Wisdoms Gathered: Summary of Strategies and Resources

45 faculty members participated in this university wide open forum, including early career minority and women faculty, senior faculty, faculty mentors, department chairs and deans. Participants were asked to respond to the following question:

Tell a story about a good experience involving supporting a junior women or minority faculty member or being supported by a senior colleague. What was it about your interaction – your unique style; decisions you made or actions you took – that contributed to this experience? What wisdom do you take from this story about what you would like to see more of at U.Va.?

In general, participants agreed that informal mentoring is crucial but that such informal networks may not be as accessible to underrepresented new faculty as they are to those from majority groups. Therefore, departments without formal mentoring programs need to be proactive in creating opportunities for mentoring to occur. Mentors outside the department are important resources. Because they do not vote on a mentee’s tenure case they can more easily serve in the role of a confidant. Multiple mentors can be helpful; they should work together in helping junior faculty members achieve their professional goals.

Below is a compilation of specific “wisdoms” suggested during the forum -- a list of concrete suggestions, strategies, and best practices for mentors, department chairs and senior colleagues in helping women and minority faculty succeed.

Qualities of Good Mentors

Good Mentors . . .

- help new faculty members learn the system by explaining departmental and/or institutional culture
- make tacit norms and unspoken rules explicit
- use their status and connections to actively advocate for mentees by introducing them to their own networks and notify them of opportunities
- encourage their mentee in an ongoing manner
- are respectful of and tailor their support to the individual faculty members’ needs
- appreciate limits to their own personal experience in their effort to advise others and refer mentees to other resources
- are open and accessible
- build mutual trust and respect
- meet regularly, at least once a month, to build meaningful relationships
- offer support that is developmental/formative, NOT evaluative
- understand that a mentoring relationship is a two-way street, an interactive process
- take seriously early warning signs and looming points in faculty career
Chairs and Senior Colleagues within the Department

Chairs and Senior colleagues should support their new colleagues by

• offering clear and detailed feedback through annual departmental evaluations
• explicitly expressing desire for junior faculty to succeed
• noticing junior colleagues and what they do well and acting on it
• making tacit norms and unspoken rules explicit (including dynamics of faculty meetings and their history)
• signaling accessibility and interest in mentee as person (coffee, open door, “how’s it going?”)
• being aware of power differentials between senior and junior faculty
• recognizing that small microgestures loom large for new and underrepresented faculty and that they are cumulative
• actively counteracting personal and departmental unintentional bias/implicit associations

Characteristics of Mentees

In productive mentoring relationships mentees exhibit the following characteristics:

• They are open to being mentored.
• They recognize the importance of feedback seeking – it is “key” to finding good mentoring relationship.

Suggestions on Improving Institutional Support

• Flexible solutions for childcare
• More recognition of hidden services that faculty of color do (helping junior faculty say no, recognizing them)
• More measures for reporting and rewarding mentoring
• Think more expansively about tenurable work
• More peer advising
• Peer work groups – talk about work in structured way
• Create safe space with focal point for cross-disciplinary exchange, where people can talk without fear of reprisal – outside power structure of department
• More advising across departments
• University support for diversity, diverse faculty can help even when department not as supportive
• Increase opportunities for mentoring across careers
• Identify mentors as portfolio strengths