

Advice for First-Time Faculty Members

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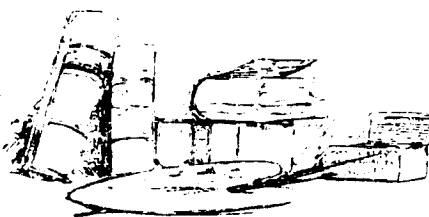
Once you have accepted your new job, you'll want to be successful in it and make the most of it, whether that means attaining tenure at the institution which has just extended you an offer, or continuing to build a successful record so that you may move on to another job. Whether you plan to be here for one year or for the rest of your life, much of what you'll need to do is the same.

Before You Begin Work

If you'll be visiting campus before the semester when you begin to teach, try to sit in on some classes to get a feeling for what the students will be like before you have to plan your classes.

If you have taken this job before you've finished your dissertation, make finishing it your highest priority. Leave it to your advisor and committee to require that more work be done on it. Trying to finish this piece of work while you're starting a new position will represent a significant drain on your energy, which you'll want to avoid if you possibly can.

When the dissertation is turned in, take advantage of the proximity of your committee and other faculty members in your department to discuss the direction your future research might take. Write down as much of your thinking as you can so that when you're in a new place you won't have to begin to frame your research from square one. As you consider your research needs, be in touch with the new department. You'll be most likely to get what you need (such as computer equipment, space, research assistants) if you ask for it as early as possible.



During this time you'll also be making practical arrangements for your move. If the department or hiring institution has offered help in finding housing, evaluating schools for your children, and so forth, don't hesitate to take advantage of it. If possible, plan to move well in advance of the time you will begin teaching, so you have some time to get yourself settled.

When You Arrive

Never assume that anyone will tell you all the things you need to know. Generally, you will get some minimal orientation, but will mainly be left to find out things on your own. Use formal channels of communication, but recognize that you may get more practical information from the local grapevine.

Attend any programs offered to new faculty members, again realizing they will give you only part of the picture. You'll be on your own for the most important step, getting the lay of the land, meeting people, and using your own judgment in evaluating both what you are told and what is tellingly left unsaid. Take time to learn what's going on before you jump into departmental or university politics or align yourself with one side or the other of a controversy you may not yet understand.

Get to know everyone in your department. If you're at a small school, try to meet faculty members in related disciplines. Look around for friendly

mentors, but don't be too quick to choose them. Also get to know administrative staff, reference librarians, graduate students, computer support people, and anyone else who can help you find out how things really work.

Learn what will be required for tenure, if yours is a tenure-track job. Think about what kinds of service, such as advising and committee work, you want to do, so that when you're asked, you'll know your priorities.

Get to know when faculty meetings, colloquia, and other relevant sessions are held and attend those you can. Get logistical and administrative details straight. Find out for what items you are authorized to spend money and how reimbursement is handled. Your institution may make much information available to you on the Internet. Become familiar with what it offers.

Life

Despite all the professional demands you'll find when you move to a new job, it will be worth your while to treat your personal life as an important priority as well. Get your family or personal life settled and organized. Get to know the broader social environment. You may well want to have friends and associates outside of your department or institution. Get to know the local community well enough that you have a chance to make some friends.

Make sure that you understand all the benefits to which your job entitles you. Most likely you will need to make some decisions about retirement plans and investments. Take advantage of every tax-sheltered dollar

you can possibly afford to set aside.

Make life on campus work for you. Learn the hours of the recreational facilities on campus and what is available to you in terms of cultural programs. Learn about safety on campus and on the routes to and from your home. Can you safely work late? Does the school offer special transportation? Are any extra security measures required in your office, in the classroom, in your lab?

Planning for Research

Decide how much time you hope to set aside for your own work. You will need to be flexible about this, but also be prepared to maintain some boundaries so that you can get your work done. Get to know the resources available for your research. What's available in libraries, labs, on-line? Who are potential collaborators on campus? Who are the experts who can save you time by giving quick answers to your reference or technical questions?

Find out whether the institution provides special funds for which junior faculty members may apply. Some institutions may offer summer research money and travel grants. Also explore avenues for external funding and apply widely. Your ability to bring in outside funding will make you valuable to your new employer and, at least in many fields, will strengthen your ability to do research.

Teaching

As you start your job, class preparation will probably demand most of your time. Try to use that time efficiently by taking advantage of all the help you can get. The first thing you'll do, of course, is to get the logistics of your classes under control, reserving books, making copies, setting up electronic chat rooms, getting class computer accounts.

Learn who your department considers its best teachers. Ask one of them to visit your classes early on, so you can benefit from that person's feedback. Also develop ways to evaluate your own teaching.

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Learn how your campus' formal process of teaching evaluation works. Will students in your classes be asked to fill out questionnaires? If so, find out in advance what the questions are.

Be aware of resources on campus that can help you develop areas where you're not as knowledgeable as you'd like to be. Look for computer and media resource centers, seminars offered by reference librarians, special campus opportunities for faculty to collaborate on teaching, colloquia at other departments. Learn whether there is support for the teaching process. For example, is there a center where you may arrange to have one of your lectures videotaped and critiqued?

In a four-year college, you probably will be a student adviser. If you have student responsibilities, find out what they are and think about how you will handle them. Think carefully about the amount of interaction you want to have with students. Of course, you'll want to fulfill your responsibilities adequately, but if you're friendly and approachable, students may want to spend more time with you than you have to give, considering the other demands on your time.

Remember that you don't have to do everything yourself. The campus doubtless has many advising resources for students. Find out what they are and where you can refer students for remedial work, writing assistance, counseling, and career planning.

If you are an "underrepresented minority" in your field, the potential demands on your time will be enormous, as committees seek diverse representation and students are drawn to mentors to whom they feel they can relate as role models. You may find it very hard not to respond to what you consider legitimate requests and

demands. However, your survival in this institution, and perhaps in your career, will depend upon your ability to balance the way you allocate your time.

Keeping an Eye on Your Career

As if there weren't already enough to do, you may want or need to spend a substantial amount of time going back on the job market. Perhaps this is a one-year position, or one which you took hoping to leave it after a year or two. If the job offers the possibility, but not the promise, of renewal, you may have little choice but to go back onto the market until you receive a firm, written commitment from your present employer.

If you're in a tenure-track position where you're happy, you probably will not go back on the market any time soon, but it will still be important to stay in touch with your professional network at other institutions and, at least to some extent, to stay current with the market. In a one-year position, you'll be expected to be job-hunting, and colleagues may offer to serve as references. If you've taken a tenure-track position which you want to leave, professional behavior requires that you continue to fulfill your responsibilities completely. You will need to conduct your job search more privately and with more discretion.

It's clear that responsibility for managing your academic career—either at your current institution or elsewhere—lies squarely on your shoulders. Success is a matter of making the most out of each opportunity that you can.

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