

Faculty Mentoring College of Engineering, Cornell University

This document provides a set of guidelines to ensure a consistent understanding and approach to formal mentoring of Assistant Professors in the college. It is understood that not all of these guidelines may be possible or appropriate to implement for all faculty. The specific nature of the guidelines provide principles that can be followed in each Department and School. These guidelines are not intended to replace informal mentoring that may also exist.

Purpose of Mentoring

The faculty mentoring program is designed to enable the success of the Assistant Professor by fostering excellence in teaching, research, and professional service early in their academic career. It will supplement, but not replace, the guidance and assistance provided by the Department Chair/Director and other senior faculty. The mentors, who are senior faculty members, will provide a supportive relationship that will help junior faculty members:

- Acclimate to the university, college, and department culture and environment,
- Learn about the campus resources, opportunities, and policies,
- Build constructive internal and external networks to promote relationships and ventures,
- Build a successful funded research program,
- Teach and advise effectively and efficiently,
- Budget time and prioritize teaching, research, and service responsibilities,
- Balance professional and personal responsibilities,
- Receive constructive feedback, encouragement, and compliments,
- Develop visibility and prominence within the profession,
- Develop short-term goals to facilitate promotion and tenure,
- Develop long-term career goals.

Program Overview

The Chair/Director should ensure that each Assistant Professor will be supported and advised by two mentors. One mentor, from within the department/school, will focus on teaching and research while the second mentor will be from a different department/school and will be a source of support and guidance on all broad and general issues.

Mentoring Assignment

Upon acceptance of an offer, and after appropriate input from the Assistant Professor, the Chair/Director should identify and assign the two mentors to the incoming Assistant Professor -- an internal research/teaching mentor and an external general mentor. The first mentor, the research/teaching mentor, should be in the same department as the candidate and, ideally, should be conducting research within the same or a related area as the incoming Assistant Professor. The research/teaching mentor should be highly regarded as a researcher and teacher.

The second mentor, the general mentor, should be someone with whom the Assistant Professor is particularly comfortable. Interest in a formal mentoring relationship may develop from interactions that begin informally. This may mean waiting a few months before the general mentor is identified. The general mentor should not be in the same department or school as the Assistant Professor.

Chairs/Directors should coordinate with their peers when mentors from other departments or colleges are solicited.

Effective mentors are essential in making the mentorship experience positive for both the mentor and the Assistant Professor. While many different descriptions of mentors exist, effective mentors in academia are typically:

- Tenured and well-respected by their colleagues,
- Committed to supporting new faculty and willing to spend time helping them succeed,
- Familiar with department, college, and university resources, offices, and culture,
- Positive about their position, department, college, and the university,
- Politically aware, and,
- Good listeners.

Roles and Responsibilities of Mentors

Broadly speaking, faculty mentors may serve myriad purposes including friend, confidant, advocate, career and intellectual guide, and as a source of information to the Assistant Professor they mentor. Specifically, mentors are, at a minimum, expected to:

- Meet regularly with the Assistant Professor and provide for him or her a safe venue to bring questions and problems, and,
- Provide the Assistant Professor with constructive suggestions and advice without being prescriptive.

In addition, once a year, the teaching/research mentor should assist the Assistant Professor in developing a career plan that addresses the Assistant Professor's annual and long-term goals in teaching, research and service. The plan, which is arrived at as a result of discussions between the mentor and the Assistant Professor, should include items such as how to:

- Provide focus in research,
- Obtain research funding,
- Effectively disseminate research results and enhance their impact and visibility,
- Effectively and efficiently enhance teaching and advising performance, and,
- Effectively manage time.

Responsibilities of the Assistant Professor in the Mentoring Relationship

Faculty receiving mentorship through this program are expected to work with both mentors to set up and participate in regular meetings and to work with the teaching/research mentor to develop the annual and long-term career plans.

Role of Director or Chair in Mentorship and Career Development

Directors and Chairs are primarily responsible for assigning mentors and monitoring the interactions taking place to ensure they are positive and constructive. Directors and Chairs should review the career plans developed by the Assistant Professor in conjunction with the mentor. In addition, they are encouraged to undertake other steps to create a foundation for success. These additional steps will often include:

- Meeting occasionally with the faculty member,
- Reducing the Assistant Professor's teaching responsibilities during their first years at Cornell,

- Limiting the number of unique and challenging classes a faculty member teaches before tenure,
- Providing opportunities for the Assistant Professor to teach existing and/or develop new graduate offerings in areas that will help their research.
- Limiting the undergraduate advising responsibilities for the Assistant Professor,
- Limiting the service loads for the Assistant Professor,
- Encouraging the Assistant Professor to travel to conferences and to funding agencies, and,
- Steering promising graduate students to the new faculty member.

Role and Responsibilities of the Associate Dean of Diversity

The Associate Dean bears responsibility for the oversight of the mentorship program and for help with appropriate assistance, if needed. The Associate Dean should solicit a list of Assistant Professor/mentor pairings on a yearly basis, provide training and resources related to mentorship as needed, assess the value of the mentorship program, and arrange opportunities for cohorts of mentors and Assistant Professors to meet in order to further the value of the mentorship program.

The Associate Dean should meet with the new Assistant Professor and the Chair/Director of the department to discuss the tenure and promotion process.

The Associate Dean should provide information to the mentors, Chairs/Directors and Assistant Professors on workshops, best practices and other activities related to the mentoring process.

The Associate Dean should provide financial assistance to attend workshops and for other activities associated with the mentoring process.

Term of the Mentor Relationship

The term of a formal mentor/Assistant Professor relationship should be two years. Productive and amicable mentor/Assistant Professor relationships may then be renewed for two-year terms through the time the Assistant Professor has progressed to become a tenured Associate Professor.

In some instances, a mentor/Assistant Professor pairing may prove unproductive or detrimental for myriad reasons. In these instances, either the mentor or Assistant Professor may end the relationship. This will be done by communicating the request to the department Director/Chair. The Associate Dean of Diversity should be informed and, if necessary, become involved with the process. It is understood by all parties that these are no-fault conclusions. The Chair/Director will then assign a new mentor to the Assistant Professor as soon as possible.

Recognition of Mentors

Capable, talented mentors are highly valued and the time commitment required for successful mentorship is significant. In addition, successful mentorship of Assistant Professors is critical to the College's continued success and prominence. As such, mentors should receive:

- Appropriate relief from other service obligations,
- Formal and informal recognition at the department level,
- Assistance to attend workshops on mentoring.

In addition, for outstanding mentors, it may be appropriate to provide additional compensation or formal awards at the department and/or college levels. Such awards are at the discretion of the department Directors and Chairs and the Dean of the College, and should be reserved for truly exceptional mentors.