Mentors’ insights: questions and suggestions from UCSC mentors (spring 2018)

The following questions and suggestions have been shared among UCSC faculty mentors before, during, and after the mentors’ workshop led by Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs Herbie Lee on May 4th 2018.

* What campus resources are available for mentees?

Suggestion: Have a look at the mentoring resources on the Committee on Career Advising (CCA) website: 
https://senate.ucsc.edu/committees/cca-committee-on-career-advising/mentoring-resources/index.html

The first two documents posted in the “constructive mentoring” section might be of special interest:  
Tips for mentors and mentees 
Suggested activities and topics of discussion for mentors and mentees

* How can I arrange meetings with my mentees more effectively? My biggest difficulty in mentoring is finding an excuse to meet with my mentees. I can't "do lunch" as I have class or meetings 5 days a week at lunch time. We are not in the same building, so I don’t run into them in the hall. Setting up a meeting seems too formal. I can check in with them by e-mail but that seems rather ineffective.

Suggestions: Maybe you could invite your mentees for coffee at a cafe on campus (before or after your lunch-time class). You can also invite them to an appointment with you in your office. I offer both options to my mentees, and some prefer the office appointment and other prefer the lunch or coffee meeting. 
Some faculty also organize group meetings with their mentees to encourage peer mentoring and conversation (e.g. at the library), but they also make themselves available for one-to-one appointments. Unfortunately CCA doesn't have funds and resources to host more informal gatherings like the one we did in the end of fall quarter, but you could perhaps use that model to invite your mentees to come together as a group (e.g. email them and propose a couple of dates/times to see which ones work best for them and then tell the you will go to Cafe Iveta at the agreed date/time and be available for anyone who wants to come in and grab a drink together).

* How can mentors be in regular contact, but not become an added burden to mentee?

Suggestion: What I usually do is I sent a group email to all my mentors close to the beginning of every quarter, just to remind them I am available and willing to meet (at my
office or over lunch on me at Terra Fresca) as a group or one-to-one. Those who need to meet will respond. I may send a similar email towards the end of the quarter.

* How can I give effective mentoring advice when mentee is another field?

_Suggestion:_ I usually tell them to double check what I suggest with people from their department and discipline and I focus my advise on issues that are less field-specific. I encourage them to develop a network of mentors and discuss with them various issues as appropriate (CCA will also be discussing departmental mentoring with dept. chairs to encourage a stronger departmental culture).

* What can mentors do when a mentee is very resistant to advice (from different mentors who are concerned and offer recommendations) and continues with practices that will harm their career?

_Suggestion:_ Perhaps one way to encourage the mentee to be more open to advice is to introduce them to other mentees, and either mentor them as a group or prompt them to discuss their challenges and share tips among themselves. Such a context encourages peer-mentoring. Conversations among mentees might help the one person who is not very receptive to advice by senior colleagues to open open to advice from near-peers. If they realize that they are the only person doing things a certain way, they might be willing to reconsider.

Another thing to take into account is the way the advice is delivered. Perhaps the mentee is over-sensitive and insecure (and compensates for such emotional challenges by resisting advice). If mentors are willing to share their own challenges, past mistakes and lessons learned, and earn trust through caring and non-judgmental communication, maybe the mentee will feel more at ease, and will be more willing to listen and learn from others. Ultimately, mentors can offer recommendations but mentees will do what they think best. If they receive the same recommendation from different mentors, hopefully they will be more inclined to consider it (another reason network mentoring is important). It is also true that different mentors might provide different recommendations, which is why we as mentors need to be mindful of the diversity of individual perspectives and expect that mentees will select and follow the advice that works best for them. In CCA’s _Tips for mentors and mentees_ we specify:

(For mentors) “Provide guidance, but also recognize that mentees will find and follow their own path. It is important to appreciate differences in others and not assume your own way is the best.” (For mentees) “We encourage you to be open to trying new approaches, but also reflect on the advice you receive from different sources and evaluate what might serve your needs better.”

* Can I ask my mentees how their second-year review went?

_Suggestion:_ It is fine to say that you are willing to talk about their second-year review, if they are willing to share. Such information can help you advise them on planning and good practices for the next review.
Other helpful things to consider in relation to reviews are:

- Share your best personal statements. Suggest your mentees also reach out to other faculty (near-peers or senior colleagues) whose personal statements you consider to be good examples and ask for copies. Especially in the case of senior colleagues, it is possible your mentees prefer you reach out instead of them, so have a discussion about this. It is best to provide your mentees with statement samples that were used in similar actions they will be undergoing (similar rank and step). If the statements were used in different actions, then make sure to contextualize their differences and indicate which aspects are most relevant to your mentees in their current career stage.
- Make yourself available to read their personal statements, and offer comments.
- Also consider helping them with their online biobib (show them yours and have a look into theirs).
- If mentees’ departments allow faculty to attend personnel review discussions of the same or higher rank and step, recommend that mentees reflect on the process, departmental and campus expectations, and candidates’ personal statements and department letters, as learning experiences and resources in preparation of their own reviews.
- If mentees are not allowed to attend personnel reviews, recommend they discuss the process with their department chair, and offer insights from your own experiences (including a de-mystification of what happens in relevant department meetings).
- Encourage your mentees to attend the Academic Personnel Office workshops for assistant professors, and the annual CCA workshops on the path to tenure, and to review CAP’s 10 tips for faculty. You and your mentees can also use CCA’s Tips on the path to tenure.

