Professional Development and Mentoring

Williams College
Office of the Dean of the Faculty

CONTENTS

Professional Development and Mentoring at Williams

At Williams College, we are committed to furthering the professional development of faculty members as teachers, scholars/artists, and contributors to college governance. We seek to provide support for continuing growth in these areas. Every faculty member has access to a range of college resources for professional development both experiential and financial. Information about these resources can be found on the NetWorks for Faculty Development website.

We recognize that faculty arrive at Williams with different kinds of expertise. Each faculty member has varied aspirations and needs for their professional development, which may well shift over the course of one's trajectory at the college.

In this document, we emphasize the importance of mentoring, the formal or informal practices used to advise, train, and/or support those with less or different kinds of experience; practices that aim to develop and improve skills; practices that provide additional tools; and/or practices that expand knowledge. Inherent to effective mentoring are the development of trust and the cultivation of a relationship that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved. Mentoring is a key aspect of professional development at all stages of a faculty career.

Formally, we structure mentoring practices so as to provide faculty with an expansive exposure to available resources, while offering them substantive, constructive support for career-long professional development. We also acknowledge a range of informal mentoring practices that are especially important to one's day-to-day life as a faculty member at Williams, including mentoring at the local, in-unit level as well as peer mentoring. Mentoring practices reasonably vary according to field and academic unit; nonetheless, we believe in cultivating a college-wide climate that fosters regular contact among faculty to engage with each other, learn about themselves and their academic units, and receive the broadest level of personal and professional support.

This document aims to help structure conversations among faculty to identify the individual needs and goals so that mentoring can be most helpful. The form that this help will take will vary according to the needs of the faculty person and the expertise of the mentor, but often the mentor will be someone who can steer a colleague to college resources and facilitate forming contacts with other faculty. Faculty should treat this as a living document that can actively accommodate their needs at a given moment, but that can also adapt to their shifting needs over time.

Whether you are reading this document with your own needs in mind or in your capacity as a mentor (formal or informal) to other faculty, we hope you will find it useful. This document refers to some aspects of formal evaluation for faculty members but its focus is

not on evaluation and its processes. For more information on formal processes, please consult the [Faculty Handbook](), chairs, or a CAP representative.

Navigating Mentoring Spaces and Stages at Williams

Faculty arrive in and often move through various stages of professional life at the college. One's professional needs also shift. At the department or program level, weekly, monthly, and semester-long activities including colloquia, sharing of syllabi, and social activities foster numerous, regular informal mentoring contexts. These opportunities can be especially beneficial to cultivating a robust intellectual climate related to teaching, research, and navigating life at Williams.

The Initial Years at Williams

For faculty in their initial years at Williams, we notably offer the [First3 Program](), coordinated by [Sarah Goh](), [Magnus Bernhardsson]() and [Kashia Pierpzak](). The coordinators— who each represent a different division—are available as resources to answer questions about the college and professional development. Department, program, and/or evaluation committee chairs and senior colleagues are also key resources in one's academic unit. For faculty in Division 3 and Psychology, the Director of the Science Center, [Tiku Majumder](), and the [Provost's Office]() are also good resources.

All new tenure-line faculty as well as doctoral and postdoctoral fellows are assigned a faculty mentor from outside their unit, whose role is informal and who is meant to serve as a non-evaluative college and community resource. Each assistant professor also receives mentoring within their academic department or program, even though many academic units do not assign formal mentors. One's chair will be a first point of contact, although all faculty members should make themselves available for support and consultation. We likewise encourage faculty to seek out other colleagues at the college, including peers, who can be helpful to them (including through means such as teaching and research/creative endeavor roundtables). In addition, forming networks outside of Williams can offer an additional way for faculty to receive mentoring.

Assistant Professors and Lecturers:
We recommend that each faculty member articulate professional goals in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and other professional skills, in consultation with scholars in one's field as well as with senior members of one's academic unit at Williams, starting with one's chair. Assistant Professors and Lecturers will have regular written communications about their progress. Assistant Professors receive annual "Fuqua" letters, as well as annual one-on-one meetings with either the Dean of the Faculty or the Associate Dean of the Faculty.

Starting at the end of their first year, assistant professors have an annual formal meeting with their department, program, or evaluation committee chair to discuss how the senior

members of the unit or evaluation committee are perceiving their performance in relationship to the unit's "Statement of Methods of Evaluation" (which faculty should receive in the fall of their first year and each fall thereafter). In addition, starting in the winter of the second year, faculty receive annual written feedback from the unit, known at Williams as the "Fuqua letter." The college requires that chairs meet with junior faculty to discuss the content of this letter. We encourage faculty to use these occasions to consider how one's goals for the year connect to unit expectations.

Visiting Faculty and Fellows:

The categories of Visiting Faculty and Fellows encompass faculty of various ranks, with various term lengths at the college, and various levels of professional experience. Often, the extent of mentoring necessary and available is impacted by one's length of time on campus. It is imperative that faculty in these roles do their part in actively communicating their particular needs, and especially as they relate to navigating the academic job market. There are a variety of resources available to aid faculty in these stages, including building skills for writing an academic cover letter, practicing job talks, and augmenting interview strategies. In addition to First3, the Office of the Dean of the Faculty and the Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity, and the Director of Writing Programs, Stephanie Dunson, are sources of support and information.

