

Department of Physiology and Pharmacology **Mentoring Committees for Faculty Members**

1. Background:

The strategic plan for the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry identifies the need to maximize opportunities for success of faculty members. The School has developed a robust Continuing Professional Development program for faculty members. More details can be found at the following link:

https://www.schulich.uwo.ca/continuingprofessionaldevelopment/teaching_and_learning_resources/schulich_faculty_development_/index.html

2. Goals:

The goal of the mentoring committee is to provide advice to faculty members on all aspects of professional development, including, but not restricted to research, grant applications, teaching, general setting of priorities and work-life balance. This would include review of accomplishments, but more importantly, guidance and advice on future activities. The process aims to assist in identifying professional development needs and career objectives. This committee is the appropriate place for frank and open discussion of the rights and responsibilities of faculty members. The role of the mentoring committee is particularly important in the current challenging funding environment and in light of rapid changes in many aspects of academic careers. Mentored faculty members should feel free to approach the members of their mentoring committee (as well as other mentors) at any time, with any issue.

Topics for discussion include:

- Which courses to teach? How do you balance teaching expectations with time protected for research? Development of an effective teaching dossier takes planning and should start early after you start your position. Use the expertise around you.
- Which committees to sit on? Seek advice on the workload of various committees to match your goals with their expectations.
- How to manage the growing research laboratory and personnel issues? There is a good chance others will have experienced growing pains and possibly friction with personnel in the laboratories. The perspective of your colleagues and their suggestions can be helpful in resolving these matters.
- Should one settle for the fast “mediocre” paper, or persist with experiments for a more complete report that would be publishable in a high profile journal? How can you achieve manuscripts without your former supervisors that will establish your independence? Advice from colleagues can assist in making these judgments.
- What is the right balance between collaborative team research and your own research (with regards to tenure)?
- What critical experiments are required to finish a project or to provide preliminary data for a grant application? Can others in the Department assist in collection of preliminary data? Advance planning for collection of such data can be essential for the success of an application.

- Are there any critical linkages that could be established with others in the research community? The committee can assist in identifying others in the research community with complementary interests or expertise, and even make the initial introductions.
- What are the benchmarks that need to be achieved for promotion and tenure?

3. Composition:

The committee would normally be composed of three or more faculty members, with a blend of more senior colleagues, more recent hires, and those with expertise in the scientific discipline of the candidate. It is often helpful to have a representative who can speak to the teaching expectations of the faculty member, with a view to ensuring a suitably strong teaching dossier.

It is desirable to have one younger faculty member in the mentoring committee as she/he would have just gone through the same process. Their recent memories of the challenges, as well as familiarity with nuances of the funding situation, would provide a useful perspective to complement that of the more established faculty. This broad committee composition would facilitate an even distribution of workload in the department. Specifics of the position (e.g. teaching faculty, faculty with primary appointments in clinical departments) need to be considered when establishing the mentoring committee. People with a potential conflict – e.g. the chair of a department or division – should not be part of the mentoring committee.

One member should be designated “chair” to ensure that minutes of meetings are taken and any matters arising will be forwarded to the Chair of the Department, and letters of support are drafted with firsthand knowledge of the candidate’s progress.

4. Frequency and Content of Meetings:

The faculty member should call the meetings. They should be held approximately twice per year, with scheduling well in advance of upcoming grant application deadlines, annual meetings with the Dean, or promotion and tenure deadlines. However, the faculty member can call meetings more often as appropriate or required.

It is helpful for the faculty member to plan to give an oral presentation of research plans within the first few months of arrival, as well as 6 months before any grant application deadline. This gives the opportunity to abbreviate the usual long list of ambitious projects to a more restricted and focused set of goals that can be achieved in the first 2-3 years. The new faculty member should also plan to provide a broader vision of his/her research path over the longer term. Candid discussion and critique by the committee is often useful in guiding new faculty members in planning and presentation of their future plans.

In relation to the first grant application, it would be helpful if the committee be given the opportunity to review the key pages of any pending grant applications (summary of application and progress). The objective is to have external eyes review these critical pages first. These must appeal to a broad range of reviewers, who in some cases will lack the detailed technical knowledge of those immersed in the discipline.

In addition to sample grant pages, a written report for the mentoring committee could take the following structure. The benefit of preparing this document (which need only be cut and pasted

from the CV) is that the committee meeting can act as a dress rehearsal for the annual meeting with the Dean, focusing attention on key topics and optimizing performance in the interview.

Summary of Activities for the year – and future plans

Teaching:

- List your contributions to graduate and undergraduate teaching, seminar courses etc. (hours, enrolment, student evaluations, future teaching plans); add teaching evaluations/scores where applicable
- List the courses/workshops attended or planned to enhance one's teaching skills
- Are there other activities that will go toward building an impressive teaching dossier? Teaching awards?
- Summary of the trainees in the lab, as well as trainees for whom you serve on advisory committees or exams

Research:

- Research funding applied for? Funding received? Has internal pre-review occurred?
- Plans for further applications? Personnel awards?
- Publications, identifying your contributions
- Invited presentations
- List of any collaborations that have been established within and outside of the Department/University

Service to the Community:

- Service on CIHR or other grant review (or personnel) committees
- Internal review of grants
- Membership on Faculty or Department committees
- External reviewer for journals and granting agencies
- Other external service (conference planning, etc)