

Department of Astronomy Professional Track Faculty Mentoring Plan

Preface

The Department of Astronomy constituted a professional track (PTK) faculty mentoring plan committee (hereafter, “the Committee”) in fall 2017. The chair of the Committee was Prof. Derek Richardson (professor at the University of Maryland, hereafter, “UMD”). Other members of the Committee were Dr. Valeria Cottini (research scientist at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, hereafter “GSFC”), Dr. Alain Khayat (post-doctoral associate—hereafter “postdoc”—at GSFC), Dr. Matthew Knight (research scientist at UMD), Prof. Lee Mundy (professor at UMD), Prof. Stuart Vogel (professor at UMD), and Dr. Hsiang-Yi (Karen) Yang (postdoc at UMD). The charge to the Committee was to develop a plan for mentoring of PTK faculty. Note that developing a mentoring plan for postdocs, who are deemed entry-level PTK faculty, was a recommendation of the 2016/17 Department Strategic Plan (specifically, Recommendation R8).

The following document is meant to serve as a Department Policy and a set of Expectations in response to the charge to the Committee, and also provides some Resources. Although beyond the purview of the Committee, this document could serve as a template for tenure-track (TTK) faculty mentoring (note that a TTK mentoring plan is required to be on file with the Office of Faculty Affairs).

The Policy and Expectations would be communicated to the relevant constituents upon their arrival, and on a periodic reminder basis thereafter. The Resources would be part of the web page described in the policy and are subject to change (as web page locations and contents are altered frequently). It might be worthwhile to have the Early Career Advisors (see below) prepare a presentation at the start of the fall semester outlining the Policy, Expectations, and Resources. It might also be worthwhile (but far more labor-intensive) to develop a web-based training program for mentoring, perhaps in conjunction with the University, and require all constituents to complete it.

Policy

The Department of Astronomy recognizes that mentoring of professional track (PTK) faculty is an important part of career development that must be encouraged and supported by the Department. Mentoring is encouraged at all levels, but this Policy is aimed primarily at entry-level, first-rank, and middle-rank PTK faculty. At present, titles at entry-level are Post-Doctoral Associate (postdoc) and Faculty Assistant, titles at first rank are Lecturer, Faculty Specialist, and Assistant Research Scientist/Engineer/Professor, and titles at middle rank are Senior Lecturer, Senior Faculty Specialist, and Associate Research Scientist/Engineer/Professor. Mentoring is a recognized form of department service for the purpose of merit review.

In the following, the Constituents consist of all entry-level and first- and middle-rank PTK faculty, and all current or potential mentors for these individuals. In practice, this means all PTK and TTK faculty. These Constituents include PTK faculty based at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) under the auspices of the CRESST agreement and other major cooperative agreements such as GPFI, but the Department recognizes that those individuals have needs specific to their location.

As part of its mentoring plan for PTK faculty, the Department of Astronomy shall:

1. Designate a Department Mentoring Coordinator, normally chosen from among the Department Staff. The Coordinator shall:
 - a. Provide a copy of this Policy and Expectations to new PTK faculty upon arrival.
 - b. Send a reminder email containing this Policy and Expectations—with a link (URL) to the Resources—to all Constituents no less frequently than once per year. This email is to include information on how a recipient can request a mentor via the Department Early Career Advisor or, in the case of large cooperative agreements, a corresponding Cooperative Agreement Early Career Advisor (see below). This email is also to encourage the recipients to express any concerns or complaints they have about the mentoring process either to one of the Advisors or the Coordinator. Finally, this email is to point out the regularly occurring *Better Astronomy for a New Generation!* (BANG!) seminars and any GSFC equivalent(s) that often focus on career paths.
 - c. Oversee maintenance of a web-based Resources page (see below) aimed at PTK mentors and mentees containing information to support and encourage the mentoring process. The contents shall be reviewed no less frequently than once per year to ensure everything is up to date and that all links to external content are functional and applicable.
 - d. Maintain a list of eligible mentees in the Department and at GSFC. This list shall indicate any mentor(s) declared by the mentee, or that the mentee specifically declined having a mentor. The mentees shall be contacted no less frequently than once per year to ask whether they are satisfied with their mentoring arrangement (this is in addition to the reminder email described above).
 - e. Maintain contact information for the GSFC Advisor(s). This Policy assumes CRESST and other major cooperative agreements will designate individuals equivalent to the Department Advisor. Those GSFC Constituents not in a cooperative agreement will be served by the Department Advisor.
2. Designate a Department Early Career Advisor every year as part of the regular committee assignment process to act as a point of contact for individuals seeking mentoring assistance. This appointment will serve as a service duty equivalent to, for example, Graduate Advisor, Colloquium Organizer, or Chair of Graduate Admissions. As needed, one or more Assistants to the Advisor shall be appointed to ensure a diverse representation of the Constituents and to serve as mentor(s) in the event the Advisor has too many mentees (see below). The Advisor and any Assistant(s) shall:

- a. Be familiar with this document and the provisions within it, including the contents of the web-based Resources page.
- b. Be familiar with other resources of utility to new members of the Department, including campus procedures, housing information, etc.
- c. Act in the capacity of mentor for individuals who either do not have their own mentor(s) and want one, or are dissatisfied with their own mentor(s). Ideally the Advisor and any Assistant(s) shall have no more than 2–3 mentees at any given time, with an additional Assistant to be designated as needed to take any excess.
- d. Either suggest a mentor or petition the Constituents to seek a volunteer mentor if an individual requests one. The field of study and the demographics of the mentee are to be considered as part of this process.
- e. Communicate the names of mentees and their mentor(s) to the Mentoring Coordinator as they are assigned.
- f. Bring any concerns of or complaints by mentees or mentors to the attention of the Department Chair.

The Department of Astronomy encourages the major Cooperative Agreements to develop their own plans for appointing Cooperative Agreement Early Career Advisors.

Expectations

The Department of Astronomy expects all members to seek and/or provide mentoring. The Department maintains a Policy for the mentoring of professional track (PTK) faculty, along with a list of Expectations to which mentees and mentors of these same are encouraged to adhere. These Expectations are meant to guide the mentoring process but can also serve in part as general recommendations for all early-career scientists regardless of whether they seek mentoring or not.

1. If agreed to by both parties, the immediate supervisor or advisor of a PTK faculty member can serve in the capacity of mentor. (In the case of prize postdocs, their *de facto* supervisor, or a relevant research group director, such as from CTC, JSI, LMA, etc., could serve as mentor, for example.) However, mentees are free to choose any mentor, including from among their peers, and in fact are encouraged to have more than one mentor, ideally drawing from outside the mentee's immediate area of expertise. The appropriate Department or Cooperative Agreement Early Career Advisor can either suggest mentors, or petition for volunteers from a suitable group.
2. The mentor shall assist (or direct the mentee to someone more suitable) with the acclimatization of the mentee to their new work environment, introductions to colleagues, and familiarization with shared governance policies. Note in the case of cooperative agreements with GSFC, this duty may fall to a group leader or secondary advisor.
3. The mentee is encouraged to work with their mentor(s) to develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that can serve as a way of organizing their career goals and milestones. It is recommended that an IDP be formulated within the mentee's first year. More information on how to construct such a plan is provided on the web-based Resources page.

4. The mentee and mentor(s) are encouraged to meet on a regular basis by prior arrangement, ideally no less frequently than once per year. In the case that the mentor is also the mentee's research advisor, this meeting is an opportunity to go over career goals and other objectives (such as may be contained in an IDP) and should not focus on research. This is an opportunity for encouragement and constructive criticism aimed at professional growth.
5. In circumstances where a mentor has more than the recommended number of mentees, such as in large research groups consisting of individuals of similar rank, group meetings with all individuals present may serve in place of one-on-one meetings, and those mentees should be encouraged to act as peer mentors for one another.

Resources

The web-based resource page, to be maintained as part of the overall Department web page maintenance policy, shall contain at minimum the following information:

1. A link to the University's Faculty Mentoring Page ([URL](#)), and the link there to *A Guide for Mentors (and Mentees)* ([PDF](#)).
2. A link to the University's *Postdoctoral Scholars Manual* ([PDF](#)), specifically emphasizing the material on pages 39 through 41 concerning how to prepare an Individual Development Plan (IDP), with an indication that this can easily be adapted for other PTK faculty as well. An example IDP is to be provided.
3. Links to the following documents (circulated previously by the University):
 - a. *Helpful Mentors: What They Do and How They Do It* ([HelpfulMentors.doc](#)).
 - b. *Junior Faculty Strategies for Success* ([JrFacStrategies.docx](#)).
 - c. *Mentoring Tips* ([MentoringTips.doc](#)).
4. Links to the Department postdoc orientation document and any equivalent for other PTK faculty.
5. A link to the latest merit review criteria.
6. Links to any relevant resources that can be provided specific to GSFC.
7. A link to the American Astronomical Society (AAS) Job Register ([URL](#)) and any other career-related resources that may be considered useful, including job interview pointers.
8. Other relevant links to University and/or GSFC policies that may be considered relevant, including sexual harassment policies, accessibility and disability services, etc.
9. A link to the schedule of Department *BANG!* seminars (and any GSFC equivalent).
10. Contact information (suitably protected against scraping by bots) for the Department Early Career Advisor and their GSFC equivalent(s).
11. Local copies of any external PDFs linked above in case those documents disappear at the linked addresses. This is to serve as a stopgap measure until the next periodic review of the site contents.