

A WHITE PAPER SERIES
FROM THE COLLABORATIVE
ON ACADEMIC CAREERS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION (COACHE)

Benchmark Best Practices: Mentoring

collaborative on
academic careers
in higher education



This series of white papers is offered freely to member institutions as part of our project's three-year support and engagement plan.

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Benchmark Best Practices: Mentoring

COACHE Benchmarks

Our surveys of college faculty produce data that are both (a) salient to full-time college faculty, and (b) actionable by academic leaders. The survey items are aggregated into 20 benchmarks representing the general thrust of faculty satisfaction along key themes.

The COACHE benchmarks are:

NATURE OF WORK: TEACHING	TENURE CLARITY	DIVISIONAL LEADERSHIP
NATURE OF WORK: RESEARCH	TENURE REASONABLENESS	DEPARTMENTAL LEADERSHIP
NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE	PROMOTION	DEPARTMENTAL COLLEGIALLY
INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK	FACILITIES & WORK RESOURCES	DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT
COLLABORATION	PERSONAL & FAMILY POLICIES	DEPARTMENTAL QUALITY
MENTORING	HEALTH & RETIREMENT BENEFITS	APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION
TENURE POLICIES	SENIOR LEADERSHIP	

What is measured in this benchmark?

MENTORING

The effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of mentoring from someone:

- in your department
- outside your department at your institution
- outside your institution

Agreement (or disagreement) with the following statements:

- Being a mentor is/has been fulfilling to you in your role as a faculty member.
- There is effective mentoring of tenured associate professors in my department.
- My institution provides adequate support for faculty to be good mentors.

Why Support for Mentoring Is Important

Mentoring has always been important in the academic workplace. Only in recent years, however, has the practice evolved more widely from incidental to intentional as academic leaders have come to appreciate that mentorship is too valuable to be left to chance.

Many pre-tenure faculty members feel mentoring is essential to their success, but such support is also instrumental for associate professors on their path to promotion in rank. While some institutions rely on the mentor-protégé approach (a senior faculty member formally paired with a junior faculty member), new models encourage mutual mentoring (where faculty members of all ages and career stages reap benefits), team mentoring (a small group approach), and strategic collaborations (in which faculty members build networks beyond their departments and colleges).

Benchmark Best Practices: --- Mentoring

Getting Started

- Ensure mentoring for assistant and associate professors.
- Promote the mutual benefits for mentee and mentor alike: mentees learn the ropes, collect champions and confidants, and enjoy a greater sense of “fit” within their departments. Mentors feel a greater sense of purpose, even vitality, through these relationships.
- Mentoring should meet individuals’ needs, so make no “silver bullet” assumptions about what type of mentoring faculty will want (or even if they will want it at all). Instead, provide multiple paths to mentors on faculty’s own terms.
- Transparency is important, especially to women and faculty of color. Therefore, written, department-sensitive guidelines help both mentors and mentees.
- For underrepresented faculty groups, finding a mentor with a similar background can be vital to success, yet difficult to find in some disciplines. Support mentoring networks beyond the department and division by reaching out to other institutions (e.g., through a consortium or system).
- If possible, reward mentors through stipends, course releases, or other avenues of recognition (examples are available in Benchmark Best Practices: Appreciation & Recognition).
- Evaluate the quality of mentoring. Both mentors and mentees should be part of the evaluative process. COACHE results can be used to frame the conversation.

What’s Working

COACHE researchers interviewed leaders from member institutions whose faculty rated items in this theme exceptionally well compared to faculty at other participating campuses. While the highest ratings were found at baccalaureate institutions, the lessons derived from our interviews with their leaders are transferable to universities at their schools, colleges, or divisions.

Christopher Newport University

At CNU, the mentoring process is overseen by a subcommittee of the faculty senate. Mentors and mentees are introduced during the provost-sponsored New Faculty Orientation events of “Getting Started Week” (<http://cnu.edu/provost/gettingstarted/>). Among these sessions is “Advice to New Faculty at CNU” (http://cnu.edu/facresc/pdf/new_faculty.pdf), which highlights COACHE data, faculty development workshops, ways to participate in shared governance, and student evaluation processes. It also signals the importance of junior faculty to CNU’s future.

