



Université d'Ottawa - University of Ottawa
Faculté de médecine Faculty of Medicine

HANDBOOK ON FACULTY MENTORING

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1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the faculty mentoring program at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa. The purpose of this program is to assist and encourage junior faculty members to develop successful personal and professional careers in academic medicine.

In 1993 the report of the Task Force on Gender Issues at the University of Ottawa (chaired by Dr. Y. Lefebvre) recommended the establishment of mentoring systems for junior faculty. The mentoring program for junior women faculty has been in place since 1995. A survey of this program was conducted in 1996 and 1998, and changes implemented in order to better meet the needs of our faculty. Although this work was initiated by the Advisory Committee on Gender and Equity Issues, the Handbook is written and intended for all Faculty members.

A mentor is an individual who takes an interest in the professional development of a junior colleague, and provides a source of guidance and support. The key ingredient to a successful mentoring relationship is a genuine commitment from both parties. This handbook provides information on mentoring and suggestions for how to structure your mentoring time. While there are a number of guidelines included, we encourage flexibility in the program. Ultimately, there are no "rules" on how to mentor or be mentored: whatever works for both of you is fine. Feel free to use any information that you find to be helpful, and do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions about the program.

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2. MENTORING: BASIC CONCEPTS How to Mentor

A mentor has the unique opportunity and privilege to encourage the professional and personal development of a junior faculty member. When we have approached individuals to become mentors, a frequent comment is: "I don't know how to be a mentor... I need one myself!", or "I have made so many mistakes, how could I serve as a mentor?" or "I am sure you could find someone better/wiser/more perfect..." In fact, having gone through the process of being a faculty member, with its inherent challenges and difficulties, and the experience you have gained along the way makes you well-equipped to be a mentor. The only real "requirement" is a genuine interest and willingness to help guide another individual.

The mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual trust and respect. The most effective mentors are attentive and effectively communicate caring and interest. *"I do not need to establish a lasting, time-consuming personal relationship ... what I must do is to be totally and none selectively present to each student, as he or she addresses me ... the time interval may be brief, but the encounter is total."* (Selenky)

A. The Myth of the Perfect Mentor

The word "mentor" conjures up images of a single remarkable individual with whom there is an intense, longstanding, and meaningful relationship. In reality, few of us have a single influential person to fill this role. While access to such an individual appears to be ideal, it may not be necessary in order to be "mentored". There can be encounters with any number of individuals that are brief, yet meaningful, and enable you to move forward. In other words, mentoring does not have to come from one individual.

The idea of aspiring to become the "perfect" person, doctor, scientist, or mentor is not realistic or reasonable. None of us is, or needs to be "Perfect" in order to be an effective and valuable role model. It is important for junior faculty to see and appreciate that we all make mistakes, encounter difficulties, have uncertainties, and nevertheless can overcome these and thrive.

The mentor need not be all knowing in all areas. Your role is to function as a facilitator and to direct your mentee¹ to the source that can provide the needed assistance. For example, if help is needed with grant writing, you may refer appropriately to other faculty (unless this area is a specific forte for you). This introduces the concept of primary and secondary mentors: you function as the primary mentor; your mentee has available to him or her the expertise from any number of individuals, who function as secondary mentors.

¹ Mentee is used in this handbook to refer to the individual who is being mentored.

B. Mentoring Relationship or Friendship?

It takes time and commitment from both parties to develop a strong mentoring relationship. Regular meetings to get to know one another make it easier for your mentee to approach you when there are difficulties. There is, however, no requirement for a time-consuming, personal relationship! Some mentoring relationships evolve naturally into long-lasting friendships, but this is not necessary for effective mentoring to occur. Some would suggest that the most successful mentoring relationships do not involve a close personal friendship.

C. Mentoring Across Differences

Not everyone has the same access to the mentoring process. Groups of individuals with the most in common and who are represented in the largest numbers may be in a better position to find effective mentors. Individuals who are from different social, economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds may have more difficulty accessing effective mentors. Those who are shy or lack confidence are less likely to request assistance. In some cultures it may be considered a sign of personal weakness to ask for help or support. Women may find few female role models in senior academic positions to look to for guidance. At some institutions, women faculty are less likely to report having had a mentor compared to male faculty, although those with mentors have more publications and experience greater career satisfaction. Clearly, diverse role models are needed. The following excerpt discusses the need to open ourselves to attend to those most unlike us:

