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.

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 work-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.

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.