Guide to Best Practices for Mentoring at Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences

Mentoring Committee Purpose. Faculty peer mentoring committees are intended to promote the successful professional development of faculty at the ranks of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Academic Specialist. The mentoring committee is formed and functions according to the Department's current By-Laws Section 3.7.5 and Appendix E. The primary purpose of the mentoring committee is to help the mentee grow and succeed in their career at Michigan State University. The mentoring committees should provide the faculty mentees a positive, supportive environment to enhance their career development as well as strategically prepare for the application of reappointment, promotion/tenure (or continuing appointment), and/or promotion in rank. The mentoring committees should provide the mentees with impartial, candid, and constructive guidance and feedback, including assessment of their progress and areas of strength and weakness at least once per year. Everyone in the mentoring process should be mindful of the power differentials that may exist and foster open-minded, transparent, equal, and respectful mentor-mentee interactions.

Mentoring Committee Composition. The peer mentoring committee should consist of at least three persons, jointly selected by the Department Chairperson and the faculty mentee. The mentoring committee members for Assistant Professors and Academic Specialists should hold a higher academic rank. The mentoring committee composition can be changed if the needs of the mentee evolve, the mentee or a mentor deems that there is no longer a good fit, or there are pertinent personnel changes, after consultation with the Department Chairperson. The changes in the mentoring committee (e.g., members and chair assignment) can occur anytime and could be beneficial after certain career milestones of the mentee (e.g., reappointment, award of tenure, and promotion in rank) and reassessing the mentoring committee.

Mentoring Committee Best Practices. The mentoring committee should provide faculty mentees a supporting environment to establish career foundations in research, teaching, extension/outreach, and service, in alignment with the mentee's appointment. The mentoring committee should help the mentee navigate the university system. Mentors should stay current with the process of reappointment, promotion/tenure (or continuing appointment), and/or promotion in rank and communicate clear and transparent information about expectations to the mentee or direct the mentee to the right sources for more information. Mentors and mentees are encouraged to attend the annual university-level and college-level workshops on reappointment, promotion/tenure (or continuing appointment), and/or promotion in rank. Mentees are encouraged to seek advice and support from the mentoring committee without fear of requesting help being perceived as weakness.

The mentors and faculty mentee should meet at least once per year during the Spring semester before the department's Spring meeting on reappointment, promotion/tenure (or continuing appointment), and/or promotion in rank (hereafter promotion meeting), or at any time with one or more mentors when particular advice is needed. In the event of the mentee is on leave (e.g., sabbatical, parental, and other types of extended leaves), there is flexibility in the committee meeting and reporting, after consultation with the Chairperson and the mentoring committee. Following the mentoring committee meeting, a concise committee report should be prepared, clearly summarizing the effort of the mentee in job responsibilities, and visibility of effort (such as scholarly activities and output). The mentoring committee report should also summarize issues and challenges raised by the mentee, and other topics discussed. The mentee has the right of confidentiality for certain discussion, and at the request of the mentee the mentoring committee and individual mentors should keep such discussion confidential. The mentoring committees should provide the mentees non-biased and constructive assessment of their annual

performance including areas of strength and areas requiring future improvement. For mentee candidates with upcoming promotion action, the mentoring committee should reach a recommendation for or against the promotion action. Mentee candidates considering early promotion must have the support of their mentor committee. Fixed-term faculty and Academic Specialists have no definitive timelines for promotion and should consider promotion following discussion and the support of their mentoring committees.

A positive, beneficial mentor-mentee relationship results from shared responsibility. Below are the best practices to share the responsibilities.

Faculty Mentee Best Practices and Responsibility. The faculty mentees should feel empowered to shape their own mentoring experience and are encouraged to follow the following best practices.

1. The faculty mentees have the right to form and change their mentoring committees.
2. The faculty mentees should schedule the annual mentoring meeting in a timely manner to ensure that all members can be available.
3. The faculty mentees hold primary responsibility for identifying specific questions and/or topics for the input from the mentoring committee and setting clear meeting agendas in consultation with the mentoring committee chair.
4. The faculty mentees should thoughtfully consider the guidance from the mentoring committee, while recognizing that the guidance is advisory and does not need to be acted upon if the mentees choose not to.
5. The faculty mentee should understand and adhere to the latest guidelines on reappointment, promotion/tenure (or continuing appointment), and/or promotion in rank by working with the department support personnel.
6. The faculty mentee should communicate any perceived problems with the mentoring environment to the mentoring committee chair and/or the department Chairperson as soon as possible.
7. The faculty mentees are encouraged to find other informal mentors to gain diverse perspectives.

Mentoring Committee Best Practices and Responsibility. The mentoring committee is an important participant in the process of reappointment, promotion/tenure (or continuing appointment), and/or promotion in rank. The following best practices are recommended for the tenure-system faculty. The practice for the promotion of the fix-term faculty and academic specialist on the flexible timeline should be decided through discussion among the candidate, the mentoring committee, and the Chairperson.

1. The mentoring committee chair should strive to create and maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect, equal participation, and open communication in all meetings. A goal of mentoring is genuine engagement about progress and priorities. So all participants must be encouraged to express viewpoints that are valued and heard.
2. Each member of the mentoring committee should make every effort to be present for the annual mentoring committee meeting.
3. When a mentee applies for promotion, the mentoring committee should provide consultation to the faculty candidate throughout the promotion process on the reflective essay and Form D.
4. When a mentee applies for promotion, the mentoring committee chair should provide consultation, guidance, and feedback to the faculty candidate in order to provide the Chairperson materials for External Reviewers (CV, reflective essay, and 5 examples of scholarly work) on or before June 1.

5. When a mentee applies for promotion, the mentoring committee chair, together with the candidate for promotion, should provide 10 potential external reviewers (5 from the mentoring committee and 5 from the faculty candidate) to the Chairperson on or before June 1. The potential external reviewers should have no conflict of interest with the candidate, as typically defined in professional setting.
6. When a mentee applies for promotion, the mentoring committee chair should present the faculty candidate at the Fall promotion action meeting or find a designee from the mentoring committee to present if the mentor committee chair is absent.
7. When a mentee applies for promotion, the mentoring committee chair should provide the mentoring committee report following the Fall promotion action meeting to the Department Chairperson with the recommendation of the mentoring committee. The mentoring committee chair should also provide the Department Chairperson a written summary that evaluates the candidate in each of their areas of responsibility supporting the recommendation of the mentoring committee.

This document is meant to be a living document and in this spirit it should be reviewed and updated at least every 5 years.

Resources

1. PSM Bylaws for Academic Governance.
https://www.canr.msu.edu/psm/PSM%20Bylaws%20for%20Academic%20Governance%202022.pdf
2. MSU Faculty Handbook:
https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/index.html
3. Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development Mentoring webpage:
https://ofasd.msu.edu/mentoring/
4. The ADVANCE: Advancing Diversity Through Alignment of Policies and Practices webpage:
https://provost.msu.edu/priorities-and-initiatives/advance