USC School of Theatre, Mentoring Activities, 2011

By virtue of the theatre discipline's collaborative nature, faculty-to-student and faculty-to-faculty mentoring activities at our School are constant, spontaneous, and often occur informally in rehearsal rooms, scene shops, production sites, and during off-campus fieldtrips. In fact, these mentoring activities are so integral to theatre art's training and communal culture that they are almost indistinguishable from teaching and peer-learning episodes. In addition to these relaxed, undocumented mentoring interchanges, our School has also implemented various formal structures to encourage general mentoring practices, which this summary reflects.

The School of Theatre’s formal structure for faculty mentoring exists in tiers involving the Dean, Associate Deans, Assistant Deans, Directors, and faculty committees. The faculty mentoring focuses more on teaching, research, and service related issues than on work life issues. The formal structure for student mentoring includes more comprehensive mentoring programs for graduate students and periodical mentoring events for undergraduates. Such faculty-to-student mentoring supports students in finding better academic and professional paths for their overall intellectual and creative developments.

The Dean meets regularly with Associate and Assistant Deans in the Dean's Council to share insights regarding school affairs. The Dean also pairs tenured senior faculty mentors with tenure-track faculty mentees and sponsors their mentoring luncheons once per semester. Annually there are one-on-one meetings between the Dean and each full-time faculty member to mentor his/her professional progress based on peer reviews by the elected four-member Faculty Council. Small groups of faculty also meet in rotation through "Dinner with the Dean" peer-mentoring events to envision a stronger school. The Dean meets with undergraduate students through events like "Doughnuts with the Dean" and "Pizza with the Dean" to mentor their academic aspirations.

The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs provides pre-promotion and pre-tenure-review mentoring, and advises on faculty affairs. The Associate Dean of Faculty mentors long-term Associate Professors regarding promotion issues and brings attention to supportive matters of interest to the general faculty. The Assistant Dean mentors newly hired full-time and adjunct faculty members about the University and School environments. The Chairs of promotion review committees and third-year pre-tenure review committees do a thorough analysis of teaching/research/service issues and mentor faculty under review, including both tenure-track and non-tenure-track full-time faculty members.

Directors of areas (performance, voice, movement, dance, design, dramatic writing, critical studies, applied theatre arts, etc.) mentor full-time and adjunct faculty members in their area. These mentoring activities include regular faculty meetings, mutual class visits, senior faculty coaching of junior faculty teaching, frequent email communications, and occasional potluck events. Artistic Director and his team of production faculty mentor guest directors to negotiate working in an academic setting. The Director of Critical Studies mentor graduate student Teaching Assistants and adjunct Assistant Instructors regarding faculty support, student relations, and time management issues. When the occasion arises, the Director of Critical Studies also mentors international Fulbright scholars during their residency in our School.

Our School's three graduate programs (MFA in Dramatic Writing; MFA in Acting; MA in Applied Theatre Arts) have all established formalized mentoring structures involving faculty-to-student intensive mentoring and outside professional and community partners to support the students' transition into the professional world.

Both the graduate and undergraduate faculty members attend student productions to give timely feedbacks, introduce students to successful professional and community role models, and continue professional associations with the alumni to sustain a lifelong network of senior, junior, and peer mutual mentoring.