"While learners may often seek mentoring from those with whom they share attributes such as value, race, or gender, they may also need help in acquiring skills or knowledge from a teacher or a colleague who is very different. Those of us with access to power and influence, and with expertise to offer, can go a long way toward reversing those subtle and not so subtle messages from earlier experiences."
(Townsend)

3. NUTS AND BOLTS: Getting Started

At the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Medicine, we have established a pool of interested mentors, and try to accommodate the specific interests and needs of junior faculty when assigning mentors. Mentors are initially assigned in order to avoid the inevitable delay involved in new faculty members finding a mentor, and to ensure early access to guidance and support. It is understood, however, that in the course of a faculty member's academic career she/he is likely to meet other individuals who will function naturally as mentors, and this is encouraged. Your assigned mentor can remain available to you as needed. Participation in this program is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. If things are not working out with your assigned mentor/mentee, simply contact the program coordinator. We will provide guidance, and if needed, can reassign you.

A. Step 1 : The First Meeting

It does not matter where or when this takes place (over coffee, lunch, on or off site, whatever works for both of you), as long as it happens within a few weeks of your being assigned to one another. We recommend that mentors be responsible for setting up the first meeting. Set aside at least 30 minutes for this initial meeting. The main purpose of the meeting is to get acquainted what are your backgrounds, interests, hobbies? Be sure to exchange telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and discuss the best mode and times for each of you to be reached. Request a copy of your mentee's CV and assessment form which will help you to structure subsequent meetings. Finally, don't forget to schedule the next meeting!

B. Step 2: Subsequent Meetings

Regularly scheduled meetings are strongly recommended, at least for the first few months, in order to establish a solid mentoring relationship. After the first few months, feel free to individualize. Some of you will prefer to continue with regularly scheduled meetings, others may be comfortable making contact on an "as needed" basis. Be sure to allow your mentee to express her/his preference, rather than assuming that regular meetings are not necessary. Scheduling time that is convenient can be difficult, but make an effort to commit to protected mentoring time, which can be as valuable as any other academic activity that the junior faculty member participates in. If at all possible, avoid being interrupted during your meetings, and avoid scheduling meetings at times when you know you will be preoccupied or rushed.

C. What to talk about?

Some areas you may want to explore include the following:

Define expectations (this applies to both of you). Early in the course of your meetings, it is worthwhile to define your expectations for the mentoring relationship. Are there particular areas that your mentee wants help with? What are his/her strengths and weaknesses?

Determine what your short and long term career goals are. This is crucial, as many of us go through our academic careers without ever clearly establishing what our personal and career goals are. Without establishing long term goals, we run the risk of ending up somewhere that we ever intended to be.

We suggest having written 1 and 5 year goals, and reviewing these regularly. Determine what aspects of your career and personal life are most valued, and set priorities that reflect these values. Refine and review research, administrative, clinical, and teaching objectives. Does your current "job description" make it possible to meet these goals? Often we are approached to participate in numerous activities that are worthwhile and interesting, but take time away from areas that may be of vital importance in allowing us to meet our long term goals. Junior faculty may feel obliged to say yes to all requests, when it may be appropriate at times to say no.

Academic Promotion.

It is usually a number of years before a junior faculty member begins to think about promotion criteria. This is an area to discuss well in advance of the time for application, for a number of reasons. First of all, if promotion to higher academic rank is a career goal for you, then you need to be certain that your clinical, teaching, administrative and research portfolios are such that they will readily lead to promotion. Secondly, you will need objective documentation of your teaching abilities and it can be extremely difficult to obtain this information after the fact (imagine filing income tax forms every 5 or so years and not having saved any receipts). Request copies of formal and informal evaluations of teaching assignments and presentations to keep in a teaching portfolio: this folder with scraps of paper randomly thrown into it will save time and angst when you are ready to apply for promotion. If you set up your CV according to the University's specifications now, and update it as you go, this will also make the application easier. Finally, keep in mind that any work you do that has impact nationally or internationally will be valuable, and it may be helpful to start to build these contacts early. If pursuing academic promotion is not a goal for you, be certain that the reasons for this reflect your own values.

Professional development.

Explore opportunities to participate in professional development seminars. Some examples include sessions that promote skills in leadership, communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, time management, presentation, teaching, computer use, grant and paper writing.

Balancing career and personal goals.

Junior faculty members need realistic role models. Mentors should try to model a balance between their personal and professional lives.