*What advice can we give our mentees on the subject of grant-writing?*

*Suggestions:* Encourage them to do the following:

- Share their application materials with colleagues and get feedback. Different readers will help them address different issues and improve their proposals in many ways. If possible, organize sharing and writing groups in which to work on their grants with other colleagues and get regular feedback.
- Read successful grant applications (e.g. written by colleagues, or posted on granting institutions’ websites) and observe what makes those applications stand out.
- Cultivate relationships with grant offices (even better if done in person).
- Start from smaller grants (including collaborative grants in which they are co-PIs) and gradually transition to major grants.
- Expect that they will get many more rejections than awards. This happens to all faculty, including seniors, and is part of the process.
- Request feedback from granting institutions for each rejection, and use it to improve their next application.
- Cultivate relationships with grant offices (even better if done in person).
• Make sure they are productive as a result of the grants they get and complete/publish work to prove they have used the funds successfully. That will raise their chances for getting more grants in the future.

• Get to know and use divisional and campus-wide resources. Some helpful relevant links by the Office of Research:
  - [https://officeofresearch.ucsc.edu/about/resources/index.html](https://officeofresearch.ucsc.edu/about/resources/index.html) See also:
  - [https://officeofresearch.ucsc.edu/ord/index.html](https://officeofresearch.ucsc.edu/ord/index.html)
  - [https://officeofresearch.ucsc.edu/osp/index.html](https://officeofresearch.ucsc.edu/osp/index.html)

* What advice can we give when mentees get their articles rejected or returned with major revisions required?

Suggestions:

• Help them not lose heart; point out that even senior faculty get their articles rejected or returned with major revisions required.

• Emphasize that in both cases they have the valuable opportunity to improve their article (and either submit to another venue, if it was rejected, or to the same one, if major revisions were required).

• Offer to read the editor’s and readers’ comments, to help them contextualize what they were told. Sometimes, the reviewers’ comments are much better than what the author takes them to be. Other times, it is obvious that a reader did not read the article carefully or became territorial and threatened by new research (e.g. somebody who has written on the same topic and in the same venue some years ago, and was contacted by the editor as an obvious choice for a reader, but did not respond with genuine scholarly criticism).

• Even when readers’ comments indicate they did not pay much attention, or they clearly misunderstood the author’s statements, or are unfamiliar with the subject, their feedback is still a valuable opportunity for improvement: the author can clarify and reinforce the argument, address terminology issues, improve their writing, etc. to make sure that they provide no reason, even to hasty readers, for misunderstanding or confusion.

• Regarding publications, it is also useful to consider which venues are more prestigious and well-regarded in the field. It is often the case that in such venues reader’s responses are more critical and detailed and the whole process might take much longer until publication. The prestige of the venue is a great advantage (and something to be mentioned in personal statements and department letters for personnel reviews).

* What should we consider when mentoring faculty on teaching?

Suggestions (several copied from the CCA Suggested activities and topics of discussion):

• Colleagues in the same discipline may give faculty “domain specific” advice (pedagogies relevant to their material), but it is also important to consider recent pedagogical developments beyond the discipline, e.g. new approaches to inclusive
teaching and learning. On this regard, the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, CITL, can offer significant support.

- Faculty can contact the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (citl@ucsc.edu, CITL) with questions and can request a consultation. The CITL website provides valuable resources and the center offers a number of important professional development opportunities through talks, workshops and other events. Other campus resources include: Faculty Instructional Technology Center, FITC; STEM Active Learning Seminar.

- Often junior faculty have been trained in the most recent, inclusive and interactive pedagogies and might have some valuable insights to offer to senior faculty.

- What junior faculty might need more help with could include time-management skills and developing confidence in the classroom. Advice that might be useful in this regard includes:
  - Do not over-prepare (you rarely have time to present all the prepared material in class; less preparation can actually lead to more fluid and generative class experiences).
  - Remember you know a lot more than your students, not only in terms of content but also in terms of critical analysis of content.
  - Be honest about your limitations, you don’t have to know everything (and you can always research something with the students, or return to the class with a more complete answer next time).
  - For more practical advice on a number of relevant issues (including purposeful teaching, confidence in the classroom, time-management, presentation and communication skills, generating dialogue, feedback and evaluations, assignments and exams, working with TAs, DRC accommodations) see CCA’s general tips on teaching (from a 2016 CCA workshop on teaching).

- Faculty may attend classes by colleagues who are considered effective and charismatic instructors, and reflect on those aspects of their teaching that are most productive in promoting student engagement, learning and success. Also, the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (citl@ucsc.edu) can provide teaching visits for faculty who want to get formative feedback and recommendations on their teaching. In 2018–19 CITL will launch “teaching squares”: groups of faculty who conduct teaching visits and exchange feedback on their classes.

- The Diversity and Inclusion Certificate Program organized by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (discussed in more detail below, in the section about service) can also help faculty promote and support diversity and inclusivity in the classroom. On diversity in the classroom the following reading is highly recommended by Jody Greene (director of CITL): Teaching across cultural strengths: A guide to balancing integrated and individuated cultural frameworks in college teaching, by Alicia Fedelina Chavez and Susan Diana Longerbeam.

- See also Committee on Teaching (COT) online resources on teaching, learning communities, and faculty support, and CCA online resources on teaching.