

**The Peer Mentoring Program For Language Lecturers
at Columbia University**

1. Definition and Philosophy

The Peer Mentoring Program for Language Lecturers hopes to foster a supportive one-on-one relationship between a “mentee” and a more experienced language teacher at Columbia who would serve as that person’s mentor.

By definition, the mentoring process presupposes a shared commitment to the reciprocal and mutual growth of both the mentor and the mentee within the institutional framework. The relationship established is characterized by a sharing of philosophies and methodologies, observation of each other’s classes, encouragement toward the fulfillment of mutually agreed upon goals, and application of this newly acquired knowledge in the language-learning classroom.

2. Program Aims and Objectives

The principal objective of the mentoring program is for participants to acquire a clearer understanding of the overall philosophy that informs language teaching at Columbia and to help them harmonize their teaching practices with that philosophy, so that they can achieve their fullest potential as language lecturers at Columbia.

More specifically, the aims of the program are for participants to:

- Conceptualize and articulate a sense of purpose and philosophy about being language teachers.
- Analyze the strengths and deficiencies of their current teaching practices with respect to the goals of their teaching philosophy.
- Expand their repertoire of professional practices, especially in the areas where they detect weakness.
- Modify their teaching practice so as to build on their strengths and eliminate their weak points.
- Develop the habit of reflecting on and adjusting their teaching practices.

3. Expected Outcomes

The mentoring program is expected to produce the following outcomes that will benefit the mentee, the mentor and the institution as a whole:

- Facilitate the transition of mentees to language teaching.
- Increase familiarity with the best practices in language teaching.
- Help mentees adjust to the requirements of teaching language at Columbia in terms of philosophy and practice.
- Promote the exchange of confidential, non-judgmental assessment of teaching
- Provide practical and concrete pedagogical advice in a nurturing environment.

- Assist mentees in acquiring the necessary skills to become independent and productive lecturers.
- Provide opportunity for mutual self-reflection.
- Foster mutual professional development.
- Integrate faculty more fully into the community of language lecturers at Columbia.
- Promote reciprocal, continuous and intentional learning as desirable principles informing Columbia's teaching and learning philosophy.

Mentoring is a starting point for a dialogue on the importance of ongoing learning. It is not part of the larger formal process of documented review and evaluation. The mentor cannot evaluate the mentee formally nor can s/he become an advocate for the mentee in any review process, and should not be viewed as such.

The mentee's participation in the program cannot and should not be interpreted as a guarantee of future positive reviews, be viewed as a promise of continued employment, nor be used to support requests for promotion or to secure raises.

4. Faculty Commitment

Participants are expected to make a semester-long commitment to the program and should believe in the overall value of peer-to-peer mentoring as an effective means to effect change and encourage positive growth.

Mentoring requires regular contact throughout the semester. Between the second week and the thirteenth week of the semester, participants should expect to spend about ten hours engaged in the mentoring process. Each mentoring pair knows best how the time should be divided.

However, because great benefit is derived from observing and being observed, mentees should expect to observe their mentor's (and/or his/her colleague's) class on two separate occasions and also have their own class observed on two separate occasions, preferably after a meaningful interval. Participants should also plan to attend pre- and post-observation meetings at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

Mentoring does not seek to make mentees and mentors work harder or longer, but rather seeks to foster a change in consciousness so that they work more effectively.

Participating in the mentoring program is both voluntary and non-remunerated. Involvement stems from a strongly held belief in the inherent value of the mentoring process as a beneficial and useful method that promotes the professional development and growth of the mentor and the mentee both and benefits the institution as well as each individual.

The success of any mentoring program depends in large part on the willingness of the participants to help each other and themselves actualize their potential.

5. Profile of Mentor

Mentors can either volunteer for the program or be nominated by their peers. They may belong to any of Columbia's language departments. They must have successfully completed more than one formal review as language lecturers at Columbia and demonstrated a background in making observations and giving constructive feedback to their peers.

To effect positive change, mentors must be willing and able to share their knowledge of, and skill in, language teaching pedagogy and practice, while acknowledging the accomplishments of their mentees. Though sensitive to the evolving developmental needs, feelings, and skills of their less experienced colleagues, mentors should not be afraid to pose challenging questions that encourage self-reflection.

By being respectful and encouraging, mentors should be able to establish a nurturing, non-threatening relationship in which mentees can take the risks necessary to discover and develop their unique potential within the Columbia University culture.

Mentors must be confident in their own teaching abilities, but open to having mentoring transform their teaching. True mentors are those who have developed the wisdom to not only teach but also learn from those they mentor.

6. Profile of Mentee

To gain the greatest benefit from the Peer Mentoring Program, participants must desire to effect positive change in their teaching practice. They must be committed to reflecting on their teaching and more closely aligning their teaching practices with those of their language-teaching colleagues at Columbia. They must be willing to take on new responsibilities and challenges, seek feedback, accept constructive suggestions, and take responsibility for their personal growth and development.

