

Mentoring Manual for New Faculty

Faculty Mentorship Program

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Introduction

Beginning a new job can be stressful whether it's your first job out of training or a midcareer transfer to a new position at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). How are you to become an academic scholar who can balance a research and/or patient care career while becoming an outstanding educator and yet meet your personal needs and family obligations? How do you create a career plan to continue your professional development, while understanding the political issues of your new department and College? And how do you find a willing ear to listen to your issues and provide confidential feedback? All these issues can seem like daunting tasks.

This is why the Faculty Mentorship Program believes that developing a relationship with a mentor (or mentors) is so helpful as you begin a new role. It's an opportunity to be exposed to another, sometimes senior, faculty member's style, knowledge, and interests as they help you build a support network, navigate the processes of rank advancement and tenure, and assist you make connections with others in your chosen field. Virtually all academicians can look back on their career and identify one or more mentors who were crucial to their success.

Why You Need a Mentor

The relationship that develops with a mentor can help you explore your personal goals and needs, assist with discussions regarding options and potential solutions to academic and personal issues, and provide counseling regarding career development, work-life balance, and promotion and rank advancement. Mentoring can also help you learn the culture of your organization, develop confidence in teaching, research, or patient care, and expand your horizons of what's available at UNMC and within your career. Mentors can speak up on your behalf within your department and by recommending you for external committee and leadership positions to assist you in regional and national recognition of your capabilities. Simply stated, you need a mentor because it will help you in attaining academic success in your field.

Do You Need a Mentor or a Coach?

As a new faculty member, you can benefit from both coaching and mentoring. Coaching assists in the development of new skills or knowledge, is typically task oriented, and of limited duration. Examples include providing reviews of your grant writing, preparing a manuscript, learning a new clinical or research skill, or how to run a clinic and do your clinical billing. In each case, someone with the necessary and specific knowledge provides needed information to you. The coach may even be your Department Chair or another to who you report.



On the other hand, mentoring is an intentional process that utilizes a supportive relationship that develops between a mentor and the mentee/protégé and focuses on the professional development and achievement of the mentee including serving as an advisor and role model to help you, the mentee/protégé, build your confidence as an academician. As a rule of thumb, the mentor should not be your direct supervisor or department chair. Mentoring does not have to be one-on-one and can even take place with a group of faculty members or peers who work on the common needs of its members.

Choosing a Mentor

It is important to find someone to be your mentor as soon as possible following arrival at UNMC. Take advantage of the mentoring opportunities that may already be present in your department, College, or professional organization. Some departments already have mechanisms in place to assign a mentor to new faculty members. Most importantly, find a mentor that is right for you. You may even need more than one based on your personal goals and needs.

So how do you go about finding a mentor on your own, if necessary? Get to know faculty members in your department. Attend department and university faculty presentations to identify people with interests similar to yours. Ask other faculty for advice and recommendations regarding potential mentors. You should even consider people in other departments or colleges, as necessary. If several names have been provided to you, spend time talking with these faculty members about your values and goals to help you choose the right person.

Once you have a potential mentor in mind, ask for a meeting with them. Start small with your request. Don't just say outright "Will you be my mentor?" Start by simply asking them to meet with you or have lunch together. Ask them about their mentoring experiences, tell them about your needs, and explain why you think mentoring would be beneficial to you. Then you can make the request for them to be your mentor.

Mentoring outcomes are often better when in-common factors such as clinical, educational, or research interests, gender, ethnicity, personal characteristics, and departmental relationships are considered. But your ideal mentor may be someone of a different gender or ethnic group or someone from a different department or College. Don't let such factors deter you.

How to be a Mentee

Make the developing mentoring relationship one of your academic priorities. Begin by understanding and identifying your needs and establishing your personal goals. Goals should be SMART goals - **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**ctionable, **r**ealistic, and **t**imely. The goals you



establish can include both professional and personal goals. Do you want to be ready for rank advancement within 6 years? Do you want to achieve consistent federal research funding? Is there a goal to receive outstanding teaching evaluations from students? Receive a top teaching award? Do you want to become a section or department chair? Are you interested in an administrative position in your college? Do you want to be involved in your regional or national professional organization? Do you hope to be its leader one day? Do you want to be involved in one of the local charities? Is a leadership position in your religious organization something you aspire to? Are you seeking that successful balance between work and outside pursuits and family? These goals can form the basis of your early conversations with your mentor.

