

Faculty Mentoring



A Handbook for the
School of Humanities,
Arts, and Social Sciences

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MIT School of Humanities,
Arts, and Social Sciences

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2013

Introduction

“Mentoring” has become a buzzword among faculty and academic administrators, and its meaning is often debated. Who, exactly, is a mentor and what does one do as a mentor? What is the role of the mentor? Should everyone have a mentor, or only junior faculty? What is the real purpose of mentoring among the faculty?

The aim of this handbook is to provide some guidelines for department Heads, faculty who are asked to be mentors to junior faculty, and to the junior faculty themselves. The goal of good mentoring is ensuring that our young faculty have the best possible chance at receiving tenure at MIT and building productive and successful lives in their fields. Some young scholars seem to accomplish this with little or no assistance from their colleagues, while others seem uncertain about what steps to take in building a successful academic life and career. It is crucial that Heads and senior faculty understand the challenges faced by their young colleagues, and agree upon a plan of action that will provide maximum support and advice to them as they make their way through the ranks.

Goals

In order for junior faculty to be promoted to the Associate Without Tenure (AWOT) and Associate with Tenure (AWT) ranks, they need to have a clear idea of what it takes to get there. They need to understand the evaluation criteria and who will do the evaluating. They also need plenty of advance notice of the actual deadlines they must meet to get their materials into the department for review. For example, many a junior faculty member, upon hearing that they will be reviewed for AWOT in the fall, mistakenly assume that they will have the prior summer to write or complete their materials; this misunderstanding can be disastrous.

Time Horizon

The promotion timeline is standardized across the Institute (although it is sometimes possible for departments to bring promotions forward earlier than expected, depending upon the circumstances). Assistant Professors are reviewed internally only (by the department) at the end of the second year. They are reviewed for promotion to AWOT in the fall of their fourth year, and for

promotion to AWT in the spring of their seventh year (see attached chart). Finally they are reviewed for promotion to Full Professor when the department Head and Dean feel that they have completed the work seen at tenure, embarked on new work, and achieved leadership in their field.

The department begins preparing promotion cases in the semester prior to the case presentation to School Council, and the department will give the junior faculty a deadline for submitting all work for evaluation with sufficient time for the work to be sent for external review. Generally no additional work will be accepted for inclusion in the case after this deadline.

It is very important for junior faculty to note that the period between AWOT and AWT is brief, and goes by very quickly. Faculty must be very strategic in planning, e.g., when to submit written work, when to apply for grants, when to schedule art projects, and try to ensure that most of this will go into the case preparation.

On What Factors Will Juniors Be Evaluated?

SHASS includes a wide variety of fields, each with their own disciplinary priorities. In History the primary unit of analysis is sole-authored monographs; in Economics it is peer reviewed articles; in Music it might be recordings and performances, and in Theater it might be productions. Regardless of discipline, however, the evaluation centers on the impact of the work.

In general, faculty are evaluated on a range of things:

- Publications/works of art
(e.g., performances, compositions, productions in the arts)
- Presentations
- Fellowships and honors
- Teaching and advising (of undergraduates and, if applicable, graduate students)
- Leadership
- Service
- Collegiality/citizenship

While the publications/works of art are the most important element, no single element will make or break a case; all are important and are considered as part of the larger profile.

The home departments can be more specific about each of these categories, and here we will offer some general guidance.

Publications / Works of Art

This is without question the most important yet ambiguous portion of each scholar's profile, and for several reasons. In most social sciences, where there is broad agreement about the top presses and journal publications, junior faculty will know or should be told where to publish. They should also be told how many publications are considered ideal as well as adequate. If they are book writers, what is the departmental expectation regarding articles? Which weighs more heavily in departmental deliberations, and why? If they are artists, what constitutes a production, or a successful creative effort?

In most humanities fields, the disciplinary norm is that by AWOT, the scholar should have a single-authored monograph completed and worthy of circulation. It is even better if the scholar has a contract with a good press, and even better yet if the book has been published.

In most social science fields, the norm is a little broader, and often includes either books and/or some number of articles.

In the arts, the norm might be books, articles, compositions, or productions.

The scholar's goal is not, however, to have a book, any book, or set of articles, or work of art, but to have work that makes an important contribution to the field in the evaluation of one's MIT colleagues and senior scholars in the field (or fields). How does one insure that the work has this kind of impact?

