

Jobs, Life, and Tenure at a “Teaching College”

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For psychologists, there’s always something next. Academic psychology is a career with a number of identifiable steps: undergraduate school, graduate school, post-doctoral fellowship, tenure, full professor (for clinicians, there are even more: internship, licensure, perhaps ABPP for those with the most persistent resolve). As a result, it is adaptive at each step to spend some time thinking about what’s next. Also, it is important at each point to make choices that maximize how much you enjoy your work and your life. One of the biggest transitions is applying for faculty positions, and it is possible that the position that is the best fit for you is one you have never encountered: a job at a teaching college.

It may help to know my bias; I got exactly the job I wanted. No job is perfect, but it is hard to imagine a better fit for me than the position I was offered at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland. As I applied for faculty positions, I had a fair sense of what I wanted (surprisingly, it was still what I said in graduate school interviews); I wanted to teach and do research, while keeping an active clinical practice. I had the opportunity to work on several interesting research projects as a postdoc, further developing my research interests in clinical geropsychology. However, while those experiences strengthened my interest in research, they also made it clear to me that for a variety of reasons I did not want a primarily research position requiring continual grant writing. This essentially eliminated medical school research positions (which also typically did not have enough teaching for my interests) and Research I university openings. The teaching opportunities I had in graduate school and as a postdoc further showed me that I really loved to teach. The best fit seemed to be teaching colleges where research was required to an extent but was not the primary criterion for tenure. However, having graduated from a large state school as an undergrad-

uate, I based this belief on very little solid information prior to interviewing.

While most doctoral students are trained at Research I universities, most colleges and universities (and therefore most faculty positions) are not in the Research I category. This means that, except for those who attended a similar school as an undergraduate, few new doctoral graduates may have a clear picture of what these schools may be like, and therefore may not consider what can be a wonderful career choice. Also, everyone tends to have a bias toward what they chose, so even well-intentioned mentors at Research I universities may not understand an interest in such a position, or may not be thinking of such positions as they provide you with assistance in your search.

The (admittedly broad) operational definition I will use for a teaching college is a school where the teaching load is relatively heavy (at least two classroom courses per semester, and sometimes as many as four) and research requirements for tenure are relatively light (perhaps a maximum requirement of one peer-reviewed journal article per year prior to tenure, with no grant funding expectations). This clearly includes a wide range of possible requirements, but does not include the research-intensive universities that are the most common training locations for doctoral psychologists. Furthermore, such schools may or may not be purely undergraduate institutions. Loyola College, for example, has master’s and doctoral programs, and is technically a “Comprehensive University” according to the categories used in the *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings. Given this variability, it is hard to describe the “typical” teaching college position, but I can tell you what it was like for me. The three categories that almost all schools use to evaluate tenure progress are teaching, research (sometimes titled scholarship), and service, so I will discuss each of these categories and then offer a few tips from the

perspective of a chair of a psychology department in a teaching college.

Teaching

The interview process showed me that teaching was the priority, and prior teaching experience was essential in landing the interview. If you think you might be even somewhat interested in a position like this, get some teaching experience as a graduate student and try to get student course evaluations for those classes. My “job talk” consisted of teaching an undergraduate class while many of the department faculty observed. (Incidentally, we will have a position open next year, and any of you who interview for it will do the same.) The students in that section turned in evaluations at the end of the class that were used in the decision-making process. I did field several questions about my research interests and productivity during interview meetings with faculty and students, but teaching was the focus, and the strong collegiality of the faculty gave me a sense of a shared community.

Once I arrived in the fall, the clearest indicator that this was the place for me was that the experiences on the job matched what I expected from the interview, and teaching was indeed the primary emphasis. I was allowed to choose a faculty mentor whose role was to support me in the tenure process and who held no evaluative role over me. The department later developed a peer-review system for teaching, such that the junior faculty elected a group of tenured faculty who sat in on tenure-track faculty classes and evaluated our teaching more summatively for purposes of merit raises and tracking progress toward tenure. Class size was capped at 35 students, fewer for more intensive courses, and I had many opportunities for contact with students outside of class. The typical course load was a 3–3, meaning 3 courses each in the fall and spring, with no requirement for teaching in

the summer. When I first arrived, there was an additional expectation that faculty (even junior faculty) take at least one “overload” or extra course for additional pay. That is no longer true for junior tenure-track faculty, who are now rarely asked to take overloads so that extra teaching does not infringe upon research time.

Departments vary in the degree to which course assignments are “fixed.” For example, I know of a similar school where classes are assigned permanently, with no variation over the years, whereas at Loyola I have been able to teach a variety of different courses. Also, the number of “preps” in a given semester is important. Teaching three sections of the same course (thus “preparing” for only one) is very different from teaching three different courses in the same semester. Furthermore, when you teach a course over several semesters, the amount of preparation required for a course drops dramatically both the second and third time you teach it, and then tends to level out depending on how much you change it each time.

The expectations of the students are also somewhat different at a teaching college, and rightfully so. The students will expect (and you will be able to provide) more time with them individually outside of class. Some intro psychology courses at Loyola, for example, are designed with regular off-campus activities built in. This is wonderful for those who want to get to know their students more personally, but it does mean that, along with the course load being somewhat more, the time invested into each student also increases.

