

What They Didn't Teach You in Graduate School

MOST NEW PH.D.'S who accept faculty positions are shocked to discover that no one told them what their day-to-day jobs would really entail. They struggled as graduate students to master the literature, theories, models, and analytical techniques in their fields and wrote dissertations of which they are proud, but they quickly realize that this knowledge is separate and distinct from understanding and dealing with the challenges and obstacles that face a beginning professor.

After spending eight or more years observing professors, many Ph.D. candidates and new Ph.D.'s assume that there is little they need to learn about the job. We believe that they are wrong. What new professors don't know can, and usually does, hurt their careers. Here is some advice based on what we've learned over the years about the job and what we try to impart, as mentors, to our students and newly hired colleagues:

Understand that most academic fields are dominated by fewer than 100 powerful people. Early in your career, you should get to know as many of them as possible—but not until you've mastered the literature (particularly the papers they wrote!) and developed some ideas of your own. If they get to know you and conclude you have no ideas, you're finished.

Specialize. Get known for something. It helps visibility. Brilliant, restless people who work on several topics simultaneously usually do not achieve as much visibility as those who plod along in the same area for many years.

Finish your Ph.D. as quickly as possible. Don't feel that you need to create the greatest work that Western civilization ever saw. Five years from now the only thing that will matter is whether you finished.

Don't take a tenure-track faculty position without the Ph.D. in hand. We estimate the odds are two to one against your ever finishing your degree. Furthermore, without a Ph.D. you will be offered a significantly lower salary, and you may never make up the difference.

Don't take your first job at the institution where you received your Ph.D. You will always be regarded as a graduate student by the older faculty members and will be treated as such. It is different, however, if you leave for some years and then return.

Consider the assistant-dean strategy. If your field suffers from an oversupply of people, one strategy is to seek a job as an assistant dean. Colleges are always looking for candidates for such necessary but nonglorious jobs as assistant dean for summer school. You, as an applicant, should insist that you also receive an appointment in your field of specialty. You should also insist that you teach one course and that you are given some time for research.

Change your career or move every seven years. Why?

- People are hired at the national market rate but are given raises based on the internal annual percentage increase. Moving is often the only way to maintain parity or gain a major increase in salary and perquisites.
- People pay attention to you because you are new. In the first few years in a new institution or department, you will have the aura of the outside expert.
- Changing fields allows you to move from a mature

area to a new, dynamic one. It is also an opportunity to get in on the ground floor of new developments.

Know that publications are your only form of portable wealth. Prioritize accordingly.

Avoid serving on a committee where you are the technical expert. If you do, you will be put on the subgroup (or, worse, become the subgroup) to make recommendations or solve the mess in your area of expertise. Such service will eat up enormous amounts of your time with little visible result and even less personal gain for you.

Learn grantsmanship. Educate yourself about who provides money for your type of research. Don't be snobbish. You may feel deep down that you did not train yourself for a life of the mind in order to become a peddler of slick prose to federal and foundation bureaucrats. But

will be educating them over and over. You may need to team up with colleagues to get people replaced who are extremely bad at their jobs.

When you do something noteworthy, ask your college's PR department to publicize it. That is one way for a lot of your colleagues across the campus to find out what a wonderful person you are. (They may even remember it at promotion time.) It also lets you brag to your chairperson and to the people in your department without being obnoxious about it.

Never become a department chair unless you are already a tenured full professor. Yes, it will reduce your teaching load. Yes, it will give you visibility. No, it will not confer power on you.

Most department chairs do less research and publish less while in that position than they would as a faculty member. Thus you are producing less portable wealth per year, and you are reducing your chances for tenure or for promotion.

Don't feel flattered if the job is offered and you are pressured by the dean to accept it: The dean has no other viable candidate who is willing to do it. If you must accept, realize that you are in the same bargaining position as a new hire. Use the opportunity to obtain something in return. Be clear beforehand that you will resign the chair's job if the agreement is broken, and if it is (as is often the case), follow through.

Write most of your articles for refereed journals. Papers presented at meetings get you funds to be a world traveler. However, even if refereed, conference papers don't really count for tenure, promotion, or salary raises.

Be careful when co-authoring a paper with a superstar. It increases your visibility and associates you with his or her reputation. However, choose carefully which papers you co-author. If the idea is yours, the superstar will probably get most of the credit.

Don't accept the impressive title of editor in chief or department editor of any publication early in your career. Journal editing takes time. Don't get involved at the editorial level until your career is well launched. At all costs, avoid editing struggling newsletters, special-interest publications, and the like.

Do, however, serve as a reviewer for journals, particularly top journals. Treat this job seriously. You will

see much junk being submitted and appreciate why some journals reject 80 percent or more of their submissions. You will develop an aesthetic for what is good and what is not. You will correspond with some powerful people. When you do get a good paper to review, you will receive much earlier knowledge of an important new development. And the information gained is worth more than the time you take reviewing.

We describe the world of academe as we see it, not as we wish it to be. But despite its many pitfalls, we believe that being a professor may be the best job on the planet—and that colleges and universities are wonderful, and occasionally transcendent, places to work.

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MATTHEW HENRY HALL

an ability to raise money can have a seismic effect on your career.

Never, ever choose sides in department politics. The side you are on expects your support and will give you no reward for it. The side(s) you are not on will remember forever.

Never take a joint appointment, particularly as your first job. The chairperson of each department will assume that the other chairperson will take care of you. Each department will assume it owns at least three-fourths of you. Furthermore, at raise, promotion, and tenure times, each department will judge you only on the papers you published in its discipline.

Get to know the development people at your institution and support them. Skilled, interactive development offices can help in obtaining outside money for you, for your department, and for students, all of which improves your quality of life. Be careful, however; development offices can be horribly inept. Many fund raisers know nothing about the academic enterprise or what you do. You