

# How to Be an Effective Mentor

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Center for Faculty Excellence, UNC–Chapel Hill  
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*Mentoring is central to both individual and institutional success. Good mentorship is a hallmark of successful academic units. ... Senior faculty members have a responsibility to support and advise their junior colleagues.*

Report of the Provost's Task Force on Future Promotion  
and Tenure Policies and Practices, May 2009

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The materials that follow were prepared by the Center for Faculty Excellence, UNC–Chapel Hill, and consist primarily of summaries of recent research and writing about faculty mentoring in addition to some original material. Some of the materials are based on the presentation on faculty mentoring Dr. Deborah DeZure, Assistant Provost for Faculty and Organizational Development at Michigan State University, did April 9, 2010, at UNC, sponsored by the CFE.

While much of this material is focused on tenure-track faculty, many of the suggestions also will be relevant for mentoring fixed-term faculty in the early stages of their careers.

Dr. David Kiel, CFE Leadership Coordinator, compiled this packet. Materials on the following additional mentoring topics may be obtained by sending email to [kiel@unc.edu](mailto:kiel@unc.edu).

- Finding a Mentor and Getting the Most out of the Mentoring Relationship
- Designing and Implementing Mentoring Programs for Early Career Faculty
- Assisting New Associate Professors (Research Report)

CFE welcomes your feedback on the usefulness of this material.

## How to Prepare and Get Started as a Mentor

### ***Make sure you fully understand the specific mentoring job you are undertaking.***

Academic units at Carolina vary greatly and so do their approaches to mentoring. Some departments and schools have very structured programs, and in others the approach is highly informal. If your school or department has written materials related to mentoring, read them. Talk with your chair, associate chair, dean, or associate dean to obtain his or her perspective on your role as a mentor. Talk with a more experienced mentor in your academic unit about how mentoring usually works. If mentoring is new to your unit, seek out an experienced mentor in another unit who can be a resource for you as you begin your career as a mentor.

### ***Understand that you have something at stake.***

There is no more critical function in the university than helping a faculty member (at any stage of his or her career) be creative, productive, and successful. While each faculty member's success is ultimately his or her own responsibility, as a mentor, you have an important supporting role. How you perform that role will be part of your peers' estimation of you as a colleague. If after learning what is expected of a mentor, you do not think this is the time for you to undertake that role, it would be much better to say this up front than to go accept the job of mentor and to do it poorly. If you do decide to be a mentor, make sure you allocate the time and effort needed to do it well.

### ***Realize that you have something to gain from the process.***

The last section of these materials — “Why Be a Mentor?” — identifies five ways you can gain from serving as a mentor. There are significant rewards for being a mentor as well as significant demands. Think about what you hope to gain from this process but also be open to unexpected rewards and learning new things about yourself, your new colleague, and the mentoring process.

### ***Start the mentoring in an open, direct, and collaborative way.***

Unless there is a set process in your unit for getting the mentor relationship started, contact the person you are supposed to mentor and arrange a first meeting. At this first meeting, share your perception of what mentoring means and how the process should unfold. Explain the benefits to the person being mentored. You might also want to be clear about what mentoring “is not.” If there are written materials that can be shared before the meeting, this can help focus the conversation. Ask how your perception of mentoring fits with your mentee's expectations and needs at this stage of his or her career.

You do not have to meet all your mentee's expectations. You may find that some concerns are outside the purview of the mentoring role. There may be some topics that are of interest to the mentee but of which you have little knowledge. Generally, once you learn your mentee's interests, you can confirm those areas in which you can provide assistance and offer to help your mentee identify other resources in those areas that are not your focus.

Consistent with your unit's guidelines for mentoring, discuss how you will work together, (e.g., how often you will meet, what kind of contact between meetings is desired, who will initiate

meetings.) Make sure that the ground rules about confidentiality are clear. All good mentoring relationships are built on trust, so it is crucial that you and your mentee reach an agreement about the confidentiality of your discussions at the outset. Close the meeting with a statement about the next steps. You might also consider following up with an email outlining your understanding of the next steps.

***Focus on being a supportive person.***

Establish yourself as a resourceful, approachable individual with a helping role. Be a good listener and take the time to really hear what your mentee is saying. Show by your response that you understand. Listening is the core skill of any helping relationship. Being a good listener in no way precludes your giving advice or direction as needed by the person being mentored. On the contrary, careful listening will help you target your direction or advice effectively.

A final tip for the new mentor: Don't be afraid to say this process is new to you as well, but be clear you are committed to being as helpful as possible.

***Follow through.***

An early test of the new mentor is related to follow-through. Whatever you said in the initial meeting about your next steps must be carried out. If you do not follow through diligently, you send the signal that the mentoring relationship is more for show than for real.