First, the scholar needs to get feedback on the work. Usually the dissertation advisor and committee have begun that process. Unfortunately, some junior scholars stop seeking feedback at that point, which is a mistake. The more feedback one gets, and from lots of different people (e.g., fellow junior faculty, experts in the field, conference attendees, etc.), the more one is likely to develop a significant, well-developed and appreciated project.

This is also why it is recommended that young scholars arrange to give at least three academic talks each year, at a variety of venues. Giving a brown-bag talk to your colleagues is a very good way to get your project out there and get some very helpful and diverse feedback. Giving a talk at an annual conference, where one can engage in discussions about how one's project fits into larger themes and currents in the field, is also important. Annual meetings also afford the opportunity for young scholars to meet senior scholars in the field, people who might be willing to read a chapter or two, come to an MIT workshop the following year, etc. Senior MIT scholars must take the lead in introducing their young colleagues to these other scholars at every opportunity. This kind of networking is absolutely crucial in building a case later.

One new approach to supporting and possibly accelerating the progress of junior faculty is to provide each junior with a "feedback meeting" at some point during the first three to four years at MIT. The department works with the junior faculty member to identify two or three top scholars in the field (not their dissertation committee), who will read or view or listen to the work carefully and come to campus for a half-day meeting to discuss it in a forum with the scholar. Often, department faculty also take part in this event. It offers young faculty an unparalleled opportunity to receive helpful feedback at a crucial time in the project's development, a time when such feedback can still be incorporated into

the final revisions before it is sent forth. Any junior or unit that would like to explore this option should coordinate with the department Head.

Second, the scholar needs to develop a timeline, and stick to it. Whether one is trying to lightly edit the dissertation, or doing new research, or completely gutting the dissertation to create two separate books, or completing a musical composition or theatrical production, sticking to a schedule is absolutely essential. Most young scholars find that the artificial deadline of submitting papers for conferences and such is very helpful for getting work done.

Third, young scholars need to consider how to balance writing articles, books, book reviews, essays in edited volumes, as well as making videos, blogs, and other forms of digital presentation. The clock to AWOT is basically three years long, and it goes by in a hurry, so planning is key. When one considers the long wait for publications to be reviewed and published, three years is a blink of an eye.

Thus, it is very important to keep focused on those things that will have the biggest impact at one's review (AWOT and AWT). In writing fields, this is usually the book and several articles in the discipline's top journals. There is no magic number of articles, but it is a good idea to have one or two by AWOT, in addition to the book manuscript. Here again, senior MIT faculty should be very direct in discussing this issue with junior faculty. Particularly at a time when the boundaries of our disciplines are blending and changing, it is crucial for juniors to know which publications are considered most important to the senior faculty. In the arts, it is usually several distinctive compositions, performances, or productions.

Often, junior faculty will be interested in exploring new terrain, whether in terms of new or experimental publications, or digital communications. This is something that they should discuss very seriously with the senior MIT faculty, who may not consider such venues as high-impact as other, more traditional venues. If the goal is to build a successful profile, it is crucial for both the young scholar and the senior faculty to agree on these things. A large number of articles and essays in semi-obscure venues is not as valuable as one or two in the leading journals.

Presentations

Young faculty should become members of at least one major scholarly organization; most are members of two or three. Young faculty should also try hard to attend these annual meetings, both to give papers, but also to serve on committees and to meet others in the field. Reuniting with former graduate

school friends can also introduce young scholars to new and interesting scholars, including leaders in the field.

There are four reasons why young faculty should give papers at conferences. First, it offers a platform to talk about research; you want people to know who you are and what you are working on. Second, it provides a good way to get feedback on one's work, both from scholars who know the subfield really well, and from those who may not be as familiar but have valuable suggestions for further research or rumination. Third, it can be a great way to meet new people in the field, some of whom will become your supporters and informal mentors down the road. Fourth, it helps to keep abreast of the kinds of questions, disagreements, and lines of research occupying the discipline.

When choosing among various conferences, invited lectures, workshops, and department colloquia, again remember that one is trying to have a big impact. Choose those venues that are prestigious in your field and/or that provide one with a high-visibility platform for sharing one's work. When in doubt, young scholars should discuss their options with senior faculty members.

