



AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE ECONOMICS PROFESSION Top 10 List



Mentoring Junior Faculty

This list describes ten (easy) things senior faculty can do to mentor junior faculty. The top ten are organized by the level of marginal resources required. Numbers one through three require very little marginal effort. Numbers four through seven involve some additional time, but very little other resources. Numbers eight and nine involve the use of social capital or political influence, which may be more costly. The latter apply more to junior colleagues at your institution rather than in your field, although most of the top ten are applicable to both.

- 1. Referee their papers first.** Use the rank of the authors to decide which papers to referee first. In particular, referee papers with junior faculty members as authors earlier. Of course, when reviews are double-blind, this technique is not possible. Editors, however, can set earlier deadlines for referee reports on papers with junior authors. The publication process takes months and sometimes years. These delays are especially costly for junior faculty facing a ticking tenure clock. Faster turnarounds will have a substantially large impact on their lives than equivalent speed increases will have for senior faculty. This is true even if the paper is rejected. Being able to revise a paper and have it under review at another outlet quickly is an important benefit for junior faculty. (This does not imply that you use different refereeing standards for research done by junior and senior faculty.)
- 2. Invite them to present.** Senior faculty members have a surprising amount of input into who is invited to their institutions to give talks and present their work. These invitations often go to established researchers, based on their records but also because their names are salient and come easily to mind or because they have personal relationships with faculty who are organizing the workshops. But these invitations are particularly valuable to junior faculty. They provide important exposure for their work, allow them the opportunity to receive feedback and constructive criticism, and helps on their vita.

The second easy thing to do, then, is to consciously invite junior faculty to present at these workshops. If you're organizing the workshop series this is easy. If you're not organizing, dropping an informal email to your colleague who is organizing the series with a few suggested names is typically effective. You can suggest junior faculty you've met at conferences, whose papers you've seen or who your informal network suggests do good research and have interesting papers. It is important to help people remember what was important and what you concluded.

- 3. Include them in organized sessions.** Many senior faculty are called upon to organize sessions at conferences, put together workshops or organize other professional activities. These offer valuable opportunities for junior faculty exposure. Invite junior faculty to present (or submit to present) at these events. Encourage them to attend, and if they can't present, to serve as discussants or chairs. It's easy to identify current leaders in a given field and to invite them—do your best to identify future leaders to invite as well.
- 4. Introduce them to others.** As we all know, networking is an important part of professional development. But junior faculty (especially female junior faculty) are often shy, reluctant to intrude and have difficulty starting and developing networks. At conferences, invite junior faculty to join your conversation groups and social events (lunch and dinner groups). Introduce them to other senior faculty who might be interested in their work. Suggest sessions they might want to attend and/or other faculty they might want to meet. Outside of conferences, recommend junior faculty to your peers to speak at their workshops and at organized sessions (numbers 2 and 3 above). If you've read one of their papers which impresses you (number 5 below), recommend it to someone else who you think might be interested. Introductions (either in person or virtually through research) offer gains from trade—they are extremely valuable for junior faculty to receive and relatively inexpensive for senior faculty to provide.
- 5. Provide professional (insiders) advice.** Senior faculty know lots of stuff that junior faculty often don't. Which journals are looking for what kinds of papers, when editors change and what it implies for publication in a particular journal, what types of grants are easier and harder to get, which conferences to attend and who to be sure to meet there, and where the political battles are, either within a department/school or within an academic field. Sharing this wisdom is another easy thing you can do to help junior faculty. This can be done at conferences, over lunch or in passing during more substantive discussions (e.g. suggestions of where to send a paper can be incorporated in number 7 below). This type of mentoring is surprisingly rare and extremely valuable.
- 6. Provide personal advice (when appropriate).** This top-ten item is a bit more delicate, as there are settings where personal discussions are not appropriate. But where they are, sharing information on good babysitters and day-care, advice on time-management, suggestions on how to handle secretaries and other personal matters can be helpful. Even advice about how to navigate administrative hurdles, which parking lot to try to get into and suggestions of good real estate agents, tax accountants and other service professionals can be quite valuable.
- 7. Provide feedback on their work.** Reading and providing feedback on each others' papers is one of the most valuable things a professional network can provide. This is the backbone of CSWEP's mentoring programs and extremely rare in economics (although more common in other fields). One important way you can mentor junior faculty is to provide feedback on their work.

