

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY MENTORING GUIDELINES

Philosophy

To support the development of a successful and satisfying career, the Department of Biology provides a mentor for all new faculty members. Successful academic career development is strongly correlated with a faculty member's level of comfort in his/her new environment. This requires that he/she come to understand and espouse the broad goals of the department, and to become aware of the individual research and teaching interests of colleagues. Familiarity with the university and the community is also important. The mentor takes a leadership role in helping the mentee develop these important connections. However, since faculty development is a departmental responsibility. It implies a commitment of each faculty member to the success of all of his or her colleagues. Although a primary mentor will be assigned, it is expected that all faculty will take part in guiding new members of the department.

An important part of the mentors' responsibilities is guiding mentees as they come to understand both the written and "unwritten" policies and practices elements of the culture of the department, the college, and the broader university. The unwritten elements include factors such as collegiality, teamwork, intellectual integrity, and responsibilities to students; as well as practical aspects of faculty life, including such elements as time management, writing and submission of grant proposals and manuscripts, appropriate committee commitments, and teaching. The written elements include documents such as the faculty handbook, policies and procedures of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Biology Department guidelines. For new faculty on the tenure track, understanding and meeting the department's guidelines for promotion and tenure is a key objective; and for pre-tenure faculty, mentors should provide timely and honest feedback to the mentee regarding progress toward tenure.

The mentor-mentee relationship is consensual, open and frank. An important feature of the mentor/mentee relationship is flexibility. Each mentor and mentee will have individual concerns, and individual communication styles. Thus, there is no established formula for mentoring. In fact, a new faculty member may change mentors, or have more than one mentor, if the need arises. The role of the mentor is supportive and guiding, not instructing or directing, since ultimately, all faculty members are responsible for their own work and activities.

Processes

Assigning mentors Mentors should not be arbitrarily assigned. Assignment of mentors is the responsibility of the chair of the department. Criteria for assignment of mentors include compatibility of research and/or teaching interests. However, ultimately, the assignment depends on a consensual process, in which mentee and potential mentors come to an agreement on their expectations for the relationship.

Mentoring activities Mentors should be available to discuss specific issues as they arise. However, the mentors and mentees should regularly meet twice a month, possibly in a social setting such as lunch. Neither mentor nor mentee should make unreasonable time demands on one another.

Both mentor and mentee have a responsibility for determining what issues are discussed. The mentee will have his/her immediate needs, and the mentor has his/her long-term experience. Mentors should address the issues that are important to the mentee, and the mentee should seek advice and suggestions from the mentor. The mentor should encourage the mentee to interact with other department faculty member, so that he/she has had at least one discussion with every tenure track faculty member by the end of his/her first year. Mentors and mentees are encouraged to meet with other mentor/mentee pairs, and to meet with each other. The chair should have separate group meetings with mentors and mentees once a year.

Mentors may aid the mentee in the development of new courses. Early in the mentee's teaching career, it is expected that the mentor will visit classes of the mentee with a frequency adequate for meaningful feedback. This feedback is for improving teaching, not for judging it. Normal class visits would be for a continuous two-week period in each semester. The mentor should provide some guidance to the mentee in the construction of a teaching portfolio, which is required for all pretenure faculty members.

Mentors should provide support for the mentee as he/she develops a research program. The mentor should encourage timely submission of grant proposals and publications. The mentor should introduce the mentee to other colleagues and make him/her aware of possible collaborations. Appropriate guidance of laboratory members should be discussed. Some specific issues to be addressed with regard to graduate students are: the responsibility for development of independent investigator skills, respect for the time constraints on students in degree programs, and the development of a mutually supportive relationship.

Conflicts and changing mentors Normally, a mentor assignment is for a one year period. With mutual agreement, the relationship can be automatically renewed each year. However, if issues arise which suggest a change, such a change can be arranged at any time. In this case, the chair, mentor, and mentee must arrive at a mutually acceptable reassignment of mentor. A written record of the nature of the change and the issues which arose must be kept by the chair, and co-signed by the affected mentor and mentee.

Record of development. In the regular written assessments of faculty members, the chair should include input from the mentor regarding the development of the mentee(s). This input will be discussed with the mentor before it is incorporated into the written assessment by the chair. Consistent with the policy of the College of Arts and Science, assessments are signed by the mentee and the chair. The Chair should also regularly inform the tenured faculty of the progress of the pre-tenure faculty.