

# Ball State University



## New Faculty Mentoring Guide

At Ball State University, we recognize the importance of developing strong mentoring relationships with our new faculty colleagues. Not only do we have a professional obligation to help these individuals make a strong start to their careers at Ball State, but we also have a strong self-interest in helping them succeed so that they become productive members of our academic community. The guide and resources that follow—most of which was supplied by your faculty colleagues—are designed to assist both the new faculty member and the mentor. Topics discussed are:

[Mentoring versus Orientation](#)

[Selecting Mentors](#)

[General Keys to Good Mentoring](#)

[Tips for New Faculty Protégés](#)

[Fall Semester Mentoring Tasks](#)

[Spring Semester Mentoring Tasks](#)

[Research Mentoring](#)

[Additional Mentoring Resources](#)

If you have any questions about these materials, or would like to add your voice to them, please [contact us](#).

### Mentoring versus Orientation

Part of our obligation to our new faculty protégés is to familiarize them with the myriad of policies and procedures within the university—to "show them the ropes" of this new system. This orientation role is vital to the mentoring experience, since new faculty members need this information to get by on a daily basis. Much of what you do during the first semester will be orienting your protégé to life and work at Ball State; a glance through the [New Faculty Mentoring Checklis](#) (PDF) will clearly reveal that focus on "the ropes."

But we want to draw the distinction between orientation and mentoring in order to shine a light on the richness involved in the mentoring process. As you mentor, think about how you are developing a guiding and supportive relationship with your protégé. Are you providing an environment where the protégé feels safe to ask questions, explore ideas, and test things out? Are you sending the message that you truly care about this individual's work and success? Are you ready to help your protégé learn what it means to be a professional at Ball State University and a member of our academic community?

So as you read through the recommendations below, consider ways you can move beyond orientation to develop a supportive mentoring relationship with your protégé.

### Selecting Mentors

Selecting the right individuals to act as mentors is an important first step in this process, and we offer some suggestions below for selecting those persons.

- Robert Boice (1992) points out that "success in mentoring depends on what mentors do, not who mentors are."
- Perfect matches in scholarly interests are not as vital as a willingness to follow some of the best mentoring practices we share below.
- The prospective mentor should agree to make a significant investment of time in the process. Some departments will assign multiple protégés to a mentor, and while this works from an orientation perspective, it might be too time consuming to develop a strong and personalized mentor/protégé relationship.
- Recently-tenured faculty members make excellent mentors because they know the recent realities of the promotion and tenure system.

- Because of the important orientation role involved, the mentor needs to understand departmental policies and procedures, as well as be familiar with the resources with which a new faculty member needs to become familiar.
- Former Ball State mentors provided these characteristics or qualities of a good mentor:
  - Desire to assist new colleagues in their professional development
  - Available / Approachable
  - Experienced with university policies and procedures
  - Experienced in a variety of university committees
  - Politically savvy as to how the department operates
  - Caring / Encouraging
  - Good communicator/listener
  - Organized
  - Has a solid network of colleagues, including those in other departments
  - Trustworthy / Confidential

## General Keys to Good Mentoring

### Meet regularly

It is important to meet regularly, even when one of you feels too busy. Set agendas for each meeting so you are certain to cover important topics like university support services, promotion and tenure processes, salary and merit procedures, etc. Try to address these topics as they become most relevant for your protégé so discussions are timely and practical. Look to the [New Faculty Mentoring Checklist](#) (PDF) for suggested topics and timings.

### Leave time for unstructured conversations

While agendas are good for orientation purposes, be sure to leave time to discuss issues that have arisen for your protégé, like a problem in the classroom, a question about submitting an article, or a concern about department dynamics. While these are not therapy sessions, be willing to listen to your protégé's thoughts, concerns, and feelings—and be certain you hold those conversations in strictest confidence in order to maintain the trust that is important to your mentoring relationship.

### Help establish a social and professional network

Introduce your protégé to colleagues across campus—both as a social act and as a way to help build professional connections. Consider attending university events together, like lectures, receptions, faculty meetings, etc.

### Explore the campus

Developing a sense of place is important when we enter a new community, so consider exploring the campus with your protégé. Meet in a coffee shop, have lunch in various places, take a tour of the library or art museum together, or visit various campus offices and introduce your protégé to their staffs.

### Follow your protégé's early work

Be willing to guide your protégé through early attempts at teaching, scholarship, and service. Sit in on classes and discuss what you see happening. Offer to review articles or grant proposals, acting as a writing coach if appropriate. Ask to be assigned to a committee together or talk about what is happening with assigned committee work. Becoming engaged with your protégé's early work will ground your mentoring in real tasks as well as show your concern for the individual's development.

