Assistance

> *"I've been here over 20 years. The culture was different back then. I received no mentoring as a new faculty member. None, zero, zip. At the time I thought that suited me just fine. Turns out I could have used it. Watching my junior colleagues now, I see that they receive quite a bit of formal and informal mentoring. I think that is great, and I want to encourage the continuation of this. A faculty position is so much more than scholarship."*

Assistance is about attending to everyone's needs – providing help, resources and support at the time that it is needed. Faculty members need a variety of support over the course of the career including mentoring, accommodation to take time off for care of family and self, seed funds to get a pilot project off the ground, technical or statistical support, etc. To create a supportive and engaging department climate, a department chair should try to understand and anticipate the needs off faculty members. It is also helpful to communicate what kinds of assistance are available, for example small funds for unexpected problems, the range of family-friendly accommodations that the university provides, mentoring for new faculty, as well as for mid-career and later, if desired. Once faculty members are aware of the range of types of assistance, they should also be encouraged to ask for what they need. Fostering a climate within the department where it is normal to receive help, and where it is understood that we all need support and assistance at different times in the career, will enable faculty members to access and receive what they need to be most productive.

Mentoring

Only 43 percent of respondents to the 2019 Faculty Quality of Life Survey felt they had received adequate formal mentoring. Of all the survey findings related to department/school climate, formal mentoring had the lowest satisfaction rating. This points to a need to improve formal mentoring for faculty members across the university.

Faculty mentoring is often practiced as a means to help untenured faculty members advance to tenure. However, this view of the purpose of mentoring and of the kind of faculty member who might wish to have some form of mentoring is much too narrow. Mentoring can provide task-specific technical advice and also psycho-social support. It can be helpful for navigating tricky political issues within academe and also for learning how to juggle the demands of career and family. At later career stages, mentoring can also help a faculty member move forward into a new research trajectory. Mentoring for leadership roles is also essential, since few academics were taught about how to chair a department or lead a division or institute when they were in graduate school.

Formal mentoring programs within the department require some organization and oversight to ensure that mentor-mentee needs are being met, and to negotiate conflicts and interpersonal issues that may arise. Often this is the responsibility of the department chair, though in larger departments it may be delegated to another faculty member. Key aspects of formal mentoring programs include written agreements between the mentor and mentee about the purpose, content and goals of the mentoring partnership. Agreement on the frequency of meetings, the duration of the arrangement, and on the schedule for check-ins with whomever is overseeing the program is necessary. If an untenured faculty member is the mentee, it should be made clear whether and in what way the mentor will participate in the tenure decision process. Each school may have different requirements for the formal faculty mentoring process and there is also a large body of literature about mentoring that can be helpful. Additional programs and guidance about practices for faculty mentoring will also be provided in the future through a new mentoring initiative from the Office of Faculty Development.

Accommodations

Less than 50% of the female respondents who felt they needed an accommodation (pregnancy, caregiving for child, elder, family member, or for own health) asked for one. And even among the women who asked for and received a child caregiving accommodation, 42% felt it was insufficient to address their need. Why might this be the case? A study at UC Berkeley, also found various caregiving accommodations to be under-utilized by female faculty. In their study the two reasons for it were lack of knowledge about the policies and accommodations available, and also the fear of using the policy (UC Faculty Family Friendly Edge, 2007). Other research has found that we have implicit biases about gender and caregiving, such that mothers are seen as less competent and committed to their work than fathers or women who are not parents (Correll, Benard, Paik, 2007). This would explain the reluctance of female faculty members to draw attention to their caregiving needs. It suggests that, at the department level, we should increase everyone's awareness about the accommodations available at Stanford to help faculty members with their caregiving and health-related needs, and also normalize the use of such policies, so that faculty members will not fear that their chances of advancement or their professional reputation would be hurt for using them.

Recommended resources:

Effective Policies and Programs for the Retention and Advancement of Women in Academia- WorkLife Law, UC Hastings College of the Law, January 2013
https://worklifelaw.org/publication/effective-policies-and-programs-for-retention-and-advancement-of-women-in-academia/
Frasch, K., et al. (2007). Creating a family friendly department: Chairs and Deans Toolkit. UC Faculty Family Friendly Edge, Berkeley, CA.
https://ucfamilyedge.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/chairsanddeanstoolkitfinal7-07.pdf