Fellowships and Honors

All junior faculty at MIT are entitled to take one semester of paid leave on a Junior Faculty Research Leave, and faculty in the humanities fields are entitled to take another semester of paid leave on an Old Dominion Fund fellowship. Thus each new faculty member has one or two semesters of leave before tenure. (Because these are automatic and internal fellowships, they do not carry the same weight of prestige as competitive outside fellowships). Juniors are also eligible to take another semester or two of leave before tenure if they receive an outside grant or fellowship (e.g., Rome Prize, NSF, Radcliffe Fellowship, etc).

All fellowships and honors are good to get, obviously, and some are more prestigious than others. Senior MIT faculty will consider the young scholars' honors and fellowships with great care because such things have different meanings in the various fields. For example, honors for one's work such as prizes for best paper or best book or best performance are extremely powerful, because they come from one's professional peers and leaders, who select from many entrants. NEH awards are very prestigious because they are so impossibly competitive given the national scale of the NEH. Awards from the American Council of Learned Societies are important because, again, they are competitive and, as with NEH awards, one's work is read and seen by leaders in the field and compared to the work submitted by one's peers around the country.

The point is that fellowships and honors are important, less for the cash element, and more for the recognition. Applying for these things shows ambition and energy, and getting one of them shows that one is able to compete successfully on the national stage.

Teaching

For many new faculty, teaching at MIT is a surprise. Undergraduates are exceptionally bright, but they may not be as motivated in their HASS classes as they are in, say, calculus or brain science. As one department Head once put it, “We have to give them a real and difficult challenge almost immediately if we want to get them engaged in our subjects.”

Too often, new faculty are a bit at sea, teaching advanced topics or theoretical material that was successful at another university, but not at MIT. They often suffer low enrollments as a result, and can become demoralized. Yet, they are evaluated on their student evaluations as well as their enrollments, and thus it is very important for department Heads and mentors to help them get off on the right foot.

It is strongly advised that departments bring new faculty into an established but introductory class in their first year. This will give them a better enrollment, will advertise them as great new teachers, and it will help them develop the skills to cover one of the core parts of the curriculum. New faculty should never teach only their specialty; at most they might offer a seminar on their topic once a year. Overall they should be encouraged to develop a class or two that serves as an introductory class that will help increase enrollments in the department.

Senior faculty should also help new faculty locate various forms of teaching assistance in the School and on campus. The SHASS Associate Dean can provide new faculty with more information on this, and the department should insist that new faculty take advantage of such programming.

On occasion new faculty spend a lot of time and energy developing new classes rather than perfecting and tweaking existing classes (many of their own creation). This should be avoided whenever possible. Given that promotion is based primarily on one’s research profile, it is counterproductive for young faculty to get overly involved in pedagogic experimentation and exploration once they have their four or five basic classes. Experimentation is best done following tenure.

Leadership and Service

One of the marks of a respected member of an intellectual community is that the community members look to her as someone who can be counted on to set out an intellectual agenda that transcends individual research interests; to manage a fair and efficient prize competition; to organize a workshop on cutting-edge work in the field, and so on.

Typically, these activities are best done by tenured faculty members, but on occasion junior faculty demonstrate their intellectual and managerial leadership sooner than later. Senior faculty must counsel juniors on this subject if they seem to be getting too involved in these kinds of activities, but should be prepared to help support them for the occasional foray into important leadership opportunities. Very often, junior SHASS faculty are invited to do something that, while quite prestigious, will clearly take time away from their publications and teaching. Senior faculty should monitor this to make sure that juniors don't get in over their head; juniors are often very flattered to be invited to participate in these things, and don't want to seem ungrateful to scholars they admire.

At MIT, juniors should be asked to serve in some fairly light committee work very soon after arriving, but should never be asked to sit on a time-consuming or politically-sensitive committee at any level. Again, some juniors will be sought out for such things by colleagues in other units at the Institute, and the department must make sure that the juniors have their priorities clearly laid out; in general they should turn down such requests.

Who Plays What Role in Mentoring?

While reasonable faculty might agree on many if not all of these ideas, putting them into practice can be difficult. Faculty are often not sure what their responsibility is towards junior faculty, Heads worry about being too directive to faculty and juniors alike, and juniors want to avoid seeming either too demanding or too indifferent.

While these worries are understandable, the faculty and Head need to ensure that the junior faculty have all the information, encouragement, and firm direction they need to succeed at MIT. With that in mind, here is a suggested guide to “who does what” in the mentoring relationship.

