

Mentoring guidelines

Department of Mathematics

University of Notre Dame

Notes prepared Fall 2022 by David Galvin

The Department of Mathematics is fully invested in the success of all of our junior faculty (tenure-track Assistant Professors/Assistant Professors of the Practice/Assistant Teaching Professors) and postdoctoral visitors. All junior faculty are mentored from their arrival through at least the time of their promotion to Associate Professor with Tenure/Associate Professor of the Practice/Associate Teaching Professor, and all postdoctoral visitors are mentored throughout their time here. The goal of mentoring is to assist newly arrived colleagues in their transition to the Department, to offer feedback and suggestions as to expectations and improvement, and to act as a sounding board for any questions or concerns of the mentee.

This document outlines how mentoring should typically proceed.

Junior faculty

When an Assistant Professor of the Practice joins the Department, they will be assigned a mentor from among the senior faculty. New tenure-track Assistant Professors will be assigned one or two mentors, at least one being a Professor whose research area is well-aligned with that of the mentee. The precise mentoring structure is a matter for discussion between the Chair, the leaders of the mentee's research group, and possibly the mentee.

Early in the semester of arrival, the Chair organizes a meeting with the new faculty member and their mentor(s). At this meeting, the Chair provides the mentee with all necessary information on Department, College and University policies and expectations, including the procedure for promotion (and, where appropriate, tenure). The Chair will provide the mentee with a copy of the Department's organizational plan, which contains appendices describing the Department's expectations for renewal, reappointment and promotion.

The mentee and their mentor(s) should meet as frequently as they deem necessary. At a minimum there must be at least one meeting per semester where the focus is on progress towards promotion. At this meeting, which should happen after early-semester teaching feedback has been released (see later), the participants should discuss:

Teaching: Is the mentee teaching a reasonable mix of service and major/graduate courses? What courses should they ask to teach in the future? Are there any issues (coming from CIFs, or otherwise) that need to be addressed?

Research: What papers have been accepted, submitted, arXived recently? Is the mentee submitting to appropriate journals? Are they applying for appropriate grant support

(NSF, NSF CAREER, Simons, AMS-Simons)? Are there fellowships, such as the Sloan, that it is appropriate to apply for? Are they participating in the Department's seminar and colloquium life, traveling to conferences and workshops, and giving seminar and colloquium talks? Is it appropriate for the mentee to consider advising students?

Service: Pre-tenure Assistant Professors have a small but non-zero service responsibility. Is the mentee taking on service roles, to become familiar with the Department, so that they can begin to take on leadership roles when tenured? Are Assistant Professors of the Practice/Assistant Teaching Professors taking on service responsibilities appropriate to their job description?

The fall meeting does not involve the Chair, but the Chair should be told when it has happened (and will remind the mentor(s) if it has not happened by fall break). The spring meeting involves and is initiated by the Chair.

If at any time either the mentee wishes a change to be made to their mentoring team, or one of the mentors wishes to withdraw, the Chair will assist to make the necessary changes. There will be no repercussions or negative consequences.

Postdoctoral visitors

Each postdoctoral visitor has a mentor, who is usually the faculty member who supported the postdoc's hire. Postdocs and their mentors will in general meet frequently to collaborate on research. But also, they are encouraged to discuss all aspects of career development, from research to teaching to professional service. On teaching, the postdoc and their mentor should discuss early semester feedback and CIF results (see later), and, if the visitor's appointment is for more than one year, they should discuss appropriate courses to request to teach.

Note for mentors: Mentoring of junior faculty is an important responsibility, and it behooves us all to take it seriously. You should prepare for meetings with your mentees, by looking over their CV, their CIFs, the reports on the observation of their teaching, and their early-semester feedback --- all of these can be obtained from the Department Office.

Note for mentees: It is entirely to your benefit to avail of your mentor as much as you need. Prepare for each meeting by making sure that your CV is up-to-date, and by jotting down any questions or concerns you have, small or large.

Other resources

Alongside direct mentoring, there are other ways in which the Department assists and gives feedback to junior faculty and postdocs.

Each class taught by a graduate student, a postdoc, or a regular faculty member below Associate rank, is assigned an observer, who visits a class meeting (or, if appropriate, multiple class meetings), writes a report on their observations, and discusses the class with the instructor. For regular faculty at Associate level, classes are periodically observed, ideally at least one per year.

The University mandates that at the end of each semester the students provide evaluative feedback for each of their courses (the CIFs), and after final exams this feedback is shared with the instructor. It can be a valuable tool for growing as a teacher.

In addition to the CIFs, the Department works with the Kaneb Center for Teaching Excellence to collect early-semester evaluative feedback for each course taught by a graduate student, a postdoc or a pre-renewal Assistant Professor or Assistant Professor of the Practice. This feedback allows the instructor to notice and correct issues early on in a course. It is very helpful to take this feedback seriously, to act on it where possible/appropriate, and to make it clear to the students that it is being acted on.

The University's Kaneb Center for Teaching Excellence is a valuable resource for all instructors. It runs workshops and offers one-on-one guidance throughout the year, and all are encouraged to avail of its offerings.

Finally, each year at the end of the spring, the Department's Executive Committee comprehensively examines the progress of each Assistant Professor, and a summary of the discussion is communicated to the Assistant Professor in a letter from the Chair.