This area is a challenge for many of us. Both female and male faculty have family and personal involvements that require time and commitment. Development of time management skills and prioritizing of goals may be helpful. Mentors are encouraged to be open about their own limitations and any difficulties they may have experienced. If junior faculty members have access to realistic role models rather than an image of "perfection" (for example, someone who appears to always do everything well, efficiently, without making mistakes, and without ever looking stressed), they are more

likely to set realistic expectations of themselves.

Stress and distress.

Explore any symptoms or signs of emotional distress. All faculty members, no matter how well adjusted and supported, can expect to experience stressors in the course of their academic careers. Whether these are due to work demands (meeting deadlines, difficult patient care issues, pressures to publish) or personal/family needs (insufficient time for self, spouse, significant other, children; personal or family illness), additional support and attention may be required. It is helpful to discuss stress management strategies before they are actually needed. The University of Ottawa has a Program on Faculty Wellness that is available to provide expertise to any faculty member who is in need of assistance. See appendix 5D for more information. I

Preparation for key events.

It may be helpful to meet prior to annual reviews with the Chairperson, Department Head, or Supervisor. Also, consider reviewing grant submissions, papers, and important presentations as needed.

D. A Note to Mentors

Remember to...

Listen carefully to your mentee, obtain clues from verbal and nonverbal communications such as facial expression, demeanor, and body language.

Encourage independence: your mentee should not feel obliged to do things the way you do, or follow your advice without question. Once guided along a career path, your mentee may ultimately make decisions that are different from what you might have chosen to do. Moving forward in a new direction is to be considered a mentoring success'. (ie, cloning is not an objective!)

Assist with networking by putting your mentee in contact with key individuals who may be helpful with research projects, committee work, and other academic interests.

Be honest with feedback. Be direct, constructive, and kind when making observations or suggestions. Don't shy away from giving "negative" feedback, but avoid being unnecessarily critical. Don't overprotect your mentee. Use praise appropriately and sparingly to reflect excellence in achievement.

Ask for feedback regularly on your own performance as a mentor so that your input can be fine tuned to effectively respond to your mentee's needs. Encourage your mentee to be proactive, assertive, and open about his/her needs.

Refer your mentee to other individuals as needed to assist with problem solving. If your mentoring relationship is taking up too much of your time, you are likely trying to do too much.

"Don't let being a perfect mentor get in the way of being a good one". Network with other mentors to exchange ideas and experiences. The names of other mentors interested in participating can be made available through the Program Coordinators.

Build trust and maintain confidentiality. Assume that all communications are private and confidential rather than common knowledge that can be shared with others.

Build on your mentee's strengths and potential. Encourage and challenge your mentee to excel with tasks rather than accepting an average performance.

Make notes that will help maintain the focus of your discussions from one meeting to the next.

Be a role model at all times, not just during your mentoring sessions. Junior faculty learn in part by watching how you interact, communicate, prioritize, perform, and problem solve. Promote collegiality and professionalism by example.

E. Mentoring Pitfalls (from the "Circles of Mentor Hell" J Bickel)

Don't abuse your authority as a mentor. Recognize that a power differential exists and don't expect your mentee to defer to you.

Don't use your mentees achievements to further your own agenda/career goals.

Be aware of your own gender and cultural biases. Particularly with cross gender mentoring, avoid dealing with your mentor/mentee in terms of his or her social rather than professional roles. Promote and encourage female and male mentees equally and based on their skills and potential. Don't assume, for example, that women are not capable of or interested in taking on leadership positions, or that men necessarily are.

Be aware of and guard against boundary violations or the appearance of boundary violations: define limits and stick to them.

4. REFERENCES

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5. UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA RESOURCES

Policy on Conflict Resolution

Policy for Flexible Work Arrangements for GFT Faculty Policy on Standards of Ethical and Professional Behaviour Policy on Sexual Harrassment Information on Leadership Workshops Mentoring handbook

Information on the above can be obtained from Dr. R. Nair, Associate Dean, Professional Affairs,
Phone: 562-5800, ext 8282 Fax:562-5457 E-mail: rnair@uottawa.ca

Sexual Harrassment Officer: <http://www.uottawa.ca/services/sex-har/eng/>

613- 562-5222

Employment and Education Equity: <http://www.uottawa.ca/services/equite/eng/index.html>

Promotions Information:, Dean's Office, 562-5800, ext 8117

Emergency Guide: http://www.uottawa.ca/services/annuaire_urgence.pdf

Office of Gender and Equity Issues/Bureau d'Équité en Matières des Sexes:
<http://www.med.uottawa.ca/genderequity/index.html>

Faculty Wellness Program

<http://www.med.uottawa.ca/wellness/eng/index.html>