

## **MENTORSHIP BEST PRACTICES**

The mentorship best practices discussed in this document have been compiled from meetings and discussions with senior mentors, faculty and students throughout the College of Medicine, the Center for Clinical and Translational Science, and the Department of Internal Medicine. In addition, literature suggesting best practices for mentors has also been considered in the formulation of the practices proposed in this document. Throughout this document, mentorship relationships will be described as those existing between a senior advisor and a protégé. The protégé may be a student, faculty member, or anyone receiving advice and guidance from another who is invested in some aspect of that person's career or personal development.

The need for establishing mentorship best practices is in part demonstrated by recent surveys in the College of Medicine that indicate that approximately 50% of faculty have identified a mentor. Of those, 20% state that they meet with their mentor only one time each year. Although there are significant variations in the percentage of faculty with mentor across the College, it is clear that there is a significant need for the College to devise programs that will assure the establishment of effective mentorship relations. The goal of the College should be that all faculty have effective mentorship.

### **WHAT IS A MENTOR?**

There are a variety of mentorship needs for students and faculty and accordingly there are different categories of mentors. A student or faculty member will likely require mentorship in a variety of areas and for this reason may require multiple mentors or a mentorship team. Categories of mentors include:

1. **Content Mentors:** These are experts who are required to inform the protégé of the most recent and significant findings and topic areas motivating a given discipline or field of study. For a protégé to be competitive she or he must be aware of the latest developments and emphasis areas in a field and these are often identified well before their publication in the professional literature. The content mentor is required to provide the protégé with an understanding of the leading developments and emerging areas of emphasis. This advanced information cannot be acquired through the peer reviewed literature and the protégé requires the content mentor for guidance in these areas. The protégé may have multiple content mentors based on the diversity of scholarship pursued in his or her career and different content mentors may be required at different stages of career development.
2. **Career Mentor:** A career mentor is devoted to advising the protégé regarding overall professional development. This guidance extends beyond any single content area or discipline

but it based on an understanding of and experience in the pathways and benchmarks that lead to a successful professional and academic career. In this sense, this form of mentorship is much broader in scope and often requires greater commitment to the protégé than other forms of mentorship.

3. **Life Mentor:** Life Mentors are those who provide guidance and advice that extend beyond the considerations for professional career growth alone. The insight provided by these mentors into the balance between professional and personal life is essential to maintaining both a productive career, a meaningful personal life, and avoiding the pitfalls of career burnout. This mentor may or may not be the same as the Career Mentor.
4. **Primary Mentor:** The above discussion illustrates that a student or faculty member may have a variety of mentors or a formal mentorship team. Nevertheless, it is commonly agreed that one individual must serve the role of Primary Mentor. This mentor engages with the protégé in synthesizing the advice and guidance provided by all other mentors to arrive at the most effective pathway for professional and personal development. It is commonly agreed that it is essential that there be one person who serves this role. In turn, this mentor must have the greatest commitment to and engagement in the protégé's overall development and advancement. It is likely that a given mentor can serve this critical role for a limited number of protégés owing to the time and commitment it requires.
5. **Peer mentorship:** An effective form of mentorship is that which occurs between students and faculty at similar career stages. Peer mentorship allows discussions of common career and academic challenges and solutions that individuals may have identified. This peer mentorship can evolve into a beneficial system of networking and mutual support that add to the guidance provided by senior mentors.

### **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE MENTOR?**

A wide range of personal and professional characteristics contribute to effective mentorship. The following have been identified as the major foundation characteristics of a mentor in a mentor/protégé relationship based on both mentor and protégé focus groups:

1. **Honesty:** This is consistently regarded as one of the critical elements in a mentor/protégé relationship. It implies that the mentor is honest in what he or she can provide and contribute to the relationship both in terms of time and resources. Being asked to serve as a mentor is an honor and recognizes the mentor's own career success and personal attributes. Therefore, it can often be difficult to decline a request to serve in this role. However, it is also essential that the mentor is honest regarding his or her capacity to devote the necessary time, expertise, and resources required for the career development of the protégé. There must also be honesty in

the mentor's evaluation of the progress of the protégé both in terms of successes and needs for improvement. Honesty is also required in the evaluation of the relationship and is essential for identifying and correcting any problems that may arise in the mentor/protégé interaction.

