

■ KRISHNA S. DHIR, Feature Editor, Campbell School of Business, Berry College

Professor Sarah Bryant Bower offers sage, down-to-earth advice to those who are either about to begin or are in the early stages of their academic careers. She addresses critical issues and offers advice that at first glance may seem to be obvious. However, on further reflection, readers will find the depth of wisdom that usually resides in that rarest of understandings that we mistakenly refer to as common sense. The insights Professor Bower offers here are rarely available or given to those who truly need them. [Krishna S. Dhir, Editor]

The Dilemma: To Publish, To Teach, To Serve

by Sarah Bryant Bower, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

You have finished your hard-earned Ph.D. degree and are ready to continue life in the university setting, but this time as a professor rather than as a student. Granted, by working on research and teaching as a graduate student, you have already experienced the hybrid life between the two worlds, so you are set for the next step up. Perhaps you are already in a tenure-track position. Now reading this article and others¹ on the balance of research, teaching, and service is a necessary step for you to make the most of the decisions that face you. We who have been through the ranks as professors and administrators want you to succeed. In this paper, various aspects of being a professor are explored and obstacles presented so that you may either negotiate up front to understand what you are getting into when you accept a position, or see a bit more clearly what faces you as you prepare your lectures semester by semester.

any other criteria. Much more important to your happiness and longevity in a university is fit, and especially in the choice of the balance of research and teaching. Almost all universities want you to be current in your field, some much more than others. The top-tier universities, large state universities, and “big name” private universities, base their reputations and rankings on how much you publish and in what journals. Only the top-tier journals will do in any field. Professors generally do not have a heavy teaching load, but instead, are expected to work on high-quality research for publication. Most of the teaching comes from graduate students, part-time faculty, or teaching faculty.²

Tier-two universities tend to lean toward teaching more than tier-one universities, unless the tier-twos are trying to move into the upper echelon. Tier-three universities are much more focused on teaching, with research a “nice to have.” If you are interested in the welfare of students, these universities might be better fits for you than the more research-oriented universities.

In reality, most universities are looking for teacher/researchers, not researcher/teachers. Therefore, there can be a mismatch in expectations if the graduate takes a job at a teaching school thinking he will have time to maintain



Sarah Bryant Bower

is professor of finance at the John L. Grove College of Business at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. Earlier she served as dean of the College of Business Administration at Clarion University, and executive director of MBA Programs and senior lecturer at City University of London, England. She has also served as department chair of finance and international business at Johns Hopkins University and assistant professor at George Washington University. Outside of academe, Dr. Bower worked as a senior economist at the Department of Treasury Office of Thrift Supervision, Chase Econometrics, and the American Bankers Association. She holds a BSBA and a Ph.D. in economics from the University of South Carolina.

sbbower@ship.edu

Choice of University and Position

One of the biggest decisions facing you is where to apply for positions. We all enjoy the feeling of hearing others ask us, “Oh, you teach in THAT University?” Prestige can feel really good, but it can only take you so far. Your choice of a university should be based more on the right fit, rather than prestige or

and improve his publication record to perhaps to move to another university. Choosing the right culture becomes necessary. Many Ph.D. programs admit only research-oriented students, with the expectation that the graduate will help the school's ranking by going to another top-research university to research and possibly teach. The student may spend considerable time helping a professor with his/her research while a student. The student becomes a strong researcher with little training, or perhaps interest, in teaching. A teaching school may not be the correct selection.

Interview Skills

It is crucial for you to understand the balance of research, teaching, and service as you interview. This balance can be presented at the university, school, and departmental levels as different from each other. You must try to understand what is expected and how those expectations are supported at all three levels of administration. Ask for written standards. Many universities and schools never put expectations in writing for new faculty. Tenure and promotion decisions are applied on an as-needed basis. Standards morph over time to suit the promotion and tenure committees. Some examples of important information for which to listen: You are told that teaching is all that matters, but you find out that the last person in your job was dismissed because he did not publish enough. You are told that you are expected to publish, but there is no money to attend conferences or to receive a summer research stipend. You are told you must publish, but you are to be given a four/four teaching load your first year and thereafter, and 50 advisees. These are all warning flags.