Initially the mentoring program will be made available only to Columbia University language lecturers who have been selected by their departments or by the Office of the Vice-President of Arts and Sciences. Eventually the mentoring program will be open to all individuals engaged in language teaching at Columbia who wish to hone and perfect their teaching skills or be exposed to other ways of teaching language.

7. Program Activities

As an active and dynamic process that seeks to promote better teaching practices through an open and meaningful dialogue, the mentoring process generally entails a series of activities including, but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- A discussion of overall goals and objectives.

- A conversation about the importance of aligning one's goals and objectives with the overall language teaching philosophy at Columbia.
- An analysis of teaching philosophy, syllabi and lesson plans.
- An exploration of how to align one's philosophy of teaching with one's practice of teaching.
- A series of classroom observations (of each other and perhaps of others).
- Both pre- and post-observation meetings.
- Feedback, practical advice, and concrete suggestions.

Additionally, participants in the mentoring program will be encouraged to read and discuss selected articles as well as attend and reflect on workshops either orally or in writing. Participants will also be encouraged to keep a diary or a journal in order to promote self-reflection. The content of the diary will be kept private, unless participants elect to share it with each other.

8. Program Resources and Support

Each participant should expect to receive the following support from the Peer Mentoring Program for Language Lecturers at Columbia University:

- The assignment of a mentor from a different language department who has successfully passed more than one formal review as a language instructor at Columbia and has a demonstrable background in making observations and giving constructive feedback to their peers in a formal or informal setting.
- A place in the LRC to meet should the mentoring pair choose to meet there.
- A series of workshops on salient theoretical and practical issues related to second language teaching and learning.
- A repository of materials (e.g. articles, websites, sample lesson plans, syllabi).
- Administrative assistance to help address problems as needed.
- An opportunity at the end of the semester to evaluate whether and how the Mentoring Program benefitted the mentee, the mentor, and language teaching and learning at Columbia University.
- An informal get-together to recognize and acknowledge the efforts of all mentors and mentees to improve the health of overall language teaching and learning at Columbia University.

9. Program Administration

Mentees will be asked to provide prospective mentors with an overall profile of their experience and teaching philosophy. They will also be asked to complete a pre-program needs assessment to help identify those areas in which a mentee thinks a mentor's input would be most useful.

After a brief meeting, mentors will be selected and matched with mentees by a committee, primarily made up of language lecturers.

The topics for that meeting may include, but not be limited to:

- The mentoring process and the role of the mentor.
- Skills and characteristics required for effective mentoring.
- Motivation for involvement in the program.
- Salient issues of mentoring.
- The value of reflection in teaching and learning.
- Various strategies and specific activities that may promote the goals and objectives of the mentoring program.

A point person will have access to a small budget to cover the estimated costs of running The Peer Mentoring Program and will coordinate the administrative activities of the mentoring program, facilitate the smooth operation of the program, and provide administrative assistance as required.

This may include, but not be limited to:

- The printing or purchasing of all materials needed for the mentoring program.
- The general administration of the program (photocopying, stationery, supplies, telephone, etc).
- Catering costs for any social events to bring together all the mentors and mentees involved in the program.

It is also important that the point person coordinating the program be readily available for contact by any of the participants (mentors and mentees) should they have any issues or concerns that they want to discuss.

10. Assessment and Recognition

An essential component of any program is monitoring and evaluation. Hence, while it is essential to conceptualize strategies that facilitate the establishment and implementation of a mentoring program, it is equally important and useful to conceive and put in place strategies to assess the effectiveness and efficacy of the program and the impact it is having on the mentors, the mentees, and the overall health of language teaching at Columbia in general.

Since the effectiveness of any mentoring program is best identified by those directly affected by it, it is crucial that both the mentors and the mentees be asked to assess whether the program benefited them, and how. Equally important is the need to put in place instruments to measure whether the program is having a positive impact on the overall health of language teaching at Columbia.

Any evaluation should address the following parameters:

- Whether mentees feel they are receiving the kind of support they need to be successful.
- Whether mentors are competent and comfortable in their roles.

- Whether the program is achieving its stated goals and objectives.

These evaluative objectives could be addressed through a combination of pre- and post-program debriefings of mentors and mentees and/or the implementation of both formative and summative assessment strategies that might include questionnaires or surveys. In all cases, participants should be provided with ample opportunity to give feedback on the program and their experiences.

Finally, the program should consider organizing an informal get-together at the end of each mentoring session. This would be an occasion to recognize and acknowledge the efforts of both mentors and mentees and would increase the likelihood that both mentors and mentees remember the experience favorably and recommend it to their peers.