SEAS Staff Mentoring Program

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Introduction

SEAS Leads is a leadership development program initiated at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences from September through May of the 2014-2015 academic year. The program focuses on developing leaders who create and/or enhance a culture that:

- Aligns our goals and work to the SEAS vision and priorities—focus
- Sets clear expectations and manages performance—accountability and recognition
- Encourages high involvement/community engagement that:
  - Fosters trust in senior leadership and ongoing change
  - Strives for transparency
  - Empowers staff to influence how they do their work
  - Is faculty and student focused, while being professionally managed
  - Reinforces a learning environment where constructive feedback is encouraged
  - Insists on an environment where all are treated with respect and dignity
- Develops a diversified staff and prepares those with interest and potential for future leadership roles.

A major component of SEAS Leads is an ongoing SEAS-specific team project. Groups of six staff members participating in SEAS Leads work together over the program timeframe to develop, propose, and ideally implement a project that focuses on important SEAS-specific issues or needs.

Team Gator chose to develop a staff mentoring program as its SEAS Leads project. Recognizing that a formal mentoring program is currently unavailable for SEAS staff, this project presented Team Gator an opportunity to step in to fill an otherwise unaddressed need. Mentoring programs elsewhere have provided significant benefits to the organizations in which they are established.

To learn from other organizations and programs, Team Gator reviewed a variety of programs established in government, for-profit companies, and most relevant, in higher education institutions. Team members also interviewed Harvard employees who managed mentoring programs: one within the FAS and the other in a professional organization at HMS (the Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students (REPS) within the New England Archivists). This handbook borrows heavily from the NEA program guide and its program format.

Team Gator considered several models for its mentoring program and determined that the mentoring circle model would provide the most benefit for SEAS staff while requiring the least amount of administrative oversight. The program format is discussed in more detail below. The program is intended to be piloted during the 2015-2016 academic year, with adjustments made for ongoing implementation thereafter.

The following information outlines the SEAS Staff Mentoring Program format and expectations for participants. These are guidelines to provide overall direction and ideas, not specific requirements on the mentoring circle format and agenda.

Overview

Mission Statement

The goal of the SEAS Staff Mentoring Program is to create an environment for teaching, learning, and professional growth among SEAS staff members. The program will achieve this by establishing relationships and connections that will foster the exchange of experiences, challenges, and opportunities.
**Definition and Format**
A mentoring circle is a group of SEAS staff colleagues who meet regularly throughout an academic year. Each circle will generally include two mentors and 4-6 mentees. Team Gator’s research indicated that in traditional one-on-one mentoring pairs, there is a risk of mismatched goals, interests, or personalities between the mentor and mentee. This risk is mitigated in mentoring circles with more than one formal mentor available to mentees. Peer mentoring can occur naturally as mentees within the same circle establish relationships with each other as well.

Mentors and mentees will be matched to a circle depending on their interests, goals, and stage in career. Each will complete an application and an initial survey to facilitate the initial grouping process.

Each circle will also be assigned a liaison to help the circle meet its goals.

**Program Goals**
Circles facilitate the exchange of experiences, challenges, and opportunities between mentees and mentors. These exchanges will enhance mentees’ ability to understand other perspectives and practices, increase self-confidence and communication skills, and provide opportunities for leadership and career exploration. While mentoring circles are mentee-focused, mentors benefit from the circles as well.

The main goals of the circles are to provide support to mentees as they:
1. Set career and personal development goals
2. Build competence and character to reach those goals
3. Foster connections with others in their professional field(s)
4. Receive support and guidance from other SEAS staff members

Mentors benefit by:
1. Expanding their professional networks
2. Being exposed to different perspectives
3. “Paying it forward” professionally

**Expectations for Mentors**
Mentors are identified through the application process, and are selected to participate in the mentoring program based on their interest, experience, and commitment to supporting individuals at earlier stages of their professional careers. They lead the group’s discussions and activities, and share their personal experiences and perspectives with their circle.