Also, accreditation expectations matter greatly in what is actually expected versus what is stated. For example, in a unionized university, the contract may state that expectations are 50 percent teaching, 25 percent research, and 25 percent service. However, accreditation goals may alter this expectation into a reality of more weight on research than the contract states. Try

to learn the tenure/promotion culture of a university/school/department.³ Ask questions and, if you choose to accept a position in one of these universities, understand the union contract, faculty handbook, as well as accreditation requirements. Insist on receiving any documentation concerning expectations for tenure and promotion, and keep them and any updates in a file.

Another area to question in the interview, as comfortably as you can, is the focus of the university, school, and department on how liberally tenure and/or promotion are granted. Does everyone get tenured or promoted, or do very few get the gold ring? Is tenure a separate decision from promotion, or are both decisions made concurrently? Some universities only tenure/promote a very few, leaving other assistant professors to find new positions. Some union universities allow dismissal of a faculty member without explanation within the first two years. After that time, more justification to remove them is needed, as if the person is almost tenured. Tenure then becomes less of a trial. Finding out the culture of *what is* versus *what is stated* is crucial to smooth sailing in these murky waters.

After You Accept the Position

As a new assistant professor, you need to be in the right environment for yourself. You should understand and admit your own strengths and weaknesses, not just accept a position because of prestige or out of fear of not receiving another job offer. The culture may not fit one's abilities or even personality.

You may not know what to ask of others or whom to ask. Establish a rapport with a broad array of others. Do not be shy. Sit down with senior faculty, other newly hired faculty, secretaries, your dean, the associate dean, and other administrators to ask, "What do I need to know?" From these meetings, you will obtain an overview of issues and procedures. They will explain what they can at that time, but also ask them again at another time. As issues come up, you will know who to talk to. In addition, taking time to get to know oth-

ers across the university also helps you to make friends and to develop a university perspective.

Do be careful whom you trust, as at times, there can be factions within schools and even departments. Each may try to convince you of his or her point of view and get you involved. You do not know the history of relationships that have formed over years. Keep some distance from issues and people tied to those issues until you understand the entire picture and do not contribute to the rumor mill. If you need help with some of the issues, ask your dean to explain his or her view of the issues and the pitfalls to avoid.

Also, be aware that, at first, things that you do will take longer than they should. This aspect of your job will improve, but you do need to plan ahead to accomplish all that you will have to do. Do establish boundaries as to when you can be available to students, other faculty, and administrators. It is all right to say "no," or to say "yes," with conditions. Ask your chair and the dean to help you determine priorities of meetings to attend and other necessary schedule items. However, do remember, students do matter. They are our reason for teaching. Do not short-change them with missed classes and/or office hours. Limiting when you read e-mails or help them outside of class or office hours is acceptable, but do make this information known to them.

Keep careful records of your contributions on at least an annual basis. This effort will pay off handsomely when promotion and tenure documents have to be put together. Keep a file with articles published or presented, annual peer reviews, student evaluations of your classes, academic and community service contribution and attendance, clubs you advise, how many advisees you have each year, "thank you" messages from students and parents, other faculty, business people, etc. There is no way to remember all of this when the time comes to put the package together. One tip, do not list every meeting you ever attended. Some faculty members try to impress committees by listing pages

of meetings attended, times, and dates. To a promotion and tenure committees, this can look trite, as if you are trying too hard.