Similarly, if your mentee does not follow through, you need to call attention to that fact in a friendly, inquiring way. Failure to do so may lead to problems in the future when important expectations are not met. Lack of follow-through on the part of the person being mentored may also be a sign that the person is having problems and needs your involvement, whether he or she is willing to say so or not.

*This article was written by David Kiel, Leadership Coordinator for the UNC Center for Faculty Excellence.*

## Tips for Mentoring Faculty Colleagues

- Be in contact (in person, email, phone) at least once a month with your mentee. Meet in person two or three times per semester.
- At your first meeting, discuss what each of you expects from the mentoring relationship. Remember your mentee may have more than one mentor, so he or she may want you to focus on particular aspects of his or her professional development.
- Exchange CVs with your mentee to stimulate discussion about career paths and possibilities.
- Review your mentee's CV at least once a year.
- Assist your mentee to develop short- and long-range professional plans, *e.g.*, a research or creative activity agenda or teaching development plan.
- Ask about and celebrate accomplishments. Encourage your mentee to inform the dean or chair about major accomplishments (*e.g.*, publications, awards, invitations) or do it for her or him.
- Offer to read your mentee's manuscript drafts, syllabi, and other written work. Provide positive and constructive criticism and feedback.
- Use your knowledge and experience to help your mentee understand how your school or department and the university operate.
- Help your mentee network in the school or department, on campus, and in the discipline. Introduce him or her to colleagues.
- Discuss annual performance reviews, third-year reviews, promotion and/or tenure reviews with the junior faculty member (*e.g.*, how to prepare, what to expect). Volunteer to read drafts of the documents your mentee must submit for reviews.
- Assist the junior faculty member in exploring the institutional and school or departmental culture (*e.g.*, what is valued, what is rewarded).
- Share knowledge of important university and professional events that your mentee should or might want to attend.
- Improve your skills as a mentor by attending mentoring workshops, reading about mentoring, and discussing mentorship with colleagues.

*This list was prepared by Professor Ruth Walden, Director of the UNC Center for Faculty Excellence.*

## **What Mentors Should Talk About: Determining Needed Information/Instruction**

Instruction for mentors: Print this checklist and circle those topics on which you could provide your mentee help. You may not be able to discuss all these topics, but you should be able to connect your mentee with those who do have information or other resources.

Instruction for new faculty: Print this checklist and circle the topics that are of immediate interest to you. Your mentor may not have knowledge of all these topics but should be able to connect you with those who do have information or with other resources.

Instruction for both mentors and mentees: Bring your marked up checklists to your first meeting and compare notes. Use the information to focus and agree on a mentoring plan, including areas where the mentor will provide help directly and areas where the early-career faculty member might draw on other resources.

### **Information that might be needed by an early-career faculty member**

#### ***Expectations***

- Performance expectations for renewal, tenure, and promotion
- Tenure stages, process, and activities
- Mentoring and how it works
- How to be a good citizen of the department or school, stated and unstated expectations
- General “do’s and don’ts” for new tenure-track faculty

#### ***Working Effectively***

- How to set goals
- How to manage your time
- How to balance your teaching and research efforts
- Building connections on campus
- Maintaining a balanced life

#### ***Teaching***

- Issues in instruction in the classroom, lab, or clinical setting
- Issues in teaching undergraduate, graduate, or professional students
- Syllabus preparation
- Class Preparation
- Effective inclusion of technology in the classroom
- Online instruction
- Grading
- Identifying resources to help with teaching

### **Research**

- Department or school research standards
- Department or school productivity expectations
- Colleagues who have similar research interests
- Obtaining research, travel, or other support funds
- Research support systems on campus
- Attending workshops and conferences
- Getting the lab or research program started

### **Special**

- Supervising teaching or research assistants
- Navigating joint appointments
- Opportunities for public service and faculty engagement
- Connecting to others across campus, being a university citizen

### **General**

- Understanding the history of the university
- Understanding the organizational structure and administration of the university
- Cultural and social events and resources on campus and in the community
- Advice about practical matters of living, commuting, shopping, schools, etc.
- Counseling or advice on personal, medical, social, or legal issues

*This checklist was adapted from the Mentor Form (2006) by Deborah DeZure, Assistant Provost for Faculty and Organizational Development, Michigan State University.*

## How Mentors Work: Determining the Most Helpful Mentoring Activities

Instructions for mentors: Print this form and check where you could provide help. In areas about which you are less knowledgeable, think about other resources or connections that you could share with your mentee

Instructions for new faculty: Print this form and check all items that might be useful. Discuss with your mentor. Your mentor may not be able to provide help in all areas, but might be able to connect you with others who can.