Mentors are responsible for setting expectations for the group, facilitating group conversations, driving discussion, and fostering participation of all mentees as appropriate. Mentors and mentees should strive for and maintain open and honest communication. Mentors are also expected to communicate with the program liaisons to schedule meetings and coordinate other logistics, or when issues or concerns cannot be resolved within the group.

Two mentors will be assigned to each circle, and co-mentors are encouraged to connect prior to the circle’s first full group meeting in order to get to know each other and to discuss personal facilitation styles and expectations. Co-mentors are partners, resources, and peer mentors. They may prepare together their circle’s discussion topics, collaborate on how to best advise a mentee,
or provide mentees information about varied experiences about managing their careers, colleagues, managers, and situations.

**Expectations for Mentees**
Mentoring circles are mentee-focused but require active participation from mentees. Mentees cannot be passive or expect mentors to simply provide answers and direction. Instead, mentees must understand that mentoring is a self-directed process. Mentees must take responsibility for setting goals, preparing for group discussions, making suggestions and posing questions, providing feedback to others, and sharing ideas and experiences with their circle. It may also be helpful for mentees to arrange meetings, send reminders, or assist with various aspects of discussion preparation or follow up.

**Expectations for Liaisons**
Liaisons are members of Team Gator who provide support to a mentoring circle during the mentoring program’s 2015-2016 pilot year, including overall oversight of the circle’s progress. Liaisons will manage the initial mentor and mentee selection and group formation for the pilot year. Once circles are established, liaisons will share information with mentors and mentees, help with scheduling as needed, provide discussion ideas, and assist with issue mediation as needed.

**Timing**
The program will run in line with the academic year, roughly from September to May. Applications for mentors and mentees will be accepted and reviewed during the summer in anticipation of the September start. Groups will meet monthly throughout the academic year.

The aim is for circles to meet for 1 or 2 hours each month monthly for the length of the program, or more often as needed. Doodle polls are helpful for scheduling meetings. Circle liaisons may help to schedule meetings, especially initially, but are not responsible for maintaining and facilitating the schedule for all meetings.

**Attendance Policy**
The success of the SEAS Staff Mentoring Program is dependent upon the full participation of mentors and mentees. Mentoring relationships develop over time and require ongoing effort. Regular, thoughtful participation is the foundation on which successful relationships rely.

Though all participants juggle personal and professional obligations, mentors and mentees should consider mentoring meetings a priority and should take steps to avoid missing meetings. If missing a meeting becomes absolutely necessary, advance notice should be given to circle members and the circle liaison. Participants who miss multiple meetings may be asked to withdraw from the program and an applicant on the waiting list will be provided an opportunity to participate. Circles should avoid cancelling meetings or holding meetings less frequently than monthly.

**Process**

**Timing**
Prospective mentors and mentees will apply for slots in the pilot program in the late spring/early summer of 2015.

**Application and Selection**

**Mentors**
The definitions of mentor derive from a variety of sources, including classical literature, military training, academia, business, and government. These definitions include the roles of advocate, coach, teacher, guide, role model, valued friend, door-opener, benevolent authority, available resource, cheerful critic, and career enthusiast. Some mentors combine multiple definitions, both generating leadership development for succeeding generations and innately leading change through continuous learning.

At SEAS, staff of various levels will serve as mentors. SEAS mentors will provide individual and circle group mentoring support that contributes to the career development of their colleagues.

The SEAS mentoring team will recruit appropriate mentors by realistically describing the program’s goals and expected outcomes, followed by a screening process. Careful screening improves the quality of mentors and helps ensure the success of staff involved in the program.

Key mentor candidate elements include:
- Commitment of one academic year
- Agreement to participate in face-to-face meetings with mentees, at least once per month for approximately one hour, throughout the course of the program
- Face-to-face interview
- Ability to and interest in motivating individuals to participate in the program
- At least one professional reference

Mentor candidates will be asked to respond to the following questions:
1. What do you hope to gain from this mentor position?
2. What is the greatest strength that you could bring to the SEAS staff mentor program?
3. How could acting as a mentor strengthen your skills?
4. What do you believe are the major issues facing SEAS staff and how could the SEAS mentoring program assist with addressing them?
5. As a mentor, how would you help a colleague?

