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MID-CAREER MENTORING

Mid-career faculty account for the majority of faculty on campuses. Yet professional development and support for mid-career faculty is often overlooked. Moreover, women and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty can be especially vulnerable to mid-career challenges. Intentionally mentoring mid-career faculty can promote their continued success and engage them as future leaders in higher education.

Mid-Career Challenges

- Faculty at mid-career are faced with the challenge of balancing increasing service loads while remaining innovative, active in research, and funded.

- Faculty at this stage often complain of undue pressure, diminished motivation, and lack of clear guidelines regarding how to achieve promotion.

- Supports and incentives frequently target pre-tenured faculty or faculty nearing retirement,[1] leaving mid-career faculty with diminished access to professional development and institutional or departmental support when it comes to career advancement.[2] This can lead to burnout or a sense of stagnation.

## Women and Underrepresented Minority Faculty

- Women and URM faculty can face isolation, tokenism, and marginalization that delay or halt their career progression at mid-career.

- URMs make up less than 10% of STEM faculty and in specific STEM disciplines only 2% of the

> *"Nationwide, over half of higher education faculty are at mid-career. … Ensuring their vitality and continued engagement is critical if colleges and universities are to fulfill their missions, but this swath of faculty rarely receive adequate support or recognition from their institutions."*
> **- Strage & Merdinger, 2015**

professoriate. It was recently found that only 300 URM women hold STEM faculty positions at the nation's top 50 research universities.[3]

- The lack of women and URM faculty in senior positions can limit access to peer mentors for these mid-level faculty and contribute to the cycle of under-representation.[4]

- The lack of women and URM in senior positions is most prominent in the STEM disciplines, due to a lack of peer modeling and support/incentives for success in these fields.[5,6]

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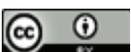
Strategies for Mentoring Mid-Career Faculty

Mentoring is well established in the literature as an effective tool to promote success and achievement of all faculty, particularly URM and women faculty.[7] Mentoring relationships are moving beyond traditional one-on-one mentor relationships to models that offer more flexibility and access. These include multi-year-long cohort-based mentoring, casual peer mentoring sessions, junior faculty mentoring opportunities, national consortia, and more.[8]

Mentoring programs should address diversity, cultural sensitivity, and inclusion. Current resources for literature to support various diversity mentoring models is compiled concisely in Sorcinelli and Yun.[7]

Guidelines should be established for collaboration, which can aid mentors and mentees in their interactions, and training and guidance should be provided on effective mentoring. Approaches must include sensitivity to diversity and equity.

Mentoring involves commitment of time and effort, and it should be supported at an institutional level. Mentoring should be acknowledged as part of official work/service loads and be reflected in compensation packages, reduced workloads in other areas, performance evaluations, and promotion.

Mentoring mid-career faculty should differ from entry-level faculty and focus on the specific needs of mid-career academics (especially tenured). It ideally should begin when faculty achieve Associate Professorship.[2] Department chairs should seek to create broad diverse pools of mentors/mentees and actively engage and incentivize mentors with resources to promote success in combatting mid-career malaise.

Group Activity: Discussion Questions

- What professional development topics/issues would interest all mid-career faculty? How might the issues be different for mid-career women and URM faculty?

- How can your department create a wider variety of opportunities to address the diverse needs of mid-career faculty?

- What topics should be addressed in training to help mentors be more effective with mid-career faculty?

- What are some alternatives to the 1:1 mentor matching model your institution could use to support mid-career faculty?

Additional Readings

University of Washington ADVANCE Mentoring Resources: https://advance.washington.edu/additionalresources/mentoring.html

University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching Resources on Faculty Mentoring: http://www.crlt.umich.edu/faculty/facment

ADVANCE National Leadership Workshop presentation 2005 http://advance.washington.edu/apps/resources/docs/Notkin_Natl_2005.pdf

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