

**CLAS Faculty Development Committee
Mentoring Recommendations to CLAS Units
Approved April 2006**

The FDC has had much discussion about the word “mentoring” and what it should mean. The Department of Philosophy’s preamble to their 2005-06 mentoring plan resonates with us:

The new members of our community need a sense of human connection, a source of sympathetic guidance and advice, a chance to blow off steam, someone from whom to hear about key events in the department's history, and so on. These sorts of mentoring benefits are freely given where a real relationship exists; it seems crucial that the person being mentored be allowed and encouraged to choose a mentor rather than having one imposed on them.

At the same time, there is a genuine need for assisting faculty in acclimating to their jobs in the first year, even through more mundane issues that at first appear more centered on “information transfer.” The FDC likes the terminology “peer advisor” for relationships that are arranged on behalf of first year faculty, while reserving the term “mentor” for relationships that faculty members choose for themselves. One of our recommendations is that advisors are appointed for the first year and, moreover, that advisors strongly encourage and facilitate the development of mentoring relationships involving the newly-hired faculty member.

We offer the following list of observations and recommendations for departments as they work to welcome, integrate, and develop the faculty they hire. To the degree that the department culture accepts, we urge each unit to be explicit in their plan about how peer advising and mentoring will occur so that the new hire, the unit, the chair, and the dean are well aware of what is expected of all involved.

- The department chair should play the role of “career sponsor.” That is, the chair should endeavor to promote an environment for new faculty in which they can develop professionally and become successful. Thus, the department chair should somehow be the epicenter of the advising and mentoring process, even if this means delegating the vast majority of it.
- For each newly-hired faculty member, the chair should appoint a set of at least 2 people (one of whom might be the unit head) to serve as “peer advisors”: that is, peer advisors are points of reference with whom regular meetings are established to assist the new faculty member in negotiating the first year. It is important that more than one experienced faculty member be involved in this advising process to provide greater diversity of viewpoints and more accountability.

If not involved personally with this scheduled advising of new faculty, the unit head should meet individually with new hires at least twice in the fall semester and at least once in the winter semester to discuss how the first year is progressing.

- Peer observations of teaching are valuable and are strongly encouraged by the FDC. Peer advisors should be charged with encouraging newly hired faculty members to spend time visiting colleagues' classes and also to have their own classes visited. These class visits in the first year are intended to be formative; they must not be used in personnel deliberations.

However these visits are arranged, they should be done in a way that is comfortable for the newly-hired faculty member. One option is to have the new person visit the peer advisors' classes first, and then have the visits reciprocated. Another option is to have visits arranged by colleagues external to the unit, such as by someone from the FTLC. New faculty might also take advantage of the FTLC's list of open classrooms to visit faculty from different disciplines on campus who have achieved recognition for their teaching effectiveness.

- Midterm teaching evaluations are yet another valuable source of feedback for the improvement of teaching effectiveness; the FDC strongly recommends that all new faculty use them. While these should be confidential and only for use by the newly hired faculty member, s/he could choose to share these with peer advisors or mentors. Regardless, these evaluations should not be used in formal personnel deliberations. These evaluations should therefore be administered by the faculty member and the results delivered only to her/him.

Peer advisors should be charged with discussing the importance of midterm evaluations with new hires, assisting the new hire in making arrangements for the administration of such evaluations, and being available to discuss them at the person's request.

- Peer advising should occur on a regular schedule with a reasonably planned schedule of topics in order to familiarize new faculty with fundamental day-to-day issues that are involved in academic life.

Ideally, these regular meetings should always include a discussion centered on how the new faculty member's teaching is going: are healthy relationships with students being established? Is there evidence students are learning and growing? Are there concerns about things that are not going well? Are there new strategies being attempted? Etc.

In addition, advising meetings should include topics such as:

- Class Lists, Syllabi, Blackboard, Department Website, the R:\, N:\, & L:\ drives, etc.

- Office Procedures (Copying, Reimbursements, Student Graders, Business Cards, etc.)
- Scheduling & Staffing Process (selecting future teaching assignments)
- The Personnel Process
- Teaching Evaluations
- designing useful midterm questions/evaluations
- Final Exams & Final Grades
- Student Advising, Student Clubs, Awards, etc.
- Search Process
- Information Technology & Technology Funds
- Conference Attendance & Travel Support
- Faculty Activity Reports (FARs) & Salary Adjustment
- Student Evaluations from Fall Semester
- Choosing Textbooks
- Alternate Assignment Requests
- Summer Plans
- Convocations & Commencement
- Important contact people in the university outside your department: FTLC, Counseling Center, etc.

Certainly this peer advising should include discussion of how faculty can make effective use of department COT staff.

- Units are strongly encouraged to provide opportunities for socialization that will enable new faculty to make connections. While this can happen through department meetings, group grading sessions, or other events focused on working together, it would be ideal if departments can provide additional, more social fora in which mentoring and peer relationships can develop spontaneously. For example, one approach might be for the department to sponsor experienced faculty taking new hires to lunch.
- For faculty with one year or less of full time university teaching experience, service commitments for the first year should be limited. We recommend that such faculty not serve on any committees during their first year, and that departments not expect significant other service from new hires during that year, so that new faculty may focus their energies on growing as teachers and scholars. For faculty hired with greater experience, initial service commitments should be commensurate with rank and experience. For all new faculty, peer advisors and the department chair should work to ensure that the service load is a balanced one that enables faculty to grow as teachers and scholars, especially during their early time at GVSU. The chair should assist in protecting new faculty from service workloads that are inconsistent with the goals of the individual and the unit.
- An essential part of peer advising in this first year should be to encourage new faculty to develop mentoring relationships with peers. While this might occur with

the appointed peer advisors, this is not necessarily expected. Ideally the new faculty member will, by the end of the first year, begin to engage in a mentoring relationship with one or more department peers, as well as one or more colleagues in a unit (or possibly even university) other than their own. One option is to participate in programs offered by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, such as the Faculty Associates Program or an Essential Teaching Seminar.

- Peer advising should also be arranged at the dean's level for new department chairs to assist them with the transition to a new and challenging position within the university. For example, many professional organizations offer "department chair workshops" at conferences, and the college could encourage and fund the attendance of such workshops by all new department chairs.