Beyond the First Years

At every stage of their careers, faculty from all ranks and academic units can be helpful resources for each other. Contexts such as the weekly Science lunches, Oakley Center colloquia, seminars, and reading groups, as well as the teaching and research/creative endeavor roundtables sponsored by the Office of the Dean of the Faculty serve as spaces where faculty can interact. Faculty also have many regular opportunities to pursue specific topics relevant to their professional development at different points in the year, including writing retreats, the Open Classroom initiative, periodic all faculty lunches on pedagogy, annual workshops on grant-writing and seeking external fellowships, an annual publishing day (including the opportunity for individual consultations with editors of major presses), and workshops on research tools, instructional technologies, new media, and the "How the College Works" series. Recurring Associate Deans' lunches also include topics related to pedagogy, research, and professional development.

Tenured Faculty and Senior Lecturers:

Tenured faculty and those with Senior Lecturer status are evaluated in various ways. Tenured faculty will have scheduled one-on-one meetings with the Dean of the Faculty the summer after receiving tenure, after the interim Associate Professor report, and after promotion to Full Professor. All faculty, regardless of rank, should feel free to ask for an appointment with the Dean or Associate Deans at any time.

Chairs:

Senior faculty may take on the role of unit chair. Chairs are often first points of contact for faculty, although all faculty members should make themselves available for support and consultation. Chairs ought to help assistant professors identify professional goals and needs in the context of the methods of evaluation used by the unit to assess their progress and performance. Chairs should steer new faculty members to college resources and facilitate forming contacts with other faculty (at Williams and elsewhere). That is, the chair will likely not be the best person to help incoming faculty in all arenas of professional development but is an important first contact.

We especially recommend an initial meeting early in the academic year between assistant professors and their department/program/evaluation committee chairs to identify the individual needs and goals of the faculty in the context of the expectations of the department/program and the college. This conversation should also include a discussion of the department/program/evaluation committee's "Statement of Methods of Evaluation," which is approved by the CAP.

Outside the Purple Bubble

Forming networks outside of Williams offers an additional way for faculty to receive and provide mentoring. Annual divisional funds enable faculty to develop those networks. Williams also participates in organizations such as the Alliance to Advance Liberal Arts Colleges (AALAC), which offers faculty the opportunity to organize or participate in thematic workshops on a range of topics with faculty from other liberal arts colleges.

Strategies, Goals, and Assessment

What follows are some prompts we hope will be useful for faculty members at all phases in their careers. Faculty may use these questions (ideally annually) to frame conversations with chairs and other faculty mentors to map out strategies for pursuing goals, assessing progress at the end of each academic year, and to identifying needs so that mentors can be most helpful. The form that this help will take will vary according to the needs of the faculty member and the expertise of the mentor, but often the mentor will be especially helpful as someone who can facilitate forming contacts with other faculty and individuals toward college resources.

We recommend that faculty meet regularly with mentors, and start with a meeting to discuss their interests and needs, with the topics below as a starting point:

<u>Identifying Goals</u>

What are your goals for the coming year? Think about at least these categories:

1) Scholarship (for example: to pursue specific research projects, to improve writing and creative habits, to gain experience/skills in placing your materials in publications and at conferences, to revise some portion of your dissertation, to generate an article from a dissertation, to submit an article to a peer-reviewed journal, to present at one or more conferences, to complete a book project, to apply for major grants, etc.);

2) Teaching (for example: to develop or revise syllabi, to work on kinds of pedagogy, to observe a range of teaching, to employ different kinds of pedagogy such as lecturing or leading small discussions, etc.);

3) Professional Skills (for example: to identify aspects of the college to which one would like to contribute, to discover sources for future grant/fellowship funding, to write a book prospectus, to learn how to write an op-ed, to acclimate to life as a Williams professor, to become an active member of one's department/program, to build professional networks in one's subfield, to learn how to be an effective department, program, or committee chair, etc.).

<u>Acting on your goals and identifying your needs</u>

Take a few minutes to assess your current skills and strengths, as well as areas in which you would like to improve. In which areas would you especially appreciate help strategizing to find the best approaches and resources or support from a mentor?

1) Scholarship (might include work habits, experience/skills in placing your materials in publications and at conferences).

2) Teaching (might include lecturing, leading small discussions, constructing syllabi, evaluating student work, mentoring, determining how many summer and thesis students to advise).

3) Other professional skills (might include budgeting, managing start-up or grant funding and accounting, managing projects, improving confidence level in public speaking, chairing, acquiring leadership skills for professional organizations, editing).

4) Juggling it all (might include negotiating competing demands from colleagues and students, carving time out for scholarship and life, tools for stress reduction, maintaining balance).

Think about how you might go about fulfilling your goals and with whom you might collaborate or consult to pursue them. You should always feel free to contact the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, your department, program or evaluation committee chair, or peers.

Periodic Assessment

Assessment of your professional development has less to do with the formal practices that are standard at the college (e.g. Fuqua letters, "Statement of Methods of Evaluation," class observations, and SCS scores). Rather, we encourage you to consider: how will you evaluate your progress in achieving and redefining your goals at the end of each academic year with the following categories in mind? You might also discuss how to track progress in achieving or redefining your goals at the end of each academic year and how your annual goals connect to longer-term goals.

1) Scholarship (might include consideration of what you actually wrote, researched, and or submitted in a given year, evaluation of the quality of scholarly production, attention to factors that supported or impeded scholarly outcomes).

2) Teaching (might include review of practices that worked well during the semester or year as well as those that did not, reflection on teaching highs and lows, focus on attainment of different kinds of pedagogical skills).

3) Other professional skills (might include consideration of techniques and strategies acquired, review of training and education received).

4) Juggling it all (might include self-reflection about your sense of balance, intentional creation of space and time to relax and do something you enjoy, consideration of overall success and thriving).