

Careers in Academe

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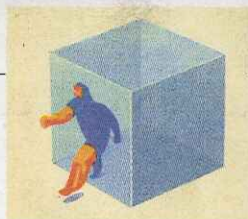
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CAREER ISSUES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

The Sweet Spot of a Nonacademic Job Search

How to get started on finding a career path outside of academe: a primer from a Ph.D. who quit a tenure-track job

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, my parents stubbornly clung to a belief that at least one of their daughters would be an athlete. Along with the skiing, which was de rigeur in my family (my dad was a competitive skier), I dutifully attended tennis lessons and

even played softball. Not much remains of those old lessons, I will confess. I haven't played tennis in years, and the closest I have come to playing softball has been reading the e-mails that my colleagues circulate about their team.

But in recent years, I have been thinking a great deal about the experience of finding the sweet spot on the racket or the bat. There was something incredibly pleasurable about hitting the ball at a specific spot that you knew would pay off. It's a lot like the rush you feel from a successful career move once you've found your niche.

When I decided to leave academe after four years as a professor, I felt as though I had stepped back into my childhood. I swung wildly on the nonacademic job market, trying to get a hit any way I could, answering job ads left and right. On one day, I would imagine myself as the director of a major museum. After all, I had a Ph.D.—one in history, no less. On the next day, I would imagine myself struggling to convince someone that I possessed the skills to be a secretary. After all, I had a Ph.D.—one in history, no less.

It took eight long months of unemployment and a lot of informational interviews before I understood that I needed to find the sweet spot and aim only for jobs in that range. To my surprise, once I found it, I began to be successful, landing job interviews and even, ultimately, two job offers. Yes, two! I was staggered by the idea of a choice.

I was offered those jobs not because I was a perfect fit for them (I wasn't) but rather because I had finally figured out how to craft an application that would highlight the skills and experiences I possessed that coincided with ones the employer wanted. Even as I had been busy telling employers that I was a "quick learner" and an impressive researcher, I had failed to understand that I needed to learn how to search for a nonacademic job.

Like most academics, I focused on the idea of leaving academe, not on the idea of entering a new and different career field. I did not understand—and failed to do the necessary research on—how the nonacademic work force operated, what its expectations were, and most important, how I could persuade nonacademic employers to hire me, a historian of 18th-century Britain with an expertise in early modern medical theories about menstruation (not, I will admit, the most useful background to have).

My inability to understand what I could and could not do meant that I spent the first few months of my nonacademic job search flailing.

Looking back, I would like to claim that I made the most mistakes one can make when leaving academe. But now, in running a Web site to assist historians seeking to leave the academy and in reviewing job applications for my day job, I have come to realize that the mistakes I made were fairly common.

Because academic culture frowns on Ph.D.'s who consider leaving the ivory tower, most of us who jump ship find ourselves at a loss as to where and how to begin a job search.

Yet a nonacademic job search is actually quite similar to a standard research project. Both require advance planning, substantial research, collating evidence for an argument, and, finally, making a convincing argument—all skills that academics possess and that, if used effectively, can ease the transition to a nonacademic job. Few of us see those connections, however, and even fewer of us use the skills we acquired in graduate school when applying for jobs.

I'll candidly admit that, even as I excoriated my students for failing to begin their research early, I procrastinated on starting my nonacademic job search. Perhaps that's understandable given that I was used to the slow pace of an academic search while the nonacademic version can move much more quickly.

Leaving academe typically entails changing fields, and changing fields always requires a sharp learning curve. You can never, in other words, start too early. One of my former bosses used to advise that you be perpetually on the job market, even when you love your current position. Starting a job search when you need a job, he would argue, is too late; you should be thinking and learning about a variety of career options at all times.

Not everyone is so career-focused, but the further ahead you plan, the more successful your job search will be. If you're a Ph.D. looking

to leave academe, you can begin that process simply by reading job ads a year or so before you go on the nonacademic market. The more you read the ads, the more you will understand what employers want.

Reading those ads will underscore the value of expanding your horizons, via an internship or even a summer job. Such temporary positions will provide you with additional skills above and beyond those you acquire in the classroom, and will also help you to determine what types of jobs you like and dislike. If working as an editorial intern turns out to be your idea of death by slow torture, the time was well spent because now you know to avoid that sort of job.

Internships and part-time jobs in the corporate sector, government, or the nonprofit world have the added benefit of persuading employers that you understand nonacademic careers and that your work experiences have made you want to work outside of academe. You are not, in other words, simply fleeing academe.

Working outside of academe before you've officially left, and before you begin an actual job search, also allows you to build and maintain a network of nonacademic contacts. Academic culture tends to be insular, so it can be difficult to socialize and maintain connections with nonacademics when you're buried in your research and teaching. That's unfortunate because the broader your network, the broader your exposure to a variety of careers. The best networks build upon years of contacts and shared experiences.

Outside the academy, people typically use networking and informational interviewing to learn about career options. Informational interviews are not job interviews. Job offers do, sometimes, come out of informational interviews, but that is rare.

The real intent of an informational interview is simply to allow you to peek inside a particular profession. It's an opportunity to ask candid questions to someone who works in that field about the skills employers want, how résumés in that field are structured, where jobs are advertised, and, even more simply, what a typical day in that profession entails.

The best informational interview I ever had was one in which the subject gave me detailed instructions about how to complete and submit a federal job application. No job offer came out of that interview, but the information I obtained allowed me to submit a successful application for a federal job a month later.

Informational interviews can not only give you tips on how to apply for a job, they can also help you to understand the jobs for which you should apply. Most academics can explain, in their sleep, the differences between an assistant professor, an associate professor, a visiting professor, an endowed chair, and an instructor. Graduate students instinctively know not to apply for an associate professorship and to focus instead on other types of jobs.

When I began reading ads for nonacademic positions, I read the job titles with a great deal of bewilderment. Associate director? Director? Program analyst? What was the difference? And which was I qualified for? Through informational interviews, I finally began to understand why my mailbox had been stuffed with rejection letters. Better yet, I came to understand where the sweet spot on my racket was and which jobs I should aim for.

Still, knowing where that spot is and knowing how to hit it are two very different things.

**BEYOND
THE IVORY TOWER**

By Alexandra M. Lord



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The Sweet Spot of a Nonacademic Job Search

Continued From Page D4

When I began writing job letters and crafting my résumé, I assumed that employers spent a great deal of time reading my materials. Having now been on the other side of the hiring table, I know that employers read cover letters and résumés in the same manner in which professors read the hundreds of essays they must grade at the end of a semester—quickly, and with an eye to finding the best argument supported by the best evidence.

Job letters and résumés that do not clearly respond to the qualifications listed in an ad are tossed after a first glance.

The situation is even worse at organizations that routinely get hundreds of applicants. There, computers often make a preliminary cut, weed-

ing out applicants who do not use the words and phrases of the job ad before their applications even reach the person in charge of hiring.

The best way to avoid getting culled early, then, is to make sure that your application materials reflect what the employer specifically mentions in the job ad. Few applicants possess the entire list of needed skills for any job. The best candidates I have seen have been those who make the best argument for why they are the best qualified for the post.

Note: I did not say that the best-qualified person was necessarily the best applicant. On several occasions, I've seen an unconventional candidate selected over a conventional one because the unconventional candidate did an outstanding job of making the connections

between the job requirements and his or her background. Not every employer adopts that approach, but enough do to enable unconventional job seekers to find opportunities if they craft a résumé and cover letter that closely reflects the job requirements.

Making a sharp argument requires substantial planning and deft thinking. Whenever I have been on the job market, I have typically carried the job ad and a draft résumé around in my purse. While riding the metro, waiting for takeout, or doing anything that provides me with a few minutes, I have repeatedly scrutinized the job ad, attempting to match my experiences with the qualifications and jotting down relevant experiences as I remember them. Over a week or so, my personal list of qualifica-

tions becomes a résumé tailored to the specific job ad. In other words, I've found the sweet spot.

In conversations with colleagues and friends, I have come to realize that my approach is actually fairly common, even among those who have impeccable qualifications. Even the best athletes need practice to find and hit the sweet spot.

Those of us who are less athletic need the most practice. But it is possible, even in a bad economy, to hit that spot.

Alexandra M. Lord is a historian who left academe in 2000 for a position with the federal government. Since 2004, she has also run Beyond Academe, a free Web site that assists historians in finding work outside the academy.

To: Professors; Re: Your Advisees. You're Not Doing Your Job

DEAR FACULTY MEMBERS: I sell Ph.D. advising services on the open market. And your Ph.D. students are buying. Why? Because you're

not doing your job.

Lest you think that by advising, I mean editing research papers and dissertations, let me disabuse you. I offer those services, but rarely am I asked for them.

A former tenured professor at a major research university, I am now running an academic-career consulting business. That's right: I am doing graduate advising for pay. I am teaching your Ph.D. students to do things like plan a publishing trajectory, tailor their dissertations for grant agencies, strategize recommendation letters, evaluate a journal's status, judge the relative merits of postdoctoral options, interpret a rejection, follow up on an acceptance, and—above all—get a job. And business is so good that I'm booked ahead for months.

As my own former Ph.D. advisees would happily tell you, I am not infallible. Your students don't come to me because they think I'm the perfect adviser. They come because I'm available and you're not. And because I don't sugarcoat the truth and you do. When their work is bad, I tell them. Point blank. "Your essay is truly awful," I've said. Or, "Has no one ever taught you how to write a grant?" Most important, I highlight the career stakes of their errors: "This job letter is no better than a B+, which in this job climate may as well be an F. Do it over." And they do.

When I ask them why they come to me—and not you, their Ph.D. advisers—the answers never vary. "Oh, my adviser? He's supportive about the diss. But in terms of my career? I'm totally on my own."

Why am I the pinch-hitter for an absentee professoriate?

Let me be the first to tell you, your advisees are working hard. They have certainly gotten the memo: Jobs are impossible, so publish before you finish. Network. Professionalize. They just don't have the foggiest notion how to do any of that.

Cultivate a letter-writer? Do the elevator talk? Tailor a job letter? You are sending your Ph.D. students out onto this job market so unprepared that it would be laughable if the outcome weren't so tragic. Meanwhile, when students ask for help with their job search, too many of you respond with some version of "Not my problem" or "The Ph.D. is not

professional training." When one of my clients asked her adviser for career help, the professor accused her of trying to "game the system." Incredibly, one of you told another of my clients, "Jobs come up all the time! It's not like there's a season for them!"

To be sure, my clients tell me that advising occurs—endless advising on "the dissertation project." As if that project, and its minutiae of citations and shades of meaning, is the

point of graduate school. It is not the point of graduate school. It is simply a document that demonstrates a mastery of a discipline and a topic. The point of graduate school, for the actual graduate students themselves, is preparation for a career. A career like yours, with benefits and a retirement plan.

That kind of career derives far less from a thick wad of dissertation pages than from the quantity of one's publications, the impressiveness of one's grant record, the fame of one's reference-writers, and the clarity of one's ambition. I don't find it problematic to say any of that openly. But apparently you do. You reject it as "vulgar" and "careerist"—as if wanting to have health insurance is vulgar and wanting to not go on food stamps is careerist.

That is pure intellectual snobbery. To acknowledge your graduate students as people in a work force requires you to acknowledge yourselves as workers, and to do that you must finally abandon the self-delusion of the ivory tower—that scholarly work is "above" capitalist exchange and anything as gauche as money. And that you will not do. The irony of faculty "work" ("I'm working on a project on death and the abject") is its scrupulous denial of any acknowledged kinship to the actual wage-work for which you do, indeed, draw a salary.

For years now, many professors have used the abysmal job market as an alibi to entirely neglect career advising for their doctoral students. "Well, the job market's impossible," my former colleagues would say, airily, "of course I always tell them that." And for too many professors, that's where their sense of responsibility to their advisees' career prospects seems to stop.

But I write this today to argue otherwise. Your responsibility to your advisees extends to telling the whole truth about the academic enterprise at this time. Tenure-track lines have been evaporating for years. Aiming for a tenure-track job is, for most students, unrealistic. For those students who wish to try, the effort requires years of methodical train-

ing and calculation of career chances, from the point of arrival in the graduate program through the dissertation defense and beyond. Your job is to look up from your students' dissertations, and assist them in mastering those skills and calculations.

How? By teaching your Ph.D.'s how to write a CV; to cultivate prominent scholarly supporters; to pursue grant money with a single-minded purpose; to apply for national awards; to publish, publish more, publish higher, write a stellar application letter, and do the elevator talk.

And when, even after doing all of the above, the tenure-track job doesn't materialize—as it often will not—instead of averting your eyes in shame from their so-called "failures," you step up, professors, and work with your



Ph.D.'s to transfer their skills into some sector of the economy that is not contracting as badly as your own.

Your job is to tell them the truth. And to extend an ethos of care beyond your advisees' writing and research to encompass their material existence. Because your students need work, even when it's not the coveted tenure-track job. Work is good. You work. So should your Ph.D.'s.

Karen Kelsky is a former professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Oregon. She left academe in 2010 and now runs a consulting business and a blog called The Professor Is In.

FIRST PERSON

By Karen Kelsky

Preparing for Comprehensive Exams: As Smart as I'll Ever Be

IN THE SPRING of 2008, I sat down in my department chair's office so we could review a copy of my transcripts. After double-checking, we realized that with the completion of the fall 2008 semester, I would fulfill the department's Ph.D. requirements for course credits. Trying to sound undaunted, I offered him the familiar graduate-student line: "Now all I have to do is write my dissertation."

"Well," replied my chair, "you have to pass your exams first."

"Exams?"

As he explained the rudiments of comprehensive exams, I suspect that he read the surprise on my face. Of course I knew *of* the exams; I just didn't know much *about* them. I assumed they were some minor formality that I could hop over, and that my coursework would suffice as preparation.

After leaving the office, I did a little research into my newfound fate. The purpose of comprehensive exams hasn't changed much since the early 19th century, when German scholars systematized the Ph.D. degree by defining its four basic elements: the application process, seminars, a set of exams, and a dissertation. Ostensibly that sequence of tasks identifies talent, teaches the art of asking and answering good questions, provides a foundation in the relevant literature, and then creates some new knowledge.

