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Opening Remarks on Best Practices in Mentoring

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Opening Remarks on Mentoring



Outline

- General Observations
- Stages of Mentoring
 - Graduate Students
 - Untenured Faculty
 - Senior Faculty
- Issues in the Mentoring of Women



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General Observations

- Mentoring is **more art than science**.
 - Corollary: There may be as many “best practices” as there are **mentor-advisee pairs**.
 - As with other arts, we can still look for **general principles** of good mentoring. (**Which is why we’re here!**)
 - But, also as with other arts, there will be **reasonable disagreement** as to what constitutes “good mentoring”.
- The **personality, aspirations** and **career stage** of the mentor are major factors.

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Stages of Mentoring: Graduate Students

- Grad school is an **apprenticeship** for learning to do **research**.
- The student's **main objective** is to learn to produce **creative, front-edge research**, and to **publish it to the community**.
- Students need:
 - **freedom to explore and create** (a lot of it)
 - **encouragement**
 - **patience**
 - **confidence-building** (progressive steps in presenting work)

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Stages of Mentoring: Untenured Faculty

- An assistant professorship is an **apprenticeship** for learning to be a **professor**.
- Junior faculty are in **much greater need of mentoring** than graduate students:
 - they have **a much more complex job** than graduate students
 - they need to achieve a **balance with “real life”**
 - there is no written **“curriculum” for success**
 - they have **no official advisor**
 - their **environment may not be supportive** or even benign

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Stages of Mentoring: Untenured Faculty (Cont'd)

- Untenured faculty need to focus their energies on:
 - building a **visible, independent** research program; and
 - being a **good** classroom **teacher**.
- Ways to help (aside from emphasizing the above):
 - **sharing successful proposals** and proposal-writing advice
 - **sharing class notes**
 - **introductions** to colleagues and at funding agencies
 - **invitations** to workshops, special sessions, etc.

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Stages of Mentoring: Senior Faculty

- Senior faculty primarily need help with **career advancement and recognition**.
- A mentor can help via:
 - nominations for **positions of responsibility**
 - nominations for **awards**
 - **encouragement & reassurance**
- This is **a two-way street**; i.e., at some point the distinction between mentor and advisee blurs.

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Issues in Mentoring of Women

- Grad students: A good practice is to treat all students the same, recognizing differences only in personality or ability.
- Untenured faculty: Two key issues:
 - Tokenism: a pitfall is to become immersed in committee work
 - Children & the tenure clock: a (the?) major concern; answers??
- Senior faculty:
 - Imposter syndrome: seems to be voiced more often by women

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Mentor as Hero!



"When these hard deeds were done by Lord Odysseus the immortal gods were not far off. I saw with my own eyes someone divine who fought beside him, in the shape and dress of Mentor ..."

[*The Odyssey* (Book 24)]

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