### Potential Mentor-Mentee Activities

#### ***Meeting Expectations***

- Provide regular feedback on general progress toward goals and meeting expectations for tenure

#### ***Working Effectively***

- Provide coaching on effective time management and tips on being efficient in teaching and research

#### ***Colleagueship***

- Attend meetings and conferences together
- Undertake joint projects
- Discuss work and ideas

#### ***Teaching***

- Provide guidance on being an effective teacher through coaching, classroom observation, or feedback
- Review syllabi, assignments, or assessments
- Assist in identifying teaching resources and support at UNC

#### ***Research***

- Provide guidance on developing and carrying out a research program
- Review proposals or drafts of papers
- Coach in grant-seeking
- Coach in setting up and running a lab
- Introduce faculty member to those he or she might benefit from collaborating with on research

#### ***General***

- Give advice about how to acclimate to the local community and access cultural, commercial, medical, and other resources

*This checklist was adapted from the Mentor Form (2006) by Deborah DeZure, Assistant Provost for Faculty and Organizational Development, Michigan State University.*

## What Makes a Good Mentor?

Good mentors are:

- Good listeners. They take time to understand what is going on with their mentees before they offer advice and information.
- Self-aware. They know what they can and cannot offer, and they observe and note how what they offer is being received by those they mentor.
- Flexible. They are willing to adjust to the needs of mentees.
- Good role models. They demonstrate effective academic practices.
- Transparent. They make their thinking explicit so mentees understand why they do what they do.
- Positive guides. They recognize and acknowledge progress mentees make; they also provide constructive criticism and helpful advice. They strike the right balance between guidance, constructive criticism, and praise.
- Facilitators. They provide resources and help mentees connect to others who share their interests and can help them.
- People of integrity. They are honest in what they say and do and work for the good of those they mentor; they do not take advantage of the mentoring situation.
- Accessible. They are available to the faculty member being mentored.

*Based on material provided by Deborah DeZure, Assistant Provost for Faculty and Organizational Development, Michigan State University, at the April 9, 2010, UNC Mentoring Workshop, citing J. Nakamura, D. Sheronoff & C Hooker, "Characteristics of Effective Mentors," in Good Mentoring: Fostering Excellent Practice in Higher Education, 2009.*

## What to Say to New Faculty Members

In general, research shows that tenure-track faculty want three things from their institutions (aside from a good salary and benefits): a more comprehensible tenure system, a stronger sense of community, and a balanced and integrated life. The same research suggests that the three biggest enemies of the success of the new faculty member are anxiety about evaluation, isolation, and overwork.

Mary Dean Sorcinelli, Associate Provost at the University of Massachusetts, is a national leader in research and writing about faculty development and mentoring. She has written an excellent piece titled the “Top Ten Things New Faculty Would Like To Hear From Colleagues.” (To receive a PDF version of this article, email David Kiel at [kiel@unc.edu](mailto:kiel@unc.edu).) What follows is a shortened and edited version of her article.

The effective mentor can help the new faculty member by emphasizing the following messages. (It would be a good idea for the person you are mentoring to read the list and then discuss it with you.)

1. ***You are a winner.*** You were hired because faculty in the department had confidence in you and your promise. They fully expect you to be successful and have an investment in your success. It’s good to reach out, ask questions, make connections, get help, and partner with senior faculty.
2. ***Pace yourself.*** You do not have to accomplish everything the first year. Build a firm foundation for your teaching and research. Make a plan to show results by the second and third years. Give yourself time to get oriented and get started.
3. ***Figure out what matters and what does not matter.*** Consult widely in the department and get a variety of opinions; create the profile of the successful faculty member in your mind. Consult what is written about expectations for those in your position, whether you are on a tenure-track or in a fixed-term position.
4. ***Renewal, promotion, and tenure processes should not be mysterious.*** You can and should understand in detail what kind of documentation you need to provide at each stage of the process. Ask for and review previous successful packages for annual and third-year review, and for tenure and promotion in your unit.
5. ***Pay attention to your teaching.*** This means being an effective teacher and getting help to do this. Work with the available assistance in your department and in the university. Find out what is considered good teaching in your department. Take this into consideration in developing your individualized approach to your subject matter.
6. ***Make a plan.*** Make a plan with manageable goals and review that plan with your mentors, the chair, and others who advise you. Set out specific goals for the first second, and third years. In making the plan, play to your strengths but match those strengths to the department’s goals. If the department has a strategic plan and goals, be sure to read that document. If not, ask what the direction is and how you fit in. (Think: What were you

hired to do? What do colleagues expect you to contribute to the unit's teaching and research program?)

