Guidelines for Mentors

Background
New faculty members arrive at an institution with many questions, and they face the challenge of balancing teaching, research/creative work, service, and in some departments, advising students. Indeed, they often experience intense stress as a result of the multiple demands and professional responsibilities weighing on them during the first year. Many have moved from other locations. Almost all of them are designing and teaching courses new to them. And all are trying to find. This is true whether the faculty member is straight out of graduate school, coming with some years’ experience at another institution, or moving with tenure.

These factors apply both to tenure-track and extraordinary faculty. While extraordinary faculty are not hired with the expectation that they will apply for tenure and promotion, many are engaged actively in research and/or creative work and feel the same pressures to balance this work with their other responsibilities while teaching a heavier load than tenure-track faculty.

Moreover, almost all new faculty teach courses in our Common Curriculum. It is important that they understand how this curriculum embodies our Jesuit core so that they in turn can help students understand the value of this curriculum to their overall education. And because Common Curriculum courses are generally the first ones our students take, excellent teaching in these courses is vital to student success and retention.

Why is Mentoring Important?
The mentoring of new faculty is essential to supporting their transition and ultimate success. Mentors serve a vital role in helping new faculty prioritize the demands upon them, adapt their teaching plans and style to the needs of the university, and find time to engage in scholarship and service. The outcomes of effective mentoring for junior faculty are many (Johnson 2007):

- Stronger commitment to a career in academe
- Greater sense of ownership and commitment to their institution
- Higher rates of retention
- More effective teaching and university service
- Better adjustment to the department, the institution, and the job
- A stronger record of scholarly productivity (grants and publications)
- Higher rates of both job and career satisfaction
- Higher rates of achieving tenure and promotion

Of course, new faculty will receive informal mentoring from a range of people—their chairs, their deans, departmental colleagues, and colleagues a few years down the tenure track. A formal relationship with a knowledgeable mentor is key, however, to achieving these outcomes.

Some Suggestions for Effective Mentoring

1. Remember that the most important element of the mentoring relationship is collegiality. Having a colleague and friend on the senior faculty can mean more to an incoming faculty member than almost anything else.

2. Remember also that you may mentor your new faculty member for several years or during the first, transitional year only. Once new faculty members get to know their colleagues,
some choose to form new mentor relationships, based on a closer match between teaching and/or research interests.

3. Meet with your mentee regularly and make clear when it is ok for the person to drop in or call you. Do you have an ‘open door’ policy or do you prefer scheduled meetings? Are you willing to take emails at any time or not on weekends? Do you want to share your cell phone # or communicate through the office phone system only? If you think about these and similar questions in advance, you’ll get the relationship off to a good start.

4. Be sure you know what role your department expects of mentors and make this role clear to the mentee. In all departments, mentors are expected to facilitate the new faculty member’s successful assimilation to Loyola, offer advice, answer questions, and shepherd the mentee’s early teaching and scholarly career.

In some departments, the mentor is an advocate, responsible for “arguing the case” for the mentee in departmental evaluation, renewal, and, for tenure-track faculty rank and tenure decisions. In others, however, the mentor is expected to take a neutral position in such matters. It’s important that you and your mentee are clear on these expectations in advance. If you’re not sure about your role, check with your chair and/or departmental administrative committee.

5. Whether your role is that of advocate or neutral facilitator, you should give your mentee as much information as possible about criteria for renewal, promotion, and tenure in your department. If your department has written protocols specifying the materials required for such reviews, obtain a copy and share this information with your mentee as early in the year as possible.

6. Try to connect your mentee with other colleagues both inside and outside your department. Many mentees are concerned that self-disclosures of failings with members of their own departments may be held against them. For this reason, some universities use systems of cross-departmental mentoring (Sorincelli and Austin eds 1992). While we do not use this model, helping your mentee establish contacts outside the department may alleviate such concerns.

7. If your mentee is on the tenure track, consider introducing him or her to members of your college rank and tenure committee. These faculty members can provide insight on the priorities such committees employ in making promotion and tenure decisions.

8. Many departments expect mentors to observe the mentee’s teaching each semester and provide written evaluation to the mentee and department chair or division head. Others ask mentors to arrange for departmental colleagues to conduct the observations. Check with your chair to see what expectations exist for classroom observation in your department.

9. You may want to serve as a coach for teaching. Offer constructive advice on teaching and/or refer the mentee to faculty support service such as Writing Across the Curriculum (to help design more effective writing assignments), Instructional Technology (to include or enhance media in instruction) or the Center for Faculty Innovation (for classroom videotaping and consultation). Encourage the mentee to attend faculty development
workshops throughout the year, offer examples of your most successful techniques, and consider inviting the mentee to one of your own or another professor’s classes.

10. Serve as a coach for scholarship. Encourage the mentee to join a Faculty Research and Publishing Group (for information, contact Melanie McKay, x7197). Help your mentee prioritize the types of publications/creative work to focus on during the early years. If time permits, you may want to read parts of the mentee’s works in progress. You may know editors with whom you could connect the mentee for publication of books and articles or sources for the production of creative work. And you may be able to help the mentee identify internal and external sources of research funding.

11. Each year, before renewal decisions, carefully review your mentee’s portfolio to ensure that it is complete and well presented. For tenure-track mentees, it is especially important to do a thorough portfolio review in the year of application for tenure. If your department and/or college has written protocols for preparing portfolios, use these protocols as a checklist. If not, you may want to review portfolios of recently reappointed or tenured faculty members and share these with your mentee (with permission, of course).

No doubt you will find many other strategies to help mentor your new colleague through the important first year and beyond. Thank you for your commitment to helping and retaining our excellent new faculty.

Works Cited
