Opening Remarks on Best Practices in Mentoring

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Outline

• General Observations

• Stages of Mentoring
  – Graduate Students
  – Untenured Faculty
  – Senior Faculty

• Issues in the Mentoring of Women

Opening Remarks on Mentoring
General Observations

• Mentoring is more art than science.
  – Corollary: There may be as many “best practices” as there are mentor-advicee 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.

Opening Remarks on Mentoring
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

Opening Remarks on Mentoring
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.

Opening Remarks on Mentoring
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.
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
"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)]