7. **Think mentors, plural.** Even if you have a designated mentor, identify your own group of junior and senior professors who will help you in research, teaching, getting to know the campus and the discipline. Include in your thinking faculty outside the department you can talk to about sensitive issues in the department, and people outside the university who can give you a perspective on the discipline. (*Note to Mentor: You could suggest that the new faculty member ask you about whom they want to meet; you may be able to make introductions in some cases.*)
8. **Connect to the faculty and the life of the department.** Be visible. Attend colloquia, get comments on your work from senior faculty. Invite people to observe and comment on your teaching. Attend department meetings. Find out how new faculty are expected to participate in those meetings (e.g., where is your unit on the continuum of “New faculty members should be seen and not heard” vs. “New faculty members should be active and vocal”?)
9. **Set priorities and manage your time.** You have to multi-task, but you also need to be clear about what you have to get done to move your career forward. Put that first and juggle the rest of your schedule. Some people block out a period of time each day for their priority work, even if just an hour. Find out what works for you.
10. **Have a life.** Sorcinelli says, “Take care of yourself and your life outside of work.” This might mean regular exercise, time with friends, a night out, a short vacation trip, time with family, or time alone. The key is to maintain your energy and your spirits. Being an early-career or tenure-track professor is very demanding, but it should not be depleting. The goal, after all, is to have a productive and fulfilling life and career.

## Epilogue: Why Be a Mentor?

Being a mentor is a major commitment and often involves hard work. However there are societal, institutional, departmental, and, most of all, individual rewards to be gained by serving as a mentor.

**By being a mentor you continue a long tradition that is critical to human progress.**

*Socrates and Plato, Haydn and Beethoven, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. In each of these cases, a “senior” person who had garnered respect and an amount of prestige and power within her/his field, took a “junior” person under the wing to teach, encourage and provide an extra push to ensure that junior individual’s success.*

Faculty Mentoring Guide, VCU School of Medicine, 2002

Each of us could probably provide other less dramatic but still important examples in every field of academic, cultural, technical, and social endeavor. In fact it seems possible to argue that, without mentoring, no field of human endeavor advances very far, very fast.

**By being a mentor you can advance to a new stage of career maturity and assure an enduring impact on your field.**

Mentoring has the potential for deep benefits for the mentor.

*[M]entoring is a developmental stage in one’s professional life, and since each developmental stage is crucial for growth, failure to serve as a mentor can lead to stagnation and internal conflict. By becoming a mentor, you have the opportunity to affect the future — you leave a part of yourself in everyone you mentor, your ideals, your ethics and your professionalism. Long after you’ve retired from the world of grants, publications, students and patients, your work will still be going on in those you’ve guided as a mentor.*

Faculty Mentoring Guide, VCU School of Medicine, 2002

**By being a mentor you make a huge contribution to your department or school and university.**

The largest investment a university makes is in its faculty, so it is extremely important to both hire outstanding colleagues and then keep those colleagues moving forward in their careers. There are ample studies to show that positive early-career experiences presage productive and satisfying scholarly careers long-term. The opposite is also true. Therefore, whatever you can do in the early stages to help the young scholar become more informed about the academic environment, to become more knowledgeable, more skilled, and more efficient is of great value to your department, school, and university.

**By being a mentor you can support values of diversity and equity.**

The U.S. system of higher education was built largely for and by white, American males born into middle- and upper-class families. In the past few decades, the academy has experienced a growing

diversity. New faculty members who are different from the prevailing norm with respect to factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, may face special challenges. Under these circumstances, effective mentoring is needed to help both the faculty member to be successful and the department or school to grow as more a effective and diverse community of scholars.

**By being a mentor you learn as well.**

Mentoring is not a one-way street. The early career faculty member likely knows literature and research with which you are unfamiliar. He or she certainly has perspectives that are different from yours. New faculty members are chosen because they bring certain interests and new knowledge to the unit. They likely have studied with experts at other universities who have developed cutting-edge concepts and techniques. By working with these new faculty members, you not only impart what you know, but you can also learn what they know. In this way, getting early career faculty off to a good start can be revitalizing for your own work and thinking as well.

**Postscript: You can define your own contribution to a mentoring initiative.**

More contemporary definitions of mentoring include a variety mentoring arrangements beyond the master-apprentice model. Mentoring can take the form of a very targeted contribution (e.g., teaching guidance.) It can occur in groups and through teams rather than in a one-on-one setting. Mentoring can occur across departments and even across universities, and it can take place online. It can be an informal relationship or a formal one.

Mentoring is best understood as a critical social process that helps faculty develop cultural competence, build skills, and develop the networks they need to be successful and to contribute to the academic enterprise. Each unit needs to take responsibility for how that process unfolds, and each faculty member needs to take responsibility for how to relate to the mentoring process. Your contribution may come in a variety of forms and at different times. How and when to be a mentor is your decision. So thoughtfully consider the role you want to play and then, using all of the resources available to you consider how you can best contribute as a mentor and then get involved.

*Adapted from the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine Faculty Mentoring Guide, 2002, available at [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/facultyaffairs/career\\_dev/facultymentoringguide/index-2.html](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/facultyaffairs/career_dev/facultymentoringguide/index-2.html).*