Like many departments, mine requires four exams, in four fields of study, administered by four faculty members, who form a committee. One of the four represents your major subfield, two are from subfields of your department, and the fourth is from a field outside your department. Typically the process involves you and each of the four faculty members agreeing on a book list, from which you are then tested.

Each of my examiners had a different idea about what a comprehensive exam ought to entail. At first I saw that lack of standardization as a problem. For my out-of-department field, for example, the professor picked all of the books for me and gave me a clear essay assignment meant to make me grapple with the ways in which the field had changed.

In one of the subfields on which I was tested, the book list was a joint effort. I wrote a rough list of books based on what I had read, what I wanted to read, and what commonly appeared on seminar bibliographies. My faculty adviser then scratched out titles that seemed too narrowly focused, outdated, or redundant, and added some classics and cutting-edge work.

For the third subfield, it was pretty much up to me. I brought a load of textbooks home from the library and pored over their bibliographies until I had a list of about 100 books that seemed to appear most frequently or were cited most often.

For my major field, I listed everything I had already read, organizing it into themes and pertinent time periods. Wherever it appeared that I had read little in a given theme or time period, I inserted titles from seminar bibliographies.

Once the head of my exam committee scratched titles off that list and added others, it was time to begin my intensive study.

At first the only point I saw in taking the exams was to pass them and get on with my diss. Some good advice cured my myopia.

Most of the faculty members whom I cornered told me to "enjoy" the task, which sounded absurd, if not cruel, as I stared at my long reading lists. But I soon found myself savoring the experience of being surrounded with a bunch of the most important, new, or classic works in my fields.

Suddenly I was reading with the intent of organizing my impressions into a big, and hopefully clear, picture of those fields, rather

than for the immediate, frantic task of cranking out another seminar assignment. The competitiveness of weekly seminar discussions with bright, motivated, and critical

peers disappeared. The need to criticize each book as a single entity faded, as did the need to churn out weekly academic reviews or critical analyses. I immersed myself in the transition from working on short-term

assignments to indulging in a more comprehensive project.

A bit of practical advice helped me see a shared intention behind what I had misconstrued as a lack of standardization. At different times, all of my faculty examiners pointed out that the books on my reading lists would be with me for the rest of my academic career. Aside from occasional bouts of blurred vision and wishing that those books weren't in my life at all, I started to realize that my work might translate into something useful, even marketable.

As I organized titles into ever-growing
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FIRST PERSON

By David Brooks



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As Smart as I'll Ever Be

Continued From Page D7

piles in my basement, I saw potential courses emerge. I started jotting down ideas for new syllabi. The process of going through the books helped me imagine teaching from them. For one of my four fields, the written exam became a survey-course syllabus with an annotated bibliography, including a justification for each reference.

The exams no longer seemed like just a hurdle to my dissertation.

Although I had no weekly seminars to attend during this time, I made a habit of strolling my department's floor and popping into open doors. Occasionally I actually had

a question about some book or historical argument, but mostly I just tried to get people to talk about their exam experiences.

It was like hearing people tell about running a marathon or traveling through a third-world country for the first time. They were proud of their struggles and recounted how transformative they had found the experience. One guy recalled wallpapering his apartment with notes and holding cutthroat quiz sessions with fellow students, a few of whom became lifelong friends. I sensed a degree of nostalgia that I have never heard anyone associate with, say, writing a dissertation.

A month before my exams, I quit reading and started studying. What I knew about each exam helped me order all the notes I had taken from the books, as well as the three or four academic reviews I read for each one. For one exam, I compiled 10 essay questions, one for each theme or time period within that subfield. At test time, my examiner would give me four of the questions, and I would write on two of them.

I grouped my notes under the question that I thought they best answered, outlined essays, and even wrote out thesis statements and some key points of analysis for each of the questions.

In contrast, another of the exams promised

to be a complete surprise. So I simply honed my notes into outlines, bullet points, and concise quotes. That's as close as I got to a shortcut. Since I'm a failure at using memory tricks, and I find study groups a distraction to good studying, I turned to rote memorization. I went to bed each night with my notes, and when I woke up the next morning, I sat down at the computer and retyped them. In between, I simply rehearsed them as if they were lines for a play.

Two days before the exams, I felt ready for the curtain call. At that point, I quit studying, took a few long runs and walks, played with my dog and my daughter, and did my best to go to bed early. In four separate four-hour sessions over two days, I poured out as much of what I had learned as possible into the written exams. The one consisting of the four chosen essay questions allowed me to write elaborate essays that I had carefully outlined. At the other extreme, the exam about which I knew nothing in advance challenged the flexibility of my knowledge, forcing me to make new connections between books and their arguments.

I walked away from each one with the satisfaction of having done all I could.

When I handed in my final exam, a friend who was a faculty member in a different university's history department happened to be there. She patted my shoulder and said, "This is as smart as you'll ever be."

Because I still had a two-hour oral exam with all of my examiners, I went home to give my notes one last look and didn't try to discern whether her comment was a compliment or a warning. The truth of it struck me midway through the orals—which were the most enjoyable and singularly transformative part of the whole experience. Fielding a battery of questions that ranged from curiosity about details of particular books to my own interpretations of themes within fields, I felt smarter than I ever had. More important, I felt as if I were talking my way into a new peer group.

Of all the benefits that came from preparing for and taking my exams—identifying the pertinent literature, grappling with and grouping the major arguments, imagining new interpretations and new courses, and experiencing this exercise in sheer discipline—the biggest was psychological. Field exams helped me to imagine myself as a teacher as well as a lifelong student. I will always see my faculty examiners as my teachers, but exams taught me to see them as colleagues as well.

A year out from those exams, and after teaching a survey course while trying to stay on the dissertation track, I'm already nostalgic about my year of exam prep. But I still hope they are the last exams I ever have to take.

David Brooks is an A.B.D. doctoral student in history at the University of Montana. If you would like to contribute a First Person essay to the series on graduate-school work and life, please e-mail your ideas and essays to denise.magner@chronicle.com.

As the world's premier aerospace university, Embry-Riddle is something of a star in the world of flight – we count a few current and former NASA astronauts among our alumni, for example. Yet much of our research makes life better right here on earth. With concerns about gas prices and climate change in the headlines, Embry-Riddle set off in search of clean energy solutions by competing in the three-year EcoCAR competition sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy and General Motors. We're also looking at ways to transform wind and ocean currents into clean, renewable energy. And aeronautics? We foresee low-cost, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) flying 400 feet above the ocean streaming live video, making it possible to better protect our wildlife. Yes, at Embry-Riddle we aim for the stars. But we always keep home close to our hearts.

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FACULTY CAREERS & THE HIRING PROCESS

How Skype Is Changing the Interview Process

FOR YEARS, SEARCH COMMITTEES conducted preliminary job interviews for academic positions by telephone, making it easy for a candidate to sit at home in shorts while answering serious questions.

But times have changed, and Skype is now the preferred method many institutions use to conduct long-distance interviews. Some job listings are even warning candidates that they may have to make an initial appearance before the committee via Webcam.

Skype is an Internet-based video service that started in 2003, its name short for “sky peer-to-peer.” It is free to use in its basic version, with an easy registration process and has become one of the best-known services of its type. *The Chronicle* first reported on Skype in the fall of 2003, but the response from the academic community ranged from embracing the simple technology to fearing lawsuits over misuse of copyrighted material.

Only in the past few years has Skype been put into broad use on campuses, for admissions interviews, classroom guest speakers, collaborative distance-learning projects, and search-committee work. Marc Bousquet, writing on *The Chronicle*'s Brainstorm blog, said Skype was affecting the MLA hiring process, with 12 percent to 18 percent of interviews now conducted via the Internet, bypassing the traditional face-to-face process at the convention. He estimated that Web-based interviewing saved departments \$5,000 to \$10,000 per search.

Even though I had read about universities using Skype for job interviews, I was unprepared to be so quickly thrust into on-camera performances in front of three search committees over a period of two weeks. With only a couple of days' notice, I had to make my first screen appearance.

After losing a bit of sleep pondering the proper Webcam angle and what to wear, I approached the first meeting with an attitude of trepidation and adventure. Before the interview, I conducted a Skype test run with my daughter to—let's be honest—see how bad I looked. A Webcam isn't the most flattering piece of technology and can make you appear gaunt, overweight, beady-eyed, or narcoleptic. And often you look all those things at the same time.

My best camera angle turned out to be with the Webcam pointed down slightly, so I placed my laptop on an empty cardboard box and tilted the Webcam toward me. Then I turned the laptop so the light wouldn't be behind me (avoiding a shadowy face).

Because the first interview was being done in my home, I cleared out whatever could be seen over my shoulder so the committee wouldn't have to stare at the scuffed shoes sitting on the floor or the dog's toys scattered around the room. I changed into a blue pinstripe oxford, knowing that white is a bad camera color because it reflects too much light and can wash out your facial features.

The first Skype connection took place right on time, but the committee was surprisingly distant from its camera. In order to accommodate all five in the screen, the table they sat behind was set well away from the lens, so I couldn't make out facial details. The little image I saw of myself in the corner of my screen, however, showed a larger-than-life close-up of my face that seemed to distort my features.

The interview itself went surprisingly well. Instead of answering questions over the phone with no reaction on the other end, I could see committee members nodding their heads or taking notes, leading me to believe I had said something that they liked. They may have been grading papers or smiling at my pasty-white winter complexion, but I choose to believe they were reacting positively to my responses.

Only one of the five faculty members didn't seem to want to be there. He appeared on the upper-right corner of the screen, partially cut off from my view, taking no notes and fidgeting in his seat. He looked down all the time, even when he was asking me his lone question. Only later did I discover that he had just been replaced as department chair a month earlier and apparently wanted nothing to do with the hiring process.

After the call ended, I not only felt a sense of relief but also found that I had actually enjoyed the experience. I felt that I got to know them much better than I would have if I had only heard their voices coming from a speakerphone. Instead of the blank uncertainty I had always felt hanging up after a phone interview, I left the Skype experience feeling that I had made new friends.

It was only a few days later when I had my second Webcam interview—this time in my college office. As a faculty member with heaping shelves of books and messy piles of papers waiting to be filed,

I knew I had to clean up the place a bit. After everything behind me got put away (some of it hidden in spots the interviewers couldn't see), I propped my laptop on the empty cardboard box and checked the scene. The lighting in my office was not only dramatically different from my home, but the fluorescent ceiling bulbs added an angelic glow to my hair. I was uncertain if that would help or hurt my chances.

This time the initial connection didn't go quite as well on their end. First the chair had my wrong Skype address, misspelling it by one letter. Then it took the committee members 20 minutes to get their Skype called up, so I anxiously waited, staring at a blank screen, while they used a cellphone to give me updates. Note to search committees using Internet

video links: Have someone come early to set up the technology.

Once the interview started, I tried to watch the facial expressions of the four distant people. The members of the group were spread out in a small classroom and had to look way up into a corner to see me on their monitor. With my halo hair and their upward glances, the experience could only be described as celestial.

Everyone smiled, nodded, and took notes—except for the one guy, again in the upper-right corner, who was playing with his laptop and checking his phone for text messages the whole time. He asked one question and made no eye contact. I began to wonder if it is a require-

FIRST PERSON

By Stephen Winzenburg



ment that every interview must include one committee member who acts like a student who doesn't want to be in class.

By the time I had my third Skype interview, the next week, I felt like an old pro. I was happy to have a smiling older professor call me at home. He was seated in a TV studio and was close to the Webcam but was difficult to see because the camera lens pointed up toward some glaring television lights. He said there were three committee members in the room, but the only other person in the picture was a woman sitting 20 feet directly behind him, and I could not make out her face.

The committee chair asked all of the prepared questions, and in the middle of one of my answers, I saw the woman behind him start waving wildly. It looked like she was pointing at something behind me with one hand, trying to signal that I should look. I turned around but had no idea what she was gesturing about.

Then, out of nowhere, a young male head popped in from the left side of the screen. He looked at me for about five seconds, then disappeared—never to be seen again. I assume he was the third member of the committee, but I'm still unsure why neither of the other members said anything during the interview.

I handled most of the questions well, until I suffered the consequences of a poor decision on my part. After having no trouble with my dog in my first at-home Skype interview, I had allowed her to once again lounge just off camera. But as this interview was winding down, I heard the dog run to the front window and start to growl. That meant she had spotted something and was going to make sure everyone

Continued on Page D10

How Skype Is Changing the Interview Process

Continued From Page D9

knew about it. In the middle of an eloquent (I thought) answer about my philosophy of teaching, the dog started barking wildly and would not stop. I stared into the Webcam and kept talking with a plastered-on smile as I moved my left hand out of view, snapping my fingers to try to get the dog's attention.

Nothing would keep her quiet. So with

gritted teeth, I pretended that it was totally normal to have a dog barking in the background of a professional interview.

The first two Skype interviews led immediately to campus interviews. The lesson here: A face-to-face preliminary interview turns out to have advantages for both sides. It's easier to have a conversation when you can see how people are responding to your

remarks. And even when things go wrong technologically, it's revealing to see how both parties handle the problem.

As for that third Skype interview, I heard nothing from the search committee for weeks and blamed that on my pesky pooch. Then one day, I got a call informing me that I was finalist for the position. I decided not to ask whether all of the barking was what had led

the committee to delay calling me.

But I am now resolved: The next time I have a Skype interview at home, my dog will be safely resting in the windowless laundry room, at the other end of the house.

Stephen Winzenburg is a professor of communication at Grand View University in Des Moines.

The A to Z of Dual-Career Couples

MUCH HAS BEEN written in academe on the topic of dual-career couples, and it remains a major issue for many institutions and people, particularly for women in science, engineering, and math.

My point of view on the subject is that of a full professor in the physical sciences at a large research university. I am also writing as a member of a dual-career couple fortunate to have two faculty positions at the same institution. Whenever I write about this topic on my blog, I am quickly reminded by the comments that some people are hostile to the concept of accommodations being made for academic couples. In the topics below, arranged alphabetically, I have tried to reflect the agony, the ecstasy, and the anger surrounding the issue of dual-career couples in academe.

