

## **Department of Religion**

### **Junior faculty mentoring**

adopted May 2015

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of our mentoring program is to provide junior faculty members of our department with support, encouragement, and advice on how to succeed at Columbia and in academia. Mentoring should begin during a new faculty member's first year at Columbia and continue until tenure. Constructive mentoring and reviewing of tenure-track faculty helps faculty to meet high standards of rigor, depth and innovation in scholarship, and to realize their full potential as scholars, teachers, and members of the academic community. Given all that is at stake, the mentoring and reviewing of tenure-track junior faculty is some of the most important work we do.

Faculty mentoring should include all aspects of academic life, including the challenging process of balancing research, teaching, service, and family obligations, and should address the needs of junior faculty as they advance through the ranks. Faculty mentoring may also take the form of department social events, invitations to professional conferences, and research collaborations, in addition to the pairing of junior faculty with a mentoring committee composed of more senior faculty to develop an individual mentoring plan.

Our goal is to promote the development of junior faculty mentoring that is attentive to differences in the backgrounds and situations of junior faculty. We recognize that, for a variety of reasons, some junior faculty members may face special challenges in receiving the kinds of informal mentoring that help their careers. We will seek to ensure that mentoring is provided in formal and informal settings that are fully supportive and inclusive of such faculty and of the scholarly interests for which they were hired.

Mentoring programs are **NOT** intended to provide a critical evaluation or an assessment of progress. This is done by the third year and fifth year reviews. Faculty mentors may serve on review committees, but are not obliged to do so.

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

#### **Development of Mentoring Plan**

As soon as a candidate accepts a position, the chair should work with his/her colleagues to develop a mentoring plan for the new faculty member. This should be discussed in consultation with all senior faculty members in the department in order to maximize useful input. The prospective faculty member should be consulted in developing this plan. The plan should include attention to teaching, graduate supervision, research and service obligations. This mentoring

plan may include participation by other members of the department and external faculty as appropriate.

*Chair's role:* Where tenure-track junior faculty hold joint appointments, the chair should review their respective requirements to ensure that they are consistent with the expectations placed on faculty without joint appointments. Particular attention should be paid to teaching and service requirements to make sure that junior faculty are not doing “double duty” in, for example, teaching large introductory lectures or holding demanding committee assignments in both departments. Irrespective of whether the junior faculty holds single or joint appointments, the chair should review their work assignments carefully to ensure that they are not being unduly burdened by an excessive number of new course preparations, large classes, or demanding service assignments. In assigning tenure-track junior faculty to departmental service, the Chair should attempt to provide them with assignments that could serve as mentoring contexts in which the junior faculty learns about the values and operations of the department and the university through their committee work with senior faculty colleagues.

At the end of each academic year, the chair should ask the junior faculty member for feedback on the effectiveness of the mentoring committee.

*Appointment of mentoring committee:* A central feature of the mentoring plan is the appointment of a mentoring committee. The committee will be appointed by the Department Chair, in consultation with the junior faculty member as soon as s/he accepts the offer to join our department and no later than his/her first semester at Columbia. The committee can change year-to-year.

*Composition of mentoring committee:* The committee will be composed of two tenured faculty members. It is preferable - when applicable and suitable – that one of the two will be from a different department or school at Columbia, thereby providing the junior faculty member with a different perspective and a broader set of connections.

*Meetings:* Mentors will meet at least twice annually with the junior faculty member (both together, or individually, as the junior faculty member prefers). Mentors should meet with an incoming faculty member during her or his first month to orient the junior faculty member to the department and the university. This early meeting is crucial in helping the junior faculty to navigate a new academic environment and to welcome the junior faculty to our department.

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 after this initial meeting.

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

*Charge of mentoring committee:* mentors should seek to:

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

*Topics:* Sample list of questions to guide meetings between mentors and the junior faculty member:

- *General research agenda and how to prioritize among research projects*  
Examples
  - Do you have books/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?
  - Are there particular parts of your work that you would like more substantive feedback on from your mentor and/or from other faculty?
- *Obtaining funding and/or opportunities for research leaves*  
Examples
  - 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 are your leave plans in the coming year?
- *Suitability of publication outlets and formats*  
Examples
  - Do you have questions about how to balance writing a book and other types of publications? [
  - Do you have questions about how much you are expected to have published and what publishers/journals you should be working with?
  - 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.
- *Gaining visibility in the field*
- Examples
  - When would be the most suitable stage of manuscript-completion to organize a mini-conference around the book?

- What opportunities have you had or will you have to present your work outside Columbia (in department seminars, major conferences, small-scale conferences, etc.)?
- Who do you think is the main audience for your work, and based on this who do you think are likely external evaluators should you come up for tenure at Columbia?
- *Questions regarding teaching: strategies for teaching, and for advising graduate students*  
Examples
  - 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 (e.g. 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?

*Questions regarding the appropriate level of service to the department, the university, and the profession:*

- 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?
- Are there issues not covered above that affect your ability to achieve your goals?
- *Work/life balance issues (including “infrastructure” issues such as dealing with the Columbia housing office, schools, etc.).*  
Examples
  - Are you facing any work-life issues (housing, schooling, day care, etc.) that make it difficult for you to do your job well?

*Other forms of mentoring apart from the committee:*

- The department should seek to create departmental/program events, such as mini-conferences and workshops, which include new faculty in various roles (audience, discussants and presenters), make them welcome as members of the community, and serve as modes of informal mentoring.

- The department should support collaborative teaching and research, team teaching, and interdisciplinary teaching efforts on the part of junior faculty, both for the intrinsic value of such work and because collaborative work is itself a form of mentoring. To the extent possible, this work should be given full credit.

### **Mentoring resources**

<http://vpf.berkeley.edu/mentoring/other-mentoring-resources>