

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES
COLLEGE OF FOREST RESOURCES
MENTOR PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

Background

Successful progress toward promotion to Associate Professor, Associate Research Professor, or Associate Extension Professor can be positively influenced by Assistant Professors' relationships with a mentor and peers. Herein, a mentor is a trusted counselor and role model to Assistant Professors (mentees) while they make progress toward promotion to Associate Professor and tenure if applicable. A mentor may be an Associate or Full Professor typically in the discipline area(s) of the Assistant Professor. The following are some commonly cited benefits of mentorship:

- Broadening the mentee's exposure to other areas of the organization and to senior leadership
- Career advice, including goals, strategies, advancement guidance, and more
- Role modeling
- Preparing for increased leadership and responsibility
- Strategic and critical thinking and planning
- Political savvy and collegiality
- Learning to build support for new initiatives, projects, policies, etc.
- Effective ways to communicate within and outside of the organization
- Constructive responses to performance evaluations
- New perspectives on institutional culture and operations
- Networking opportunities with new contacts within and outside the organization
- Guidance on managing stress, including balancing work and personal lives

Objectives

- To encourage and promote professional and personal development and institutional involvement of faculty who are in early stages of their academic career by creating an environment wherein new faculty work one-on-one as mentees with experienced and successful senior colleagues;
- To promote excellence in teaching through development of teaching materials, use of technology, formats, classroom instruction and evaluation, and other professional developments for teaching performance;
- To promote improvement in research and proposal development skills of new faculty and to help them develop strategies for obtaining external funding; To promote development and engagement in service, extension, and other outreach to the public; and
- To help new faculty develop strategies for presenting professional promotion (with tenure when applicable) and reappointment portfolios so as to enhance retention and advancement.

Policy and Procedure

New faculty should be informed about the mentoring program at the time of their interview and will be reminded of it during their initial contract year. A new faculty member may start the mentoring process at any time, but is encouraged to participate during the early stages of appointment, preferably within three months of employment. The relationship between the mentor and mentee will be informal and flexible. The mentee may remain with the original mentor(s) throughout the mentoring period or may opt for another mentor(s) at any time. Mentors may be changed by either party without stating a reason.

Those serving as mentors shall be given credit for “Service” on annual evaluations and shall receive appropriate recognition.

Each new Assistant Professor (mentee) shall contact the Department Head to indicate his/her interest in acquiring a mentor(s) and identification and discussion of appropriate colleagues to serve this role for the Assistant Professor. Typically, the mentor is a colleague within the Assistant Professor’s (mentee’s) home department, but another colleague within the Assistant Professor’s (mentee’s) college or from other MSU departments also may serve as a mentor. Additionally, an Assistant Professor (mentee) may opt to acquire multiple mentors (e.g., colleagues with interest in collaborative research). The mentee should make a recommendation to the Department Head who will accordingly assign a mentor(s). Assignment of mentor should be within six months of the start date of the new faculty member. Notification will be sent to the mentee, mentor, department head, and dean.

Recommendations for the Assistant Professor

- Develop clear expectations and/or objectives for the mentoring relationship, share them with the mentor, and be prepared to discuss these at your first meeting.
- Be specific with questions you may have for your mentor.
- Any matters discussed between the mentor and mentee should be treated as confidential by both parties.
- Prepare an agenda and identify specific points of discussion for each meeting. The agenda and all discussion points should be archived by the mentee and mentor.
- Share your personal development plan, or portions of it, with your mentor. The mentor may have experience or contacts that can assist you with various personal goals and objectives.
- Take the initiative to schedule the meetings with your mentor. Everyone suffers from limited time, and mentors often have severely restricted schedules, so schedule meetings well in advance.
- Be flexible: your work with your mentor may go in unexpected directions, your objectives may change, and new benefits may arise.
- If possible, invite the mentor to observe occasions when you are practicing newly learned skills or share those skills in some other format. Ask the mentor to provide written evaluations of his/her observations of you demonstrating your skills (e.g., lectures, workshops, etc.).

- Reassess as needed: mentors and mentees may discover that through no fault of either partner, they must change their expectations or discontinue the relationship.
- Be considerate of your mentor's time; abide by time limits set.

The mentor shall provide the Assistant Professor guidance toward achieving satisfactory or greater progress toward promotion and tenure (when applicable). They should agree on frequency, duration, and place of meetings (see suggested timetable below), and they should decide whether or not the mentor will have an "open door" policy. Mentees should formulate their career goals clearly and bring specific problems and concerns to meetings for discussion. Based on annual reviews and meetings with the mentor(s), the Assistant Professor should develop a dossier of accomplishments in each programmatic area. As a suggestion and example, the dossier may be compliant with formats of required dossiers/applications for research, teaching, or service awards at the college or university level. The dossier should be submitted to the P&T committee when the Assistant Professor has his/her mid-cycle review 2-3 years before his/her request for promotion (and tenure if applicable).

Recommendations for the Mentor

- Review the mentee's expectations and objectives for the relationship and provide ideas, suggestions, and other feedback.
- Ask your mentee how they would like you to assist them in their professional development goals. As the relationship progresses, ask them how you have helped them, how they have changed as a result of your interactions.
- Any matters discussed between the mentor and mentee should be treated as confidential by both parties.
- When possible, choose one or more leadership activities, special projects or initiatives, or administrative responsibilities in which you may involve the mentee.
- Help the mentee see alternative perspectives, interpretations, and approaches.
- Invite the scholar to observe you implementing the skills that the mentee is trying to build (if possible).
- Key mentoring skills include listening actively, building trust, building capacity, and encouraging and inspiring others.
- Be inquisitive- ask questions to assist the mentee analyze their objectives. Excessive direct recommendations on how to handle specific situations can lead to dependence on your guidance.
- Suggest reading materials or other resources that might help the scholar in his/her development.

To promote success, CALS, CFR, MAFES, and FWRC will sponsor workshops on selected professional development areas determined to be important to the success of the new faculty. The Dean will support these initiatives with available funds.