Advantages. People often focus on the difficulties of being in a dual-career couple, primarily in terms of the challenge of finding two appealing academic jobs in the same place or at neighboring institutions. But for many of us there are also advantages. A major one is the high level of understanding of each other's work.

Bodies (two of them). Studies of married female faculty members show that many women in the physical sciences and math are married to other academics, the majority of them in the same or similar fields. Although the two-body problem may arise when institutions try to hire male faculty members, it more commonly occurs with female candidates. The issue, therefore, has become inextricably linked with that of hiring and retaining women in science, engineering, and math. Some dual-career couples hope for two tenure-track or tenured positions; others want (or are willing to take) one such position, with the other member of the couple accepting a job as an instructor, a support-staff member, or a research scientist with partial or no support (other than a title and a desk). For some couples, the first scenario is ideal, and anything else will cause stress in the relationship. Others are fine with the second scenario. Couples need to discuss this issue thoroughly and figure out what is best for them.

Competition. Say that both members of an academic couple are in the same field, department, or institution. Are the two in competition with each other? If so, how stressful is that? Some women write to me and say that they don't want to "compete" with their partner and that, perhaps, it's best if there is "only one professor in the family." Every couple is different, of course. For some, being in the same department or institution or even on the same career path is stressful and stifling. Others enjoy sharing their professional lives in that way.

Deans. If department heads are uninspired about how, or whether to, create job opportunities for a dual-career couple, deans (or

provosts or other administrators) can make things happen. In fact, that was my situation when my current university was trying to figure out whether they could hire both my husband and me: The department didn't think it would work, but administrators at a higher level made it happen. Fortunately, the department head was pleased with the arrangement, so we did not have to worry that one of us was hired against the will of the department.

The stumbling blocks in our hiring were related to faculty lines, salary, and start-up costs. Deans can be important even when both hires are in the same department, and are essential when the partners are in separate departments. Some departments are reluctant to give any sort of position to the spouse of someone being hired in another department, even if the spousal candidate has expertise and talents that could benefit the department, and even if there are economic incentives provided by the institution to support the hire. Perhaps there is no way to overcome such resistance, but university-level administrators should work with reluctant department heads and find constructive solutions.

Economics. Budget constraints can make hiring a dual-career couple difficult. Likewise, economic woes can follow two partnered academics throughout their career. I have encountered colleagues (and one department head) who thought that dual-career couples should be treated as an economic unit—so that if two faculty members in one department are married to each other, that relationship should be considered in decisions about salary and raises, and their combined salary should be a more significant consideration than either individual salary. In my opinion, a faculty member should be considered on his or her merits—no matter the circumstances of the initial hiring, just as is the case in tenure and promotion.

Fields. Which is more difficult—finding two nearby jobs in the same field or in different fields? The short answer is "yes." A more specific answer is that the difficulty of finding two jobs in one department at the same institution might be offset somewhat by the fact that it may be easier for one administrator to accommodate two partners than it would be to involve multiple departments (see the "deans" entry) in the negotiations. The degree of difficulty also relates to the size and resources of the institution, and whether there are other nearby campuses or just one rather isolated college or university.

Gender. Institutions that are serious about increasing the number of female faculty members in underrepresented fields must be willing to find solutions for dual-career couples (see "bodies"). The problem may be particularly severe for institutions in isolated locations with few other job opportunities for academics, or at institutions with limited resources for making multiple hires. I know

of one search in which all of the top candidates for a tenure-track position were female scientists married to other scientists. The institution had to decide whether to fail the search and hope for another pool of excellent candidates with less complicated personal lives, or create a second position and hire a spouse as well. It ended up hiring a couple.

Higher Education Recruitment Consortium.

National and regional consortia help solve the two-body problem for academics by facilitating dual-career job searches and providing information to help administrators with the institutional challenges of such hires.

Illegal. Many women write to me to complain that they are asked "illegal" questions about their spouses during job interviews for faculty positions. Despite efforts to educate faculty members and administrators about what is permissible to ask about a candidate's personal life, women are commonly asked about their marital status. Or hiring committees seek that information through indirect means. Some women who write to me want to know if they can refuse to answer, or should answer all questions even if they are inappropriate. The trouble is, refusing to answer a question about a spouse or partner is the same as acknowledging having a "two-body problem." So most women just answer the question when asked, even if they worry that their answer will jeopardize their chances at a job offer.

Job-sharing. Some institutions hire both members of a dual-career couple only if they agree to share a job. That may be an attractive option for some couples, as long as each member qualifies for benefits (health insurance, retirement, etc.). At some institutions, a half-time position wouldn't qualify you for benefits, but 75 percent of a position would, so the couple might share 1.5 faculty lines instead of just one job. In theory a part-time position comes with reduced teaching and service work, but in reality it may not.

Kids. A few years ago, while visiting another university, I had lunch with some female graduate students and postdocs. All of them said they did not want an academic career, because it was impossible to have children and be a professor, especially if you were married to another academic. They had arrived at that belief because the one female professor in their department was childless. To me that was a dramatic illustration of the importance of role models. Of course it's possible to be in a dual-career academic couple and have kids. In fact, it is more than possible; it can be a very nice life, with opportunities for family adventures.

Long distance. Should two partners live separately for a while if it might increase their chances of getting jobs together later on? I am often asked that question, but it's something each couple has to decide. There is no one right answer. My husband and I lived

CATALYST

By Female Science Professor

apart for a few years because we decided that independently pursuing our careers was the best plan for us, and we were fortunate that we eventually ended up living and working in the same place. Partners need to decide: How long is too long to live apart? What will we do if both of us get tenure-track jobs, but nowhere near each other? Will one of us give up the job? How will that be decided?

Midcareer move (dual-career edition).

If you and your spouse are lucky enough to find academic positions near each other, does that mean you can never leave that campus? Not necessarily. When my husband and I have been approached by other institutions seeking to recruit one of us, we are typically told upfront, "And of course we would hire both of you." Being in a dual-career couple may make you less movable, but it doesn't mean you will never have any opportunities to move.

Nepotism. Some people object to the apparent nepotism of dual-career couples, particularly in the same department. However, partners at the same institution, or even in the same department, don't have decision-making roles regarding each other's hiring, salary, or promotion. If one member of a couple is the department chair, the other member of the couple reports directly to a dean or other administrator. Policies are in place to avoid conflicts of interest with dual-career couples.

Offices. There are many nice things about landing two jobs in the same place. There are also continuing challenges (see "economics") and minor annoyances. An example of the latter: Colleagues or students are looking for my spouse but can't find him, so they come to my office and ask where he is. Thus far I have confined my responses to polite answers (typically, "I have no idea"). A few times I have looked under my desk and in a drawer, then announced, "Well, he doesn't seem to be here." I have been tempted to get a leash and hold it up when asked the "Where is your husband?" question and say, "Oh, no! He's off the leash again!" Somehow I have resisted the urge.

Partners. What if you aren't married but have a long-term partner? Can you negotiate a position for your partner, or do you have to be married? I know of a few examples of dual-career couples who were not married but who nevertheless negotiated two positions. But I believe that's still rare. Clearly this is a relevant issue for gay couples. Even though there is no guarantee that married couples won't divorce, some administrators are uncomfortable hiring unmarried partners, because they somehow perceive such relationships to be less stable or more easily abandoned.

Qualified. A concern commonly raised by critics of the general concept of dual-career couples is that only one of the people in the couple is likely to be any good. The other person, critics claim, might not even be qualified for the job that's offered. The issue of what defines "qualified" is tricky, but it is not in the interest of a department or institution to hire an unqualified person, even for the sake of increasing diversity. If the "other" member of the couple is deemed unqualified for a faculty

position, institutions are unlikely to offer one, even if it is economically feasible.

Recruitment and retention. When it comes to obtaining an academic position, are there any advantages to being part of a dual-career couple? Some colleagues report that their universities are pleased when a top candidate negotiates for a second position, because that means the candidate is more likely to stay. This phenomenon seems to occur most often at institutions where it can be difficult to attract and retain faculty members owing to such factors as a high cost of living or unappealing (to some) location. Dual-career couples who are successful at separate institutions, but unhappy about having long commutes together, may be poached by other institutions. That is not common enough to make it a general feature of the experience of academic couples, but it's nice to know that sometimes being part of a couple can lead to job opportunities.

Sabbaticals. It may be easier for dual-career couples to go away for a sabbatical than it is for couples in different professions—if you can convince administrators to approve your leaves for the same year, and if you can work out the economic issues. Many American institutions pay faculty members 50 percent of their salaries while on sabbatical, so that must be factored into your plans.

Trailing spouses. It is rare that an institution has two equal positions open at the same time and hires both members of a couple on an equal footing. It happens, but it is far more common that there is one faculty position (tenured or tenure track) for one member of the couple, and the other is hired as part of a negotiation. In fact, it is typically assumed that one member of a dual-career couple is the “trailing spouse”—the one the institution hired only because it really wanted the other member. “Trailing spouse” is not a neutral concept: The stigma, even in a tenure-track position, can persist for years, particularly if there is unequal treatment in terms of resources (start-up support, space) and workload (teaching, service). Ideally, with time (and some retirements and new hires), the institutional memory of who was a trailing spouse fades away.

Unfair. As is probably quite clear, I am sympathetic to dual-career couples. Some people, however, are not—especially if two faculty positions are involved. The objection may stem in part from a feeling that one person is somehow circumventing the search process (see entries on the notion of “qualified” and on “trailing spouses”). There is no escaping the fact that when someone is hired, someone else is not, and it can be hard for unsuccessful candidates in a search to set aside disappointment (or anger) if a second position is created for the spouse of the successful candidate. That two people are hired instead of one, however, does not mean that the second hire is unqualified. In all cases that I know of, the “trailing spouse” is interviewed (gives a talk, meets with faculty members, etc.) before a second offer is made.

Voting blocs. One reason that some faculty members are reluctant to hire dual-career couples in the same department, particularly in small programs, is the fear that the couple will form the dreaded Voting

Bloc. I am sure there are examples of couples voting the same on some issues in faculty meetings, but I am more likely to vote the same as colleagues in my research field than I am to vote in lock step with my spouse.

When (to bring up your two-body problem), and what (to say). Some administrators have told me that they want to know as soon as possible whether they need to start working on a dual-career hire—even as soon as the interview stage. That might be fine if there is a system that uses the information in a constructive way rather than penalizing candidates for it. Lacking such a system, I think it's better to keep such issues off the table, unless a candidate chooses to mention his or her personal situation. Of course, it is naïve to think that this information is unknown. Many women are asked during an interview about

their marital (and parental) status and plans (see “illegal questions”), or this information is acquired through back channels.

What to say? When asked a personal question, it is reasonable to reply, calmly and pleasantly, “I'd rather talk about X,” in which X is some topic relevant to research or teaching. Years ago, during my own interviews for faculty positions, I tried to walk a fine line between making it clear that I wasn't going to sit there and discuss my personal life in detail, and not being defensive about it. When asked about my husband, I would say something like, “We're both looking for faculty positions and are just trying to get the best jobs we can.” And then I would try to change the subject back to research and teaching.

eXtremely complicated. Will the two-body problem always be so fraught and com-

plicated, or can colleges create systematic ways to deal with these situations that do not penalize the couples and yet result in hires that make sense for the institution? Even in these economically dire times, I think there are ways that human-resource offices and administrators can focus on the long-term benefits of hiring dual-career couples rather than the short-term economic costs.

Zero. That is the number of times I was not asked about my husband during interviews for faculty positions.

Female Science Professor is the pseudonym of a professor in the physical sciences at a large research university who blogs under that moniker and writes monthly for our Catalyst column. Her blog is <http://science-professor.blogspot.com>.

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How Do You Teach Networking?

AT THE END of the fall semester, my wife and I went out to our favorite restaurant, where we found ourselves in a polite scrum with a man and his teenage son for the one seat

available at the crowded bar. Although they probably had arrived just before us, the man generously ceded it to my wife, and we struck up a conversation.

It turned out that they were visiting from Florida and were in New England for a tour of a nearby university, a larger and more research-oriented institution than the liberal-arts college where I teach. Since I direct the honors program at my college, I told them about it and encouraged the son to consider applying. The father and son both seemed interested, so I gave them my business card, and then a table opened up for them and we parted company.

As they were walking away, I saw the man wave my business card in his son's face, and say: "Networking: This is how business gets done about 90 percent of the time."

I nudged my wife and rolled my eyes, and I'm guessing the son probably rolled his, too, neither of us believing that barroom networking could really make a difference in the universe of higher education.

And at the time I believed that. I have a wealthy brother-in-law who once told me, late one evening in a (different) bar, that he would get me a job at his alma mater, where he made sizable annual donations. I rolled my eyes at him, too.

"Academia doesn't work like that," I said. "Now buy me another drink."

The first half of that sentence reflected my instinctive distaste for the very idea of networking—a distaste, and perhaps mistrust, that I know is shared by many of my fellow academics. Networking, for me, has always called to mind images of unctuous sales reps glad-handing at conventions, everyone acting as friendly as possible because, at bottom, they all want something from one another.

Last spring, however, after witnessing an expert networker in action at an academic conference, I was forced to re-evaluate my half-baked notion of networking as a polite term for slimy self-promotion. The change of heart came about more easily because the expert in question happened to be my older brother Tony.

A political scientist at the University of St. Andrews, in Scotland, and a scholar of ethics in international relations, Tony told me a few months ago that he would be in Montreal in March for the annual convention of the International Studies Association. Since we live an ocean apart, and I don't get to see him much, I decided to drive up from Massachusetts and spend a day or two with him at the conference.

"I'll clear my calendar on Saturday for you," he said, "but you could even come on up on Friday, as long as you don't mind going out to dinner with a bunch of political scientists."

So I showed up in Montreal at around 3 p.m. on Friday. He was still chairing a panel, so I sat down by the concierge's desk to wait for him. A few minutes later I spotted him coming across the hotel lobby and stood up to greet him. Just before he reached me, someone stopped him and shook his hand. He disengaged himself, we hugged, and then

I turned to pick up my bags. During the five seconds it took me to gather up my things, someone else came up and greeted him.

