Orientation and Mentoring

New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring

The Department of Epidemiology at Columbia University is committed to producing world-class science with real-world impact while training the next generation of epidemiologists. Our more than 150 faculty members are a community of collaborators with a leading portfolio of research, fieldwork, and teaching in over 60 countries as well as close connections to New York City communities, institutions and leaders. The department's research units and centers work to reduce disease and injury, improve environments, promote science, and help us all live healthier lives.

We are committed to science that looks, thinks, and discovers differently. This includes prioritizing the recruitment of scientists that come from backgrounds that are under-represented in the field of epidemiology and who bring perspectives to their research, teaching, and community service that reflect membership in groups historically excluded from higher education and epidemiology.

As one of the oldest and most distinguished departments of its kind, the Columbia Department of Epidemiology continues to pioneer scientific thinking emphasizing that the field of epidemiology is a science of critical importance. The Department prides itself on a balance of research, education, and service – a mix of leading scientists, master teachers, and top trainees, all in service to the public's health. Our scientists are leaders on a wide array of topics including identifying and containing infectious diseases and pandemic response, preventing cancer and other chronic diseases, reducing the tragedy of gun violence and trauma, advancing mental health and healthy aging, responding to the opioid crisis, evaluating the role of the environment in health and disease, and identifying socioeconomic structures that can be modified to improve health and meaningfully extend human life. Social justice and service are key components in our activities, and many of our scientists are well-known for their advocacy, their engagement with communities outside the academy, and their impact on policy.

We produce over 1,000 peer-reviewed scientific publications every year, including in the very best scientific outlets – Nature, Science, the Lancet, the New England Journal of Medicine, the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the Journal of the American Medical Association, and the British Medical Journal. Columbia Epidemiology faculty are honored to include among them a dozen elected members of the US National Academy of Medicine, an elected fellow of the UK Royal Society of Science, recipients of the Canada Gairdner Award, and multiple elected members of the century-old American Epidemiological Society. Each year, our department's faculty are a major part of Columbia's most highly cited researchers on the Web of Science and, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, our scientists led the science and rapid response at Columbia University, for the nation and for the world. Their work has been cited in landmark Supreme Court decisions, Presidential Commissions, Congressional testimonies, some of the largest civil litigation lawsuits in US history, numerous World Health Organization reports, and every leading news outlet in the US and abroad.

Mentoring Guidelines

The Department of Epidemiology has recently recruited a record number of superb and innovative full-time faculty, and will continue to add new faculty. As these outstanding new faculty join us, the orientation agenda described below will be discussed with them by key faculty and senior staff leaders to insure a smooth, consistent, and above all, welcoming introduction to the Department. Within the first three (3) months after their start, each new faculty member should meet with both

key faculty and senior staff leaders listed below, who will orient them to various aspects of the Department of Epidemiology and broadly discuss tenets of constructive mentorship as well as specific mentor and/or mentee assignments. These discussions will serve as the basis for mentor-mentee relationships and the basis for subsequent, and more specific, mentorship processes that will be determined between the mentors and mentees once these dyads are established. The structure of these meetings is also detailed below; these meetings will be initiated and scheduled from within the Chair's office by the Assistant to the Department Chair. For these initial meetings, key faculty and senior staff leaders will include the Department Chair, the Vice Chair for Research, the Department Administrator, the Vice Chair for Education, the Director of Academic Programs, and the Director of Human Resources/Faculty Affairs. Guiding agenda items for these meetings are listed below (including website hyperlinks).

Within the first six (6) months of joining the department, all Assistant Professors and/or non-tenured faculty members (including non-tenured Associate Professors), will select at least one mentor from the department's faculty, in concert with the advice of the Department Chair and, if needed, the other key faculty and senior staff leaders listed here. Mentors should be at the rank of Associate Professor or above and do not necessarily need to have common substantive topical and/or methodological expertise with mentees. It may be preferable to select mentors other than supervisors, e.g., not an Assistant Professor's center or lab director, but that is at the discretion of the mentee. Mentor-mentee assignments may also be changed over time. Where affordable, applicable, and meaningful, additional mentorship support and training may be sought from outside institutions. Mentees may also have more than one mentor, although the number of primary mentors should likely be at most two people. In addition to their faculty mentor(s), all Assistant Professors and non-tenured faculty members will also receive secondary mentorship from the Department Chair.

