



# 10 TIPS TO SUPPORT MENTORING WITHIN YOUR UNIT



Chairs and directors play a critical role in mentoring new faculty. A strong and sustained commitment to mentoring leads to long-term retention and job satisfaction of faculty across ranks. Here are 10 tips for chairs and directors who want to create a culture of mentorship in their department or school.

## Tip 1: Recruit and Train

➤ Continuously and intentionally recruit mentors; do not wait until you hire a new faculty member. Avoid relying on one or two senior faculty members to mentor all new faculty hires. Identify associate and full professors and lecturers as potential mentors. Encourage them to build mentoring knowledge and skills through readings, conferences, and professional development. Keep current and potential mentors well-informed of departmental policies and practices. Annually brief them on any changes, particularly those related to RPT and other evaluative structures.

## Tip 2: Match Intentionally

➤ A strong pool of mentors will facilitate optimal mentee/mentor matches when the time arises. Once a new faculty member is hired, ask (do not assume) what type of mentor they prefer. While teaching and research are common requests, some faculty may be interested in being matched with someone who can help them with community connections or interdisciplinary projects. Others may want to be partnered with someone who shares a similar social identity.

## Tip 3: Connect Early

➤ Facilitate an in-person or virtual introduction and an exchange of contact information between the mentor and new faculty member as soon as possible – do not wait until the beginning of the semester. Set an expectation with the mentor to schedule a one-on-one meeting specific to mentoring with their mentee during the first two weeks of the semester.

## Tip 4: Communicate the Value

➤ Send a message that you value the time the faculty members devote to mentoring. Provide space and time for mentorship pairs to meet. Provide them with resources to meet for coffee or dinner, purchase a book to read together, or attend a conference together. Recognize mentors and mentees at departmental/school functions. Encourage and guide them in articulating this commitment in their annual reviews and RPT documents.

## Tip 5: Be Patient

➤ Mentoring relationships progress in stages. The early stages include initiation (when the relationship is being established) and cultivation (when norms of the relationship have been established, and the ongoing value of the relationship is evident to both mentor and mentee). Cultivation can take two to five years.\* Support mentorship relationships as long as possible. Consider meeting with mentors and mentees separately and together to assess their progress and needs.



## Tip 6: Monitor and Manage

➤ Ask mentors and mentees to create a plan that articulates goals and sets reasonable benchmarks. This promotes accountability and provides opportunities to celebrate accomplishments. If needed, it can also be a way to reassess the mentoring relationship. If the relationship is not working for both parties, provide a non-punitive, non-judgmental exit. A plan also helps all parties recognize advanced stages of mentoring that include separation (when the mentorship bond loosens as roles change/evolve) and redefinition (when the relationship becomes primarily based on friendship or collegiality).\*

## Tip 7: Respect the Relationship

➤ The trust between mentee and mentor is critical. The mentor's role is to support the mentee; it is not the mentor's role to report on the mentee to the chair or director or to evaluate the mentee's performance. You can foster trust by being transparent in your expectations and communications to both mentors and mentees.

## Tip 8: Encourage Informal Mentoring

➤ Support and encourage informal mentoring within multiple departmental practices and procedures. Purposefully group faculty members in meetings and service assignments to promote collegial conversations between all faculty ranks. Encourage collaborative teaching and research within your department and school.

## Tip 9: Consider Groups

➤ If you have several mentees in your unit, get them together. Their exchange of experiences and information will empower them and be helpful to the other new faculty. Likewise, bring your mentors together to share experiences, resources, and ideas. Their conversations will provide valuable insights for the department/school.

## Tip 10: Reach Beyond One

➤ Recognize that faculty members may find additional or different mentors over time. Encourage new faculty members to form what is sometimes referred to as mentoring constellations.\* Within their constellation, multiple mentors offer unique support and connections for mentees. For example:

- A unit-level mentor is critical to help a new faculty member: 1) learn the curriculum and programs, 2) understand RPT and other evaluative structures, and 3) acclimate to the department/school practices.
- However, mentors from other campus units can provide a safe place for new faculty members to discuss topics they may not feel comfortable addressing with colleagues in their department/school. They also may enhance interdisciplinary networks.
- In addition, community-based mentors and those from professional organizations can be helpful to new faculty members looking to establish an array of disciplinary, professional, and personal connections.



Contact the Center for Faculty Excellence  
to learn more about support for new faculty.

*Based on research of Kathy E. Kram, Monica C. Higgins, and David A. Thomas*