Overview

Mentoring is a critical element of the professional development of faculty members during the early stages of their careers. Formal mentoring is provided by annual performance reviews conducted by the department chair and PAT committee. Informal mentoring is the responsibility of all established members of the faculty, who in interest of collegiality are enjoined to support, guide, and collaborate with junior faculty members whenever possible.

This policy recognizes a need for an intermediate level of mentoring that has structure without involving an entity also directing formal, summative performance reviews. Accordingly, within 30 days of the appointment start date of a fulltime, non-tenured member of the faculty, the department chair shall select a tenured faculty member to function as a peer mentor to that person. The choice must have the concurrence of the nominated mentor, the mentee, and be approved by the chair of the PAT committee.

Role of the Mentor

Peer mentoring should be a formative process with the objective of facilitating the professional development of the mentee. Specifically, the role of the peer mentor is to help the mentee adapt to their role as a member of the faculty of an engineering department with a comprehensive mission involving teaching, scholarship, and professional service. This assistance may take many forms, including:

1. Proactive advice regarding duties or situations with which the mentee is likely to be unfamiliar.
2. Assistance with networking within the department and the larger academic community to identify sources for teaching materials, potential graduate students, and research collaborators.
3. Service as an “off-line” source of information on singular questions that may occur to the mentee. Such questions may cover any aspect of the departmental mission, personnel policies, including performance expectations and best practices for any and all activities associated with teaching, research, and professional service.
4. Formative review of the mentee’s primary work product (proposals, course syllabi, course materials, pedagogy, research proposals, journal submissions, etc.) and activity outcomes, followed by recommendations for enhancing performance.

The mentor is charged with taking a leadership role in volunteering for or otherwise initiating the formative review activities. An effective strategy for formative review of teaching is classroom visits. It is within the prevue of the mentor to recommend such visits; however, they should occur only with the permission of the mentee, should be pre-scheduled, and should be made as inconspicuous as possible to the students. The mentor should make a concerted effort to provide immediate verbal or written feedback to the mentee after each visit regarding their impressions and recommendations.

The terms “mentor” and “mentee” imply a one-way exchange of knowledge and information; however, it is expected that the mentor will benefit professionally through exposure to the mentee’s unique background and talents.
Required Meetings and Documentation

A minimum of one meeting near the end of each academic term, excluding summer, is required between the mentor and mentee, with the mentor responsible for making the arrangements. After the spring semester meeting, the mentor will prepare a very concise (less than 500 words) summary of their impressions of the mentee’s growth over the prior year. Copies of this report will be provided to the department chair and the chair of the PAT committee.

Applicability and Duration

This peer mentoring policy covers fulltime faculty members only. It does not include part-time or temporary faculty. The department chair is responsible for arranging training, supervision, and mentoring for part-time or temporary faculty that is appropriate for their duties.

For fulltime tenure-track faculty members, the formal peer mentoring period will continue for three years or until the mentee has been approved for tenure by the Board of Trustees, whichever comes first. With the concurrence of the PAT committee chair, the department chair may extend the formal mentoring period past the nominal three year requirement on a year-by-year basis, but not past tenure approval.

For fulltime term faculty members, a minimum one-year peer mentoring period is required. The department chair may extend or reinstitute peer mentoring as appropriate to the term faculty member’s activity assignment, experience, and performance.

While it is expected that formal peer mentoring will eventually end, it is important that informal mentoring extend through and beyond tenure. Faculty who served as official peer mentors are particularly well prepared to maintain this informal mentoring.

Mentoring Service Activity Assessment

Functioning as a peer mentor is a critical professional service function with broad ramifications for maintaining a stable, productive departmental faculty. Accordingly, these duties should be reported on the mentor’s annual report in the professional service category, and will be considered by the department chair when both formulating an activity assignment and conducting the annual review.

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