Faculty Mentoring: Tips and Checklist for Chairs and Heads

These tips are adapted from the University of Michigan ADVANCE Program guide [*Giving and Getting Career Advice*](http://advance.umich.edu/resources/CareerAdvising.pdf). Much of the content is aimed at faculty in disciplines with a high proportion of external grant funding from the NIH or NSF, but the tips and checklist can easily be rewritten to suit your department or college needs. **==============================================================================**

# Tips for department chairs and heads

Department chairs and program directors set the tone for how many faculty in the unit—senior and junior—will view the issue of career advising. If the chair or director does not appear to truly value the practice, or merely gives it lip service, it will be clear to all concerned that it is not a valued activity in the unit. By taking career advising seriously, and consistently communicating that it is part of the responsibility of all faculty, chairs and directors can help create a climate in which better career advising takes place.

1. Build into the evaluations of senior faculty a share of responsibility for mentoring new colleagues. For example, during reviews for merit increases, chairs and directors can take into account the quality and quantity of career advising by asking explicitly for this information on the annual review forms. Have senior faculty document in their annual report their efforts to assist junior faculty in getting research grants, establishing themselves as independent researchers, and having their work published in peer-reviewed outlets. Collaborative research—especially when the junior scientist is the lead author—may also be a sign of a productive career advising relationship. You may also want to ask junior faculty to indicate which senior faculty have been helpful to them, as a sort of check on these self-reports. [*Works*](http://works.umn.edu) has dedicated screens for reporting mentoring activities that will appear on a faculty member’s annual activity report.
2. Take multiple opportunities to communicate to senior colleagues the importance of providing career advice to junior faculty.
3. Recognize that senior colleagues who support junior research faculty may be conflicted regarding the development of independence of their junior collaborators. Openly discuss the professional expectations and responsibilities your senior colleague has toward research faculty they support.
4. Ensure that the procedures and standards involved in the tenure and promotion processes are clear to junior faculty and they understand how they might move from the research to the instructional track.
5. Ensure that all junior faculty know about family friendly University policies.
6. Create opportunities that encourage informal interaction between junior and senior faculty. You might create a fund for ordering pizza, a lunch budget, a gift card for a local coffee shop for them to share, etc.
7. Provide a “tip sheet” for new arrivals. A tip sheet would include items such as contact people for key services around the department or unit. More broadly, check to ensure that the newly-arrived faculty have access to the information, services, and materials (e.g., computing or lab equipment) needed to function effectively in the environment.
8. Recognize that senior faculty may not be completely certain how best to engage in career advising. Help them! For example, sponsor a lunch for senior faculty in which the topic of discussion is career advising and faculty can exchange information and ideas on the subject.
9. Work with the junior faculty member to develop a career development plan. This includes encouraging them to develop an independent scholarly reputation through participation as a principal investigator or co-principal investigator on research grants, sole or primary authorship of significant research papers, and/or co-advising of graduate students.
10. Use the annual review and conference with the junior faculty member as an opportunity to discuss her/his accomplishments and goals for the future. Recognize that junior faculty may find it difficult to assess the significance of criticism; be careful to frame criticism in a constructive way, but also be as clear as possible.
11. Use email as a mechanism to ensure the entire faculty has equal access to key decisions, information, and career opportunities.

# Checklist to share with junior and senior faculty in the department: Questions to ask and to answer

This is a list of questions junior and senior faculty may use to remind them of issues they need to discuss.

| **Department or Research Unit Culture** | * Who are the key people in the department or research unit? * What are appropriate ways to raise different kinds of concerns or issues and with whom? * Who can help me set up an email account, find out about resources like copying or processes like grading? * How do people find out about and get nominated for awards and prizes? * What organizations are important to join? |
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| **Research** | * Can you tell me about the Institutional Review Board and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, which provide approval for human and animal subject experiments? * How do I set up my lab? * How do I get grants? * How do I build grants and plan supplements to fit soft money realities? * Are my grant proposals appropriate for this department or unit? * Are there research or equipment projects being developed by other faculty in the department that I can or should get involved with? * May I read some successful grant proposals, as close to my research area as possible? * What conferences should I attend? * Are there people that I should collaborate with? * How do you get on professional association panels? * What are the journals to publish in? * Have any colleagues published there? * Am I publishing enough? * How can I increase my visibility in the field? |
| **Teaching** | * What classes do I need to teach? * How do I get a good teaching schedule? * How do I get to teach important classes? * How do I deal with sticky situations or problems with students? * How do I encourage graduate students to join my research project? * Can I serve on dissertation committees? * Do I have enough graduate students? * How are teaching evaluations handled and weighted? |
| **Service** | * What are the important committees to serve on? * How can I get nominated to be on them? * Are there committees to avoid? * How is this work documented? |
| **Promotion and Tenure** | * What are the department’s criteria for promotion and tenure? * What or who can clarify these criteria? * What would you have wanted to know when you began the tenure process? * How does one build a promotion or tenure file? * Who sits on the tenure committee and how are they selected? * How should I prepare for the annual review? * Is my job description matching the work I do? Are my research, teaching, service and grants of an appropriate level? * Who should I meet in the institution, in the discipline and even worldwide? |