Executive Summary

In developing recommendations on best practices for mentoring junior faculty to tenure, the Subcommittee on Mentoring considered issues including disciplinary differences, departmental cultural practices, and policies and practices that would work in any department and promise to yield results. Also considered, and discussed in its report, “Recommendations on Best Practices, Danforth Campus,” were tensions that can emerge during mentoring policy development and implementation.

To develop its recommendations, the Subcommittee analyzed data including reports of mentoring practices and policies from academic departments in most schools on the Danforth Campus; analyses of the 2006 Faculty Survey data; and reports including the National Academies’ 2009 report on differences at critical transitions in careers. According to the University-wide faculty survey data, Washington University does significantly less well in the mentoring category than peer institutions. The disturbing figures provide impetus for mentoring practices at the department level, where junior faculty are socialized into the profession, the discipline, and institutional expectations.

Part I: Best Practices—Findings
Based on material from department-oriented schools, best practices in mentoring junior faculty share the following characteristics:

Commitment Conscientious commitment across the department is reflected in written policies and in ongoing formal and informal practices.

Communication A formal, written mentoring policy, included in a department’s faculty handbook, is essential. It should make clear what mentoring is, the junior faculty’s responsibilities, and opportunities the mentoring relationship provides.

Mentoring and evaluation The junior faculty should be helped to understand which activities serve each function. Annual reviews can guide departments in mentoring, although they are primarily evaluative and do not in practice constitute mentoring. More-rigorous third-year reviews, with input from off-campus scholars in departments whose fields are large enough to warrant these, can be very helpful.

Practices and Policies in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences
Specific disciplinary areas require specific kinds of mentoring. The Subcommittee chose from among departments and programs in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences the policies and practices that seem most critical in these disciplinary areas. Policies and practices from English, Psychology, and Biology are detailed in “Recommendations on Best Practices,” together with other departmental, program and school variations (see appendices in full report). These suggest guidelines for discipline-based departments and may also apply to professional schools whose work fits largely into a certain disciplinary area. Also noted are certain professional school practices that may be applied more widely (see appendices in full report).

Part II: Recommendations
In all department cases examined, the role of the department chair is critical to how well and explicitly the department assumes responsibility for mentoring junior faculty. Mentoring issues should be a key part of training for chairs.

Accountability should include 1) biennial reporting on mentoring by departments to the deans to the provost; and 2) provost biennial survey of all schools and departments, with special attention to junior faculty, of how mentoring is perceived in each unit, followed by a results analysis by gender and disciplinary area. Specific departmental information will go to department chairs, relevant deans, and the provost.
Outcomes assessment should be maintained through internal records and exit interviews by a third party outside the department or school who reports to the dean and to the provost.

Information and training should involve 1) explicit, written policies available to the chair and senior and junior faculty; 2) group training for department chairs, linked to the leadership training initiative; 3) mentoring for chairs by proven institutional leaders; and 4) sharing of “Recommendations of Best Practices” with the School of Medicine, while urging it to develop a comparable document, as part of the University’s movement toward strong junior-faculty mentoring programs in every area.

Other issues for consideration are 1) ensuring that all chairs see common interests in and responsibility for promoting mentoring and developing faculty and understand this as a University-wide mandate, 2) developing junior faculty members’ sense of inclusion in department and University communities in productive ways that will not disrupt their progress toward tenure, and 3) the major issue of post-tenure mentoring.