

SUMMER 2019 MENTEE SURVEY HARVARD OPHTHALMOLOGY MENTORING PROGRAM

The Manager of Faculty Affairs asked mentees to provide meeting dates with mentors over the last year and to provide input on the highlighted points below. A total of 57 mentees responded to her request: 40% of Instructors (24 of 62); 40% of Assistant Professors (21 of 52); and 34% of Associate Professors (12 of 35). While only 38% of the mentees participated, the collection of responses was nonetheless substantive and constructive.

1. **Advice to other mentees on how to be the best mentee possible** fell into 5 categories.

- a. ***Scheduling meetings:***

“Be proactive” is the resounding refrain. As one mentee wrote, “This is one that I should listen to myself: reach out. My mentors have been incredibly helpful when I do reach out.” Mentee responses confirmed that it is “important for mentees to initiate the mentee-mentor meeting and engage in frequent and open communications with the mentors.” One mentee advised, “If mentees want to make this as productive of a relationship as possible, they should make the effort to reach out.” Noting the challenge of setting up appointments with mentors who are clinicians, another mentee advised fellow mentees to “seek appointments months in advance and use events where the respective person would be present anyway, such as faculty retreats.”

- b. ***Preparing meetings:***

“Come with a written agenda” is the essence of preparation—concrete topics and specific questions to be covered during the meeting with a mentor. “Have a list of your priorities and goals and ask for specific, directed help in how to achieve them.” One mentee specifies that the list should be “in descending order of priority to you.” Another advises, “Think about deficiencies in your career or future aspirations and be prepared to talk to your mentor about how best to achieve them.” It is essential to “prepare your CV early and keep it updated.” It is important to allow enough time for all requests (i.e. review of CV or other documents).

- c. ***Approaches to take during the meeting:***

“Take the lead in the conversation.” Tell your mentor what your career goal is; communicate with your mentor about any problem relating to your future career; ask about promotion requirements—don’t be shy. Be open to talking about your current status and future plans, and seek advice. Ask questions even if you do not expect immediate resolution. Be honest, share your doubts, and seek to gain confidence through these meetings. Be persistent, and push for what you believe you deserve.

“Listen.” One mentee advised, “Show initiative and enthusiasm. If so, mentors will invest effort in you because they see your dedication and drive.” Another wrote, “Be available and actually listen to the advice you get.” On the most practical level, remember to take notes. At the end of the meeting, schedule the following meeting.

- d. ***Actions to take after the meeting:***

Write a summary of the major items discussed; keep it for your records and email to your mentor so s/he can refer to it in the future.

- e. ***General approach to being a mentee:***

Understand yourself and your personal and professional goals. Take the initiative to maintain regular communication with your mentors—schedule career meetings, and ask for comments on

your projects and career development regularly. Create a 5-year timeline so that you see your path forward. Document your progress every 2-3 months and update the timeline yearly. Share this with your mentors. Finally, remember not to expect your mentors to have all the answers.

2. **Advice to mentors on how to be the best mentor possible** fell into 6 categories.

a. *Be available:*

This was the most rousing chorus: be available; be present; be accessible. As one mentee wrote, “The number one thing is that mentors should be approachable and try to have the mentee’s best interest in mind. Even if it’s just to pull the mentee aside at an event or dinner and chat with them, that could help break the ice.” Another mentee who is newer to the faculty acknowledges how busy everyone is, “but some mentees are just starting and really appreciate tips for success in both research and clinic. These meetings are so valuable!”

b. *Provide parameters and direction:*

Ask mentees to come up with goals and priorities for which they need help. If they need help with something that is out of the realm of the mentor’s expertise, then help direct them to someone who can help them. Point out that the academic track is not always linear and that there will be hiccups along the way. This understanding helps demystify the process and allows mentees to recognize that success on the path to promotion is possible with hard work and tenacity, hiccups notwithstanding.

c. *Listen:*

Hear out your mentee; try not to interrupt his or her flow of comments and ideas. Listen carefully to understand exactly what the mentee’s concerns are, and only then provide feedback. Figure out at what stage your mentee is and share your suggestions accordingly, adjusting your advice to the skills of the mentee as well as to his or her priorities and values. Always take into account your mentee’s specific situation and never give generic advice.

d. *Be personal:*

“I find it very helpful when the mentor gives examples from personal experience,” commented one mentee. Give insights on the mistakes you have made and ways to avoid mistakes clinically, surgically, academically, in grant writing, etc. Be honest and transparent and share doubts you have had as well as how you faced those doubts. That will in fact help the mentee gain more confidence by recognizing that even those who are successful struggle with doubts.

e. *Be practical:*

Give concrete advice on manuscript opportunities, journals, reviewer opportunities, etc. Get down into the details. Update the mentee’s promotion timeline at every meeting.

f. *To do in general:*

Know what your mentee’s career goals are. Show earnest interest in the welfare of the mentee; be devoted and engaged, and offer assistance when the mentee needs it. Help the mentee to take his/her own path forward, not necessarily the traditional one. Keep your mentees in mind not only during the meeting but throughout the year; be on the lookout and let them know when opportunities arise that might benefit them. Remember that being a good mentor requires a certain maturity and feeling good about yourself; in other words, lead by example. Finally, take the initiative

to reach out to your mentees if time allows. As one mentee pointed out, “in a way they are doing you’re the favor of getting the chance to mentor. They should not be solely responsible for maintaining the relationship.”

3. **Mentors provided wise advice across all areas: promotion preparation, management skills, clinical expertise, grant writing, and work-life balance, and tenacity.**

- My mentor told me not to see promotion as a target but as the natural result of academic success.
- My mentor talked to me about management skills: it is important to know yourself and understand people.
- I have been particularly appreciative of my mentors’ knowledge on to whom I should send difficult cases.
- My mentor, an experienced grant writer, taught me the nuances of grantsmanship.
- My mentor advised me to pursue the NIH program officer for more information regarding the status of my application, which spurred me into action. It turned out to be a great experience and I’m thankful to my mentor for pushing me to do it.
- After my mentor gave me a lot of valuable professional advice, she added personal advice on the importance of securing time with family even during intense periods at work.
- “Sometimes you have to be ready to be a pest to get things done.” So I was advised by my mentor. Not being afraid to be a pest was the most practical piece of advice I got this year.

4. **Mentees are happy with the website (<https://eye.hms.harvard.edu/mentoring>).** “It is well-designed, organized, and easy to understand.” “It has a good assortment of information.” “It has every detail related to the mentoring program that I would expect.” Mentees appreciate in particular the teaching resources, articles, HMS information, and 2018 survey results.

They furthermore provided some excellent suggestions that the Manager of Faculty Affairs is incorporating into the site as well as into the program. The site will include more narrative describing the overall goals of the program, how it works, and who participates, including the current number of mentees and mentors. Quotations will be added. A monthly email will be sent highlighting a specific area of the website to remind and encourage faculty to consult the website. Mentees want a presentation or activity on the mentoring program to be included in every bi-annual faculty retreat.

This remark by one of the mentees sums up both the *raison-d’être* of the Harvard Ophthalmology Mentoring Program and its ongoing success:

“Most helpful to me is just knowing that this program is in place and I can reach out to my mentors for advice. Being mid-career and someone who has not had a formal mentor prior to this program, I tend to just try to figure things out on my own. There is such a wealth of advice and opportunities through Harvard Ophthalmology. I am always in awe and always humbled at being part of this amazing department.”