Characteristics of effective mentees include:

- Coming prepared with personal goals for initial discussion
- Preparing agendas in advance of each meeting
- Being on time
- Being prepared
- Being an active listener
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Recognizing the importance of the mentor's time
- A willingness to request and act on feedback
- Someone who follows through with recommendations

Many benefits will accrue to you during this relationship to help you meet your goals and needs, increase your personal satisfaction, understand your new organization, and prepare for rank advancement and leadership development. In addition, you will have gained an available confidant. And as you progress through your career, remember to be generous with your time when a future junior faculty member asks you to be their mentor.

Establishing a Relationship with Your Mentor

You should take charge of the mentoring process. Remember, this is for your benefit. Establish clear expectations and boundaries during initial discussions with your mentor. Identify your needs and make them known. Bring your personal goals to the mentor for discussion and possible enhancement. The more your mentor knows about your desires and needs, the more effective he or she can be in sponsoring you for activities in your department or professional organizations.

Mentorship is often for a defined period of time, commonly one year. It should entail a commitment for regular meetings and can cease or transform to a new relationship once your



goals have been met. It is helpful to have an agreement of confidentiality for the relationship. This will permit you to seek counsel and discuss sensitive issues that might have developed with other faculty members or Department leadership. You should confirm with your mentor that there will be no direct feedback of your discussions to your Department chair or other leadership. Having a written mentoring agreement for your interaction between you and your mentor can be helpful to avoid future conflicts.

Responsibilities of the mentor and mentee include:

- Development of trust
- A commitment to regular meetings
- A commitment to preparation
- Development of a mentoring agreement
- Establishment of the mentee's goals
- Establishment of boundaries
- A willingness of both to receive feedback
- Open communication
- Confidentiality
- Accountability to the process

You may benefit from having more than one mentor at a time. And some new faculty will benefit from mentoring that utilizes a group of peers (peer group mentoring) to work on common issues.

Making the Most of Your Mentor's Time

It is important that you come prepared for each meeting with your mentor. Starting off well at your first meeting with your mentor may set the stage for the effectiveness of each future session. Have a plan for the relationship. You should already have established your goals and needs to discuss with your mentor. Plan to convey personal values and other characteristics about yourself including your background and work-style. Be prepared to explain what you are looking for in a mentoring relationship regarding your goals, skills acquisition, academic guidance, rank advancement, and work-life balance. Be accountable for each meeting. You should not expect the mentor to simply tell you what to do. If you disagree with comments or recommendations of the mentor, ask questions or seek clarification. Set each meeting's agenda and deliver the agenda to your mentor in advance of each meeting. Be on time for meetings and show interest.

What to Do If Things Don't Work Out



Establishing ground rules and boundaries including the development of a mentoring agreement that you and your mentor both sign can often prevent problems. Throughout the relationship, it's important that you and your mentor are willing to bring forth concerns for discussion before they get out of hand.

If you have concerns about how well the relationship with your mentor is going, start by reviewing what you have gained from your mentor, assess what you think may be missing from the relationship, and evaluate how your needs correlate with the skill set of your mentor. You might find that the mentor has the needed background and that you should just speak up more strongly regarding your needs and what you require from the relationship to keep it moving forward.

But if the mentoring relationship isn't working, you should move forward with terminating the relationship. In general, it is best done face-to-face or at the least by a telephone or video interaction. Be gracious while being honest with your mentor about why you think it is time for you to move on. A final discussion of the positive aspects of the relationship may offset any lingering discomfort for both of you. And it is likely best to try to keep the connection for future interactions. If the mentoring process is something established by your department, you may need to bring the change to the attention of your department chair or mentoring manager so they can help with your transition to a new mentor. And remember, you will continue to benefit from mentoring as you get the new relationship established.

Coming to Closure with Your Mentor

When you and your mentor feel like you've done as much together as you can and all of your goals and needs have been initially met, it may be time to close out the formal mentoring relationship. You may find it useful to sit down and go over your goals and needs one last time and discuss the positive aspects of your relationship. Don't forget to say thank you. In fact, don't forget to send a handwritten message of thanks to your mentor.

Summary

There is much data to support the importance of mentoring in the professional development of new academic faculty. So get going with finding a mentor or a peer mentoring group. If you're struggling with starting, the faculty mentorship office will be pleased to help you. Please contact us before your struggle gets out of hand.



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