

SURVIVAL IN THE ACADEMIC JUNGLE: A BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides the perspective of three senior business professors regarding the opportunities and obstacles a young professor faces as he or she embarks on a career as a faculty member in a business school. The paper addresses the "life cycle of a faculty member"; the impact of accrediting agencies, specifically AACSB International; the impact of the performance appraisal process; and the occasional necessity of "moving on".

INTRODUCTION

New junior faculty members face a number of opportunities and dangers as they enter the academic jungle in an attempt to establish a meaningful career. Critical to the process is the early career phase leading to promotion and tenure. It is here that the greatest risks occur.

It is understood that faculty must engage in teaching, research, and service while building the social connections embodied in the term collegiality. Frequently, the prior experiences of the junior faculty member do not prepare them for the reality of the early years in the profession.

Connections with the discipline are critical for maintenance of a career. Given the prominent role played by research in the academy and the dynamic nature of knowledge within the discipline, professional development is a mandatory

activity. In a similar vein, the expectation for the profession expressed by accrediting bodies is dynamic.

The motivations of faculty change upon achieving tenure. The focus shifts from joining the profession to active participation in the profession. Leadership and mentorship roles emerge and are embraced.

THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE PROFESSOR

The Early Years

The central focus of a newly hired junior faculty member is exhibiting those behaviors that will ultimately result in promotion and tenure. The typical probation period lasts for six to seven years. This period is one of great stress for new faculty. You are in a new environment, you are

now preparing several new courses that must meet the needs of your new institution, you must engage in a process of socialization with those individuals that will ultimately determine your fate relative to continued employment at the institution, and you must publish sufficient articles to meet department and school expectations which may be difficult to obtain with any specificity.

Given the uncertainty associated with the tenure decision, it is important to adopt a career model that will prove successful somewhere in the academic community. Of necessity, the focus must be on research and publication. Naturally, this leads to a life-cycle of research productivity with a peak near the fifth to seventh years after graduation (Goodwin and Sauer, 1995). Following this peak, production tends to level off and be maintained for a period of about twenty years. It is interesting to note from the study of Goodwin and Sauer that taking a position as an administrator, such as department head, is associated with a significant decline in research productivity that persists throughout the balance of one's academic career. They call it "the curse of peer recognition." Obviously, young faculty should not accept administrative appointments and anyone accepting such an appointment should understand the negative ramifications.

Despite the focus on publication, it is also important that attention is given to performance in the classroom. This is particularly challenging because doctoral students in business are not normally given any special training on teaching pedagogy. Consequently, they mimic what their graduate school mentors were doing and this will frequently fail in the undergraduate classroom where many end up performing. The undergraduate business student today reads less, attends class less, writes less, free rides on group assignments and performs lower on the GMAT exam than students from other disciplines (Glenn, 2011). This student represents a challenge for even the most gifted teacher, much less one with no background in learning theory.

The Later Years

At the end of the early years, the faculty member usually is promoted to Associate Professor and awarded tenure. The next phase of the career is then focused on those activities that will lead to full professor status. First and foremost, scholarly production must be maintained on a regular and systematic basis. A corollary activity that supports publication is active attendance at professional meetings as a paper presenter. Also, one can visit other research institutions and present papers to peer groups and obtain feedback on the content of the paper.

While using professional meetings as a proving ground for research, one must avoid getting involved extensively in editorships. Goodwin and Sauer found that serving as an editor actually was associated with decreased production in a similar manner as that of serving as a department head. So, be an active presenter and discussant but be leery of any administrative role in the association.

The faculty workload is frequently measured by the number of classes taught. Hu and Gill reaffirmed the fact that teaching load has an adverse effect on research productivity over their broad-based sample of IS faculty members. They found that teaching loads up to 11 hours per week did not significantly affect production while those beyond that level were significant detractors to research.

Once the final promotion to full professor has been obtained, diverse roles may be sought. For some, the best job in academics is that of a tenured full professor and they want to stay right there, in many cases deeply involved in doctoral student education or mentoring. For others, having obtained professor status now provides an opportunity for greater service to the profession and they actively seek editorships, organization offices and participation in groups studying the challenges facing the academy. Still others strive for administrative roles on the campus including department head, associate dean, dean and then provost and ultimately president.