### Look for chances to collaborate

Help your protégé in some early professional experiences by collaborating on some projects. This could involve bringing your protégé into your current research project, or it could involve team teaching some units within your respective classes. Such collaborations will let you guide your protégé within the context of real projects, as well as help build valuable experience and confidence.

**Be proactive**

Your protégé will not always know the right questions to ask, or may not always feel comfortable admitting to a teaching problem or lack of knowledge. So be proactive and ask specific questions that will generate conversation. Here are some examples of general and specific/proactive questions:

General: How's your teaching going?

Specific: How are you doing managing the large class environment?

General: How is grading going for you so far?

Specific: My students often don't participate much during class discussions. How are yours doing?

General: How's your research going?

Specific: You talked about searching for a grant to fund your research project. How's that going so far?

General: How's your P&T document going?

Specific: Your P&T document is due in three weeks; would you like me to take a look at a draft with you?

Another important aspect of being proactive is helping your protégé keep track of upcoming deadlines—promotion and tenure files, salary documents, grant applications, freshman midterm grade deficiencies, etc.

**Understand your protégé's needs**

It seems to go without saying, but it is important to get to know your protégé's background, goals, interests, and needs—to understand the person you are mentoring. Our new hires range widely in their previous experiences and expertise, so learning about your protégé early on can make your mentoring efforts more focused and productive. Further, really getting to know your protégé will allow you to identify needs that may require you find someone else to assist in mentoring this person.

**Tips for New Faculty Protégés**

As with any relationship, a successful mentor/protégé relationship requires hard work from all persons involved. A new faculty member cannot simply sit back and "be mentored," but must be an active participant in the process. Below are some suggestions on how protégés can best take advantage of the mentoring opportunities they are offered.

**Make time to meet regularly with your mentor**

You will be very busy the first semester, but it is important to make time to meet regularly with your mentor, even when you feel overwhelmed... or especially when you feel overwhelmed. Boice

(1992) reports that a good mentoring relationship leads to a "more rapid socialization to campus" as well as improved ratings of teaching. So look at mentoring as an important long-term investment of your time, not just another hassle in your short-term schedule.

**Ask for help or feedback when you need it**

Ask questions when you have them; floundering around or fixing mistakes later will take too much of your valuable time. Don't worry that you are bothering your mentor, or how asking for help might appear. You are new and need assistance; that is the precise reason we have a mentor program in place!

**Be willing to listen and learn**

Part of your professional identity probably involves being self-reliant, but take the time to listen to the advice your mentor provides and look at this as an important learning opportunity. Sure, not all advice is useful or accurate in any situation, but be open to learning from your experienced colleagues.

**Take advantage of the opportunities presented**

Again, consider various opportunities—speakers, classroom observations, ITAS' Alpha Seminars, etc.—as investments in your long-term professional development. Find time for these opportunities, and consider asking your mentor for guidance on which uses of your time might be most beneficial.

**Be open and honest**

Share your true feelings, thoughts, and concerns with your mentor; this honesty is vital to getting you the guidance and assistance you need. Because your mentor understands the need for confidentiality, you should feel safe in sharing these thoughts. Remember, though, that confidentiality should work both ways, so be careful about sharing your mentor's comments with others.

**Be proactive about your needs**

If your mentoring relationship is not productive or does not meet your needs, let your mentor know in a courteous manner. Perhaps your mentor doesn't have the specific experiences or knowledge you need; there is nothing wrong with asking to locate someone who would be able to mentor you in those specific areas. And in some cases, the personal dynamics between a mentor and protégé just don't work out. Talk to your department chair about finding you a new mentor. It may be an awkward situation, but handled professionally, asking for a new mentor is better than staying in a situation that is unproductive for everyone.

**Fall Semester Mentoring Tasks**

We all recognize that the first semester in a new faculty position is a whirlwind; our new colleagues must learn an entirely new system and culture, all while teaching new courses in an unfamiliar setting. The responsibility of guiding a new faculty member through this transition is an important one, as evidenced in this list of general tasks mentors should seek to accomplish in the fall semester.