"I just have to talk to this person for a few minutes," he said to me, "while you get settled in upstairs. Meet me down here in a half-hour."

A half-hour later, we sat down in the hotel bar to catch up. Before I had three words out of my mouth, someone walked up, put a hand on Tony's shoulder, and asked if he

had plans for breakfast the next morning. Another small group of people walked by, all of whom stopped and greeted Tony by name. Anyone who stayed for more than a minute or two was dutifully introduced to his younger brother, the English professor, before they moved on to their next panel, drink, or dinner plans.

Over the course of the next 48 hours, that same scenario happened countless times. Whether we were in the lobby, browsing at the book exhibit, or walking around the streets of Montreal, we could not go more than five or 10 minutes without running into someone who greeted Tony by name, and who wanted either to catch up with him briefly or talk a quick little bit of shop—their plans for a forthcoming conference, comments on a recent controversial publication, questions about the editorial board of some new journal.

Sometimes, after the person had moved on, Tony would explain the association. "He's a former Ph.D. student, and he's teaching in England now." Or: "I wrote him a letter of support for his tenure case." Or: "We're planning a panel together for a conference I'll be at this summer."

None of it ever struck me as unctuous, self-promotional, or even directed toward a specific goal. It looked to me like the way the business of his discipline was getting done, as he made and reaffirmed contacts with a host of people who were all invested in the enterprise of conducting research and teaching in international relations.

As the weekend went on, I found myself returning again and again to my obviously mistaken notion that networking was unimportant to academics. Here was some of the most effective networking I have ever seen, and the environment was about as academic as it comes.

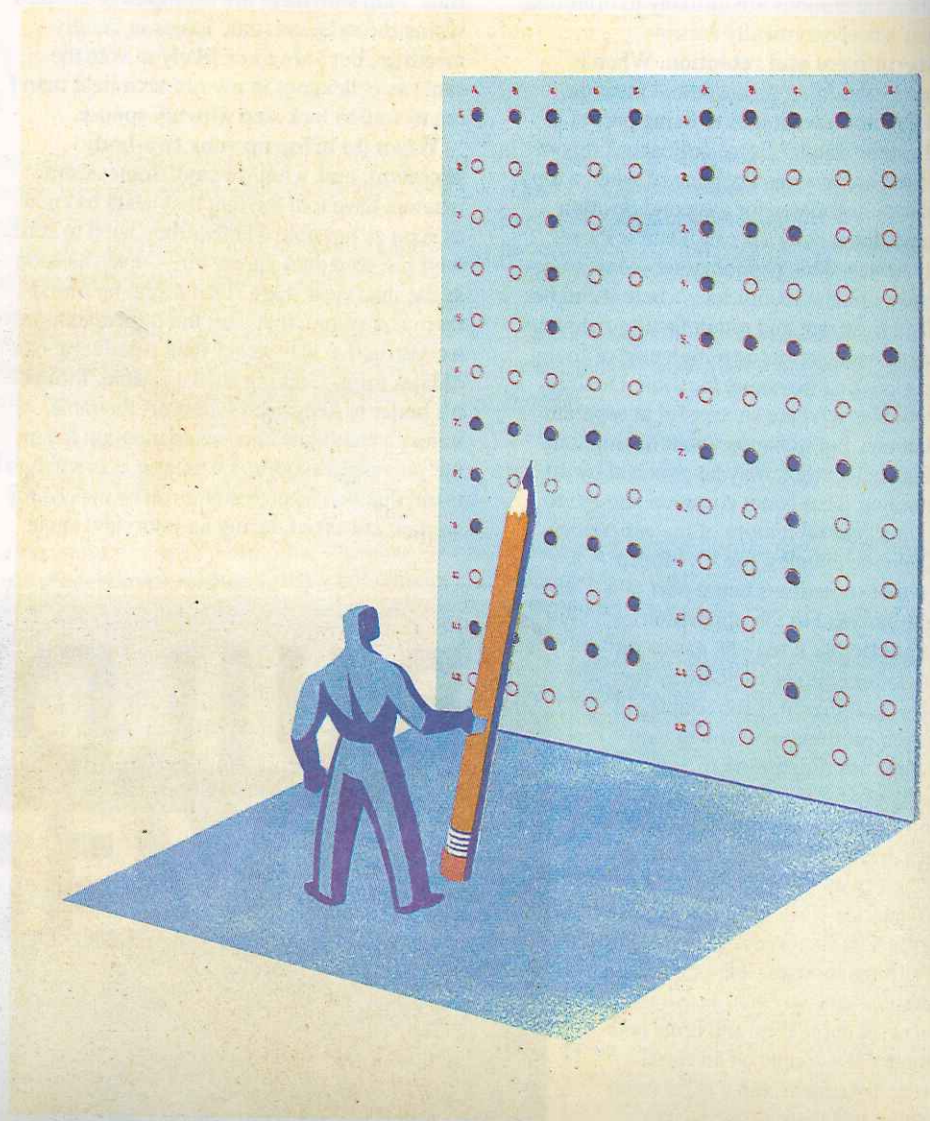
It struck me all the more powerfully because, in comparison, I began to see myself as the worst networker in the world. The last Modern Language Association meeting I went to was in Philadelphia. I took the train down from Massachusetts on the morning of my panel and came home the next day. Over the course of that 24-hour period, I spoke with about five people—at least four of whom were the other participants on my panel. I spent the rest of my time trudging alone through the streets of the frozen city or reading in the hotel bar.

The first conclusion I drew from watching my brother was for myself: I need to do more networking—a lot more. The next time you see me at an academic conference, the chances are pretty good that I'm going to walk up and introduce myself, shake your hand, and see if you want to have a breakfast meeting.

The second thought that occurred to me, though, was a question: Is the lesson that I learned one that I should be teaching my students?

ON COURSE

By James M. Lang



If business happens through networking, then what should I be doing to help my students understand both why, and how, to network? Do I have an obligation to teach the importance of networking to students in my English courses, or can I safely leave that lesson to my colleagues in the business department?

I am guessing that those of you who teach at research universities, and have graduate students under your care, probably do take the time to impress upon your charges the importance of networking, and perhaps even nudge them into networks you have already established. The kind of one-on-one interaction that professors have with doctoral students seems like it would lend itself well to career lessons.

But what about those of us who teach primarily, or exclusively, undergraduates, and are in fields where networking would be unlikely to find itself on the curriculum? Should I raise the topic in the senior capstone seminars I teach in the English department? Or should our department offer workshops or co-curricular events that will either teach students about networking or help them get started on it?

This all might seem pretty far afield from what I was trained to do in my English Ph.D. program. But with each passing year of my life as a tenured professor, I gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the way in which faculty members can, and should, contribute to their institutions outside of the classroom.

Before I had tenure, I used to scoff when the admissions office would send out requests for faculty members to contact prospective students or appear at admissions events. You do your job, I would think to myself, and I'll do mine.

I have a better view of the larger picture now, and understand that if every constituency at the institution doesn't help in attracting new students, we won't have an institution to

which to attract them. So these days you'll find me, several times a year, giving a talk or participating in events for prospective students.

By the same token, I have come to understand that helping students get into graduate school or get jobs is part of my responsibility, too. They didn't pay all of that tuition money to come to a small, liberal-arts college only to be kicked out the door at the end of my seminar without a second thought for their futures. And I do my share of advising students about graduate school, writing letters of recommendation, and responding to requests for help from graduating seniors or recent graduates.

But if the lessons I learned in Montreal about networking are correct, then I am not doing nearly as much as I could to help them understand the importance of this basic skill.

Acknowledging that doesn't help me come up with any concrete steps I could take in or out of the classroom, though. Even if I can see how helpful it would be to teach my senior majors the importance of career networking, and help them get started on it, I don't have a clear vision of what that lesson would look like.

I invite readers to share their reflections and experiences on this issue, and especially to help those of us who are not in business fields to think about how—and perhaps whether—we might help our students learn the lesson I learned from tagging along behind my big brother.

James M. Lang is an associate professor of English at Assumption College and author of On Course: A Week-by-Week Guide to Your First Semester of College Teaching (Harvard University Press, 2008). He writes about teaching in higher education, and his Web site is <http://www.jamesmlang.com>. He welcomes mail from readers sent to his attention at careers@chronicle.com.

Why Colleges Should Invest in the Development of Adjuncts

THE MORE I TEACH, the better I like it. I look forward to the start of class, I'm energized by my discussions with students, and—I know this is going to sound corny—sometimes I revel in an almost luxuriant sense of accomplishment at the end of class.

That's one good thing, many people say, about those of us in the adjunct pool: We often teach simply because we like teaching, and our enthusiasm creates an upbeat, and therefore effective, classroom.

I didn't set out to teach. In fact, as an undergraduate majoring in English, when I was invariably asked which grade or subject I wanted to teach, I would glare contemptuously and snarl, "I do not intend to teach."

But six years ago, after a decades-long and varied career in technology and corporate management, I decided I did, in fact, want to teach. At last I had something to say in a classroom—experience to share, guidance to offer. At the time, I was an information-technology director for a major utility company in the Pacific Northwest, and I liked my job quite well. But after a milestone birthday, I realized that if I wanted to try my hand at teaching, I had better get at it.

I quit my job, said goodbye to my six-figure income, and set to work trying to understand what I could bring to a classroom that would be useful, unusual, and worthy of someone's time and attention. I studied adult learning and instructional design. I learned the difference between "training" and "education," as well as a few things about assessment and a bit about how to market one's services. I also tried to figure out how universities work (I never really made much progress on that one).

Today I'm teaching about as much as I want to—two or three courses a quarter, some credit and some noncredit. Occasionally, I do on-site

can I do? What courses, memberships, conferences, and associations will help me know whether my students are getting the most out of the time we spend together, and what more I should be doing to make sure they do?

Clearly, those of us in academe's adjunct army will be better at our jobs if we're encouraged to develop as teachers, if we're sent to conferences, sponsored for memberships in professional organizations, and invited to participate in the professional-develop-

ment activities our employers sponsor.

I realize that the push to hire adjuncts is because we're cheap and disposable, and that if cost savings were the only driver, then investing money in our development may seem counterintuitive. But the longer I supplement the ranks of full-time faculty members, the more important it is that I do

a better job every semester. Or in five or 10 years, will I still be on the periphery, hurting and pecking my way through online-learning systems I haven't been taught how to use?

It's not just the theories and practices of education that we could use help with, but also what's going on in the departments in which we teach. One of the departments I teach in invites me to everything—from graduate seminars to potluck suppers. I'm lucky, and I know I better understand and represent the department thanks to those occasions. But should luck determine how well adjuncts know their departments?

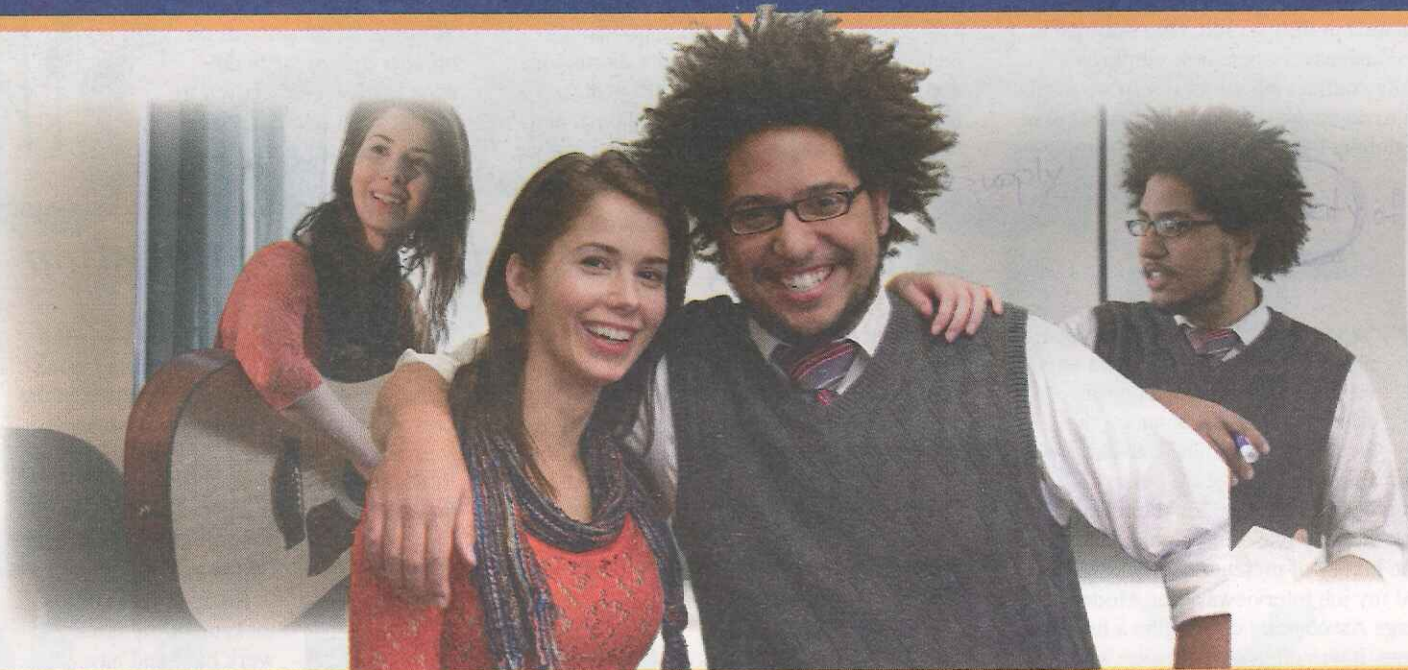
New adjuncts are often hired and left to their own devices. Sign a contract, head to the classroom. How the university systems work (how to post grades and materials, de-

Continued on Page D14

THE ADJUNCT TRACK

By Susan de la Vergne

Webster Students Thrive



Whether a student is a ceramics major who wants to be a gallery owner or a marketing major who loves music, Webster University faculty and staff provide individual attention and the resources to encourage the student to pursue the goal, and the dream.

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How can we get support to develop as teachers?

corporate instruction. Not only is it true that the more I teach, the better I like it, but also that the more I teach, the better I want to be at it.

That's where we adjuncts hit the wall. How do we get better at it?