Research/Scholarship

While research requirements for tenure are significantly reduced in comparison to Research I universities, they have been somewhat of a moving target in my experience. In speaking with other colleagues at similar institutions, this is not unusual. As a gross generalization, if the expectations for tenure change during the 6 to 8 years prior to tenure, they are most likely to change in the direction of increased research requirements. I mention this so that you are aware that the research requirements discussed while you are interviewing for positions are much more likely to increase than decrease during your tenure-track years. In my case, the quoted number of expected publications stayed constant, but the soft (or “real”) number increased by one, and external quality indicators (i.e., external reviews of your research, quality ratings of journals in which you publish) began to be weighed more heavily. I think it is increasingly rare that there are no research/scholarship expectations. Also keep in mind that if you accept a position at an institution where the emphasis is shifting more toward research, it may be more challenging to find senior faculty

who can provide concrete guidance for you as you progress toward tenure.

As you interview for positions, it is important to ask about support for research, such as the amount of startup funds and lab space available. Teaching colleges will have fewer resources in general, but may still have some very helpful and creative supports in place. For example, Loyola funds a competitive, one-semester junior faculty sabbatical that I and several other faculty in the department have received. Because we have graduate programs, I was able to find some graduate students who were interested in research assistantships, but most of the RAs I recruited were undergraduates. This is important to consider if your research requires RAs with more advanced levels of training, although good college seniors can typically handle the same level of responsibility as a first-year graduate student. It is possible to apply for and receive grants at some teaching colleges, but the grant offices are likely to be less well developed at smaller schools, perhaps offering less support than would be the case at a more research-focused institution.

Service in General

There really should be graduate-level courses that prepare you for this, but there are not. Almost regardless of where you accept a position, service work will take up more time than you expect. For the uninitiated, “service” consists of all the work outside of research or the classroom, such as advising students, serving on departmental or college-wide committees, and becoming involved in professional organizations at the local, statewide, or national level. Typically there is an expectation that you engage in some sort of service at each of these levels. At smaller schools, a larger proportion of your service will be at the campus-wide rather than departmental level, and at teaching schools service is more likely to involve direct work with students. Again, as teaching colleges are likely to be smaller, campus-wide involvement is important, because members of the Board on Rank and Tenure are more likely to expect that they know you (or at least know of you), and college-wide service is the best way to ensure that.

From the perspective of the college, professional/community service is also important in order to show that you are involved in your discipline beyond the campus boundary. Generally speaking, departments and colleges are most concerned that you assist with service within the department and college. The relative importance of outside professional service is often relatively less, but doing something outside will help you, and I believe it to be critical to the field of psychology (more on that later). You should ask about service requirements at each particular school during the interview process. Once you arrive, start

slow and learn to say no. To the extent that you can, choose service work that is satisfying to you, balancing what you have to do with what you enjoy.

You will likely notice a certain contradiction very early on as a new faculty member: other people will ask you to serve on their committee or in their organization, and 10 minutes later at lunch they will enthusiastically proclaim their disdain for all service work. Later, you will become that person. You will have to do some service that you won't like, so try to also get involved in things you do like while not overwhelming yourself too early. Among friends here at AABT I will now disclose my darkest professional secret: I actually enjoy many types of service work, particularly in professional organizations. I see service as critically important for the students, the life of the department, and the field of psychology as a whole. Additionally, I love being in groups that work effectively. In this regard, AABT has been a great organization to work with. Some of my first professional service roles were within AABT, and they provided me with invaluable experience.

Clinical psychologists are trained extensively in keeping quiet about their professional work in the name of confidentiality, and this is both necessary and important. However, professional organizations can make our voices heard in the larger community, and my concern is that we are well trained in confidentiality and significantly undertrained in professional advocacy. I seem to have digressed, so back to the issue. If you share this secret love of service work with me, your toughest work as a new faculty member will be trying to stay out of too much service work. Whether you love service or hate it, work hard to balance it with teaching and scholarship, and to the extent you can do work that you enjoy.

Beginning Professional Service

I was asked to write a bit about how I started getting involved with professional service. Like many of you, I joined several professional organizations in graduate school and showed up for the meetings when I could afford to make it to the conferences. This made it somewhat difficult to actively participate because I often went a couple of years between attending particular conferences. Once I started a faculty position it was easier to go to conferences more regularly (I had departmental support and an income) and I became more actively involved.

It is almost certain that if you attend any group meeting three or more times in a row you will be asked to do something. AABT is no exception, and it is a particularly good place for younger professionals to get involved. I was asked to be the leader of the Aging SIG (somewhat to my surprise) and agreed to it with some hesitation, because I

had not yet had a professional leadership role. I served in this role for 5 years, and it turned out to be a great opportunity, both because the SIG was productive and because the people were great to work with. The opportunities that come simply from participating are amazing and incredibly rewarding. Additionally, I learned a few things about professional service that have continued to guide what service I do and how I do it. Here's my advice, for what it's worth.

