

# Being a Good Mentor

# What is a mentor?

A person who facilitates the career and development of another person, usually junior, through one or more of the following activities: providing advice and counseling; providing psychological support; advocating for, promoting, and sponsoring the career of the mentee.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Michigan Gender in Science and Engineering Subcommittee on Faculty Recruitment, Retention and Leadership's April 2004 Final Report

# Overlapping Mentors

- The previous definition says “one or more”, you shouldn’t try to do everything
- Junior faculty benefit from a set of overlapping mentors:
  - Departmental mentor(s)
  - Outside professional mentor(s)
  - You

# Logistics

- Regular, informal, one-on-one meetings yield productive conversations with lasting impact. Such interactions seem most effective when they occur with predictable frequency – as often as once a month, and no less than once a quarter.
- Regular meetings complement an “open-door” policy, where the mentor makes clear that the mentee can approach them with questions or concerns.
- Junior faculty members tend to prefer that the mentor take the initiative to set up regular meetings and to follow through on them.

# Discuss expectations

- At your first meeting (or at your next one), listen to each other's goals and expectations.
- If expectations are not compatible, discuss where there may be common ground.
- Agree on aligned expectations.

# Model Professional Behavior

- Lead by example.
- Develop trust and respect through your behavior in the mentoring relationship.
- Maintain confidentiality, so as to create a safe place for the mentee to ask questions and discuss uncertainties, without judgment.

# Practice Active Listening

- Resist the urge to act and make decisions for your mentee. Let them talk things through.
- Reflect back to them what you are hearing.
- Ask probing questions.
- Show compassion and empathy.
- Take a genuine interest in your mentee.
- Mentoring involves both empowering tenure-track faculty to do their best work and supporting them with advice and resources.

# Provide Constructive Feedback

- Recognize that it is often difficult and intimidating for junior colleagues to articulate their questions and needs, and to approach more senior faculty. Recall that things you say may—without you intending it—lead them to feel more anxious, more inadequate, or hopeless about their own future. It is important to contextualize your feedback so it is constructive rather than undermining, and offers direction rather than simply criticism.
- Give praise as well as criticism when warranted. Always present criticism in a private and non-threatening context with specific suggestions for improvement in the future. Rather than emphasize past problems or mistakes, focus on future actions that may remedy or redress those problems.



# Multi-year Plan

- Help your mentee develop short-term and long-term goals including both research and teaching.
- Help your mentee develop a multi-year plan to achieve these goals.
- Make sure your mentee is aware of key resources within their Division
- Evaluate the plan, e.g., with the UCSF checklist.

# Recognize Differences

- Acknowledge that there are differences between you and your mentee that transcend the obvious ones of demographics.
- Thinking styles exercise

# Celebrate

- Celebrate a milestone or accomplishment of your mentee.
- Enjoy the mentoring role. Savor being proud of your mentees and remember that your mentees may turn out to be very special, life-long colleagues.