“We assign every new faculty member a mentor from outside their department, but in almost all cases within their division. That way, the mentor is someone with knowledge of the college and how things are done in their discipline...and just in case there were to be a conflict in their department, they’d have a person to go to outside their department. Sometimes even if there’s not a conflict it helps to have a set of ears to go to.” — Vice Provost

Hamilton College

Hamilton established mentoring programs for faculty of color and discipline-specific mentorship groups where colleagues provide advice and guidance to each other. “For example,” the Dean explained, “a new science faculty group meets for lunch regularly, which was successful for those members, and we are trying to develop that model for others.”

“We are always looking for ways to improve mentoring. We have a culture of wanting people to succeed and invest

in them when they are here. Part of mentoring is to develop expectations clearly... We have an 'external' mentoring program where every pre-tenure faculty member is assigned a senior faculty member outside the department. This match happens at the end of the first semester. It's meant to be someone with experience who can be turned to for advice and will proactively ask the pre-tenure faculty member about progress and issues rising in the department that they want to discuss...such as navigating policies and procedures. They do not evaluate. These are private conversations."

— Dean of Faculty

College of the Holy Cross

At Holy Cross, the Associate Dean of the Faculty oversees mentoring, as well as orientation and other programs for new faculty. Each mentor-mentee pairing is a “no fault” arrangement: if the match does not work, the office will find a new mentor. Here, unstructured relationships are the rule; the Faculty Mentor Program states:

“The College has no set ‘model’ for a mentorship. Each new tenure-track faculty member is paired with a tenured faculty member in another department who has volunteered to be a mentor. Each mentor-mentee pair will develop their own way of proceeding in terms of focus, meeting arrangements, etc. Yet, the new career faculty member is encouraged to establish the initial connection with their mentor.”

Kenyon College

Kenyon’s formal mentoring program follows new faculty members through their first two years at the College. The provost’s website offers guidelines and tips under the heading, “Making the Most of your Mentors,” which includes information on how to find a mentor; what to talk about (e.g., teaching, time management, research, and interpersonal issues); progress reports; and year-end meetings.

Kenyon also relies on “Mentoring Program Evaluation” forms. The mentee rates how beneficial the mentor was with respect to 14 dimensions such as helping set career goals and timelines; balancing personal and professional priorities; and learning about the culture of the department. The mentor, on the other hand, assesses the extent to which he or she addressed each of the issues.

“Our mentoring program is intended to identify those faculty peers with whom faculty feel most comfortable. That’s important, because it allows them to speak freely and at ease and get honest feedback about what might be very difficult issues. It’s also confidential... I have no desire to see, hear or read anything that goes on in those conversations because it’s necessary for colleagues to talk outside the shadow of review. And then there’s also informal mentoring, which is a reflection of the broad support that departmental colleagues and non-departmental colleagues have for each other. I think it’s an ongoing process and that accounts for success.”

— Provost

Stonehill College

All new full-time faculty and fellows are paired with an experienced faculty mentor during their first year. Following an introductory lunch during the orientation period, mentors and mentees are encouraged to meet at least three times per semester. Mentors can be reimbursed up to \$100 for expenses incurred with mentees (e.g., for lunch or coffee).

“We select mentors from outside the department so there’s not an evaluative role. We pair on other interests. We have an economist and psychologist who both study sports and work together. Or, we have professors with similar life experiences; for instance, one has two small children and the mentor just experienced something similar. We provide a small fund for lunch and coffee throughout the year.”

— Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Resources

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COACHE Benchmarks

This benchmark report is part of a series of white papers available through COACHE. The complete list of white papers includes:

APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION	INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK & COLLABORATION	NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE
DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT, QUALITY & COLLEGIALLY	MENTORING	NATURE OF WORK: TEACHING
DEPARTMENTAL LEADERSHIP	NATURE OF WORK: RESEARCH	TENURE & PROMOTION

About COACHE

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) is a consortium of more than 200 colleges and universities across North America committed to making the academic workplace more attractive and equitable for faculty. Founded in 2002 with support from the Ford Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies, COACHE is based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is now supported by its members.

Designed to generate not simply “interesting” data, but actionable diagnoses, COACHE’s suite of faculty job satisfaction surveys have been tested and continuously improved across multiple administration sites and cycles. Institutional reports and executive dashboards provide college leaders with a lever to increase the quality of work-life for their faculty; to advance a reputation as a great place for faculty to work; to provoke better questions from and more informed decisions by prospective faculty; and to generate ideas and initiatives from faculty that enrich and expand the range of possible improvements.

COACHE also brings academic leaders together to advance our mutual goals of maximizing the impact of the data, with many opportunities to meet with counterparts from peer institutions and to discuss COACHE findings on faculty affairs.

Call (617) 495-5285 to request your invitation to participate.

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