

# Division of Biology Faculty Mentoring Program

*(updated May 2019)*

## **Introduction**

A dynamic and productive faculty is one of the most important assets in the Division of Biology, and the hiring and training of new faculty members is a significant investment that requires support from the administration and from more experienced faculty colleagues. Through screening of applicants and interviews of candidates, we select new faculty members with the greatest potential to contribute to the long-term growth and success of our research and training programs. To assist new faculty in realizing their potential, the Division of Biology is committed to providing resources and guidance that promote the professional development of both pre-tenure and non-tenure earning faculty members and facilitate a successful transition to tenure and/or promotion. Therefore, the Division of Biology has established a formal program for mentoring faculty members, the Division of Biology Faculty Mentoring Program or DoBFMP. The goals of the DoBFMP are to:

- assist new faculty members with the transition to a new academic environment by assigning one or more faculty mentors as part of broader network of support
- provide individual guidance with respect to establishing effective and productive research and teaching programs, and a balance of appropriate service and outreach activities
- enhance the success of Division faculty members in securing extramural funding
- assist new faculty members in additional career development activities
- provide effective mentorship that will facilitate the transition of new faculty members to productive faculty colleagues

Note that there are numerous related training and professional development resources available to faculty members at Kansas State University, such as those offered through the New Faculty Institute (<http://www.k-state.edu/tlc/programs/nfi/>) and the K-State Teaching and Learning Center (<http://www.k-state.edu/tlc/>). All faculty mentors should be familiar with the availability of these programs and other related resources (e.g., proposal preparation guidelines, hiring procedures) for incoming faculty members and should ensure that the mentee is aware of these programs and resources. The goals of the DoBFMP are to complement these campus-wide programs by providing mentoring and support that is specific to the mission and culture of the Division of Biology.

## **Assignment of Faculty Mentors**

To achieve the goals of the mentoring program, the Coordinator of the DoBFMP, in consultation with the Director of the Division of Biology, will work with each incoming junior faculty member to identify one or more appropriate more experienced faculty mentors. The assignment of one or more faculty mentors is mandatory for pre-tenure faculty members and available to non-tenure track faculty members. At least one of these mentors should have broadly shared research interests and expertise with the junior faculty member, while additional mentors could also have similar research interests or could, for example, provide mentoring in regards to teaching or outreach. The mentor(s) will assist incoming faculty members with their transition to Kansas State University and to the Division of Biology, and will continue to provide advice and counsel throughout the pre-tenure and/or promotion evaluation period. The Division Director will retain ultimate responsibility for advising new faculty on matters pertaining to annual and mid-tenure evaluations and academic advancement, and annual progress towards tenure will be evaluated by the Division of Biology Tenure and Promotion Committee. However, in many cases the mentor(s) can also provide informal feedback to the mentored faculty

member on progress towards tenure/promotion and can assist with interpreting and responding appropriately to periodic reviews of progress, such as annual reports and mid-tenure reviews. Mentoring can also contribute to the professional development of non-tenure earning faculty members, and such individuals may request assignment of one or more mentors. Mentoring can also aid tenured faculty in preparation for promotions and career advancement, and mentors can be assigned to more advanced faculty members when requested, and in consultation with the Director.

The mentor(s) will serve as an important source of guidance and advice in areas ranging from University and Division policy and procedures to teaching approaches to securing extramural funds and building a productive research program. Mentors can also provide information about other academic activities and resources, such as recruitment of new students, addressing personnel issues, and sources of internal funds. Mentors may also provide advice with manuscript preparation and responses to reviews, when appropriate. In addition to one or more formally assigned mentors, it is likely that other less formal “mentoring” relationships will develop with both junior and senior colleagues in the Division. These relationships are encouraged, as they can provide additional opportunities for advice and counsel from faculty colleagues with different experiences, perspectives, and expertise.

### **Goals of the Mentoring Program**

- Short-term goals
  - Familiarizing new faculty with the Division and KSU campus and its academic environment
  - Networking—introductions to colleagues, identification of other potential mentors or collaborators
  - Developing awareness—helping junior faculty understand policies and procedures that are relevant to their work environment, as well as helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses
  - Providing constructive criticism and encouragement, compliments on achievements
  - Helping to manage professional priorities—budgeting time, balancing research, teaching, and service
  - Assisting new faculty with developing strategies to balance professional responsibilities with personal commitments
  
- Long-term goals
  - Achieving career advancement for all faculty members
  - Developing visibility and prominence of Division of Biology faculty in their respective fields
  - Increasing the recognition and stature of the Division of Biology in the regional, national, and international scientific community

While the benefits to junior faculty members should be obvious, it is important to note that a positive mentor-mentee relationship also benefits faculty mentors. These benefits include:

- Satisfaction in assisting in the development of a colleague, and a contributor to continued academic excellence in the Division
- Ideas for and feedback that can improve the mentor’s own teaching and scholarship
- Retention of excellent faculty colleagues
- Enhancement of research and teaching quality in the Division and continued recognition of our scholarship locally, nationally and internationally

- Credit for mentoring activities as an important component of service contributions in the Division

### **Qualities of a Good Mentor**

The most important tasks of a mentor are to help new faculty members acclimate to the academic environment at KSU, especially within the Division, and to assist them in achieving the excellence in teaching, research and services that are hallmarks of the Division of Biology faculty. Although the role of a mentor can be an informal one, it poses a challenge and requires dedication and time. A good relationship with a supportive, active mentor contributes significantly to a new faculty member's career development and satisfaction. Some general characteristics and guidelines for a successful mentor-mentee relationship are as follows:

- **Accessibility** – the mentor should be available to the junior faculty member. The amount of time invested in mentoring will vary with each mentoring relationship, but periodic “formal” meetings along with informal impromptu interactions are both useful. Meeting frequency may vary over time, but a general guideline is a minimum of one formal meeting per semester, although more frequent meetings (e.g., monthly) may be useful in the first semester. The mentor might keep in contact by dropping by, calling, e-mail exchanges, or extending a lunch or coffee invitation. In addition to periodic meetings, the mentor should be available to read and critique research proposals, with sufficient lead time from the mentee (see Assisting with Proposal Development below).
- **Networking** – the mentor should be able to help the new faculty member establish a professional network, within the Division, the University, and the larger scientific community.
- **Independence** – the new faculty member's intellectual independence from the mentor must be carefully preserved and the mentor must avoid developing a competitive relationship with the new faculty member. While collaboration with a mentor is possible, it is not necessary. In cases where mentors and mentees do collaborate on proposal development or publication, it is important to remember that evidence of unique contributions in the context of collaborative research, and establishment of an independent research program, are critical to a successful promotion and tenure decision.

### **Qualities of a Good Mentee**

To get the most out of the mentor/mentee relationship, the mentee should come to the relationship open to receiving feedback and guidance from the mentor. Successful mentees feel empowered to manage the direction of their professional life and take responsibility for their professional development and growth. Specific responsibilities of the mentee include:

- **Open communication** – early on, the mentee should initiate contact with the mentor and discuss expectations regarding the mentoring relationship, including the frequency of meetings. Meeting frequency can and probably will change over time as the mentee gains experience, but it is important to establish a baseline at the beginning. Some mentees will want more frequent meetings and others may want less frequent ones, but what is important is that there is two-way communication with the mentor about what is wanted and expected. At the same time, communication does not need to be limited to scheduled meetings. Mentees should not feel inhibited about contacting the mentor for advice when needed, while also being respectful of the mentor's time. Mentees should keep the mentor apprised of progress.

- Preparation – mentees should come to meetings prepared to discuss specific topics and with specific questions in hand. Ample lead time should be provided when asking the mentor to review manuscripts or grant proposals.
- Willingness to accept constructive criticism – the mentor/mentee relationship should be collaborative, with the mentor helping the mentee to identify strengths and weaknesses. Mentees should ask for feedback, and should try to not feel defensive when discussing weaknesses. Remember that honest feedback is key to improvement. Mentees should be active listeners when receiving feedback, and ask for clarification when necessary. It is also appropriate for mentees to provide the mentor with honest feedback regarding the mentoring experience.

### **Changing Mentors**

In cases of changing commitments, incompatibility, or where the relationship is not successful, either the junior faculty member or mentor should seek confidential advice from the Coordinator of the DoBFMP and/or the Division Director. It is important to realize that changes can and should be made without prejudice or fault. The junior faculty member, in any case, should be encouraged to seek out additional mentors as the need arises.

### **Assisting with Proposal Development**

An important aspect of the Division’s mentoring program is a formal process of internal review of major proposals targeted for submission to extramural funding agencies. These reviews are intended to provide constructive comments and positive feedback to junior faculty members, that will enhance the probability of funding success and shorten the time it takes to establish an extramurally-supported research program. Ultimately, reviews will benefit the entire Division by contributing to the resource base available to support research and other scholarly activities in the Division through the BRIEF program, which is funded by returns of overhead from extramural grants, and by raising our research standing within the University and the broader scientific community. Below is an outline of the general procedures and mechanics of the internal proposal review process. Note that this internal review process is designed primarily to assist pre-tenure faculty members submitting proposals to major extramural funding agencies, such as NIH, NSF, and USDA, and is a highly encouraged part of proposal preparation for pre-tenure faculty members. However, similar reviews may be helpful to non-tenure track faculty and established faculty members as well, and these can also be arranged through the Coordinator of the DoBFMP.

- Proposal reviews will be coordinated by the Coordinator of the DoBFMP.
- Reviews will be obtained from at least one of the faculty mentors of the proposal PI, depending on areas of expertise, plus up to two additional colleagues (potentially including additional mentors of the PI as appropriate). Additional reviewers will generally be selected from within the Division, but may include other investigators from the University or broader scientific community, with approval of the proposal PI.
- The purpose of these reviews is to provide constructive comments that will ultimately enhance the probability of a positive funding decision. Reviews may address topics such as the “fit” of general concepts to the target program, the effectiveness of the rationale and “packaging” of proposal ideas, including appropriateness of research goals, methodological approaches, etc. Although detailed comments are welcome where necessary, these reviews do not need to be highly detailed in order to be useful to the PI.

- The primary goal of this program is to facilitate funding success for our faculty. Therefore, it is important to solicit comments and feedback sufficiently in advance of a submission date to incorporate these comments. It is the responsibility of the junior faculty member to provide a *draft proposal* with sufficient lead time to receive reviewer comments and to incorporate suggestions, as appropriate. Ideally, discussions regarding potential research ideas and target agencies should be an ongoing mentoring activity. Once a specific proposal program is identified, the faculty member should contact their mentor(s) and the DoBFMP Coordinator well in advance of an anticipated submission deadline to arrange for reviews (e.g., notification of intent to submit should be provided *at least 30 days* prior to the submission deadline). Specific timelines for getting proposal drafts to reviewers can be flexible, but should be set in advance in consultation with the DoBFMP Coordinator and potential reviewers.