If I were back in the business of technology management, I would know just what to do: I'd go to conferences, join associations, attend training and networking events—all of which would help me become better at my job. But now that I'm a freelance instructor, on the fringes of the education business, those opportunities are not in easy reach. Besides unguided self-study, what

Why Colleges Should Invest in the Development of Adjuncts

Continued From Page D13

velop coursework, get access to systems, and find keys to the office), what the department's expectations are (its standards, emergency procedures, culture, even meetings schedule)—all of that we often have to figure out on our own.

In my first foray into university teaching, I was lucky: The business college at Oregon State University assigned an associate professor to be my mentor. When I came up against a difficult student, I was glad I had someone to turn to for help.

But that sort of approach to mentoring adjuncts is the exception and not the rule. A couple of years later, when I started teaching at a different university, I had a more typical experience, slogging through the first semester without any guidance. While many people were willing to answer my questions, no one thought to anticipate them.

It's unlikely that universities would look to the business world as an operational model to emulate, but they should. One example to follow: Businesses orient new employees, including contract labor, because it's cost-effective to do so. Yes, in part, companies save salary dollars by making sure their people—

employees and contractors alike—get the instruction they need to minimize “rework,” as they say in business. That's not a direct concern in the business model for adjuncts, given that we are paid a fixed amount to teach, regardless of how much time we spend navigating byzantine university processes or working independently to be better instructors.

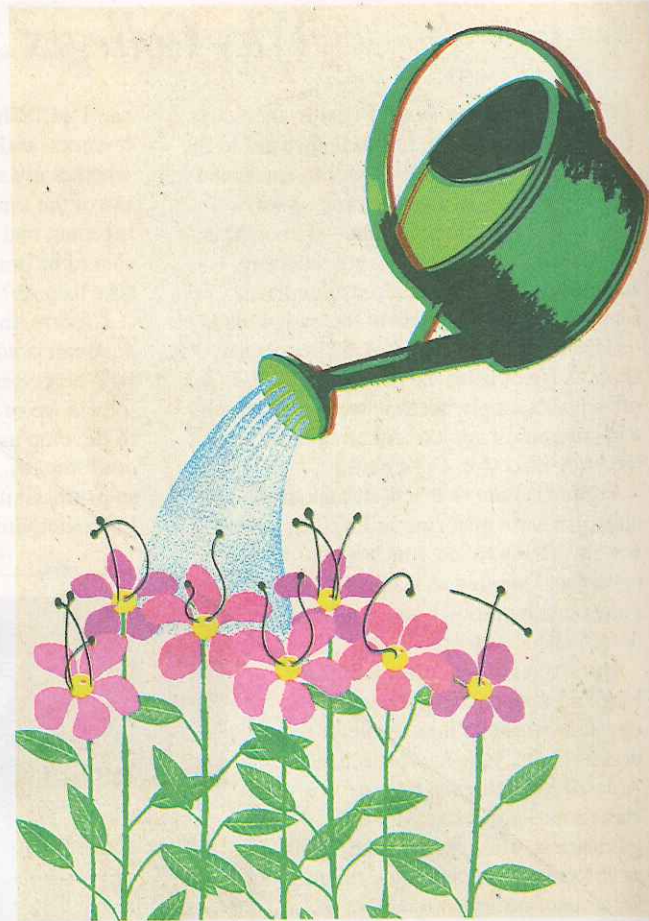
But here's a cost implication that is relevant: Business leaders don't want underprepared employees making costly mistakes, and such mistakes can be pre-empted when new employees know “how we do things around here.” Training employees saves everyone time, grief, and, especially important in these lean times, expense.

Universities should want the same thing. The cost to Oregon State, both direct and indirect, would surely have been higher had I not had a mentor there to assist me when I encountered that difficult situation with a student. Time spent on damage control alone would have been higher. But thanks to my mentor, we were able to expedite discussions and plan our next steps pretty efficiently, much better than a floundering adjunct, new to the classroom, would ever have done alone.

You could say I'm simply making a case for what adjuncts want—professional development, better orientation to the institution, and a closer connection to the department.

But I'm also making a case for what universities *should* want for their ever-expanding legion of adjuncts—for us to perform better in the classroom, minimize start-up time, and maximize institutional knowledge. In business terms, it's a matter of improving product quality while reducing expenses, guiding principles that belong in higher education in the 21st century.

Susan de la Vergne was an adjunct instructor in Oregon who recently moved to Los Angeles and is seeking a new teaching position.



Answering the Illegal Interview Question

I'M LUCKY in that I work in a department that is kid-friendly, at a university that's making a concerted effort to support women on the faculty and families (including with a new parental-leave policy).

As a novelist whose personal bio exists on the back of every one of my books, I don't have the luxury of pretending not to have kids. At my job interviews at the Modern Language Association convention a few years ago, it was obvious to anyone who knew my work and could count on their fingers that I was immensely pregnant with my fourth child. In academe that is much like growing a fourth head—though growing a fourth head would be more attractive because academics prize the mind over the body.

I've been treated extremely well on job interviews when I was pregnant—so large I once had to ask for a golf cart for the campus tour. And I was offered the job.

However, it was when I was not pregnant that I was asked the big illegal question, during a campus visit at an institution that shall remain nameless.

I wasn't pregnant then, but I did have four kids at home. In the college's defense, I asked a lot of questions about area schools and programs for kids. (I was interviewing the area as much as being interviewed for the job.) And so kids were kind of on the table—though not professionally speaking.

The illegal question I was asked had been posed in legal terms many times over the course of the 48-hour visit: “You're so busy. Do you have the energy to invest in this job?” The “so busy” could be about my writing life or about the nonprofit group that I founded with my husband, and not necessarily about the kids, so I always answered in practical terms. The question surfaced so many times under different guises, however, that at one point, I finally said, “Well, I would be quitting the job I currently have to take this one on. That will help.”

Then the big illegal question was asked, point blank, and, oddly enough, it was during

a meeting with the entire search committee—six or so professors. It was put to me like this: “With juggling the demands of your writing and your very busy family life, how do you intend to do this job?”

I think I paused and looked around the room, waiting for someone to throw a yellow flag, call the foul, and restart the question back at the line of scrimmage.

Everyone looked at me patiently, as if to say, “Well?”

And so I answered the question. It's a blur. I don't recall what I said, frankly. I might have gone on a short spiel about how my husband is a stay-at-home dad and that our household is actually weirdly retro—a 1950s household where the gender roles are simply reversed.

But if I did, I hate myself for it.

Answering a question that the search committee would never have asked my husband, if roles had truly been reversed, undermines the positive steps women have made in the workplace.

I might have said that I've obviously proven that I can work in academe, continue to publish (in fact, outpublish everyone in that room; that would have been the frustrated subtext), and manage a household with four kids in it.

I might have simply said something cryptic, vaguely Buddhist, “I have abundant energy, and it's easier to let the horses go than to hold them back.”

Truth is, I've got an arsenal of answers to that question. It comes up in every single media interview I do. While my male literary counterparts with kids in the home are asked about their work and process, I'm asked again and again one question: How do you do it?

Honestly, I don't mind talking about it. It's an important subject, and for those of you who are swinging families and work, my answer is simple: I do it messily, imperfectly, sometimes wearily. But I was compelled to

have a writing career and have kids at the same time. If I'd sacrificed writing for the kids, I'd resent the kids. If I'd sacrificed the kids for writing, I'd resent the writing. To support both of those endeavors and because I'm dedicated to teaching the craft, I've found a home in academe. To avoid bitterness, I bully on with all of it.

But regardless of the makeup of my family, I work hard and have a track record. I love the work, and I love the kids.

And, truth be told, I probably answered the illegal question with a bit of attitude. In retrospect, I wish I'd had more attitude and said something like, “You know people ask me all the time how I manage to get so much done. Sometimes I feel like answering back: How do you manage to get so very little done?”

The person who asked the illegal question? Maybe you're imagining some older professor who holds firm to a 1950s mentality.

Wrong.

It was a woman, almost exactly my age. She is married and has no children. (Why do women do this to one another again? I forget.)

The statistics on female faculty members having kids are interesting. Women in academe have fewer children than female lawyers and doctors. That surprised me, especially since professors can make their schedules somewhat more flexible—teaching night courses or piling up courses on certain days, if their departments allow for flexibility—making academe a seemingly nice fit for faculty members who want to raise a family.

So how do we explain those stats?

My hunch is that in academe there still exists an old, stubborn divide between the high ground of the mind and the swamps of the body. Maybe women in academe are simply not as interested in having children, especially not more than one. Or maybe having a big family sends the message that one couldn't

possibly prize the intellect if one chooses to spend one's time wiping bottoms. In other words, if you want to be taken seriously, keep the kids to a minimum.

One of my greatest survival instincts as a professor is this: I've long since stopped caring what my colleagues think of my intellect.

Still, I didn't get a job offer from the college that asked the illegal question, and I was left guessing why.

Was it that the department thought that I prized the body over the mind and would be too busy raising kids to do a good job, despite a body of evidence to the contrary? Was it that I'd proven that it was possible to prize the body and the mind and still do a good job—in fact, publishing prolifically—which gave the impression that I was snubbing my nose at their sacrifices? Was my impatience with their illegal line of questioning obvious enough that I came off as uppity?

The truth is, it may have been none of those issues. But I still had to process the experience, which left me demoralized and, at the same time, driven to prove them wrong once again.

It all felt very familiar.

That year's job search ended happily, however, with my current position at Florida State University. I'm no longer on the market and have no intentions of taking another job elsewhere. One of the main reasons is my institution's growing support of women and families. That means a lot to me.

Lately, I've felt guilty for not taking the time to talk about these issues with my students, both male and female. I worry I have fumbled the Feminist Torch, on a very personal level. I should say to my students, “Here, take this, and keep running.”

But, seriously, sometimes I don't even know if we're still running on a track. If we are, some of us are sprinting forward and others back. And, personally, I've lost my bearings.

Juliana Baggott is an associate professor of creative writing at Florida State University.

FIRST PERSON

By Juliana Baggott

The Challenges of Deciding When to Leave

TWO READERS ASKED US to answer essentially the same question posed some years ago by the Clash: "Should I stay or should I go?"

Question: I am about to

complete a Ph.D. in the humanities, and I've been at my university for about seven years. I'm one of those people who've taken a bit longer to finish than is typical in my program. Over the years, I've really grown to love living here, and I have a lot of anxiety about leaving for an academic position. At the same time, I don't want to be one of those people who hang around the campus forever, going from part-time job to part-time job, with no hope of advancement. Do you have any suggestions for someone in my shoes?

Julie: When you arrive on a campus for a doctoral program, it's usually understood that you are there to get your degree and move on. It's also understood that research universities do not hire their own Ph.D.'s for tenure-track positions, and that Ph.D. students know that going into the program.

However, getting a Ph.D. can last five, six, or even 10 years. It's no surprise that during that time many doctoral students put down roots, making friends, meeting a spouse or partner, even buying homes. What seems like an abstract concept in the first or second year of a program—I'll be moving away someday—can start to seem like a very painful reality as you think about your post-Ph.D. life.

Jenny: It's a common problem in graduate school. I'll be the first to admit that I moved into an administrative position, rather than continue to pursue a tenure-track position in my field, because I really loved living in Philadelphia.

Julie and I know a lot of Ph.D.'s who have stayed on their doctoral campus and pursued successful careers. We've known just as many, however, who've spun their wheels in adjunct positions with no true path for advancement, or in research positions with long, intense hours and little pay. Our column "What Can Faculty Members Do to Help?" generated a few comments from readers who seemed to feel that the path of limited potential and lack of income was inevitable

for Ph.D.'s in non-tenure-track positions.

Julie: We certainly don't agree with that pessimistic view of all nonacademic careers. It depends on the position. We know many successful Ph.D.'s working in a wide range of nonacademic careers that are just as fulfilling

for those people as an academic career would have been, and, in some cases, even more so.

At the same time, it is important to be realistic. A career transition takes time and energy. It takes getting

out there and talking to people. In the case of our reader above, location is crucial. If her university is the largest employer in a small town, it may be harder for her to stay in her community than it would be if the institution were located in a large metropolitan area. There's a big difference in the way you might conduct your job search depending on whether you're in a major city like Chicago or a small one like Davis, Calif. It can be tough to build a solid nonacademic career in a place where your university is the only game in town. That may seem obvious, but it's a factor many Ph.D.'s don't take into account as they contemplate their postgraduate plans.

Jenny: If your university is in a small city, you should start creating connections there as soon as you realize that you want to stick around after earning your Ph.D. Begin to learn about the wider organization of the university, beyond your own department or school, and seek out any Ph.D.'s you can find who work in administration there. I have talked to many Ph.D.'s who feel that they learned more about higher education in one year of working in an administrative position than they did in all of their years in a Ph.D. program. I know I did.

Julie: If you can't find a lot of Ph.D.'s in administration at your institution, seek out people who took their doctorates with them to other nonacademic professions, and who might be willing to do an informational interview with you. As you do your research on alternate careers, look for a position with a future, not one that will leave you spinning your wheels endlessly, with no hope for advancement.

To do that, it's important to ask yourself several questions: What can I do to begin this transition while finishing my program? Do I

like working with students, particularly undergraduates? Have I talked with any Ph.D.'s working in substantive nonacademic roles here? Do I see myself enjoying doing what they are doing?

Jenny: Once you've finished your program and moved into a different role, you might need to take a break from your academic department. People there have seen you in the role of doctoral student for a while and may have difficulty imagining you in any other capacity. Spending a lot of time in your old department may reinforce any hesitancy you have about envisioning a new future elsewhere for yourself.

Julie: If you are doing adjunct teaching, you should also ask yourself this: At what point does adjunct work stop being a way to build experience on your CV and start being a waste of your time and energy? Talk to people with extensive adjunct experience. Some of them like the work a lot and have crafted careers around it. At the University of Pennsylvania, we had a panel on "Understanding Adjuncting" that featured four speakers who had varying degrees of comfort and happiness with their work.

Jenny: On a similar front, scientists need to gauge the value of temporary research opportunities carefully. Many research positions are good steppingstones to careers as productive research scientists. However, many others are dead-end jobs. We've seen junior scientists get stuck in roles that offer them no hope for advancement and no chance to do strong research.