Mentees
Details TBD

**Grouping**
In order for mentees to be exposed to managers and leaders other than their direct supervisor, and to allow for as open and honest communication as possible, Team Gator liaisons will attempt to form mentoring circles that do not match staff members and their supervisors in the same circle.

**Kickoff Meeting**
TBD if there will be one

**Meetings**

**Overview**
The mentoring circle’s conversations should focus on career growth, facing challenges, and solving problems. Although liaisons may provide a group with ideas and articles to help start the initial conversation, they expect that the mentors and mentees will set and drive the discussions.
themselves. Mentors will help guide and promote productive discussions in the circle to ensure all members of the group have an opportunity to participate. All participants should be willing to give professional and personal support to the other members of the circle in addition to receiving support themselves.

**Confidentiality and Trust**
Circle members should discuss the level of confidentiality to be maintained regarding group discussions. It is recommended that mentoring circle conversations remain confidential and should not be shared outside the circle. In addition to confidentiality, creating a climate of trust is important to maintaining harmony within the circle and will help promote productive conversations. Members should discuss how they will establish and maintain each other’s trust over the course of their relationships.

**First Meeting Suggestions**
In the first meeting, members should begin to get to know each other and should each discuss their goals.

**Expectations and roles**
- Establish group norms
- Participation, confidentiality, and trust
- Support of the mentoring circle in meeting goals

**Introductions of mentors and mentees**
- Share history of past work experience
- Discuss motivation to pursue a chosen field or career
- Share aspirations, goals, and interests

**Possible Discussion Themes**
- Updates from the group
- Career skills development
- Challenges faced during work
- Learning to network
- Career planning
- Goal setting
- Negotiation skills
- Promotions
- Professional development
- Professional service and leadership
- Defining what success means to you
- Managing up, down, and sideways
- Time management
- Work/life balance
- Balancing family and career
- Identifying individual strengths and weaknesses
- Sharing lessons learned in the workplace
- What you hope to gain from participating in the Mentoring Circle
- Learning how to promote yourself

**Outside the Circle**
Meetings and conversations outside the full-circle discussions are encouraged if beneficial to those involved. Mentors should ensure that smaller group meetings do not detract from the overall circle and that they do not exclude members who could have benefitted from the meeting.

**Strategies for Success**

Group mentoring should provide personal and professional support and guidance, and opportunities for self-reflection and growth for each group member. A firm commitment from each circle member, a willingness to invest time and energy, and clarity about expectations are the keys to a successful mentoring group. Success is also dependent upon participants maintaining contact between formal meetings, using meeting time efficiently and productively, and ensuring that all members are participating fully. A mentoring group develops over time, as relationships take time to establish and grow.

A successful mentoring group will:
- Establish group norms when the circle first meets
- Set clear goals, needs, and expectations
- Define and agree upon availability
- Focus on learning (and teaching)
- Connect members to people and/or resources that can contribute to the group objectives, network and collaborate with group members and/or their colleagues/friends
- Develop professional skills
- Provide constructive feedback
- Encourage self-reflection
- Foster development of trust, understanding, confidentiality, and empathy with fellow group members

Participants in a successful mentoring group will be:
- At ease with one another
- Honest with one another
- Willing to ask for and seek help/advice
- Patient and kind
- Approachable and accessible

And will:
- Promote and encourage each other
- Establish and maintain good communication
- Build and maintain relationships
- Listen to one another with an open mind and be nonjudgmental
- Stay in touch and respond to one another in a timely manner

**Harvard Resources**

Harvard Business Publishing’s ManageMentor

Center for Workplace Development, Career and Professional Development Courses
[http://ohrdb.harvard.edu/cwdcourses/cpdcourses.php](http://ohrdb.harvard.edu/cwdcourses/cpdcourses.php)

**References**
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https://hbr.org/2011/03/the-three-networks-you-need/


http://www.albany.edu/academics/mentoring.best.practices.toc.shtml