2. **Openness:** This feature is critical to allow the protégé to develop his or her own unique career. The mentor must be open to the protégé's own original and innovative ideas and not enforce his or her own biases in guiding the protégé. There is a difficult balance between providing useful career advice and guidance and yet allowing the protégé the freedom to develop a self-determined career path. The mentor's ultimate goal is to allow the protégé to identify and realize his or her own career and personal growth and potential. Openness to the evolving realization of that potential is therefore essential. Openness also implies that the mentor is accepting that the protégé seek and obtain guidance beyond the current mentorship relationship. This should not be viewed as threatening to the mentor, but should be welcomed as a sign of the initiative and growing independence of the protégé.
3. **Commitment of time:** Effective mentorship requires the capacity to devote time to the protégé and her or his career development in its many aspects and is recognized as one of the essential requirements for the mentorship/protégé relationship. The capacity to meet at regular intervals is essential, but so is the ability to address problems and issues that require immediate attention and unanticipated times. If this commitment is not possible, a mentorship relationship should not be established. It is also clear that this commitment of time limits the number of mentorship relationships in which a given faculty member can truly engage.
4. **Provide formative feedback:** The mentor's role is to provide honest feedback to the protégé but in the category of formative or instructive rather than evaluative feedback. This requires that the mentor provide specific guidance in areas in which the protégé must improve and honest appraisal of areas in which there is success. However, it may be difficult to maintain trust and openness in a relationship in which the mentor has responsibilities for providing evaluative feedback to the protégé such as in the setting of promotion and tenure evaluations. Although a challenge in smaller departments, it is often preferable that a mentor not have a direct role in the promotion and tenure evaluations of the protégé.
5. **Provide inspiration and motivation:** The mentor serves as a role model for the protégé's career development and progress. As such, an important role of the mentor is to provide the inspiration and motivation for the protégé to pursue a career of excellence. Through the mentor's own example, both in career success and career challenges, the mentor demonstrates and teaches the qualities of resilience and commitment that are essential for success in the academic setting.
6. **Foster independence:** As noted above, the ultimate goal of the mentor is to guide the protégé in discovering and realizing his or her own unique career potential. This requires that the protégé develops progressive career independence and less reliance on the mentor's guidance. The mentor and protégé should frequently discuss whether the protégé is demonstrating

increasing career independence, and the mentor should set specific expectations that require progressive career independence.

7. Provide structure and timelines for career achievement: Because career independence requires time, the mentor should help establish a time structure for career development with specific timelines for achievement of career benchmarks. It is strongly suggested that the mentor and protégé develop a written five year career development plan with specific milestones to be achieved over the period. Such a plan provides an important touchstone to evaluate career progress and to identify impediments that must be addressed to assure career advancement.
8. Provide instruction regarding the processes and expectations for promotion and tenure: A significant responsibility of the mentor is assuring that the protégé acquires an understanding of both the expectations and time lines for promotion and the process of application and approval for promotion and tenure when appropriate. Although departments and the College may provide information and orientation to this process, its complexity and fundamental importance to faculty development demands that the mentor play a fundamental role in guiding the protégé through this process.
9. Networking: Career advancement requires developing connections with experts in the protégé's field both within and outside the College and University. The mentor provides a major role in facilitating these connections. In addition, networking includes introduction to national organizations in the protégé's field and establishing service roles in those organizations that can lead to leadership positions. The advocacy of the mentor is essential to allow the protégé to gain national prominence. It is important that the mentor play a role in nominating the protégé for local, regional, and national awards and recognitions that will further contribute to career advancement.