When planning your career, always be thinking a few steps into the future. Make sure any position you take has something to offer you in terms of career development—even if the job is only a stopping point to another opportunity.

Question: I'm a second-year doctoral student, and I have to say that the endless stream of dismay about the lack of tenure-track positions is bringing me down. Faculty members tell me that the market has always been this way, but only one of the eight students on the market this year from our supposedly strong program got conference interviews, let alone a job offer. Should I leave the program when being an academic has always been my dream? I have to say, though, that the thought of doing something else, and the options presented to me so far, are more than a little depressing.

Julie: As wrong as it may feel, it's important to think strategically about your post-Ph.D. plans early on in your graduate-student career. It's helpful to *have* a plan. Be realistic about your possibilities, and review them at least a couple times a year. You may find it helpful to check in with a career adviser or someone in campus counseling to help you assess what you should be doing, careerwise, at different stages of your graduate studies. We emphasize that step because we've seen people drift off after finishing a degree and, because of the vicissitudes of the job market

and other contributing factors (a student's shaky mental health, isolation while writing the dissertation, lack of a support system, for example), enter what seems like a parallel universe of subsistence living and hopelessness.

Jenny: What does it mean to have a plan? It means setting some concrete professional goals for yourself alongside those you need to achieve as part of your degree program. Sometimes the two sets of goals will coincide: For example, it's essential for everyone to learn how to give a strong academic presentation at a conference, and presentation skills are crucial to many nonacademic jobs, too. It's essential to learn the software of your field, whether it's for demographic analysis, literary analysis, or biomedical processes. And in almost any nonacademic job you take, learning new software is a requirement.

Having a plan also means devising a strategy for dealing with the volatility of the academic job market. Decide in advance how many times you're willing to go on the tenure-track market, or what regions of the country you'll limit your search to. That can give you a stronger sense of control over your own destiny.

Julie: Even if you find your future prospects dismaying, it's terrific that you are thinking about them now and not waiting until you finish your Ph.D. Many people in the second year want to concentrate only on what's happening in that year. Part of having a plan means you are regularly assessing the skills you are developing as a graduate student and learning about how you might use those skills in many workplaces.

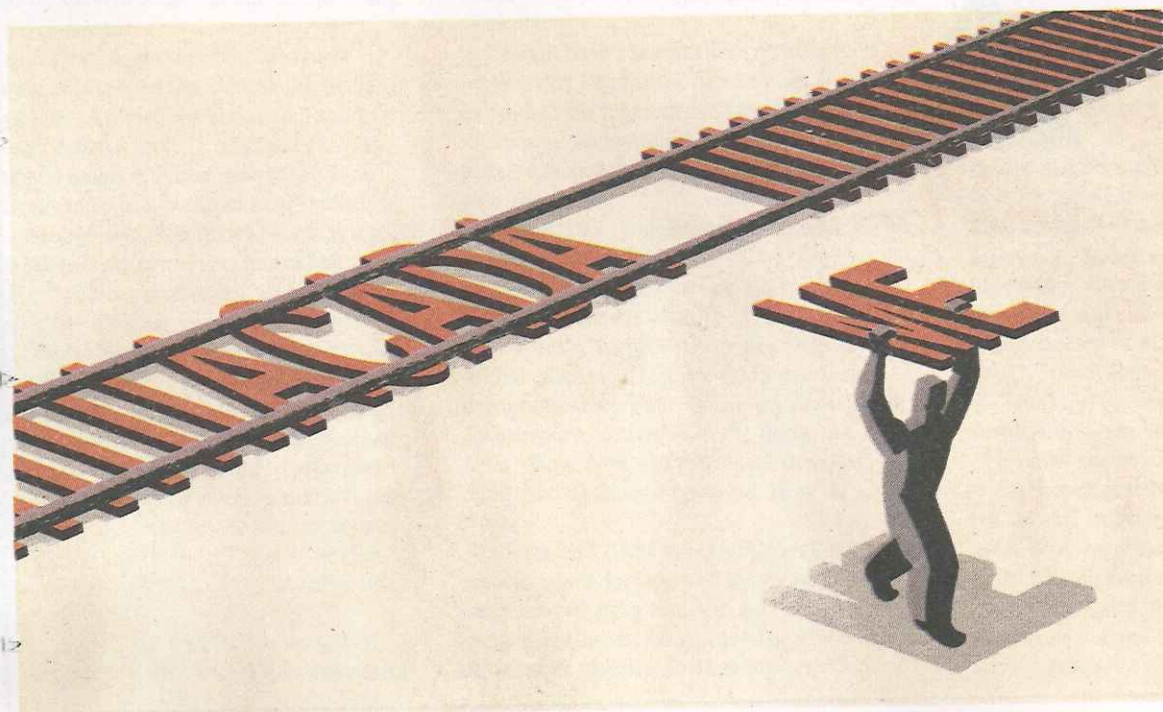
Jenny: It's not our place to tell you whether you should leave your doctoral program. There is nothing wrong with wanting to stay and do your best work. At the same time, while you're assessing your own skills, you and other doctoral students should also be evaluating your program and asking:

- Generally speaking, am I happy here?
- Am I supported in the work that I do?
- What about other students who left the department before receiving a Ph.D. gone on to do? And what about students who did complete a degree. Where are they now?
- Do their outcomes align with my hopes and expectations for my own career?

Julie: If you find you regularly answer "no" to the first two questions, talk to other students as objectively as possible and see how they are feeling. You also might find it helpful to go to your institution's counseling office and find someone who works with graduate students to talk through your thoughts and feelings about your program.

We find that students who assess their own feelings periodically are better able to make the decision to stay in a program or leave. Such assessments may sound like a chore, but they are an effective way to regain a sense of control when so many things may feel like they are out of your hands.

Julie Miller Vick is senior associate director of career services at the University of Pennsylvania, and Jennifer S. Furlong is associate director of New York University's Office of Faculty Resources. They are the authors of The Academic Job Search Handbook (University of Pennsylvania Press). If you have questions for the Career Talk columnists, send them to careertalk@chronicle.com.



CAREER ISSUES IN ADMINISTRATION

After 40 Years, Changing My Academic Major

LIFE IS ABOUT sequence. For 30 years I was a university president. In 2007, when I left office at George Washington University, I became a professor there as well as a consultant for Korn/Ferry International, an executive-recruiting firm. Ever since then, people keep asking me how I like retirement. I am not retired. I am just no

longer president. I've merely changed my major.

When my wife and I moved out of the president's house and into a home of our own, we sent out change-of-address cards titled "Relocation and Reinvention." We were moving, hence "relocation," but daily activities were also changing, hence "reinvention."

Needing a plan to guide my reinvention, I established a three-part arrangement. And I would advise those of you retiring from one job and rethinking your work life to do the same. It certainly helped me.

First, set up a financial plan, including, of course, securing continued health insurance and making choices about how to draw down pensions and savings. It's crucial that you get honest, objective financial advice.

Next, devise a professional guide. You need to fill the day from breakfast to dinner. Once the daily routine of work has been disrupted, you need a framework, a tree rooted in the ground, upon which ornaments can be hung. For me the frame is teaching. The predictability—14-week terms and set times for class and student advising—gives me structure. I also consult part time for Korn/Ferry, searching for college presidents, vice presidents, and deans for institutions around the world. And I continue to publish on a variety of subjects, mostly about higher education and leadership.

Finally, develop a personal plan to fill the remaining time, when you are not engaged in structured professional endeavors. When one is a senior academic administrator, the days are about 18 hours long. Now I am home more regularly and prefer eating dinner at my kitchen table to almost any spread put out around town. In the old days, I wore a tuxedo twice a week. Now, when invited to a black-tie event, I come sporting a dark suit with black Mephistos on my feet. I'm more relaxed and less worried about how much money I've raised. I travel more. I sit on a foundation board that meets in Madrid twice a year, studying innovative ways to spur the economy, especially with the use of technology. I try to couple board meetings with a few extra vacation days. My children live far beyond the East Coast; both boys have baby sons, and my frequent-flier miles are accumulating on various airlines.

With my three-part plan established and running relatively smoothly, all is well, you may think. Yes and no. It's about 80 percent fine; 20 percent needs refinement.

As crazy as the work hours were when I was president, as relentless as the pressure was, as all-consuming as the job was, I confess that I loved it, and I miss it. With a presidency comes a mission: to advance the cause and standing of a consequential institution wherever you go, with whomever you meet, at all times, in all venues. The job defines the direction of your life. It becomes who you are. I'd meet a new person and wonder which faculty members I might introduce her to, which students could serve as interns in her company, which fellowship could she endow, which new faculty chair could be established.

A university is an organic institution, growing, changing, continually in need of care and feeding. Being the head of a college is both an honor and a hoot; it is an awesome responsibility and a great deal of fun. At George Washington, I was responsible for thousands of employees and students—a huge payroll and a lot of tuition dollars. I increased the endowment, met with Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winners, and welcomed visiting dignitaries to the campus. That was the icing on the cake, or what I would describe as outside stuff.

Inside activities were equally fascinating and far more consequential. Faculty members are endlessly engaging. Students are a perpetual promise. The institutional mission is important. To quote James Madison, "Education is the true foundation of civil liberty."

So the job was fun, important, and gave me gray hair. I worked at it with a zeal that is hard to describe. Being a university president is like running a marathon that never ends. Until one day it does. It was time for it to end—time for me, and time for the university. Nineteen years is a long run.

My send-off gave me a high, as I was feted all over town, toasted, roasted, and given mementos. People were very kind. The university raised significant dollars, established a chair for me, named a school after me (the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration). Members of Congress entered complimentary words about me in the *Congressional Record*, a few of which were even true. My

wife and I moved into the new house and went on vacation for five weeks. All was good with the world in the summer of 2007.

By week six of my "retirement," the clouds began to form. I missed the action. I was out of my groove, and that was an uncomfortable feeling.

Yes, people still called and wanted to have lunch with me. Other presidents sought out my advice. Students flocked to my class. But it wasn't the same. The seat of power was gone, and someone else was sitting 10 rows up at half-court. The old challenges and points of satisfaction were missing. For a time, I lost my point of focus.

It took me a year to develop a positive vocabulary—to begin to see things in a new light. It was OK to leave the house at 9 a.m., not at 7:30 a.m. Dinner at home was a renewed pleasure. My wife is still trying to get me to take Fridays off, but somehow I can't seem to manage that; my DNA requires a five-day-a-week routine. And some habits are hard to break. I still surround myself with clutter, take-aways from events. Menus, programs, badges, pictures, plaques, and piles of books and memos cover my desk—all evidence of my newly engaged life as a teacher and writer.

When I was a dean at Boston University, in the 1970s, I came to know a senior professor who had a distinguished career as an art historian. One day he described an energetic junior faculty member who worked in various areas of study and flitted in and out of his office all through the day, as "a series of flashing lights rather than a steady glow."

In the early days of my post-presidency, that is how I sometimes felt. Life was a series of flashing lights, some of them bright and strong, but the days of a steady glow, when I managed a complex organization, seemed to be behind me, at least for a while.

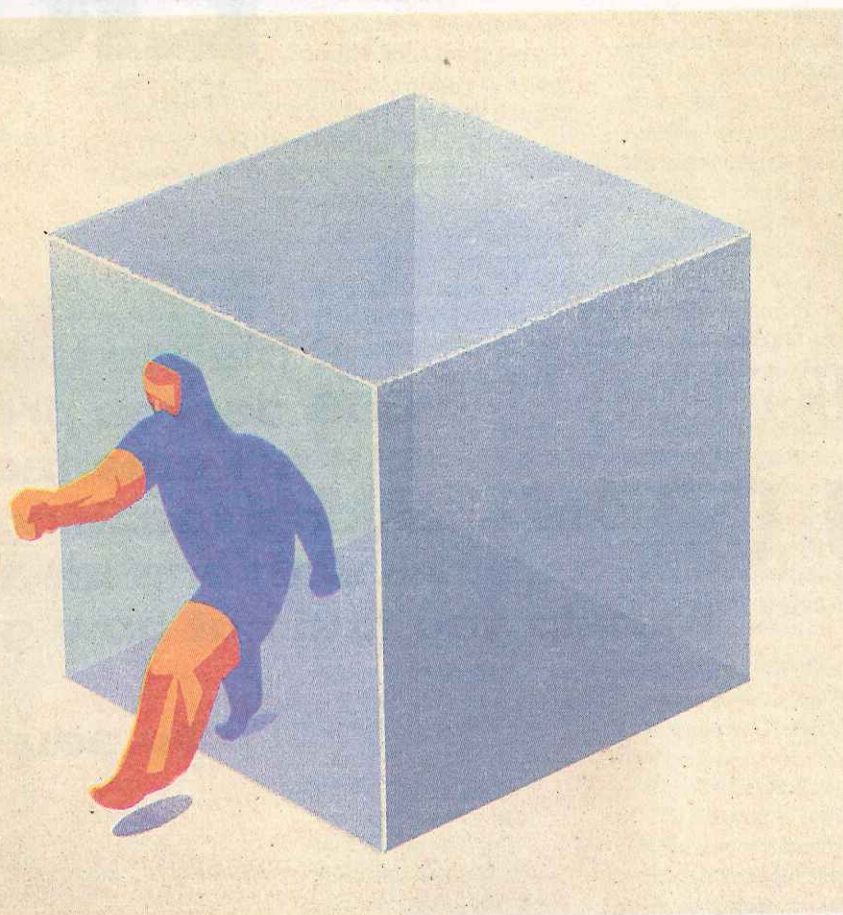
Until I found my groove again.

The structure of my new faculty life was more difficult to devise than the old administrative job. My work is defined more by silos than before: teaching, consulting, and writing seem less interconnected than was the presidency, where the university was one major platform, a central concept with many moving parts.

On the plus side of my new life order, I find the reduction in stress to be healthful: I eat better and exercise more. I traded three secretaries who took dictation—they were the last of their kind—for a MacBook Air laptop and a BlackBerry. I'm in charge of my own communications. I read more for fun and less for professional obligation. And, after many years of careful attention to every word I uttered in public or private conversations, my First Amendment rights

FIRST PERSON

By Stephen J. Trachtenberg



have finally been restored.

