. This website should also provide up-to-date information about deadlines for paperwork related to reappointment and tenure, as well as information about what a CV should contain. At the beginning of each academic year, department chairs will be asked to report to the Deputy Dean on the mentoring committees of each junior faculty in their department, and comment on how well they are functioning.

Assignment of mentors: The department chair should assign a mentor to each junior faculty member as soon as they have accepted the formal offer, and this should be communicated to the faculty member and mentor. Within the first year of their appointment at Penn, the department chair should discuss with the junior faculty member who they wish to be on their mentoring committee and designate this group as the mentoring committee.

“The mentor/mentee relationship appears to be most successful when assistant professors play a role in choosing their mentors.” [1]

Composition of committee: The exact composition as well as the size of the mentoring committee should be left to the discretion of the department; the only requirement is that at least one member of the mentoring committee be a primary tenured professor within the department. However, we recommend that: 1) the primary mentor (chair of the committee) be as close as possible in research area to the mentee and someone with whom the mentee feels comfortable; and 2) if the mentee is a woman (or underrepresented minority), consider placing a woman (or minority member) on the committee.

There is ample research which shows that issues of gender and race play a large role in mentoring. This should be balanced with the following observation: “The key to mentoring women is not whether the mentors are women or men, but whether they are able to relate to women.” [2]. The same holds true for minorities [3].

It should also be noted that much of the most effective mentoring that occurs in SEAS is done informally by eating lunch or going out for drinks together, and that people who fall outside of those natural social interactions risk that form of advice: “the lack of social and professional connections available to most women in academic science and engineering departments, in concert with overt and covert gender bias as well as differences in socialization, creates special and unique problems for women.” [2]

Due to considerations 1) and 2) above, it may be appropriate to have someone from outside the department or school serve on the mentoring committee . They may even serve as the chair of the committee. In this case, the department chair should ensure that the mentor understands the promotion process within SEAS, and that there are other primary faculty members on the committee who are actively involved with the mentee.

Role of Department Chair: There are two concerns with having the department chair be the sole mentor for the junior faculty member. First, its success depends on the department chair being an excellent mentor, which may change with the appointment of a new chair. In particular, a department chair may not have the same personal investment in junior faculty who were hired before their tenure as chair. Second, since the Chair makes decisions about raises and influences tenure decisions at the departmental and school level, there is a natural conflict of interest between the Chair and the junior faculty member. However, in many departments (especially the smaller ones), the chair may be both closest in research area and best informed about tenure practices within SEAS. Therefore, while we recommend *against* the Chair being the chair of the mentoring committee or the sole mentor, they should not be excluded from the committee if the situation warrants it.

Yearly review. The Chair should meet on an annual basis with the mentee and mentoring committee to review their recommendations, and determine whether or not the committee is functioning well for the junior faculty member. Although in some schools a written review is provided to the chair (and occasionally to the junior faculty member), we recognize that the document may be incorrectly perceived as a guarantee of tenure leading to potential legal problems, and therefore leave it up to the department how they wish to proceed. It is important, however, that the mentoring committee and department chair verbally communicate their advice to the mentee at least once a year. The primary mentor and other members of the mentoring committee should also meet with the junior faculty member at least once a semester.

“Assistant professors with assigned mentors, but whose mentors *do not actually engage in the mentoring activity with them*, reported a greater likelihood of leaving Penn than assistant professors without mentors.” [1]

Term of mentoring role: We recommend that mentoring, in particular by the primary mentor, continue up to promotion to full Professor. While junior faculty are the most in need of mentoring and tenure is the most crucial point of one’s career, there are different expectations and a certain amount of mystery that surrounds promotion to full professor. It is therefore important that associate professors understand the requirements for this promotion, and in particular the need to “give back” to the school in ways that were not expected for tenure.

Mentor education and reward: For the benefit of new mentors, periodic meeting will be held by the Deputy Dean’s office to go over expectations and specific responsibilities

of mentors. At this meeting, several of the school's best mentors will share tips and advice. Mentoring expectations will also be posted on the School's web site.

To recognize the importance and investment that mentoring represents, we recommend that mentoring within the school be recognized in the following ways: 1) A question about mentoring activities should be included in the yearly "brag sheet" of activities provided by the faculty member to the department chair; 2) The answer to the mentoring question should be considered in the yearly raise decision; and 3) A School-wide mentoring award should be established for the person who has fostered the professional development of other faculty members by providing inspiring and effective mentoring.

Responsibilities and expectations of mentors. The mentor should serve as a source of supportive guidance and constructive criticism. In particular they should

- Ensure that the mentee knows the requirements for promotion and tenure. In particular, they should discuss what constitutes excellence in research and teaching in their field: How many conference/journal papers? Should they write a book? How many grants, and of what type? What is valued and what is rewarded in the departmental culture?
- Help junior faculty members set priorities among the demands on their time. Academic plans should be developed to establish the expected amount of effort to be spent on research, teaching, and administrative work. Specific goals, including grant applications, conference papers, journal papers, should be set with tentative deadlines.
- Help junior faculty recognize and attract good PhD students. The key to early success is having good graduate students with whom to work. Similarly, a struggling graduate student can consume a lot of valuable time. If the faculty member is hired before decisions on incoming graduate students are made, the mentor can help by working with the new faculty to find good students, or encouraging the department to admit additional students in the new faculty's research area
- Feedback and encouragement on accomplishments. Mentors should not just be sounding boards, but should actively engage in helping the junior faculty succeed. This can take the form of: sharing/co-advising a PhD student; recommending them for Program Committees in the leading conferences; getting them invitations to talk at other institutions, especially those where a potential letter writer

Responsibilities and expectations of mentees. Mentees must be proactive about their mentoring. Many mentoring failures occur through ignorance on the part of the department rather than maliciousness. Mentees should therefore actively solicit input from their mentors by scheduling meetings at least once every 6 months. If their mentor is away for an extended period, they should confer with their department chair to seek a replacement. Similarly, if the mentoring committee is not working well for the mentee they should feel free to talk with their department chair, or Deputy Dean if there is a conflict, about changing the composition of the committee.

School/Department-Wide Mentoring Activities. Certain topics related to mentoring can be addressed at the school level (e.g. the initial session with the Dean and school administration, workshop on how to write NIH grants periodically offered by IME , workshop on NSF Career proposals offered each June by SEAS). These workshops not only address topics of broad interest to junior faculty, but bring them together and provide social contacts that they might not otherwise make. Other focused topics should also be developed (e.g. How to get internal grants, Keeping teaching in balance).

Finally, we recommend that the department provide meetings for new assistant professors with the undergraduate and graduate group chairs to explain the curriculum and how to advise students, as well as with the heads of the business offices to explain details of grant management and finances.

References

[1] Faculty Mentoring Practices at Penn 2006 (Committee on Faculty Development, Diversity and Equity (CFDDE)).

[2] Barriers to Women in Academic Science and Engineering, by Henry Etzkowitz, Carol Kemelgor, Michael Neuschatz, and Brian Uzzi. In Willie Pearson Jr. and Irwin Fechter eds. *Who Will Do Science? Educating the Next Generation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

[3] “The Truth About Mentoring Minorities: Race Matters,” by David A. Thomas. Harvard Business Review, April 2001.