### **EXPECTATIONS FOR THE PROTÉGÉ**

The mentor/protégé relationship requires active participation by both parties. It is obvious that the protégé cannot have a passive role in this relationship. The expectations of the protégé include the following:

1. Honesty: As is the case for the mentor, honesty and open communication are regarded as one of the fundamental characteristics of the protégé. This requires both honesty regarding career goals, the current progress towards career benchmarks, and in expressing any concerns regarding the progress of the mentorship relationship. It is recognized that communicating concerns or dissatisfaction to a mentor may be difficult for a protégé. For this reason it is essential that a system of mentorship oversight be established as discussed below.
2. Respect for the mentor's time: Just as the mentor must be able to devote time to the mentorship relationship, the protégé must respect this commitment in both the request for meetings and during mentor/protégé meetings. It is beneficial to both the mentor and

protégé to make meetings efficient and targeted to specific issues. Guides for effective and time efficient mentor/protégé meetings, such as those listed under “Mentor Support,” are useful to assure effective use of time.

3. Contribute ideas, goals, and career plans: Although the mentor serves as an important guide and counselor for career development, the protégé must contribute his or her own ideas and plans for career growth. This is an important step in establishing career independence. If the relationship is based in part on developing scholarship in the mentor’s own area of expertise, the protégé will ideally contribute original ideas to the mentor’s program as well.
4. Follow time lines for achievements proposed by the mentor: To assure that the mentorship relationship is effective, the protégé should make valid efforts to achieve the career benchmarks and follow timelines outlined by the mentor. It is recognized that this may not always be possible, and identifying impediments to their achievement and solutions to these barriers is a significant component of mentorship meetings and conversations. However, they are only meaningful if an honest effort to achieve these goals has been made.

#### **MENTORSHIP SUPPORT**

The above expectations clearly indicate that effective mentorship requires a wide spectrum of departmental and College support. These include the following:

1. Mentorship resources: The mentors requires resources such as outlines for career development plans, guides for effective and efficient mentorship meetings, and a means to document mentorship meetings. Mentors also require access to resources to address the special needs of protégés that may extend beyond the mentor’s own experience. These include resources addressing the issues of protégés from under-represented ethnic and cultural groups and training in cultural competence. These resources must be provided by the departments and the College.
2. Release time: It is clear that effective mentorship requires a significant commitment of time. Accordingly, mentors must be provided with the time to devote to mentorship. This may require release time from clinical or other administrative commitments without penalty of reduced salary support or reduction of other forms of support.
3. Academic credit: Effective mentorship is essential to the academic advancement of the departments and the College. Accordingly, effective mentorship must be accorded academic credit equivalent to successful publication of manuscripts, acquisition of grant funding, or other recognized achievements that are given credit for academic advancement.
4. Training: Mentorship is a complex process requiring skills in interpersonal relationships, principles of career development, and expertise in specific content areas. The mentor is

essential to the long term progress of the protégé, and accordingly an empiric approach to this process jeopardizes the protégé's career success. Therefore, formal programs in mentorship training at all career stages are required to develop a college wide "mentorship capacity." Early career stage trainees and faculty members benefit from mentorship training both in preparing them for future mentorship roles and to understand the expectations they should hold for their own mentorship relationships. Mid-career faculty must receive this training given their imminent role as career mentors. Senior mentors can further refine mentorship skills and share mentorship expertise through expert round tables and discussion groups. Senior mentors are essential in the training of future mentors. The College and department must play an active role in establishing the variety of training programs that are essential for expanding the mentorship capacity of the College.

### **THE MENTORSHIP PROCESS**

The process of mentorship requires coordination of a wide array of elements both between the mentor and protégé and within the institutional environment. The following have been identified as fundamental elements and guidelines for the mentorship process:

1. **Mentorship Selection:** Identification of the appropriate mentor or mentors is essential to the success of the mentorship process. It is apparent that simple assignment of mentors to protégés is for the most part ineffective and does not assure a successful relationship. So-called "found" mentorship has been shown to be the most common pathway in the College of Medicine. In this process, the faculty member or student identifies his or her own mentor(s) through associations with the mentor or by the mentor's reputation. However, it cannot be expected that all faculty or students can successfully identify appropriate mentors in the absence of an overall framework that facilitates this process. Identification of potential mentors for a faculty candidate should be an intrinsic component of the divisional or departmental leadership's recruitment efforts. The faculty candidate should have the opportunity to meet with potential mentors during recruitment visits to begin the process of mentor selection. The process of mentorship identification should continue with interview of potential mentors and final identification of the appropriate mentor. It is notable that in many nonacademic fields, mentorship selection is accomplished through extensive mentor interviews, and it is the consensus that this process should be implemented in the academic setting. The College, departments, and divisions should facilitate this process through mentorship advisory groups (see below) as well as other aspects of an overall mentorship program.
2. **Mentorship agreements:** After identification of a mentor and agreement by the mentor to service in this capacity, it is recommended that a mentor/protégé agreement be written and signed by the mentor and protégé. The process of constructing this agreement requires that the mentor and protégé openly discuss the expectations and framework of the relationship and avoids misunderstanding of the expectations of the relationship. Sample

mentorship agreements are among the resources that should be provided to mentors by the College and departments.

3. Frequency of meetings: The frequency of mentor/protégé meetings varies greatly with the discipline and career path of the protégé. Faculty who are basic lab scientists will likely interact with the mentor on an almost daily basis. However, these interactions may focus on specific technical and experimental rather than career development issues. In contrast, those with a primary focus on clinical care may not routinely encounter their mentor. The consensus of those contributing to this document is that at a minimum there should be one mentor/protégé meeting every three months specifically dedicated to discussions of career progress, challenges to this process, and setting further goals and development plans. These meetings should be scheduled at a regular interval to assure that they occur. Obviously, meetings may be required at more frequent intervals as required based on challenges to career development or the approach of career milestones including grant applications, manuscript preparation, or promotion and tenure preparation.
4. Career development plan: As noted, a fundamental role of the mentor is to guide the protégé in identifying her or his fundamental career goals. A discussion with the faculty member regarding what areas of expertise he or she will be known for as their career evolves is one approach to identifying these goals. It is strongly recommended that the mentor and protégé collaborate in writing a five-year career development plan with specific career milestones identified throughout this period. Such a development plan provides a framework for the measurement of career progress and for identification of challenges to career advancement and specific needs that will assure career success. Example career development plans and templates are among the resources that should be provided by the College and departments to mentors.
5. Mentorship diaries: It is important that the mentor document the discussions and results of mentor/protégé meetings. Extensive documentation is not required, but notation of items discussed, problems that may have arisen, and action items should be clearly noted. Example diaries are resources that can be provided to the mentor by the College and departments.
6. Mentorship oversight: Systems are required to monitor mentorship within divisions, departments, and the College. In some College's this consists of an associate dean or similar appointment who is charged with assuring effective mentorship of all faculty. Other strategies include development of senior mentorship advisory committees consisting of faculty with extensive experience with successful mentorship. Oversight is required to assure that mentorship has been identified for all faculty and students, and to identify and help correct problems that may arise in the mentorship relationships. Oversight faculty provide an opportunity for both protégé's and mentors to seek advice regarding challenges in the mentorship relationship that may be difficult to address directly in the mentorship relationship. As noted above, it may be difficult for a junior faculty member or student to

discuss dissatisfaction with the mentorship relationship with a senior and established mentor. In this way, mentorship oversight groups or faculty can mediate challenges that arise in the mentorship relationship and resolve challenges at an early stage. Mentorship oversight also requires periodic check in with the protégé's and mentors regarding the success of the mentorship relation. This may consist of periodic brief surveys or questionnaires or periodic meetings with mentors and protégé's.

7. Facilitation of peer mentorship: The College, departments, and divisions should facilitate peer mentorship meetings to allow faculty and students to share their own challenges and solutions to common problems in career and scholarly development. This may consist of sponsoring periodic small discussion groups, possibly with senior mentors in attendance, and formation of small learning communities.
8. Mentorship as an expectation: The College, departments, and divisions should establish effective mentorship as an expectation for faculty and faculty leadership. Annual performance reviews should include reporting of mentorship activity with credit being given for effective mentorship. Similarly, junior faculty should list whether they have established a mentorship relation in their annual reviews. As an expectation, establishment of effective mentorship programs and oversight of these programs should be included as a metric for evaluation of senior leadership in the College, departments, and divisions.