Faculty Mentoring

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ADVANCE National Leadership Workshop
July 28-29, 2005

In 20 minutes, please cover…

- mentoring new faculty
- mentoring mid-level faculty

The whole story on new faculty

- Hire absolutely first-rate people
- Measure your unit's (and your own) success on their success
- Treat them honestly and clearly
- Take no prisoners with regard to ensuring their success

- It's not just the chair's job ─ it's the job of the entire faculty ─ but the weight falls on you

First-rate Hires

- If you hire somebody who isn't smart, creative, dedicated, and driven — it's going to be much tougher for (you to help) them to succeed
- Faculty mentoring should start with strong "raw" material
  - Then fill in knowledge and skill gaps and
  - Help identify a strong course and keep them on it
- Simple mantra: "Excel in research and education (and later, in service)."
  - "`Excellence in scholarship' is defined with respect to the criteria used and standards applied by the best departments in the candidate's field."
  - Have positive influence, and make sure that the leaders in the field know it!

Measuring success

- "What's good for me is what's good for the department"
vs.
"What's good for the department is what's good for me"

- Not consistent with all departmental cultures, but I strongly believe it's critical in the long-term

Be Honest

In informal situations, in annual reviews, and in direct and indirect dealings

- "I can make an offer to Sally Jones this year at a higher salary than yours. I think this is a good thing for the department in many ways. I promise to fix this inversion as soon as I can."

- "This year we're nominating Jane and Michael for Sloan Fellowships, but not you. We think you're a strong candidate but would benefit from waiting for a year. Barring major changes, we expect to nominate you next year."

- "We're putting you and Fred up for tenure this year. We believe there is some slight added risk by putting your cases up in the same year, but we fundamentally believe both of you deserve to be promoted and we'll work hard to make it happen. I've told Fred the same thing."

- "We've decided to pass on moving your promotion forward this year. We're thrilled with your research, but you haven't been showing sufficient effectiveness at teaching. We'll work with you in a couple of dimensions, including (a) sitting down for an extensive discussion of what we perceive isn't going right, (b) helping you get help, and (c) working with you to hand-pick teaching assignments for next year that will let you focus on teaching and show improvement."

Take No Prisoners

- Learn what they are doing
  - You needn't become an expert in their area, but you *have* to be able to give their "elevator pitch" on what they are doing and why
  - They'll (deeply) appreciate your interest, and it will allow you to promote them to colleagues, funding agencies, industrial groups, etc.
  - Work with them to make sure what field they are in (it's not always clear), and that they are publishing, etc., in a way consistent with that judgment
- Do your homework!
  - What awards are they eligible for? Are they legitimate candidates? (If you can't tell, get on the phone! It's critical not to nominate candidates who aren't ready, since you're over time developing a credibility for your entire department.) Who can effectively endorse their nominations? Who is on the selection committee? If you see another department in your field having great success, call their chair and ask how they do it.
  - Read and comment on, in detail, their early proposals; make sure they get copies of successful proposals to the same programs
  - For promotions, prepare their dossier with deep thought and care; know it better than they do when you have to defend it
- Constantly check-in and drop reminders
  - Research, education (and later on, service) are the focus
  - Help them plan, a year or two in advance, "pre-tenure tours"

Some pitfalls

- Faculty orientation is too much, too fast — needs later reinforcement [Georgia Tech ADVANCE site]
  - Need a plan in place to stay in close touch, especially the first year
    - I try to drop in, maybe every 2-3 months, into the new faculty offices, just to say, "Hey, what's up?"
    - Definitely need an open door/open email policy for questions
- Time management; faculty who become "quick starters" [Boice, Felder & Brent]
  - Reduced time spent preparing courses (to an average of 1-1.5 hours of preparation per lecture hour after their first semester)
  - Spent more time on scholarly writing (3 or more hours per week)
  - Integrated their research into their undergraduate classes
  - Discussed teaching with their colleagues
  - Regularly sought advice from colleagues (average 4 hours per week on discussions of research and teaching)
  - Lectured at a pace that allowed for active student participation

Bottom line

- Probably the most important thing about mentoring is to be explicit about it — not giving it lip service, but identifying it as a genuine and essential part of the future of your department
- Your department will be heavily limited in where it can go if you don't mentor your people well
  - This applies not only to faculty, but to students and staff as well

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Expectations for Promotion to Professor

- Achieve promise that was strongly indicated when tenured

- Demonstrate leadership in some key dimension(s)

Problems include…

- The field changes, but the person can't transition to new hot areas

- The person becomes discouraged and gives up

- Can almost never say, "It's me" — instead blame is placed externally (on the field, on the department, etc.)

Possible red flags

- Little or no research/publications
- Few graduated Ph.D.s and/or none in the pipeline
- Lousy funding
- Lousy teaching

- Like all those self-assessments: "One or two of these may not indicate a problem, but people with more of these problems are more likely to be stuck in transition."

Some observations

- Was this a hiring problem?
  - Did you hire for the person or for the field?
- There are few mid-career faculty programs
- It's a career development issue, not a promotion issue
- It's often hard to distinguish problems with the person's ideas from problems with the person's presentation of those ideas

Some ideas

- Seed money to encourage risk, allowing people to transform their focus (and maybe their approach)
- Teach them how to compete with different organizations
  - NIH workshops for engineering
- Match stalled faculty with people who have failed at getting grants, but then hit a bunch in a row
- Matchmaking stalled people with co-PIs in and out of the department
- Work with them on presentation of their ideas
- Encourage a focus on education for a while
- Internal sabbaticals

One "chair's pitfall"

- Sometimes these stalled faculty are not pleasant to deal with
  - They often become increasingly marginalized
  - It's definitely tougher mentoring people you don't like
- But there's real value in helping them
  - Every improvement they make is of long-term and significant value to the department
  - A 10% improvement that pays off for 20 years is huge

My only high-level advice

- The absolutely best time to discuss this topic is immediately upon tenure
- There is no question in the person's mind that you are supportive of them, so they are incredibly open to constructive suggestions
- But it's easy to forget people at this stage
  - "They are doing great anyway."
  - "I can take it easy on at least one faculty review and evaluation this year."
- And doing that can be costly in the long-term, so keeping with them as early Associate Professors can pay off big-time in the long-term