Today I am viewed by some as a gray eminence and asked for advice regularly, a rather nice situation. I am old enough to witness the realization of ideas I had 30 years go—ideas that at the time were considered revolutionary and now have become accepted as matters evolutionary. I am mature enough to understand that the next generation is eager to move up the ladder.

On the negative side, growing older is not as much fun as advertised. Some friends

are sick, and some have died.

Some people on the campus still call me “Mr. President,” but many shout across the street, “Hey, Steve!” I enjoy sitting in front of the library and watching students come and go. I tried belonging to Facebook but couldn’t keep up with all the alumni who wanted to be my friend; my in box became cluttered with other people’s information.

I’ve developed a rhythm and a pace to my new life. I still glad-hand with people I meet on the university campus, and I’m as

inquisitive as ever about what’s happening in higher education.

I spent over four decades as a senior administrator on three campuses, and by my estimation I’ve attended nearly 70 graduation exercises. Four years ago, it was time to leave the presidency, time to hang up the cap and gown, time to stop marching behind the marshal with the mace.

Life now has become more normal and less ceremonial.

Recently, at a Washington affair, I ran

into an old friend. He put his arm around my shoulder and said with a smile, “Hello. Weren’t you once Steve Trachtenberg?”

I’m here to report that I’m still Steve Trachtenberg, but today I wear a Washington Nationals baseball cap instead of a mortarboard.

Stephen J. Trachtenberg is a chaired professor of public service and president emeritus of George Washington University. He is a partner at Korn/Ferry International.

How Administrators Can Pursue a Doctorate on the Job

THERE IS NO shortage of advice available to new doctoral students. But as a vice chancellor for student affairs, and someone who worked throughout graduate school, I thought I could offer some advice to my fellow student-affairs professionals who are working full time in our field and seeking a Ph.D.

Be clear about your goals. It is critical to have a clear sense of your reasons for pursuing a doctorate. Are you seeking the credential for career opportunities? Or for personal or professional enhancement? You may be doing it for both of those reasons, but it’s likely that one of them is more important to you. Your answer may well inform how you approach the challenge of balancing your academic activities with your work and life responsibilities.

Theory can and should inform practice. That is one of the core beliefs of our

profession, and it’s certainly true for those starting a doctoral program. It would be a wise investment of your time to review Nancy Schlossberg’s theory of navigating transitions that describes the 4 S’s (situation, self, supports, and strategies), Robert K. Merton’s notion of the potential power of self-fulfilling prophecies, and John Weidman, Darla Twale, and Elizabeth Stein’s “Socialization of Doctoral Students to Academic Norms.” Praxis makes perfect when it comes to thriving in a doctoral program.

Take a colleague to class. As you move through your doctoral program, you will need the support of your colleagues. Let them know when you start the program, and keep them informed ahead of time about points in the process at which you will be facing particularly heavy demands from your

academic pursuits. Be sure to let your supervisor, subordinates, and peers know that you intend to handle your work duties, but that you may need some flexibility with regard to deadlines or other considerations. Be sure to let your work colleagues in on your successes in the classroom. Everyone likes to invest in a winner.

A question that may arise: Should you invite your supervisor (or the senior student-affairs officer) to serve as a member of your doctoral committee, assuming he or she has the requisite academic credential? As with many good questions, the answer is: It depends. What is your relationship with that senior official? Have he been supportive of your doctoral studies? Will she bring valuable expertise to the table, or is an invitation merely a political consideration? Who won’t you be able to include on your committee if you invite your

supervisor? Will adding that person to your committee require special permission from your department or college? If so, what has been the department’s or college’s attitude toward such special appointments?

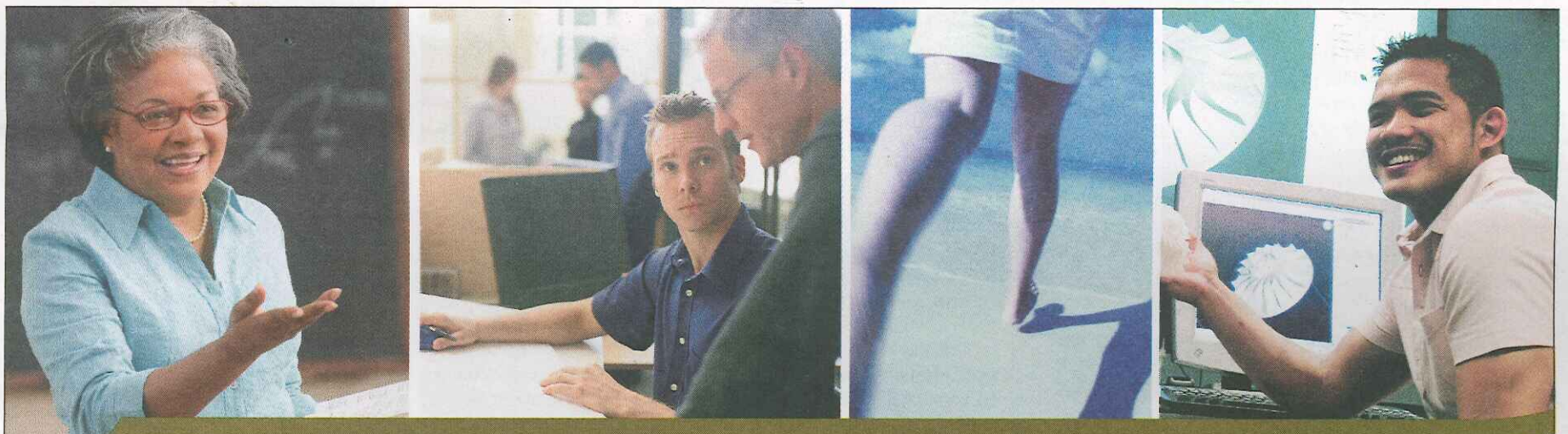
You are not the first, and you are not alone. The doctoral process has deep roots in the history and culture of academe. Those roots have helped make the process strong but also inflexible. For better or worse, the doctoral process is both challenging and, at least as you move into the dissertation phase, isolating. It can be helpful in the difficult moments to recall that there are others who have been through it before you, and still others who are going through it at the same time as you.

The point at which you move beyond taking courses and start focusing on your dissertation is a particularly vulnerable time. You won’t regularly see your classmates and will spend a good deal of time alone reading, re-

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FIRST PERSON

By George S. McClellan



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How Administrators Can Pursue a Doctorate on the Job

Continued From Page D19

viewing, doing research, and writing. Reach out for advice, support, and the all-important safe place to vent.

Pursuing a doctorate is a process, and completion is the goal. It is never too early to take action in support of that goal. While they may seem like a distant concern when you start, comprehensive exams will come quickly.

A word of advice on preparing early on for the exams: flashcards. Yes, flashcards. As you move through your studies, create a flashcard for each of the readings you are assigned. Include the title of the article, name of author(s), topic phrase, and brief notes outlining the highlights. Use different-colored cards for different core courses. It may seem tedious work at first, but a modest investment of effort now will pay great dividends when it comes time to prepare for your exams.

Another bit of advice related to comps is to start looking around early in your program to identify folks with whom you may want to form a study group. You are looking for people who are dependable, easygoing, successful in the classroom, and willing to share. You might be strong on developmental theory, and other members of your study group might have a thing for finance or the law. The closer you get to comps, the more you will appreciate a strong, supportive study group.

You can also apply the principle of starting early to selecting paper topics. You may not have nailed down your dissertation subject, but if you have narrowed it to one or two

ideas, use any freedom you are offered in writing assignments to begin exploring literature related to your possible dissertation topics.

That can be a valuable time-saving strategy in several ways. First, you can compile and develop material that will make up the literature-review section of your dissertation. Second, it presents opportunities to bounce ideas and arguments off of various faculty members. Their reactions can inform both your choice of dissertation topic and your choice of people to serve on your dissertation committee.

It's all about finishing. There is a great deal of wisdom in the adage that the best dissertation is the one that is finished. Beyond the surface, however, what factors increase the likelihood that your thesis will be not only finished but good? I see three essential elements: Your dissertation topic has to be compelling to you, acceptable to your committee, and doable within the scope of your time and resources.

A good dissertation topic is one that you want and need to understand. It has to hold your interest over a period of time in the face of critical examination by others and a host of intervening life circumstances. It has to get you out of bed on the bad days, call to you through writing blocks, and compel you to write the paper once you have the answers you seek.

Few doctoral students have a problem finding a compelling dissertation topic; many have a problem cutting their list down to one. An important principle in pruning is

to keep in mind what is acceptable to your committee. You might have great interest in a cutting-edge issue or a perspective on an important question, but that may not be a great choice for a dissertation. Why? Committee members may not believe there is a sufficient literature base to inform or support your work. Members of your committee may feel ill-prepared to provide guidance or critical oversight if they feel ignorant about or disconnected from the topic. Worse still, you might find yourself caught up in a debate among committee members regarding the emerging or unsettled area of the field, and have your dissertation delayed or denuded as a result.

A dissertation can be costly in terms of both time and money. Have a realistic budget in mind for both as you move into the final stage of your doctoral program, and be sure that your choice of dissertation topic is in keeping with that budget. Keep in mind that research involving humans involves a strict clearance process, which takes time. Getting approval to gain access to data sets takes time. Cleaning data sets takes lots of time. Transcription of data takes lots of time and money (in varying combinations, depending on exactly how you get the work done). Most institutions charge a dissertation-filing fee, and you are probably going to want to buy some additional copies of your printed and bound dissertation to share with family and others who matter to you.

In selecting a compelling, acceptable, and doable topic for your dissertation, keep in mind "topical heat" where possible. What

does that mean? Simply put, some dissertations can be worth more to you down the road than others, based on their topic. A more market-friendly topic can help you land jobs in student affairs that pay more than others, lead to publication opportunities (including more financially rewarding ones), and position you to do more consulting and speaking. I am by no means suggesting that potential financial considerations be a primary means of selecting a topic, but it ought to be something you have in mind when it comes down to choosing from a shortlist of topics that have met your primary criteria.

One final bit of advice relates to the power of language and the importance of self-concept. Doctoral students are pursuing doctorates through coursework. Doctoral candidates have completed the coursework and are now working on dissertations. A.B.D. is not a credential. At best it's a temporary condition; at worst it is an indicator of a stalled goal and work not yet completed. It might just be me, but seeing A.B.D. on someone's résumé is more likely to raise doubt than inspire confidence.

Enrolling in a doctoral program is not for everyone, but if it's for you, then I hope my advice will help. Remember, some discomfort is likely. Report any swelling or signs of redness immediately. Trust me. I'm a doctor.

George S. McClellan is vice chancellor for student affairs at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne. He writes for The Chronicle about career issues in student affairs.

A New Chair Learns to Chalk It Up to Inexperience

WHEN MY DEAN phoned to invite me to serve a term as chair of the mathematics and computer-science department at my college, I was honored to take on the role. I was excited about representing my department and eager to perform important tasks, like managing personnel searches, leading program reviews, and coordinating teaching schedules.

As a new chair, I fully expected to tackle pressing problems and deal with significant issues concerning my department. And while I have devoted substantial portions of every week to those kinds of high-level responsibilities, it has surprised me how much of my time has been focused on unforeseen and, well, peculiar tasks.

I did not expect to have to manage the wide-ranging reactions in the department to a decision to switch from plastic-foam to glass cups in the faculty kitchen. Nor did I ever think I would be investigating the mysterious case of the sleeping bags found stashed in the student lounge. And I especially didn't anticipate conducting a yearlong quest for the perfect piece of chalk.

That's right: A task that has consumed a surprising amount of my time as department chair has been trying to find the right chalk for our faculty members to use in their classrooms. That is not the kind of responsibility I had in mind when I signed on to the job. But my chalk search has resulted in a new understanding of the skills necessary to be a successful department chair—not to mention my acquisition of a slew of facts about the

manufacturing and distribution of chalk, which I now use to amaze friends and family.

When my colleagues first expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the chalk in their classrooms—it wasn't erasing well, and students were having trouble reading over the smudges it left behind—it seemed logical for me to get involved. Sure, chalk is important to how we teach, but it seemed like a trivial issue, and I was sure that I'd have the whole thing figured out in just a few days. Little did I know.

Depending on where it's mined, some chalk is hard and some is soft. You'd think, then, that one could order chalk based on where it is made (Israel, Korea, France), but that's not necessarily the case. This was a problem, because in my department, after exhaustive testing, we decided that we wanted the soft chalk mined in a specific location, but the chalk company couldn't guarantee that that's what we would receive.

I also learned that there are differences in pricing based on the brand, composition, and color of chalk, which is not so surprising but became increasingly frustrating as we found that we liked the composition but not the color of one brand, or the color but not the composition of another. So while we liked the soft, white chalk sold by one company, at \$1 a box it wasn't a cost-effective choice.

When we finally found a soft, yellow, inexpensive chalk that worked for all of our professors, we discovered that it didn't work for everyone—specifically, the custodial staff in one of our buildings. Apparently the fine yellow dust left in classrooms after our lessons made a mess of the floors and equipment there. So I learned the fine art of compromise: We would

use different kinds of chalk in different buildings. Chalk crisis resolved.

Or was it?

Just then a female faculty member approached me to complain (half-jokingly, I soon learned) that she felt discriminated against. I immediately offered her a seat (amid the various cartons of chalk now cluttering my office) and asked her to explain. I braced myself for what she was about to say. And it quickly became clear that her problem was with ... the chalkboard.

Our classrooms have projection screens above the chalkboards, which are difficult to reach without standing on a chair or contorting yourself into a weird stretch. Luckily (or so I thought), ropes had been attached to make the screens easier to pull down. Unfortunately, if you're not using a screen, the rope swings in front of the chalkboard and interferes with the lecture. Taller professors simply tuck the ropes up onto the top edge of the blackboards and continue with their classes. But shorter professors have a more difficult time. My shorter colleague felt uncomfortable with her options—jumping in front of her students to reach the screen's cord, asking a tall student to help, or stepping onto a chair to retrieve it.