Mentor-mentee dyads or triads will likely meet monthly, but at least quarterly, and complete a brief, annual progress report to be included as part of their annual meeting, that typically takes place in the spring, with the Department Chair (see template below). It is expected that the annual report will be sent by mentees to their mentor(s) one month prior to their annual meeting with the Department Chair for discussion and approval. Additionally, all Assistant Professors undergo standard Fourth Year Reviews as part of Columbia University and Mailman School of Public Health policy. The Fourth Year Review will occur in lieu of the annual meeting with the Department Chair in its respective year. Specific guidance for these Fourth Year Reviews, including document preparation, review process, and necessary approvals, are provided by the Mailman School and can be accessed via the Department's Human Resources/Faculty Affairs Director and a past document containing this guidance is also available here. For the Fourth Year Review, mentees will prepare a standard document in advance that will serve as the basis for discussion at a joint meet with their mentor(s) and the Department Chair. Within three (3) months after this meeting, their mentor(s) will draft a standard Fourth Year Review document (as per Mailman School and Columbia guidelines) detailing the mentee's progress and the details of what was discussed at the Fourth Year Review meeting.

Discussion and guidance will also be provided on best practices in becoming a mentor to masters students, doctoral students, and postdoctoral fellows including being directed to a guide to best mentoring practices from the Office of the Vice Provost, and online courses in evidence-based mentoring practices such as the "Science of Effective Mentoring" from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine that includes guidance on setting expectations and boundaries, the impact of effective mentoring on family, building trust and addressing power, negative mentoring experiences, inclusive environments, multiple mentorships, mutual benefits, and role modeling.

General Orientation with the Department Chair of Epidemiology:

1) Department Vision and Homepage – http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/epi

2) History and Core Strengths –

a. A COMMUNITY OF COLLABORATORS – A nexus for top scientists with over 1,000 publications each year and an array of dynamic research units and centers focusing on key health topics.

b. A LEADER IN TRAINING – Highly competitive epidemiology training programs with over 1,000 full and part-time trainees each year from across the US and around the world.

c. GLOBAL TO LOCAL ACTION – A global portfolio of research, fieldwork, and teaching in over 60 countries along with close connections to New York City institutions and community leaders.

d. A NEW VISION FOR REAL IMPACT – A vision for significant growth and real-world impact that includes new resources, new faculty, and new leadership opportunities in multiple interest areas.

e. A CENTURY OF TRADITION – One of the oldest and largest departments of its kind that many prominent epidemiologists, at Columbia and beyond, continue to call home.

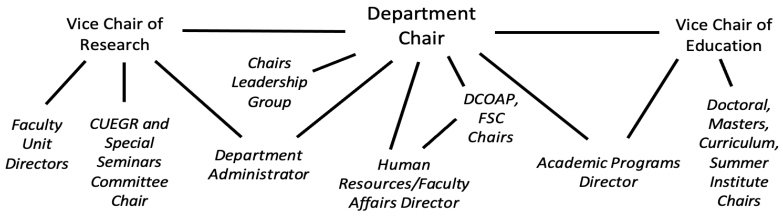
3) Importance of Self-Care and Balancing Life Outside of Columbia with Work

4) Handbook for Epidemiology Faculty

5) Faculty Ranks, Titles, and Affiliations, and Appointments and Promotions

6) Contacts and Organizational Chart:

Columbia Department of Epidemiology



7) Annual Meetings and Mentorship from the Department Chair:

In addition to their faculty mentor(s), all Assistant Professors and non-tenured faculty members will also receive secondary mentorship from the Department Chair. In addition to regular mentor-mentee meetings, mentees will meet annually with the Department Chair, typically in the spring. In preparation for this annual meeting, they will prepare a brief, annual progress report. The annual report should be sent by mentees to their mentor(s) one month prior to their annual spring meeting with the Department Chair for discussion and approval. This progress report will then be sent to the Lead Assistant staff person in the Chair's Office; the progress report will contain the following elements:

(a) Updated CV and other support page
(b) Evidence demonstrating national (or, where applicable, international) reputation:

- High-impact scientific or didactic model papers and citations
- Leadership in scientific/ professional societies
- Grant peer-review committee membership
- External, invited talks at major conferences and leading institutions
- Roles in community advocacy or social justice organizations
- Testimony or science for governments/NGOs, policies, or court cases
- Participation in policy or standards setting committees
- Journal editor responsibilities
- Lay media placements or op/eds

(c) Progress on last year's goals discussed at spring career planning meeting
(d) 2-3 concrete goals with deadlines within the next 1 year
(e) 2-3 concrete goals with deadlines within next 3 years
(f) Names of faculty mentor(s) and, where applicable, mentees
(g) Recent course evaluations (provided by the Chair's Office)
(h) Grant proposal planning spreadsheet

Additionally, all Assistant Professors will undergo Fourth Year Reviews as part of Columbia University and Mailman School of Public Health policy. The Fourth Year Review will occur in lieu of the annual meeting with the Department Chair in its respective year. Additional information and details regarding Fourth Year Reviews can be obtained from the Department Administrative Director of Human Resources/Faculty Affairs. Specific guidance for these Fourth Year Reviews, including document preparation, review process, and necessary approvals, are provided by the Mailman School and can be accessed via the Department's Human Resources/Faculty Affairs Administrative Director and a past document containing this guidance is also available here. For the Fourth Year Review, mentees will prepare a standard document in advance that will serve as the basis for discussion at a joint meet with their mentor(s) and the Department Chair. Within three (3) months after this meeting, their mentor(s) will draft a standard Fourth Year Review document (as per Mailman School and CUIMC guidelines) detailing the mentee's progress and the details of what was discussed at the Fourth Year Review meeting.

8) Mandatory Monthly Faculty Meetings, Listservs (Department and Units), Setting up Faculty Webpage, Setting up Lab or Personal Websites, and Committee Membership

9) Grand Rounds, Department Seminars, and Communications

10) Centers affiliated with Department of Epidemiology, as well as The Mailman School of Public Health and Columbia University more broadly.

Research, Grants, and Finance Orientation with the Vice Chair for Research and the Department Administrator (DA):

1) Faculty rights and responsibilities

2) Connecting with one or more Epidemiology Research Units:

The department has eight Epidemiology Units representing the key interests and expertise of its scientists (listed from largest to smallest in terms of affiliated faculty): (1) Chronic Disease Epidemiology Unit, (2) Social and Spatial Epidemiology Unit, (3) Infectious Disease Epidemiology Unit, (4) Psychiatric Epidemiology Unit, (5) Substance Abuse Epidemiology Unit, (6) Environmental Epidemiology Unit, (7) Neuro-Epidemiology Unit, and (8) Violence and Injury Epidemiology Unit. Unit activities include faculty meetings, research collaborations, work-in-progress presentations, specific aims discussions, journal clubs, etc. Unit members also participate in trainings for grant preparation and submission. Cross-Unit collaboration is also strongly encouraged and faculty should feel free to join as many Epidemiology Units as they feel coincide with their interests. Faculty report that they are affiliated with an average of 1.9 Epidemiology Units. Each Unit Director holds a seat on the Chair's Leadership Group (CLG).

3) Department of Epidemiology-affiliated Research Centers

4) Guide to Administration, Finances, and Reimbursements

5) Grant Submissions, Columbia Institutional Review Board, Columbia Research Compliance and Administration System (RASCAL), and Checklist

6) Mailman School Grants Office, and Research Resources (R2) Office.