Section/Department Head

- Meet with new faculty within a week or ten days of their arrival on campus to let them know the specific opportunities available to them (e.g., Junior Faculty Leave, Dean’s Fund, etc).
- Tell the junior exactly what the unit expects from them in terms of teaching, service, and participation in the life of the unit.
- Identify two faculty mentors (tenured) who will be assigned to the junior. One should be in your department, but the other one might be drawn from another unit. Sit down with them together and go over the department’s expectations for mentors. Set up a schedule (e.g., at the end of each term) for the mentors to report on the mentee’s progress.
- Report the faculty member’s accomplishments and challenges to the Dean at the end of each term, and discuss any needed fine-tuning.
- Make sure that mentors are provided with up-to-date information regarding the junior, (e.g., course evaluations, fellowship opportunities, etc.)

Mentors

- Familiarize yourself with the junior's work; make sure you understand what he/she is trying to accomplish.
- Establish a regular schedule for meeting with your mentee.
- Go over the department's expectations for what must be accomplished to be considered for promotion to AWOT and tenure. Be specific about quantity of work, number of talks, measurement of impact, selection of publishers and journals with whom to publish, and indications of potential leadership in the field.
- Help your mentee identify three classes that she can really master and that can be offered every year. There is no virtue in developing lots of new classes, none of which gets traction. Try to ensure that at least half of the classes address the big and general issues that MIT students get excited about.
- Visit the classes once or twice a year. Figure out if the mentee needs extra help with teaching by going over their course evaluations, enrollments, etc. as soon as they are available. Help your mentee figure out new strategies.
- Ask your mentee for a timeline that outlines a plan of work on publications. Help her modify the timeline if it seems unworkable and help her stick to the timeline once it is agreed upon.
- Help your mentee network in the field. Encourage him to attend the leading conferences and workshops, and introduce him to the leading scholars both in Boston and in the field. He will already know most of his peers, but will need some help in breaking through to the leaders.
- Help your mentee strategize to publish in the right places. Especially for faculty in interdisciplinary fields, it can be very difficult to know what "the right places" might be, and they may agree to publish in venues that will have little to no impact. Try to help them sort this out.
- Make sure that your mentee understands the norms of department/Institute collegiality and citizenship. Make sure that your colleagues also reach out to the mentee to discuss their work, etc.

Junior Faculty

- Be proactive. If your mentor seems uncomfortable talking about the department's expectations, initiate the conversation yourself. Make sure you feel that you understand the issues.
- Make a workplan that is both realistic and ambitious. Your research output and your impact on the field are the most important ingredients to your success at MIT, so make them a priority and hold yourself to a schedule.
- Discuss any concerns about scholarly direction and profile with your mentors. For example, get clarity on what counts towards your scholarly portfolio – blogging? op-ed pieces? essays in collections? Don't assume that this is fixed in stone. Talk to your mentor about how to raise your scholarly profile – conferences? small workshops? committees? Opinions on this vary considerably, but you want to try to align your activities with departmental expectations.
- Identify several classes that you can focus on over the next few years, and try to make them successful. If you have not taught very much, seek out the advice of those more experienced, and consider getting guidance from the Teaching and Learning Lab at MIT. Get your colleagues' thoughts on how MIT students might differ from those you have taught before, and suggestions for developing a successful and exciting classroom experience.
- Strike a balance in your committee work. Before tenure, it is wise to limit such commitments. In a small department you might be asked to serve on a search or admission committee (which are modest to large commitments) once in a while, but try to resist spending more than an hour or two a week on such things, including Institute and professional committees.
- If you feel that you and your mentor(s) are poorly matched, discuss it with the department Head; you may need a new mentor.

SHASS Faculty Promotion Schedule

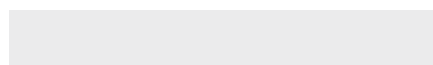
References are
to Academic Years

Promotion/Tenure

Year 1
2013-2014



Year 2
2014-2015



Year 3
2015-2016

Department begins
Promotion case in
Spring/Summer of 3rd Year

Year 4
2016-2017

Promotion case is presented
in Fall of 4th Year

Year 5
2017-2018

Promotion to Associate
Professor without Tenure
effective 5th Year

Year 6
2018-2019

Department prepares
Tenure case in
Fall of 7th Year

Year 7
2019-2020

Tenure case is presented
in Spring of 7th Year

Year 8
2020-2021

Promotion to Associate
Professor with Tenure
effective 8th Year

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