THE ASSOCIATION TO ADVANCE COLLEGIATE SCHOOLS OF BUSINESS (AACSB)

For new faculty members that join the faculty of an AACSB accredited business school, the AACSB standards will significantly impact expectations relative to performance. Key among those standards is Standard Two:

“The mission incorporates a focus on the production of quality intellectual contributions that advance knowledge of business and management theory, practice, and/or learning pedagogy. The school’s portfolio of intellectual contributions is consistent with the mission and programs offered.” (AACSB, 2011, pp.19-20)

With AACSB reviews of business schools now conducted on a five year cycle, the pressure for consistent intellectual output throughout an entire career is being brought by the process. Further, the focus is very clearly on peer-reviewed journal articles:

“Generally, intellectual contributions should meet two tests:

- Exist in public written form, and
- Have been subject to scrutiny by academic peers or practitioners prior to publication.” (AACSB, 2011, p.22)

Essentially, all faculty members are expected to be productive in research. There is little room for non-producers. The portfolio of intellectual contributions must come from a “substantial cross section of the faculty in each discipline.”

This point is further spelled out in Standard Ten:

“The faculty of the school has, and maintains expertise to accomplish the mission and to ensure this occurs, the school has clearly defined processes to evaluate individual faculty member’s contributions to the school’s mission. The school specifies for both academically qualified and professionally qualified faculty, the required initial qualifications of faculty (original aca-

demically preparation and/or professional experience) as well as requirement for maintaining faculty competence (intellectual contributions, professional development, or both).” (AACSB, 2011, p.42)

The expectations become more specific under the “Basis for Judgment” section of the Standard: “At least 90 percent of faculty resources are either academically or professionally qualified” and “At least 50 percent of faculty resources are academically qualified.” In general, academically qualified faculty are those that possess a doctorate and remain research active. While a minimum of 50 percent AQ is permissible, this is basically true only for business schools that have only an undergraduate program. The expectations for AQ faculty are higher for master degree offering institutions. For doctoral degree granting institutions, the expectation is that virtually all faculty will be AQ.

For those new faculty members that expect a long and successful career in academics, regular publication of journal articles is mandatory. While standards do not address what is enough research, visiting teams let expectations be known to school leadership. Minimums of two articles per five years are emerging at all levels. In order to greatly exceed minimums and qualify eventually for a funded chair at a research university, publication of at least two articles per year with frequent appearances in top tier journals would be more appropriate.

Over time, expectations in the academy change. Such change will frequently be manifest through the adoption or revision of standards of professional organizations. Therefore, it is important that faculty monitor the changing standards for AACSB as they progress through their career. Many of the standards and much of the emphasis that exists in current AACSB standards did not exist 20-30 years ago. Drastic changes have occurred within one generation. Yet, scholarly productivity is still the “coin of the realm”.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

As a faculty member, you should expect to be reviewed on an annual basis. This review will normally cover your contributions to teaching, re-

search, and service with additional feedback for junior faculty as to promotion and tenure likelihood. In order to be prepared for this review, it is essential that you maintain a person record of your activities including courses taught with student counts, credit hour counts and student assessment of instruction, scholarly activities including publications, papers presented and paper in process, plus service to the institution and profession. Likewise, you should constantly be updating your resume and professional portfolio for future opportunities that might emerge.

A part of the annual review should also be forward looking with goals for the coming year in all aspects of performance. It is during this conversation, usually with the department head, that any concerns relative to the conflict between teaching load and research can be addressed. Time management is very important to success and small shifts to the days and times classes are offered may make a big difference in time available for research.

One of the current trends in education is for more offerings of online instruction. The market for non-traditional students or adult learners continues to expand and to desire additional education using methods that accommodate their current location and time availabilities. This form of instruction can be very time consuming and junior faculty should avoid this type of instruction particularly during the probation years. If you must teach using this method of delivery, the annual review process can be used to adjust other elements of your schedule to accommodate the added time this method of instruction will require. Further, a very substantial amount of preparation must be done prior to the delivery of the course rather than on the fly as the course is taught. Having time during the summer to prepare for an online course during the fall term would be a reasonable request.

MOVING ON

Despite the best efforts of a faculty member, there may come a time when a new opportunity must be found. Whether tenure denial occurred or salary compression forced a move, the faculty member must find a new opportunity. It is here that many rely on contacts that have been made

in the profession during the period of service at the current institution. This underscores the necessity of becoming active in your discipline-based professional associations. Not only will you benefit from the academic activities of the association, you will form friendships with your colleagues and they will be there to help you when are seeking a new opportunity.

The relocation event will interrupt the stream of scholarly productivity and care should be given to minimize that impact. And if salary compression was the primary driver, you should at least get a 25 percent raise to justify the move (Carper, et. al., 2008).

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