The first part of this is to get their work. Many junior faculty are timid about sending their working papers to senior colleagues, especially uninvited. Make this easy for them by requesting their papers, either in person at conferences or

via email.

Then, read the papers and offer constructive suggestions. Links to literature they might have missed, suggestions about new analyses they can run with their existing data or new data to collect, ideas for improving their modeling technique, and feedback on the writing and the paper itself are all extremely valuable.

Communicating these suggestions is important as well. It's often useful to frame these as previews of referee reports—if you had been the referee for this paper here's what you would have said—and suggest that their chances of publication will be increased by addressing these comments now rather than in response to a representative referee. Also, offering solutions, citations or other direction (rather than simply saying “this is bad”) will be particularly useful for the mentee and will take the sting out of the feedback. If you don't have the time for personal communication, sending a copy of the paper with your notes in the margin can also be surprisingly helpful.

For the truly dedicated, offering feedback at other stages of research can also be helpful. For example, when a junior colleague is revising a paper, reading the referee reports they receive and their response to those reports can often add value. Offering suggestions on their conference presentations and other seminars is also useful. Most helpful is offering feedback on research statements and tenure packets. We receive lots of formal instruction in how to do research, but surprisingly little in how to engage in these other professional tasks. Never give a presentation without practicing at least once to be sure that it will fit into the time frame and that you know how to move from one point to the next. Include your visual aids in your practice.

- 8. Manage their administrative work.** No one likes to sit on committees, but administrative work is an important part of what we do. At research institutions, time spent on administration can be deadly to junior faculty who not only need to publish but need to publish quickly. This is especially true of junior women who are often given more administrative work than similarly-junior men (either for stereotypical reasons or because of the desire to have gender-balanced committees). Junior women at research institutions need to be protected from administrative work as much as possible.

At other institutions, doing administrative work is an important opportunity to demonstrate one's contribution and commitment to the organization. Senior faculty can influence administrative assignments to enable junior faculty to demonstrate this commitment and make contributions, as well as to avoid political minefields. Assigning them to high-profile (or low-profile) committees, assigning them to committees where their economics training is particularly valuable, or assigning them to committees that “fit” with their other contributions can all be extremely helpful.

- 9. Manage their teaching assignments.** Teaching loads are often non-negotiable, but there are other details of teaching assignments that often have a larger impact on both the input and the output of teaching. At research universities, keeping the number of preparations the junior person needs to do down to a minimum is essential for research productivity. Teaching courses whose material is familiar

will also reduce costs. Teaching courses to friendly audiences (e.g. elective courses rather than required courses) will increase teaching ratings and expose junior faculty to enthusiastic, happy and low-maintenance students.

At other institutions, teaching is an important signal of quality and commitment. Senior faculty can offer advice and guidance on teaching assignments. Ideally, junior faculty at these institutions are assigned to courses that the institution considers important or critical. In a perfect world, teaching a course that makes a junior faculty member irreplaceable is a positive outcome, and one that can often be arranged in collusion with a senior faculty mentor.



Similarly, ensuring that junior faculty have good teaching support (when available) is another dimension on which a senior faculty can help. Recommending good TAs who have worked for you in the past, sharing course materials, inviting junior faculty to observe your courses, and offering to observe theirs and offering feedback are both valuable and relatively inexpensive.

10. Be Supportive. This top-ten item is much less concrete than the others, but equally important. Academics is a surprisingly solitary endeavor and the attitude of many is “me against the world.” The feeling that someone else is on your side, especially someone with talent and institutional power, is liberating and a huge relief. Support can be communicated in many different ways. Some of the top-ten items above can show support. But so can other things like praise, expressing concern, sympathy, solidarity, and offering encouragement.

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