

Astronomy Department Junior Faculty Mentoring Program

Junior faculty will be supported by meetings each semester with the Department Chair and (separately) a mentoring committee.

Composition of the Mentoring Committee:

Two tenured faculty, normally (but not necessarily) from within the department.

Appointed by the Department Chair, in consultation with the junior faculty member during his/her first semester at Columbia. The committee can change year-to-year.

Charge:

- provide support and advice on how to succeed at Columbia and in academia
- serve as a sounding board and advocate (if necessary)
- provide feedback on research
- help orient the junior faculty member within Columbia (e.g., on finding available resources for research and teaching)

The junior faculty member is **not obligated to follow any advice, nor does the advice constitute a roadmap for or guarantee of promotion or success.**

Topics mentors might discuss with mentees include:

- The timetable for and process of reviews and promotions leading up to and including tenure.
- General research agenda and how to prioritize among research projects
- Obtaining grant funding
- Suitability of publication outlets and formats
- Gaining visibility in the field
- Balance of research, teaching, and service, strategies for teaching, and for advising graduate students
- Work/life balance issues (including “infrastructure” issues such as dealing with the Columbia housing office, schools, etc.).

Meetings:

Mentors meet at least twice annually with the junior faculty member (all together, or individually, as the junior faculty member prefers). Mentors should meet with an incoming faculty member during her or his first semester.

Mentors should inform the department chair that this meeting has taken place, but **should not report on the substance of the meeting, nor provide an evaluation of the junior faculty member.** The junior faculty member should feel free to ask mentors for feedback and advice at other times when needed.

Mentoring meetings should be informal and collegial conversations; junior faculty should feel free to request that conversations, or sensitive aspects thereof be kept confidential.

While these meetings are confidential and are not part of the review process, the Junior Faculty should be aware that any members of their committee who are senior faculty in the Astronomy Department will eventually be participating in the evaluation of their tenure case.

Appendix: Sample list of questions to guide meetings between mentors and junior faculty members. This should not be seen as a mere check-list, nor as a constraint on discussions, but rather as a way to foster a broad-ranging conversation.

Research:

- What papers are under review? Where?
- What specific plans do you have to submit work for review in the future? Where?
- Are there co-authors on your work? Who, for what papers/books? Are your co-authors senior to you, junior to you, or peers?
- What do you see as the overarching theme or contribution of your research?
- Are there infrastructural problems (e.g., IRB approvals, need for RAs or travel money, need to identify research assistants) that are making progress on research difficult?
- What efforts have you made (and do you plan to make) to seek outside support for your research? Do you have questions about the process of seeking outside support or have you faced issues in doing so?
- What opportunities have you had or will you have to present your work outside Columbia (in department seminars, major conferences, small-scale conferences, etc.)
- What do you hope to have achieved vis-à-vis concrete research outputs by the time (a) of your next A&S review, and (b) you are scheduled to come up for tenure
- Are there particular parts of your work that you would like more substantive feedback on from your mentor and/or from other faculty?

Teaching:

- What courses have you taught?
- What has been the feedback from the students? (Consult course evaluations where available)?
- How many grad students are you advising formally? How many informally?
- How much time do you spend talking to students (graduate or undergraduate) about issues other than their research (eg personal problems)?
- During the past semester, what proportion of your work time do you estimate was devoted to any aspect of teaching?
- Are there aspects of your teaching assignments that you feel are unduly burdensome? If so, why?
- Have you had an issues or problems in working with TAs (or know how to utilize them)?
- Have you had any issues or problems in assigning grades to students?

Service

- What service have you provided in the department?
- What service have you provided at Columbia but outside the department?
- What service have provided outside the University?
- Are there any specific requests for service that you would like to say no to or that you worry are putting undue burden on your time?
- More generally, do you feel you can say no to service requests when you need to?
- Approximately how many articles do you review for journals a year? Do you feel like you know when to say yes and when to say no to such requests?

Other

- Are there issues not covered above that affect your ability to achieve your goals?
- Are you facing any work-life issues (housing, schooling, day care, etc.) that make it difficult for you to do your job well.