

Mentoring of pre-tenure faculty members in the School of Biology and Ecology

Most pre-tenure faculty can be greatly helped by collegial support and advice from tenured faculty about the institution's idiosyncrasies and important personalities, how to teach effectively, how to launch a research program, how to get funded, who to go to for help in various matters, and how to use one's time effectively. A small commitment of time by a mentor can make a large difference in the success and well being of pre-tenure faculty.

For about 15 years, pre-tenured faculty in SBE have been assigned a mentor. The purpose of this practice has been to help retain productive junior faculty by supporting them through their pre-tenure years. The plan presented here specifies important components of mentoring in SBE.

Purpose of mentoring:

Mentoring aims to support pre-tenure faculty members along the path to promotion and tenure. This support can include helping pre-tenure faculty understand the culture and professional expectations of SBE and UMaine, set career goals, make a plan to meet career goals, learn about campus resources, and explore options to challenges. The mentor should provide constructive feedback and advice on the mentee's teaching, on steps taken to successfully establish the mentee's research program, and how to use time wisely. The mentor can enlist the support of other tenured UMaine faculty in supporting her/his mentee.

Role of the school director:

The school director, in consultation with the PAC of SBE, will select a mentor. Often the mentor has been the chair of the search committee, but this may not always be possible or optimal. The director should explain the importance of mentoring and outline expectations of the mentoring relationship to both mentor and mentee. The director should meet with mentor and mentee at least once a year to support the mentor-mentee relationship and to assess its effectiveness.

It may be suitable for more than one SBE faculty person to mentor one mentee. For example, one faculty person might be appropriate to guide a mentee toward success in research, while another faculty person would be better suited to mentor the teaching of the same mentee.

The mentoring relationship will normally be confined to the pre-tenure period.

Role of the mentor:

Mentors should be proactive in working with mentees to establish and maintain an effective mentoring relationship. The mentor will contact the new faculty member (mentee) in advance of his/her arrival.

An important part of the mentoring relationship is confidentiality. The mentoring relationship is strictly supportive and not evaluative.

The school director maintains resources about successful mentoring that mentors and mentees should consult periodically.

Responsibilities of the mentee:

Mentees should be open to the support of the mentoring relationship. This openness requires preparation for discussions with the mentor about promotion and tenure, career goals, and other key issues. Mentees should tell her/his mentor about problems or challenges when they develop.

Mentoring plan:

Mentor and mentee should meet in person at least once a month, perhaps more often during the first year and less often in later years. Important issues that the mentor and mentee should discuss include but are not limited to: promotion and tenure policies and procedures, career goals and timelines, prioritizing professional commitments, UMaine culture and professional expectations, funding sources (internal and external), developing professional skills, identifying UMaine human and technical resources (e.g., statistical analyses, grant proposal preparation, teaching effectiveness), and establishing a good professional reputation.

Some specific topics that might be considered:

- a. Short-term goals:
 - i. Familiarization with the campus and its environment
 - ii. Networking—introduction to colleagues, identification of other possible mentors.
 - iii. Developing awareness—help the mentee understand policies and procedures that are relevant to his/her work.
 - iv. Constructive criticism and encouragement, compliments on achievements.
 - v. Helping to sort out priorities—budgeting time, balancing research, teaching, and service.
- b. Long-term goals:
 - i. Developing visibility and prominence within the profession.
 - ii. Achieving career advancement.
- c. Common issues:
 - i. How to establish an appropriate balance between teaching, research and committee obligations?
 - ii. How is teaching evaluated for promotion and/or tenure? What criteria are used?
 - iii. How to obtain feedback concerning teaching? What resources are available for teaching enhancement?
 - iv. How to identify and recruit good graduate students? How are graduate students supported?
 - v. What to expect from graduate students? What is required in the graduate program?
 - vi. What are the criteria for research excellence, how is research evaluated?
 - vii. Where to look for funding resources for research?
 - viii. How does the merit and promotion process work? Who is involved?
 - ix. How much committee work should one expect? What types of committee activities are important or priority for a beginning faculty member?
 - x. What social events occur in the department?

Additionally, work-life balance issues must be part of the training for mentors and the Director. For example, the mentor should inform the mentee about the opportunities for altering the tenure clock as appropriate.

What to do if the mentoring relationship is not productive:

If a mentee needs support in an area wherein the assigned mentor does not have sufficient expertise or experience to be effective, the mentor and/or director may refer the mentee to other faculty or staff who might be more helpful. If the relationship is not productive and mutually satisfactory, the mentor or the mentee should consult the school director about identifying a new mentor.

Approved by SBE Faculty 3/22/13