- Orient your protégé to departmental policies and culture, as well as to key university-wide policies and initiatives.
- Introduce your protégé to the department/college promotion and tenure processes. Assist in the preparation of the first-year P&T document and help establish an initial plan/timetable for working toward tenure. (In the case of contract faculty, this should focus on policies and planning for annual reports and merit pay.)
- Help your protégé transition into a full-time teaching role at the university, including assistance as needed with course planning, effective teaching, dealing with teaching challenges/problems, etc.
- Assist with the initial development of a research agenda and help locate funding and other resources to support that plan. (See "Research Mentoring" below for more details)
- Advise as needed on various professional issues, such as time management, navigating departmental politics, balancing teaching/research/service, balancing work/home life, etc.
- Assist with networking, including introducing your protégé to faculty, staff, and administrators across campus.

For more details on these and other fall semester mentoring tasks, see the [New Faculty Mentoring Checklist](#) (PDF).

**Spring Semester Mentoring Tasks**

As your protégé enters the spring semester, things will start settling down a bit, allowing for some time to reflect on the transition to BSU thus far and to plan for ongoing professional development. You will understand more about your protégé's personality and evolving needs, so spring is the ideal time to talk openly about the mentoring process thus far and to develop a personalized ongoing mentoring program, which may include the following:

- Help your protégé develop/refine a timeline toward tenure. Based on conversations with individuals serving on the department's P&T committee, identify scholarship requirements and develop a plan or timetable for reaching those goals.
- Break down the major tasks in your protégé's work (scholarship, teaching, service, etc.) and consider finding specialized mentors for these or other areas. For example, is there someone within (or outside) the department who would be a particularly good match to help with the development of teaching skills? Is there someone who shares the protégé's research interests who might become a good mentor or collaborator in research and scholarship?

- Consider moving beyond the department to find mentors or colleagues in allied disciplines. Developing a strong and diverse network will lead to a richer engagement within the university community.

## Research Mentoring

by Carolyn Kapinus, Department of Sociology

Adjustment to the new faculty role is stressful since it often involves preparing new courses, launching or maintaining an active research agenda (and/or finishing a dissertation), engagement in university service in a new setting. Robert Boice's (1992) research on new faculty member success indicates that the typical junior professor spends more time on course preparation and less time on scholarly research than is needed to meet the criteria for promotion and tenure. In contrast, a small group of new faculty (labeled by Boice as "quick starters") devoted three or more hours a week on research writing, incorporated their scholarship into their courses, and had regular discussions with colleagues about research and teaching. These quick starters were able to maintain an active research agenda while earning high scores on student and peer ratings of teaching. The key difference between the typical new faculty and quick starters is the ability to balance conflicting job demands.

Mentors are often focused on helping the new faculty member survive the whirlwind of the first year and discussing research can get lost in the shuffle. It can also be difficult to focus on mentoring the new faculty member in developing his/her research agenda when many seasoned faculty members struggle with the conflicting demands of teaching, research, and service. The following tips gleaned from Paul Silvia's book *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing* (2007) can help new faculty (and mentors) craft out the necessary time for research:

### Devote 30 to 60 minutes a day to scholarly writing

One of the most frequently cited obstacles to scholarly writing is the need for large blocks of time to think and write and finding such blocks of time can be next to impossible. Yet most of us can find 30 to 60 minutes in each working day to write. Moreover, having a regular writing schedule maintains momentum and reduces the anxiety and fear associated with writing.

### Set writing priorities

Most active researchers have multiple projects to juggle. Prioritizing projects and breaking large tasks into smaller tasks helps in establishing concrete goals for each writing period. It's overwhelming to start revising a manuscript for review, but more manageable to begin a writing session with the goal of revising the first two paragraphs of the introduction.

### Monitor writing progress

The simple step of keeping track of how much and/or how often we write can foster motivation to write. It also helps make us aware of how we use our time. Some people may keep track of the amount of text generated. Others may use a simple log in recording the amount of time (minutes and hours) spent writing to stay on schedule.

### Rewards for meeting goals

Rewards for meeting a research goal, such as submitting a paper to a journal, help to reinforce progress. Additionally, focusing on the process (such as submitting a paper to a journal) rather than the outcome (having a paper accepted for publication) can reduce the anxiety associated with writing. Immediate rather than long-term rewards help maintain momentum.

## Additional Mentoring Resources

Boice, Robert. *Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*. Allyn & Bacon, 2000.

Boice, Robert. *The New Faculty Member: Supporting and Fostering Professional Development*. Jossey-Bass, 1992.

Johnson, W. Brad. *On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty*. Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 2006

Silvia, Paul J. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. American Psychological Association, 2007.

Sorcinelli, Mary Deane, and Ann E. Austin, eds. *Developing New and Junior Faculty*. Jossey-Bass, 1992.

If you have any suggestions for improving this guide, please [let us know](#).