The Mentoring Relationship and Activities

Each PFF mentoring relationship will be unique. In general, we ask Fellows to spend as much time as possible on the partner campus with their mentor. Once or twice a month is a good target as email and phone calls allow ongoing interaction. Also, we ask Fellows to invite their mentors to visit Duke and to attend any presentations you might give.

The overall goal of the mentoring relationship is to offer the Fellow a comprehensive picture of the day-to-day life of a faculty member on the partner campus. To accomplish this, most of the activities between PFF Mentors and Fellows can be grouped under three basic categories: shadowing, talking, and collaborating. Here are some ideas for what each of these might involve:

Basic Types of Mentoring Activities

Shadowing

A day in the life. You can learn much simply by spending a full day (or more) on the partner campus, following your mentor as they teach classes, hold tutorials or advising sessions, have lunch with students or colleagues, attend faculty meetings, or participate in various committee meetings.

Service. Ask your mentor if you might sit in on a variety of faculty, administrative, or committee meetings of the department and/or college. While such meetings are often a major part of faculty workload, graduate students usually have little opportunity to observe this side of academic life.

Administrators. Ask your mentor if they might be able to arrange a lunch or two with various institutional administrators and staff. In turn, you should feel free to invite your mentor to have lunch or dinner with you here, and to include other Duke faculty—your dissertation advisor, for example—to join that meal.

Talking

Searches and hiring. Your mentor is an invaluable resource for learning how hiring decisions actually get made at the partner school: how faculty positions are argued for; how search committees are comprised; what is expected in a letter of interest or an application; what on-campus interviews are like; what mistakes candidates make when they visit; what kinds of talks or teaching presentations are expected.

Managing a career. Talk with your mentor about the nitty-gritty issues of academic life: How do you manage time for research and family while being responsible for teaching, advising and other service? What is it like to work in an institution where you may be the only faculty member who works on a particular topic or in a particular field? How difficult did your mentor find the transition from life in graduate school to being a faculty member? What resources are available for professional development, conference travel, research funding? What strategies has your mentor employed to take advantage of these resources?
Teaching. Talk with your mentor about the opportunities and challenges offered by the classes that they teach on a regular basis, including how these courses fit within the general education curriculum, the nature of the undergraduate student body, particular instructional goals and problems, etc. Here is one area where you and your mentor might be able to engage in truly collaborative thinking: What are you trying to accomplish intellectually in disciplinary courses and what are some of the instructional strategies that might be deployed to reach those goals?

Governance. Talk with your mentor about faculty governance on the partner campus: who makes what kinds of decisions; how much autonomy is granted individual faculty members or departments; how much oversight comes from the administration; how much pressure do people feel from external sources, whether parents and boards or state legislatures?

Colleagues. What is departmental or divisional life like on the campus? What is the general atmosphere? Is it competitive, political, collegial? What roles do your mentor's colleagues play in his or her intellectual life?

Promotion and tenure. What are the procedures and requirements for achieving tenure at the partner campus, including: What materials need to be gathered and what processes are used in evaluating them? Are external assessments required? How are teaching, scholarship, and service really weighted? What place do student evaluations of teaching serve in the process? Who finally decides, and what is the time clock?

Autobiography. Your mentor, of course, has a professional history of his or her own, and this history may well hold important lessons that can only be learned through a kind of personal narrative. Mentors are generally quite willing to share their stories, and fellows should feel free to ask to hear them.

Collaborating

Guest lecturing or teaching. We hope that you and your mentor will be able to devise opportunities for you to do some guest lecturing or to help run a lab or two. Perhaps there might be ways in which, given time enough, the two of you could actually co-teach a particular unit or section of a course.

Course design. Can you devise ways to share in the design, development and preparation for a class to be offered by the mentor in the spring or next year? Are there particular kinds of lab units, field projects or other types of instructional units that the two of you could work on together? Are there specific research needs that the mentor has that you or some facility at Duke might help address?

Visits to Duke. Feel free to invite your mentor and some of his or her undergraduate students to Duke. You might ask your mentor to visit and comment on one of your own classes; you could develop a special research/lab project for the undergraduates using resources here; or you could try to set up a “visitation” day where undergraduates could attend a variety of Duke classes and where your mentor could speak with faculty here.

Working with undergraduates. Are there ways in which you could help mentor undergraduate students at the partner campus?

Conferences and research. Are there professional conferences that you and the mentor might attend together? If you are working in roughly similar areas, might there be any possibility of some joint scholarship? Remember that many professional conferences reserve sessions for pedagogical issues. Perhaps some collaborative thoughts about the mentoring process itself could result in a jointly authored article or presentation.

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