CHSU Functional Mentoring Program for Faculty Growth and Success

The rewards and satisfactions of an academic life are considerable, but they are counter-balanced by practical challenges and high-performance standards that, at times, can be quite intimidating. Therefore strong self-assessment and continuous quality improvement processes for faculty members is imperative. The reflective portfolio and functional mentoring process described in the PDF available to download are a potential solution to this problem.

The Professoriate - A Scholarly Occupation

Ideally, a university is a place in which individuals participate in a community that is founded on the ideals and application of critical inquiry in the pursuit of new knowledge, truth, and a better life for all. With this scholarly approach, a university strives to steward what is best in society while leading prudent change in the public interest. Given discretion and perseverance, this critical inquiry leads to new knowledge and understandings, enhanced capabilities, new technologies, enriched community life, and personal growth and development for every member of the academic community.

It is for this reason that a significant proportion of an academic's work is expected to be "scholarly." Practically, this means that one's:

Teaching should show evidence of how instruction capitalizes on one's cognitive and ethical maturity and expertise to enable students' intellectual and interpersonal growth and to ensure the development of profound and useful knowledge. Among other things, scholarly teaching may be demonstrated through theory and evidence-based innovations in teaching, mentoring, program development, assessment and evaluation.

Research or discovery should show evidence of conscientious, systematic inquiry resulting in the validation and refinement of existing knowledge and/or the generation of important new knowledge.

Integration should show logical, critical and insightful synthesis of isolated facts from disparate disciplines into new and more comprehensive meanings or perspectives.

Practice should employ evidence and criterion-based critique of current practices leading to improvements or the creation of sustainable new approaches, protocols, procedures and standards of quality.

Community engagement should link scholarship (above, e.g., community-based participatory research, service-learning and service) and the resources of the university to address important and urgent social, civic and ethical problems.

Developmental Partners

Faculty are encouraged to engage others in developmental partnerships. These can arise naturally from shared offices, shared projects, team-teaching and mutual service on committees. Therefore in every working context, faculty are asked to reach out to others who are in a position to provide feedback on performance. Normally, this is done through the "SII" a tool that is used institution-wide as a tool for growth (SII = Strengths-Insights-Improvements).

Critical Reflection and Planning

The central component of a reflective academic portfolio is regular documentation of critical reflection on one's work. CHSU has developed the faculty growth rubric as an aid to this work. Developmental partnerships are an important part of this reflection, since others often are in a position to help us see our blind spots.

Once a year, in collaboration with a reflective partner, faculty are encouraged to reflect on their academic performances using the rubric as a guide and identify two to four areas in which they would like to grow during the upcoming year.

Thereafter, they meet with their department chair to discuss the needs and begin the process of constructing a plan to undertake a set of growth projects during the upcoming year. The plan will be finalized in collaboration with one or more **functional mentors**. These can be identified in collaboration with the department chair. At a minimum, the plan should include: a) Desired outcomes; b) Evidence and documentation needed to demonstrate progress, and; c) Resources required.

Faculty members are expected to contact the potential functional mentors and determine if a collaboration around the mentee's growth needs over the upcoming year is practicable. From this point, faculty members are expected to implement the plan independently, but the department chair may check in on progress occasionally.

Functional Mentor

The most important fact to consider is that those who are mentored consistently rise more quickly within a profession and their paths tend to be less problematic.[i]

Most institutional mentoring programs involve pairing of a junior faculty member with a more senior member, but often without much structure or guidance. Friendship bonds often form, but professional development usually is haphazard. We offer functional mentoring as an alternative.

Functional mentoring is project-focused. As the mentoring relationship develops, the mentor and mentee begin to flesh out the project in detail. To be considered in this regard are: 1) How to communicate, how often and how long (usually 1 hour); 2) How the agenda will be set and monitored; 3) Issues of trust and confidentiality; 4) Constraints on the mentor (time, topics, etc.); 5) Norms of behavior; 6) Specific actions to be undertaken; 7) Experiences to be gained; 8) Timelines for achievement; 9) Criteria for performance; 10) Needed documentation; 11) Useful resources; 12) Methods of assessment.

A part of the functional mentor's job is to empower faculty members to assume progressively more responsibility for their professional performance – pushing them beyond their current limitations. Much of the self-development process will be undertaken independently. However at times the mentor may need to be there: for moral support, challenge, skill practice, and especially assessment.

Assembling the Reflective Portfolio

As the project is implemented, faculty should reflect on the quality of their work by tracking each indicator and assembling a reflective narrative that will be part of their developing promotion portfolio. It is helpful to create a systematic process to collect and record reflective assessment data during the year. For each performance indicator, it is helpful to make comparisons of current performance with the targets established for future performance. Several times a year, and just before the project is finalized, all

reflections should be reviewed as part of the annual performance review and a summary "should be written that will include:

1. Accomplishments with supporting evidence
2. Areas for continuing improvement and potential plans for next year
3. Insights about the performance area.

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i Kochan FK, Trimble SB. From mentoring to co-mentoring: establishing collaborative relationships. Theory into Practice. 2000;39:20-28