7) Intervention-and-Implementation Science Pilot Awards and Other Pilot Research Awards

8) New York City Epidemiology Forum

Teaching and Curriculum Orientation with the Vice Chair for Education and the Director of Academic Programs:

1) Handbook for Epidemiology Students

2) Educational Committees – Curriculum, Doctoral, Master's

3) Teaching Responsibilities, Epidemiology Syllabi, Teaching Assistants, the MSPH Core Curriculum, and Academic Calendar

4) Classroom Conduct

5) Teaching Resources (MSPH "Teaching Toolkit"; Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

6) Student and Trainee Advising and Mentoring, Student Support Resources

7) Opportunities to engage with student practica and internships

8) EpiSummer@Columbia

9) Annual Student Awards:

• The Susser-Stein Awards
Given at the Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER) each year to support a pipeline of new epidemiologists from under-represented backgrounds and institutions. Named for prior Columbia Epidemiology leaders, Mervyn Susser and Zena Stein, and their activism for epidemiology and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Epidemiologists-in-training from under-represented backgrounds and institutions are eligible to apply for travel support.

• The Anna Gelman Awards for Excellence in Epidemiology
Professor Anna Cheskis Gelman was in the first class of women to receive a public health degree from MIT in 1934. Professor Gelman was a generous benefactor and devoted her more than 50-year career to the Columbia University School of Public Health. The Gelman Award is given to students for high academic distinction and the potential for significant scientific contributions to the field of public health

• The Jenkins Awards in Epidemiology and Social Justice
Dr. William Jenkins was one of the first African-American epidemiologists in the US Public Health Service. He is best known for halting the Tuskegee syphilis experiment in 1969. Dr. Jenkins spent the rest of his career fighting racism in US healthcare and mentoring Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students. The Jenkins Award in Epidemiology & Social Justice is given to students who exemplify this commitment and show great promise in addressing racism and advancing health equity.

• The Sidney Kark Awards in Epidemiology and Global Health
Dr. Sidney Kark is widely recognized as one of the 20th century's most original and inspirational leaders in social medicine. Dr. Kark worked as a physician in 1940s South Africa and pioneered the idea of community-oriented primary care – that medical care be rooted in communities, for communities, and with communities. The Kark Award is given to outstanding students with exceptional commitment to global health research and equity.

• The Susan Baker Awards in Injury and Violence Prevention Epidemiology|
Professor Susan Baker pioneered the field of injury prevention, saving countless lives from tragic events such as drunk driving, gun violence, and childhood trauma. Based on her work, the National Academy of Sciences issued the watershed 1985 report, Injury in America, making safety a public health issue in the US. The Baker Award is given to students for extraordinary and innovative research in violence and injury prevention.

Human Resources/Faculty Affairs Orientation with the Director of Human Resources/ Faculty Affairs:

1) Review new faculty appointment (title, track, rank, promotion, and tenure, if applicable),

2) Review of all hire/employment documents (MSPH new hire employee forms, CU UNI, CU ID, tax forms, I-9 process, invention agreement, pre-hire attestation form, as well as benefits welcome program orientation appointment, etc.)

3) Processing of appointment, on-boarding and activation in Columbia University system

4) Obtaining Columbia University ID, UNI, and email account

5) Distribution of information for attending the Columbia University Benefits Welcome orientation

6) Commuting and parking information (where applicable)

7) Assisting with all the compliance requirements and trainings

8) Staff hiring or transfer needs and forms (where applicable)

9) Connecting to the Department Operations Lead staff person about keys, office space, laboratory space (where applicable), computer, telephone, deliveries, and information technology needs

10) Present the structure of the Mailman School and, to some extent, the structure of Columbia University, and what other additional School and University orientation sessions the faculty should expect in the next year, e.g., the Mailman School orientation session to introduce new faculty to school leadership, with a focus on resources for research and faculty promotion.