

Mentoring: How important is it to your career? *Very.*

UM women faculty members who have had mentors often perceive that they have worked more productively, felt more connected to their peers and to the university community, and been able to develop in more directions than have their colleagues who “did it alone.” So, having a mentor is likely to make you more successful and satisfied with your career. Based upon our research, and upon years of talking with women faculty members, we urge you to GET A MENTOR! Better yet, get several of them.

I would tell a new woman colleague to find a bunch of mentors. Keep on looking for people with common interests and common problems. Different people are going to be useful for different things.

Deborah Gumucio,
UM Professor of Cell and Developmental
Biology, Medical School

How do I get a mentor?

If you are lucky, your department has set up an effective formal mentoring program that matches you with one or more senior colleagues. Take advantage of that system in every way you can. In addition to, or in place of, such formal mentoring, seek out your own mentors. What should you look for in your mentors? Pick men and women who are interested in you and who are willing to spend time helping you. Finding such people may not be as simple as we make it sound, but it is definitely worth the effort: One colleague may read your works-

in-progress and talk with you about your research; another may guide you through the rough political waters of your department; and yet another may offer you advice about advancing your career while maintaining a family life.

What can a mentor do for me?

You are likely to benefit from the following types of help. Use this list as a guide to the mentoring support you seek.

1) RESEARCH: Get a mentor to describe the nature and quantity of research your department expects; to read and offer suggestions about drafts of your work; to help you develop networks with colleagues inside and outside the institution; and to keep tabs on your progress.

It's very important to have people to talk to about your work, discuss ideas, read your papers and your grant applications, and give you feedback. You can't really do it as a loner. It's much harder to do.

Claudia Kent, UM Professor of Biological
Chemistry, Medical School

2) TEACHING: Get a mentor to help you establish a workable balance between your teaching responsibilities and your research; and to offer advice about the kinds of course loads to request. Remember, too, that consultants at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching can help you develop ways to teach your courses more effectively.

3) NEGOTIATING: Get a mentor to advise you about when and how to say “no” to requests from administrators and

colleagues—especially for committee assignments; to intercede on your behalf when saying “no” is not something you can do for yourself; and to recommend when you should say “yes” to such requests.

4) DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES: Get a mentor to support you through your department's annual/third year review and tenure processes; to explain and help you manage sensitive departmental issues; and to enable you to feel more comfortable and connected with your colleagues.

5) EMOTIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT: Get a mentor to whom you can go for “words of wisdom” about balancing the demands of your career and personal life; and to advise you about university policies designed to help with family/work-life balance.

Early on in my career, I had some opportunities to do things that seemed very scary, like run for national office in a professional organization. I wish someone had said, “That would be very smart and useful. You are worthy and capable, so do it.”

Betsy Foxman, UM Professor of
Epidemiology, School of Public Health

Every time you're asked to do something that you don't think you can handle, ask the person you've chosen as your mentor, “What's your advice?” It will give your mentor a chance to support you in saying no.

Regina Morantz-Sanchez,
UM Professor of History,
Literature, Science & Arts

Get to Know Us!

The Center for the Education of Women (CEW) is a part of the University of Michigan system devoted to the professional and personal development of faculty, staff, students, and community members. We offer free counseling as well as workshops, research, and advocacy on the issues that women face in higher education.

The Junior Women Faculty Network (JWFN) is CEW's informal mentoring program for women assistant professors. We offer workshops to foster professional development and host social events to allow them to meet their colleagues from all areas of the campus.

The Women of Color in the Academy Project (WOCAP) at CEW works to highlight the contributions that women of color make to the University and to build a support system for their career development, satisfaction and retention.

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