Join organizations that are active in doing things that are important to you, and join with the attitude that you are there to contribute, not just to listen. Take a few meetings to get your bearings and think about what you can add, and then get involved in something. My criteria for joining and involvement are: Do I think it is important and can I contribute meaningfully? When you join something new, think about whether you have time for it, and if not, consider if there is something else you are willing to give up in order to do the new work. If neither of those conditions is true, don't do it. Reevaluate your contributions periodically to see if they fit with your interests and the best interests of the organization and the profession in general. Keep in mind that organizational "grunt work" is very important; most contributions are not flashy. Contributions to one committee or organization often flow into other opportunities, so think strategically about where you will have the most fun and make the most impact as these arise.

Some Random Thoughts From a Chair

Finally, here are a few unrelated thoughts that came to mind as things that are helpful to know while looking for (or having recently earned) a faculty position. Some of these pointers are from general experience and some are from my recent experience as department chair.

1. Consider the department camaraderie and morale during the interview process. Healthy debate and disagreement are the lifeblood of academia, but a collegial atmosphere adds a great deal to professional and personal quality of life.

2. If you plan to stay in a position long term, keep in mind that you are choosing a lifestyle in a way that is broader than the job description. Consider which positions best fit your personal and family life now and in the future.

3. Think about how the teaching/research/service balance factors in to Item 1 above. Create "plans to tenure" for your teaching, research and service development in collaboration with a senior faculty mentor (formal or informal). For example, create general plans for your research over the tenure-track period, with scheduled initiation, completion, and submission times for projects

you expect to do. Think about ways to improve your teaching based on peer observation and student evaluation, and pick a few areas (e.g., syllabus, classroom presence) to work on each year. Review these plans periodically and change them when appropriate.

4. Even if you decide on a position at a teaching college, be careful about creating too much grading work for yourself. The good new teachers typically load their courses with activities that involve heavy teacher feedback. I think feedback to students, on writing, for example, is a necessity in every class, but energetic young faculty are likely to overemphasize this at first.

5. Be good to your new department's office staff from the beginning, even on the interview. First, it is the right thing to do; second, it will make your life easier in ways you cannot fully appreciate; third, others around you (like me) may make judgments about you based on how you treat those who appear to have less power and authority than you. If there are problems, deal with them appropriately but try to avoid being the department jerk. If staff are complaining to the chair about someone, you don't want it to be you (Yes, this is an inelegant rephrasing of the Golden Rule).

6. Be assertive in a politically mindful way. It should be okay to say no to the chair when you need to, but be aware of the politics of your department and institution. This will be easier to do in some places than others, so ask other junior faculty about the norms in your department. Who and what you can say no to may be surprisingly idiosyncratic.

7. Regardless of what type of position you take, stay involved in professional organizations. It is critical for psychology and it helps keep you fresh and engaged.

8. At several points in your teaching, research, and service you are going to have the thought, "I am in no way qualified for the responsibilities I now have." Don't let that thought overwhelm you. Do the best you can in what you do and let that thought pass by. The only time for concern is if that thought never crosses your mind.

9. You will worry about tenure too much, and it will be difficult to take it to heart when other people say "you're doing fine." Again, do your best and let it go.

10. There is a book called *The Compleat Academic* (yes, it is spelled "Compleat") that many of us in your shoes have found quite helpful. Buy it.

11. Most importantly, as you choose a position, listen to advice but do what feels right for you. Both declarative and nondeclarative experiences will factor in to what is ultimately the best decision. Listen to others, then trust your gut and make the decision that will make you happy.

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■ **When you started graduate school, what did you think you were going to do after you got your degree?** I thought I would be doing what I am doing, except for the administrative responsibilities.

■ **What did you want to do when you finished graduate school?** Again, I wanted to teach and do clinical work and research, although more specifically in a "teaching first" environment.

■ **How long did it take before you got over the "imposter syndrome" (the feeling that you're not as much of an expert on topics as other people think you are, or that they will "figure out" that you actually don't know what you're talking about)?** I was just about over it until I became the youngest person in the department chairs' meetings. Then I had the opportunity to face the issue all over again.

■ **What helped you get over the imposter syndrome, if you have at all?** Behaviorism helped. I figured out that how I behave in my position is far more important than how old I am. Do your job the best you can, do it authentically (be yourself), and things will work out. Cognitive reframing also helped. Many people before me have succeeded in faculty positions at my age, and there are many people who have major accomplishments at surprisingly young ages. Finally, having good support people to talk to (my wife, Amy, and my peers) is helpful. Still, probably every couple of weeks I look around and think, "How the hell did I get here?" Then I laugh, shake it off, and keep moving.

■ **How has AABT helped you in your professional development/career?** AABT introduced me to a number of peers and senior leaders in geropsychology and behavioral and cognitive therapy more generally. The addi-

tional benefit was that it helped me develop a much more sophisticated understanding and practice of behavioral approaches. Also, it is where I had the first opportunity to become deeply involved in a professional organization. AABT is a great place to begin professional involvement because it is small enough to meet people and contribute quickly, and it doesn't feel overwhelming. The people are friendly and the conference sessions are incredibly useful.

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