

Mentoring and Being Mentored after Tenure

This advice derives from a 2017 Field Conversation co-sponsored by ASTR's Mentoring Committee, with moderator Tracy C. Davis (Northwestern University), Patrick Anderson (University of California-San Diego), Suk-Young Kim (University of California-Los Angeles), and Henry Bial (University of Kansas).¹

Important Terms:

Mentor/Mentee: colleagues who commit to a mentoring relationship geared toward enhancing the career advancement of one colleague and the professional satisfaction of both; usually, the mentor is not in the mentee's direct line of supervision. The relationship focuses on:

- The mentee's emergent, long-term goals
- Opportunities, options, and incentives that serve long-term goals
- Enhancing exploration, agility, and feasibility
- Developing an actionable development plan that addresses all "pillars" of promotion review (e.g. research and artistry, teaching, service inside and outside the institution, consultation, external profile) in relation to institution-specific requirements and priorities

Sponsor: Someone in a position to nominate a colleague for new opportunities.

Coach: Whereas managers or mentors may help solve problems, give advice, or make suggestions relevant to a faculty member's professional goals, workplace coaches generally provide feedback, challenge thinking, and ask questions geared toward an employee's better fulfillment of others' agendas.²

About Mid-Career Advancement

Mentoring relationships benefit from clear goal-setting. For example:

With Assistant Professors

1. Onboard and Set Goals
2. Cultivate the Pedagogue
3. Prepare for 3rd-year Review
4. Prepare for Tenure Review

With Associate Professors

1. Review Profile and Set Goals
2. Cultivate Administrative Leadership
3. Grow the Profile
4. Prepare for Promotion Review

This focuses on what the individual is doing and the arc of how it meets personal goals as well as milestones that are institutionally set and rewarded.

There is little guidance about what it is like to continue to build a profile after tenure. But the clock keeps ticking.
(Patrick Anderson)

Why career planning is helpful at this point

- Associate professors can be swept into administrative roles and have little guidance about what it is like to continue to build a profile after tenure: women, faculty of color, and other minorities can find this particularly true.

- Mentoring relationships within and/or outside one's institution can help associate professors keep on track. Learn to weigh opportunities: what is truly important among the various tasks presented? Sometimes saying "no" is the best option, but on what grounds?³ It can be challenging to recognize which responsibilities meet your goals as well as those of institutions and which administrative tasks get the recognition they deserve.
- Consider the impact that your research will have on your family. When and how can you get research done, and who other than yourself does this affect? Should you consider your choice of methods, or sub-field, in conjunction with your other responsibilities at home and at work?
- In many institutions, administrative skills and service are not rewarded as strongly as research. But the pathways are not uniform at all kinds of institutions: find out how what is prioritized at your institution.
- The thing that brings you to your colleagues' or institution's attention, and then results in a new opportunity, might simply be because you showed up a lot. But this does not mean you are ready, or right, for the opportunity.
- There are two especially terrible reasons for associate professors to agree to administrative appointments: feeling pressured, and feeling flattered. Beware of both.
- Most administrative and leadership positions are inherently cyclical, e.g. department chair or journal editor. If they are asking you now, you can be reasonably confident that you'll be asked again at some point down the road.

Try to think about your personal life in tandem with your research. Whatever you do, no matter how hard you try, life is going to show up.
(Suk-Young Kim)

What to prioritize in a mentoring relationship at this stage?

- At all career points, mentors—usually more senior faculty—can be invaluable guides.
 - Mentees:** build multiple, explicit, longitudinal mentoring relationships with trusted colleagues suited to mentor you at this stage. These mentors may respectively help you reflect on different aspects of your life and work this can be especially helpful. Establish a network of mentors who address your various needs (e.g. scholarship, artistry, teaching, administration). They may be within your department, elsewhere in your institution, or in ASTR. Our field is relatively small, which means it can be easier to make and maintain contacts. You may be at a similar career point, or not; in either case, sharing experiences can be affirming and provide strategic guidance.
 - Mentors:** help your colleague reflect on the constitution of their mentor network. How does this also relate to sponsors who can provide external letters for promotion review?
- Build time to meet into each other's schedules.
 - Mentees:** set an agenda for each meeting.
 - Mentors:** help your mentee be mindful of goals and timelines.
- Especially if you wish to explore a career in administration, build up sponsor networks *in addition to mentor networks*.
- Having lunches with senior colleagues can be great—advice is good—but senior colleagues might also be mindful of what they can do to assist associate professors' development. Are administrative responsibilities appropriately timed, fairly distributed, and well-sequenced for the individual? Are

they coupled with opportunities to attend professional development training so that new skills are developed in sync with new expectations?

Sometimes mentoring is spontaneously offered. Can you recognize this when it happens? Watch for these “contact moments” and seize opportunities to follow up. Then, when your career is more advanced, look for opportunities to pay it forward. Make a random call, *just because someone else did that for you.*
(Henry Bial)

Administrative approaches to mentoring

- Build up—and pay back—sponsorship networks. Maybe a particular opportunity is not right for you, but you can suggest someone else.
- If your department does not have an organized program for mentor-matching, take initiative and invent it. When you have the opportunity to advocate for this to become a department-wide then school-wide policy, work for this. Usually it requires someone—a chair or dean—to ensure that the initial matches are instituted and that the structure is sustainable. Contribute to this culture of mentoring and show its value, both from the perspective of being a mentor and a mentee.
- Working in leadership can give you experience helping others prepare for promotion to full professor. Get advice and learn.

Mentoring chains that link undergrads to grad students, master’s students to doctoral students, grad students to post-docs, contingent faculty to tenure-line faculty, assistant professors to associate professors, associate professors to full professors, and full professors to emeritus faculty emphasize the importance of building relationships at all points of our development within communities of learners and knowledge-makers. We need mentors to figure out which grad programs to seek out, *and* we need mentors to help us make conscious decisions about the later phases of our careers.

(Tracy C. Davis)

¹ Special thanks to Jennifer Goodlander and Kyna Hamill and for making records of this session.

² [Center for Creative Leadership](#).

³ Robin Bernstein, [“The Art of ‘No,’”](#) *Chronicle of Higher Education* 19 March 2017.