No problem, I thought. This is easily solved. I asked the machinist in our physics department if he had any recommendations. He quickly suggested putting a hooked stick in each room that could be used to reach up and grab the metal hook on the screen. We could then remove the ropes. It was genius.

The machinist set to work, and his brilliant hooked sticks were hung on the walls behind every classroom door in our building. All was



well—except that everything had happened so quickly that I had not yet communicated the change to all of my colleagues, and when a professor leapt up to grab the rope that was tucked into the upper edge of the chalkboard, she fell and broke her toe.

I am happy to say that my colleague's toe healed well, and that my chalk saga has come to an end, thanks to a collaborative effort among the math and computer-science faculty members, the college's purchasing department, and our custodial staff. But it makes me wonder: With such surprisingly complex drama involved in the life of a department chair, what will I have to tackle next?

In the meantime, I'll chalk this experience up to a lesson learned: Expect the unexpected.

Catherine A. Roberts is an associate professor and chair of the mathematics and computer-science department at the College of the Holy Cross.

MOVING UP

By Catherine A. Roberts

CAREER ISSUES AND WORKPLACE CULTURE

Bootstrapping My Way Into the Ivory Tower

CRITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION love to suggest that we professors are living it up. But I'm not. I have less than \$100 in my checking account. I've been ignoring a recurring robo-call from a company trying to collect a \$50 payment that is overdue. The gutters on my house are falling off. My electric bill is late, and I can't drive my car because the check-engine light is on.

Oh, and I received tenure this past spring. I'm not kidding. And no, I don't have a fat savings account, and no, I am not irresponsible with money.

My salary is average for someone of my rank, discipline, and college size. If you're a college professor, people assume that if you don't have a healthy bank account, you must be a closet gambler or have some other hidden addiction. But my financial predicament is a result of bootstrapping my way into academe, and the harsh reality of leaping from rural Arkansas to a professor's job in upstate New York with no financial-support system along the way. Indeed, it was not a leap at all but a long, slow, humiliating slog.

I am a single parent, which explains some of the financial struggle. In the rural South, where I grew up, having children before 25 is the norm. So when I found myself pregnant and alone at 23, I decided to have the baby, and returned to graduate school a few pounds heavier in the fall. I completed my master's program through sheer willpower, had my son, and immediately entered a Ph.D. program.

I am aware that, in that situation, most people would simply find a stable job close to home. I was unwilling to relinquish a dream I'd had since the age of 10. So I refused to listen to the voices—some of them quite real and very loud—telling me that in order to be a "good parent," I should understand my limitations and give up on academe. That

is the first obstacle those of us wishing to overcome our lower-income background must face. Many people will tell us we simply cannot have what we want because of who we are, because of where we come from. And the humiliations that came with carrying an illegitimate baby in graduate school? I don't know where to begin.

There are the countless hours I spent in offices applying for social services: food stamps; Section 8 housing assistance; WIC (food for mothers and young children); Medicaid; heat assistance. There is the professor who told me to leave a teaching assistants' meeting to which I brought my 4-year-old: "And take *that* with you," he said, pointing to my son.

Every single purchase was impossible. I could pay for child care or books, but not both. Every bill that was paid meant another was not. Even generous scholarships don't take into account \$700 a month for child care. And yet I felt ashamed for every dollar I borrowed and every bill I couldn't pay.

When I graduated and began teaching, things improved—a little. Now making about \$30,000 a year, I began paying back my student loans. But when my car broke down I couldn't replace it, and had to bike to the grocery store. Our rental house was small, pest-infested, and drafty. Every month we would eat peanut butter and macaroni and cheese as we waited for the next paycheck.

I sensed that it was uncouth to talk about late bills and shut-off notices at work. My academic peers weren't living recklessly, but they did

Continued on Page D22

FIRST PERSON

By Rachel Wagner

I felt ashamed for every dollar I borrowed and every bill I couldn't pay.

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Bootstrapping My Way Into the Ivory Tower

Continued From Page D21

have nice apartments, clean furniture, and simple luxuries like new clothes, compared with my thrift-store clothing. Most friends were now buying homes with assistance from their parents. My own parents distanced themselves from me, reading my academic ambitions as a judgment of their frugal lives, by then based on one office manager's salary. Needless to say, there could be only the barest support from home when I had a financial problem. Not only did they have no money to offer me, but they already saw me as living an affluent life with my books, college-owned computers, and work-related travel.

Here's what happens when you are living close to the financial edge as a single parent in academe: You need to attend an academic conference to interview for a job, as your current position is a one-year temporary position for someone on sabbatical. So you have to buy a plane ticket. Sure, you'll be reimbursed from the college's travel allowance for about 80 percent of the trip. But how will you buy that plane ticket in the first place, in order to be reimbursed a month or two later? Credit card? Afraid not. That was closed out last year because you couldn't pay for it while you worked as an adjunct for \$15,000 a year.

Well, ask your parents for a loan. Weren't you listening? OK, then, ask a colleague to help you. I could, but that violates all standards of friendship, especially the one where you aren't supposed to tell anyone affiliated with your job that you don't have enough money to go on an interview. And your nonacademic friends? They don't have money, either. So why not ask the college for an advance? Because it doesn't give advances. And you have just violated the unspoken standard that stipulates you should never reveal your financial struggle if you are in academe.

So here's what I did, and I am not proud of it. I phoned a guy I had been dating who had recently been exposed as a cheater; he had no fewer than three other girlfriends while we were together and had lied repeatedly to my face. I knew he had air miles. Lots of them. So I asked him to help me. He did.

Fast forward 10 years. My son is now 17, and I have just received tenure at a fine college. Although things are much better, I'm still paying back student loans, and I am nowhere near "safe" financially speak-



ing. My colleagues are lovely, but I can tell how different my story is from the typical experience. When we go out to dinner, I become anxious, knowing that with so little in my checking account, I must order a cheap entree. When everyone orders bottles of wine and appetizers and then decides to split the bill evenly, my heart sinks. Either I must tell them I cannot afford to contribute to all that, or I must risk having my debit card rejected in front of them.

A few months ago, my car broke down and wiped out the meager savings I had earned by teaching over winter break. A large heating bill left me juggling expenses until this past summer, when I took on four extra jobs to rebuild my savings. I took work advising new students, teaching a summer-school

course, prepping a new course, and doing online development for another course.

At the same time, I was finishing up my first book. However, the people at my publisher who were responsible for issuing the tiny advance I was supposed to receive were slow about sending that money. So now I was once again depleted of cash, staving off creditors, and amassing late fees. Should I have e-mailed my publisher a third time to complain that I had not yet received the book advance?

Such things are embarrassing. They suggest that I am irresponsible somehow, when the simple fact is that some of us just don't have as much as others. We didn't have parents who paid our way through graduate school or gave us money for a down payment on a house, and we got kicked around

financially in other ways. No matter the cause, those of us who don't have money in reserve have an awkward and humiliating place in academe.

This ought to be a victory story: Small-town smart girl becomes a tenured college professor. And I am very proud of my achievements.

But let's be honest here. The system doesn't easily support those wishing to improve their lives, especially those raising children in the process. I'd like to think that we still live in a country where dreams come true, where education is open to all who are capable and hardworking. But what I had to do was almost impossibly difficult, and the degree of shame and cognitive dissonance I carry around is palpable.

Without food stamps, housing assistance, subsidized student loans, and Medicaid, there is no way I could have made it through graduate school. Today all of those programs are under threat. To kill those supports is to kill the dream entirely for some people, to be another voice telling smart young women to just give up and accept the limitations their backgrounds have imposed upon them.

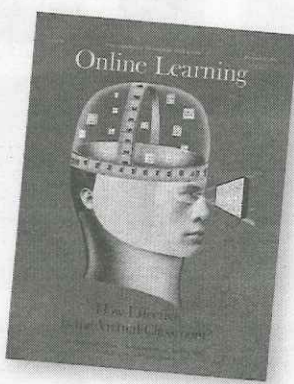
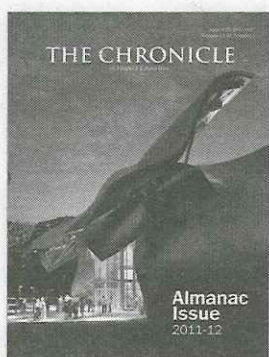
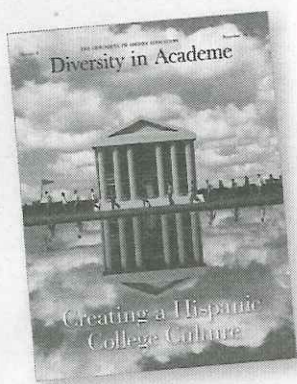
If that happens, the only people able to make it into academe will be those with a privileged financial background, whose families can step in when life challenges them. But even existing social supports will not allow full entry into the ivory tower. If you start behind, you'll stay behind, no matter how hard you work.

Tenure won't protect you from heating bills, car repairs, or the fact that you can't buy milk until tomorrow, when you get paid. It won't protect you from bill collectors who don't give a damn that you can't pay them now because you haven't yet received your first royalty check. Shh. Don't tell anyone.

Rachel Wagner is an associate professor of religion at Ithaca College.

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Educating Our 'Customers' to Their Satisfaction

IN THE MIDDLE of a semester, one student in my developmental-English course came to my office to tell me that he had to withdraw and that it was my fault. He couldn't continue because my teaching style didn't meet his needs.

Foolishly, I asked for an explanation, and he spent the next five minutes outlining every instance in which I had interfered with his learning style, including by assigning homework, giving tests, taking attendance, and requiring that all essays be typed, printed out, and handed in at the very beginning of class.

When I began to tell him that I do all of those things because I'm trying to teach academic responsibility, he interrupted and said, "You're not letting me be me."

As a faculty member, I have found myself on a number of occasions dealing with students who are upset with me for not letting them be them, or, as some say, for "disrespecting" them. I'll admit that my definition of "respect" must be different from theirs, because many times when I'm told I've been disrespectful, it usually occurs when I don't give the lecture notes to a student who missed two or more weeks of class, or when I tell a student not to answer her cellphone in my class, or when I tell a student that he lost points from his final grade for disrupting the classroom when his friend entered my class to ask when it would be over because he was hungry and my student was his ride.

In all of those conversations, I was trying to prove how *their* actions were the disrespectful ones, not mine, but they never believed me.

For some time, I wondered why certain students acted that way. When I was in college, I would never ask my teacher for lecture notes of the days I had missed. I never answered my cellphone in class, or even acknowledged a friend who decided to interrupt a lecture to ask me a question.

I was the first person in my immediate family to complete college. As an undergraduate, I had no idea what my responsibilities were in the college classroom, but I must have innately known that if I wanted to earn the respect of the professor, I should first show the professor some respect.

But maybe times have changed. Maybe students are so used to our consumer-driven society that they have an inaccurate sense of entitlement. They believe the customer is always right. Maybe it's true, and customers are always right. Maybe the academic and business sides of education have become so blurred that my title of assistant professor has actually been changed to "educational liaison," and I am supposed to teach students only what they want to know and nothing more.

I'm sure if that change did actually happen, it would make my job easier. I would no longer have to worry about disrespecting anyone, because students—or, as they would probably be called, learning clients—would be permitted to answer the phone in class whenever they wanted, to pick which days to come to class, and to determine when, or even if, tests and papers would be assigned.

If students were dissatisfied with my service, they could fill out a complaint form, and I would tell them that someone would contact them in 24 to 48 hours. Or I could use some of the great customer-service lines I've heard in my life. For example, when my cellphone wouldn't work in my new house, a customer-service representative said that he could see on the company's map that I live near a lake, which was "absorbing the cellphone waves, and there's nothing we can do about it."

So if students ever questioned why they hadn't learned anything in my class, I guess I could simply state, "The lake has absorbed all of your knowledge, and there's nothing we can do about it."

Recently, in another developmental-English course I teach, students complained about some of the services on the campus, including those provided by teachers. Teachers need to show that they care about the students more, I was told.

I asked how that could be accomplished. One student raised his hand and said, "By understanding that we have lives outside of class—so we shouldn't be expected to be here all the time." Another student said, "And by turning papers back to us sooner."

Although both students swore that they were talking about *other* teachers, their comments were specific to my course, because I have a strict attendance policy, and I had collected essays during the previous session, which was on a Wednesday, and they were upset that the papers had not been graded by the following class, on a Friday. When I asked if the students felt disrespected by tough attendance policies and papers not being graded within

48 hours, they all said yes. I have heard similar complaints before, though not in my own courses. At several colleges where I've taught, outside companies have been brought in to survey students and determine how to make their educational experience more rewarding. The survey results showed that students wanted more-lenient attendance policies and a faster turnaround on graded papers. One "expert" presenting the results at a faculty meeting even told us it was our responsibility to institute changes that were more student-friendly.

Faculty members were being asked to be responsible for students instead of creating a system within the classroom that makes the students responsible for themselves.

It does seem that the customer-care model has invaded the college classroom. Maybe I will just have to learn to accept it, but it will be difficult because any time a teacher focuses on dealing with a particular student, the others in the classroom suffer. No one is paying attention to their needs, which might just be to learn the material.

Some time ago, I had a student answer his phone in

class and carry on a conversation as he walked out of the room. When he returned, I approached him and quietly reminded him that he lost points for answering the phone in class. He asked me where the dean's office was located—the academic version of "I want to see the manager."

I told him where to find the dean and that if he left, he wouldn't be permitted back, because the class had been disrupted too many times that day. He did leave, and later that day, an administrative assistant from the dean's office contacted me and said the student had filed a complaint against me. She wanted to know if he could re-enter my class.

I know the customer should get what he wants, but I said no. I had to keep him out because the phone incident was one of many disruptions from that student. Plus, I had to think of the other customers who had earned my respect by taking their academic success seriously. Those students acted like they saw the giant lake and wanted to do everything they could to keep it from absorbing them.

Brian P. Hall is an assistant professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College, in Cleveland.

FIRST PERSON

By Brian P. Hall

All classrooms are not created equal

Staring at a computer wasn't enough. Dr. Gustavo Pereira's meteorology students wanted more. So they headed to the Midwest, braved the elements and chased the eye of the storm. They were no longer just students. They were professionals.

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