

Faculty Mentorship at AUC August 30, 2020

Background Information

In Spring 2018, AUC Provost formed an Advisory Committee from three highly regarded academics from top universities in the US to review the current policies and processes related to promotion and tenure at AUC. The Advisory Committee viewed the promotion and tenure review as one phase in a continuous process that is connected to other phases in the faculty's career. Hence, any reform of this review should include not only the review phase that takes place at the sixth or seventh year, but also all the phases prior to this review. In their report, the Provost's Advisory Committee pointed out the apparent lack of ongoing, meaningful mentoring of faculty at all levels at AUC.

In Fall 2018, following receiving the report of the Advisory Committee, the Provost assigned a Task Force the mandate of analyzing the report and formulating an action plan pertaining to the report's recommendations. The Task Force adopted a methodology by which it looked at all the phases in a faculty member's journey at AUC. Such a journey starts with the initial step of identifying the need for faculty lines, followed by recruitment and hiring, mentoring, first year review, third year review, annual performance review and up to and including the last of phase of promotion and tenure review. The Provost's Task Force recommended developing a new university-wide faculty mentoring program.

Why Mentoring Matters?

When they first arrive, all new faculty, regardless of rank or past experiences, need to get acquainted with the culture, policies, and procedures of AUC. Collegial advice new faculty receive on teaching strategies, development of independent scholarship/research, writing successful grant proposals, accepting service opportunities, etc. may save valuable time and increase chances of early success. Fostering a culture that supports the success of its faculty is in the best interests of AUC and an effective mentoring program can guarantee a smooth integration of new faculty, enhance their ability to add value to the institution and promote a more positive institutional climate.

Feedback from Departments

Before we embark on designing any formalized faculty mentoring program at AUC it is important to receive input from departments. This summer we approached department chairs who had new faculty join their department last academic year and/or are joining this year to help us identify the

key features of a successful mentoring program that can help mentees make the most of their mentoring relationships. The feedback we received from department chairs was very valuable and insightful. There was consensus that a mentoring program for new faculty is not only highly valuable and needed, but as indicated by some is “a priority”. There was a general agreement that mentoring should be voluntary and the contributions of mentors should be an integral part of the overall evaluation of service. The majority were in favor of adopting a formal well-structured mentoring program indicating that informal mentoring often lacks the regularity of communication and the comprehensive coverage of different aspects that occurs in structured formal programs. The majority opted for a flexible program that allows capturing the differences in characters and needs of the different mentees and advised against the application of a one-size-fits-all model and any rigidity that may interfere with the growth of the mentorship relationships. While the majority favored the one-to-one mentoring model, there was emphasis that no one mentor can play all roles and new faculty can benefit from group mentoring and multiple experiences and recommended creating a supportive mentoring community.

Piloting A Faculty Mentoring Program in the AY 2020/21

The foci of faculty mentoring should include valuable professional and personal guidance in different domains. To address the full range of these needs an effective faculty mentoring program should involve mentoring relationships with a broad array of experienced colleagues. AUC is starting a faculty mentoring program for all new faculty. The program includes both one-on-one and group mentoring. This combination of modalities will decrease the mentoring burden on individual faculty and will increase the exposure of new faculty to multiple mentors. Group mentoring will cover specific points of general knowledge of importance to new faculty which may be efficiently provided to groups of faculty via seminar or workshop format. One-on-one mentoring will cover knowledge about department specific standards and practices, as well as discipline-specific academic and career guidance in addition to specific needs of the mentee.

Group mentoring schemes will be designed by the Office of the Provost. Meeting dates of group sessions will be set in advance and there will be a theme for each meeting. Topics covered in group sessions include but are not limited to: Enhancing teaching effectiveness; development of independent scholarship/research; writing successful grant proposals; better balancing of teaching, research, committee work and other responsibilities; better informed choices regarding service activities; managing graduate students; enhancing the knowledge of tenure and promotion policies and processes; preparation for and progress toward academic promotion; information on resources and opportunities available to faculty; getting to know academic policies and procedures; social and cultural challenges during the first year in Egypt; and relocating with children. Workshops can be geared to participants' needs. Coupled with one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring promotes positive interactions, builds meaningful and supportive relationships among peers, provides a forum for reflective dialogue and creates a support network for each mentee.

In order to build a mentoring program that is aligned with the needs of new faculty and thus likely to be sustained, departments should be involved in the process of building a program consistent with the needs and culture of their department. One-to-one mentoring schemes will be designed by the mentee's department. Department chairs will oversee and coordinate mentoring efforts for

their faculty and help mentees make the most of their mentoring relationships. There are several ways by which mentor/mentee pairs can be assigned: leaving mentor and mentee to fully self-select, the department makes the formal assignment, or some combination of these two options. Data suggest that pairings may be more sustained and successful when both the mentor and mentee have some choice, but departments may also consider the scholarly basis for assignments or perceived commonality in some aspects of career goals.

Mentors and mentees, whether assigned by the department or self-selected, should establish what the scope of mentoring will be. The agenda should be led by the needs of the mentee. Both the mentor and mentee have responsibilities for maintaining the productivity of the relationship. Mentoring requires commitment and mentors should be sure they can commit adequate time to this task. Willingness to share knowledge and invest time for guidance on an ongoing basis, the ability to create an environment of trust, and the ability to respect others' personal boundaries are some of the qualities of effective mentors. Effective mentoring also requires commitment, engagement, ongoing self-reflection and evaluation on the part of the mentee. Thus, it is essential that the faculty members seeking guidance clearly define their career goals and needs from this mentoring relationship. Clarity regarding expectations of the time commitment and efforts on the part of the mentors and mentees is essential. Departments should develop some confidential ways of assessing and managing unsuccessful or difficult mentoring interactions. Each mentoring relationship should not be shorter than one year but can continue for as long as there is mutual interest.

Assessing the effectiveness and impact of mentoring relationships is critical. At the end of the academic year chairs are expected to report on the mentoring efforts of their departments, provide feedback on what worked well, what didn't, and what should be added to a mentoring program. Department chairs are expected to help in assessing this pilot experience by providing data on the competencies and satisfaction of the mentor, competencies and satisfaction of the mentee, quality of the support provided by mentors, achievement of defined goals and outcomes for mentoring, tools and resources needed to support the mentor in his/her role, and any other aspect as they see relevant.

We hope this pilot will help us work together to design an effective mentoring program that supports new faculty members' success and satisfaction. We invite you to contribute your ideas and feedback on what works, what doesn't, and what should be added. Please address all comments and suggestions to Associate Provost for Assessment and Accreditation Zeinab Amin at zeinabha@aucegypt.edu