

## **Mentoring in the Philosophy Department: Summary of Policy and Practices**

### **Introduction**

Junior faculty are hired in the Philosophy Department with the expectation that these promising young scholars will become outstanding teachers in the Department and will achieve the stature in their field (or fields) of research and publication expected of tenured faculty members at Columbia University.

The path to tenure includes a number of formal reviews, prior to the tenure review itself, that junior faculty go through:

- a 1<sup>st</sup>-year confirming review
- a 3<sup>rd</sup>-year developmental review
- a 5<sup>th</sup>-year critical review

Important details about these reviews are documented at

<http://fas.columbia.edu/chair-resources/promotion-and-tenure>

### **Formal mentoring**

Since September, 2012, the Philosophy Department has had in place a mentoring program for our junior faculty. The mentoring program is **not** an element of the formal review process, but one of its main goals (among others) is to provide constructive advice to junior faculty members about navigating the trajectory leading up to the 5<sup>th</sup>-year review and beyond. The Chair of the Department assigns a senior faculty member—since September, 2015, **two** senior faculty members—to each junior faculty member. The mentors are typically selected on the basis of overlap with, and expertise in, the junior faculty member's principal areas of research; and they are normally members of the Philosophy Department, though in some cases it may make most

sense to turn to someone from another department as one of the two mentors. Over the course of a junior faculty member's time at Columbia, the mentors may change, e.g. if a mentor is on leave, or at the request of the junior faculty member.

The role of the mentors is

- as just mentioned, to provide support and guidance on how to prepare for the 3<sup>rd</sup>- and 5<sup>th</sup>-year reviews and, more broadly, on how to succeed at Columbia and in academia
- to provide feedback on the junior faculty members' research, teaching, and service
- to provide advice to junior faculty members regarding resources (both at Columbia and outside Columbia) for research and teaching
- to serve, if necessary, as advocates for the junior faculty
- and, most importantly, to provide advice and guidance so that our junior faculty can achieve their full potential—in both their research and teaching

The mentors are

- to meet with the junior faculty member assigned to them at least once a semester (all together or individually, depending on the individual junior faculty member's preferences) during the junior faculty member's first three years at Columbia, and at least once a year in subsequent years
- to let the Chair know that these meetings have taken place; **the mentors, however, should not report on the substance of the meetings, nor provide an evaluation of the junior faculty member**
- to be available at other times for additional meetings, if the junior faculty member would like to have such a meeting
- to treat the mentoring meetings as informal and collegial conversations; the default stance accordingly is that **the content of these conversations should be treated as confidential**, unless the junior faculty member specifically indicates otherwise

*NB: The mentoring program **does not provide, and is not intended to provide**, either critical evaluations of the junior faculty members' teaching and research, or official assessments of their progress. Junior faculty members **are not required to follow the advice offered by their***

*mentors; nor does the advice constitute a roadmap for, or a promise of, promotion or success.*

## **Informal mentoring**

The Philosophy Department is also strongly committed to informal mentoring. Discussion—in particular, the posing of, and responding to, questions and objections—is central to the practice of philosophy. Feedback from a range of senior colleagues on work-in-progress by junior faculty members can thus be very valuable. Similarly, any number of senior colleagues besides the official mentors can provide useful suggestions about a variety of practical matters, including: choosing which conferences to participate in, how best to prepare work for submission to particular publishers or journals, enhancing one’s effectiveness in the classroom, and so on. In this sense all members of the senior faculty can play a significant mentoring role for the junior faculty.

## **Appendix**

The list that follows is taken, with some changes and additions, from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences’ website. See

<http://fas.columbia.edu/faculty-resources/junior-faculty-resources>

These are some of the topics and questions to be addressed in mentoring meetings. But this list is in no way meant to be exhaustive: junior faculty members and their mentors should obviously feel free to discuss any other matters of interest or concern to them.

Concerning research

- What do you see as the overarching theme, or the central contribution, of your research?
- Do you have questions about whether it is better to write a book or a series of articles?

- What opportunities have you had, or will you have, to present your work outside Columbia? (In departmental colloquia at other universities; at major conferences; at smaller conferences or workshops; and so on.)
- Who do you think is the main audience for your work, and, based on this, who do you think are likely to be the external evaluators of your work, should you come up for tenure at Columbia?
- What do you hope to have achieved *vis-à-vis* concrete research outputs by the time (i) of your next A&S review, and (ii) when you are scheduled to come up for tenure?
- What books/papers of yours are under review? Where?
- What specific plans do you have to submit work for review in the future? Where?
- Is any of your work co-authored? Which papers/books? Who are your co-authors? Are they senior to you, junior to you, or peers?
- If you are writing a book or a sequence of interrelated articles, do you have plans to organize a mini-conference around your work on this project/these projects? Note that the Department may have funds available to support, at least partially, such an event.
- Are there particular parts of your work that you would like more substantive feedback on from your mentors and/or from other faculty?
- Are there infrastructural problems (e.g., IRB approvals, need for RAs or travel money, etc.) that are making progress on your 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?

#### About teaching

- What courses have you taught?
- What has been the feedback from the students?
- How many grad students are you advising formally? How many informally?
- Are you supervising any senior theses? Or other independent work by undergraduates?
- How much time do you spend talking to students (graduate or undergraduate) about their academic work?
- How much time do you spend talking to students (graduate or undergraduate) about issues other than their academic work (e.g. personal problems)?

- During the past semester, what proportion of your work time would you estimate was devoted to any and all aspects of teaching?
- Are there aspects of your teaching assignments that you feel are unduly burdensome? If so, which ones, and why?
- Have you had any issues or problems in working with TAs?
- Do you feel you know how best to utilize TAs?
- Have you faced any issues or problems in assigning grades to students?
- What courses would you like to teach in the future?
- What resources would be helpful for developing a new course you are interested in teaching?

#### On service

- What service have you provided in the Department?
- What service have you provided at Columbia, but outside the Department?
- What service have you 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 burdens on your time?
- More generally, do you feel you can say 'no' to service requests when you need to?
- Approximately how many articles per year do you referee for journals? How many book manuscripts for academic presses? Do you feel that you know when to say 'yes,' and when to say 'no,' to such requests for refereeing?

#### Other matters:

- What are your plans for academic leave in the coming year? In future years?
- Are there issues not covered above that affect your ability to achieve your academic goals?
- Are you facing any work-life issues (housing, schooling, day care, etc.) that make it difficult for you to do your job well?
- Are you facing other issues (e.g. health problems) that make it difficult for you to do your job well?