



Educational Opportunity & Diversity Programs

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## **THE DEPARTMENTAL MENTOR**

In the spring of Junior year, each CUNY Pipeline Fellow is paired with a faculty member in his or her major discipline who will serve as the student's mentor.

The primary criterion for the selection of the mentor is that the interests of the student and the mentor form a match. Consequently, there is no reason why the student cannot have a mentor from a CUNY campus other than his or her own so long as regular contact between student and mentor can be maintained. Mentors may also be drawn from the faculty at the CUNY Graduate Center.

The expectation is that the mentor and student will “bond” and that the relationship can be maintained throughout the student's undergraduate career. It may, of course, develop that either the mentor or student desire to withdraw from the relationship. Under these circumstances, once the mentor and student have discussed the matter and both are convinced of the need for change, they should contact the Pipeline Program office, which will assist in identifying a different mentor.

### **Selection of the Mentor**

Students applying to the Pipeline Program are responsible for identifying a faculty mentor at their home campus. Some students may already have a good working relationship with a faculty member – someone from whom the student has taken a course, perhaps. Under these circumstances, the student should approach the faculty member to find out whether the faculty member would be available to serve officially as his or her mentor should the student be accepted into the Program. Students who are having difficulty identifying an appropriate faculty mentor should contact the Pipeline Program office.

### **Your Responsibilities as Mentor**

The student whom you have agreed to mentor wants to become a university professor. He or she is currently majoring in your field and/or considering applying to a Ph.D. program that covers your major research interest. While associated with you, therefore, he or she will be your protégé. In general, your responsibility is to introduce the student to the profession by showing him or her what it is that a college professor does; supervise the student's progress toward timely graduation; help to identify appropriate graduate schools; explain the nature of a graduate school program and the differences between graduate and undergraduate education; and supervise his or her application to graduate school. The following guidelines are suggested:

- (1) Hold a general acquaintance conference during which you get to know your protégé and what his or her present interests and future plans are. Share with the student some of your own professional interests, e.g., courses you have taught, research interests, articles and books published, committee work and the like. Have your student submit to you a copy of his or her

transcript showing courses taken since admission into college. You will want to be certain that the student is making timely progress toward obtaining his or her degree and graduating on time. Act as your student's advocate if he or she is closed out of a required course.

- (2) Supervise, plan, and discuss with your student his or her academic program with a view not only to college requirements, but also a long-range preparation for suitable graduate programs. Does this student need a foreign language for graduate school or a basic course in science or mathematics? Insist that the student clear his or her program with you before registration. We want to avoid the situation in which a student plans to graduate at a certain time, only to discover at the eleventh hour that a required course is missing.
- (3) Once you have discussed with your student the activities for each semester, it is important that ground rules be established. For example: (1) How often will your schedule allow you to meet with your student? (2) How long will these meetings be? (3) What specifically do you expect the student to do and how much time will you allow for it to be done? You might also want to remind your student that appointments with you must be kept on time; if the student finds it impossible to keep an appointment, you must be notified in advance. Be sure to explain your preferred means of communication—e-mail, a phone message, a message left in the department office. Reaching an understanding of this sort at the beginning of the relationship saves future grief.
- (4) Discuss with your student the nature of a professor's activities beyond the classroom. Let him or her see how you go about preparing to teach a course, devising your syllabus, selecting and ordering texts, and so forth. One of these days he or she will be doing this. Encourage the student to observe one or more of your classes. Can he or she participate in any way by working as your peer tutor in a basic course? It would be good for your student to have some teaching and/or tutoring experience with you, if circumstances permit. Perhaps he or she could work as your teaching assistant.
- (5) Try to find a way to include your student in your committee work, and, if you are an administrator, find room for him or her in any activity that you consider appropriate. The point is that students should become familiar with the idea of service (committees, etc.) and know something about the duties of a college administrator. It may be possible for your student to attend a departmental meeting or, if you are a chairperson, assist you in some of the non-confidential work of your department. One day this student will be a department member somewhere, and it is not too early for him or her to get a sense of how a department functions. As always, your own judgment will determine the appropriateness of such activities.
- (6) All CUNY Pipeline students must engage in research. You may begin the process by having the student work as your assistant on a project of your own. Are you working on an article, monograph, or book? How might the student benefit from seeing how you decide to embark on a research project, encounter the difficulties that are involved, investigate the sources that must be consulted, and use these sources to further your own inquiry. How might the student assist you in your library research in a way that allows him or her to learn from the experience?
- (7) Will you be presenting a paper at a conference? This would provide an excellent opportunity to introduce your student to appropriate professional organizations, regional or city-wide conferences, as well as periodicals in your field.

- (8) Supervise the writing of the senior thesis (see the section that follows for more information on this important aspect of your responsibilities as mentor).
- (9) Your student needs to learn about graduate school and graduate work. Explain how the system works, the number of credits and other requirements for a Ph.D., ways in which graduate study is usually financed, and so forth. Provide assistance to your student in identifying and gaining admission to appropriate graduate programs. Review his or her application materials, especially the personal statement. Remind the student to take the GRE and GMAT in the fall of the senior year and to consult the grants office about the availability of graduate fellowships. The student will need your support and encouragement in obtaining graduate school application materials and completing all aspects of the application in a timely fashion.
- (10) Monitor the scholarly activities and achievements of your student and provide specific information that can be entered into an annual report.
- (11) Undoubtedly, you will have other ideas about the most effective ways of mentoring this CUNY Pipeline student, and you certainly should feel free to use your own approaches. In general, our aim is to provide our students with insights into their chosen professions and to prepare them for the kinds of tasks they will be called upon to perform in graduate school and as members of the academy.

#### **DEPARTMENTAL MENTOR & SENIOR THESIS**

By June of his or her Junior year, your student should have completed a proposal for the Pipeline thesis. What he or she requires from you is ongoing direction and support in completing each stage from concept to finished project. The mentor's role as it relates to the senior thesis is similar to that of the Ph.D. dissertation advisor. Your student will need assistance and direction in:

- clearly formulating the major theme, idea, or problem to be investigated
- identifying bibliographical sources and basic literature on the research topic
- establishing a timetable for completion of various portions of the thesis in stages rather than rushing to write everything at the end.

We suggest that you meet with your Pipeline student regularly. You should assign him or her a task and then check this task before going on from there to the next stage. This kind of step-by-step monitoring is crucial. You, as the expert, are the best person to judge the results that are emerging from the research, the nature of the conclusions to be drawn, and, most importantly, whether and how this student may be able to make an "original" contribution to the area of inquiry. What do we expect from a Pipeline thesis? At the least, there should be an analysis and conclusions drawn from a body of researched material. The degree to which the student is able, in addition, to make an original contribution must be your decision, based on the difficulty of the project and what insights you can realistically expect him or her to have at this early stage of a research career. Exercise your own professional judgment in this regard.

The senior thesis must be completed by May 15<sup>th</sup> of the Senior year.