Understand your own needs to be liked and provide service to students and the university, versus wanting to be left alone to publish. You must strike a balance. Listen to your dean and department chair if they give you warnings, even if subtle. Some new professors seek committee work to be involved in the life of the university, but neglect research. They have a standard excuse not to conduct research saying that they are too busy with students and committees to do any research. However, the opposite also occurs. Professors isolate themselves and minimize participation with colleagues. These scenarios play out in schools all over the country. The results are often the same: non-tenure votes in years five or six. In an example of the first case, in one school, the young professor was well liked and patted on the back for her exemplary service from her first semester onward. No one stopped her, and perhaps took advantage of her. She would not listen to the one person who tried to give her learned guidance. She enjoyed the limelight. Sadly enough, she did learn that what is rewarded in the short run through smiles and thanks may mean little in the longer run.

Another example of what not to do came from a professor who wanted to be promoted to full professor. After several years of inactivity, he made it plain that he was publishing and volunteering just to get promoted and would do nothing afterward. He did not get promoted either, and felt bitter that his efforts were not rewarded.

Treat students and colleagues with respect. Be careful of getting too close, especially with students. Any issues of impropriety can be ruinous to your career. Small practices can be dangerous. For example, keep the door open when you are meeting with a student. If the subject is sensitive and you feel privacy is necessary, ask a third party such as your department chair to be present. Many times, male and female students can “flirt” with their teachers in hopes

of obtaining better grades or because there is genuine attraction. Avoid these traps. Avoid any opportunity that someone might claim that you behaved inappropriately, whether true or not. Accusations by others are difficult, if not impossible, to overcome.

Always remember, we want to be accepted and do the job for which we were hired. Do build value for yourself and your school. Travel to and network at conferences, meet business people to learn how our academic disciplines work in practice and to make connections that help students obtain internships and permanent employment. Take an internship yourself over a summer to update and strengthen your own skills, then write about it. Then in your tenure/promotion write-up, explain how these lessons learned linked to your research and classroom teaching.

However, a non-tenure vote is not a death knell for one’s academic career. You might do everything right, but for some reason some member of the promotion and tenure committee just does not like you. Perhaps, your teaching, research, and/or service were not up to standards. Anything can happen. There are other jobs out there, and the mantle of non-tenure does not have to stop you from continuing to climb the ladder at another school. Do not be afraid to move to another university. You can move laterally, be promoted, or perhaps move into administration. Learn your strengths and weaknesses. Just be sure that you learn from your mistakes and find the right fit in your next position.

Care of Ourselves and Others

Remember, we at any university live in a privileged society surrounded by well-educated people who, by definition, are scholars and thinkers. Most people in the world are not as educated as we are, but that does not make them less than we. We just know more than anyone else about our subject. Avoid absorbing poor culture habits of your department or school. If you see poor meeting attendance as a norm in your department, be the one who does attend and work with others to improve meeting agendas so

that others will go. Take back to your department what you learn. Your reputation is built on the follow-through of your obligations. You get out of your work what you put into it. If others are lazy or ill spoken, do not fall prey to that attitude yourself. This is being politically careful. You never know who will hear what you said. Also, bad talk leads to bad attitudes that make for poor performance and an unhappy work experience. If the work place is poor, change it or leave.

Also, remember that all people count in this world, and no one is better than anyone else. Remembering this piece of advice can help you be kind to that wayward student who did not come to class to hear the answer to his question, to the annoying arrogant professor down the hall, and to the new professor whom you might mentor one day.

Always stay marketable. Work harder than anyone else to be the best teacher, researcher, and service provider that you can be. Be energetic; be positive; be aware. Take what might feel like risks, and take up for yourself. You will then never lack for opportunities.

Endnotes

1. Also see “Academic Street Smarts” in this column, July 2006. Four deans give their in-depth perspectives on this issue. There is some overlap of ideas between the earlier paper and the current one, but only some.
2. Full-time teaching faculty members are fairly new in top-tier universities, as they are hired to teach only and are not expected to do research. Often they do not hold tenure-track positions and are contractual only.
3. One promotion and tenure committee turned down an applicant for promotion and tenure by telling her that she needed 100 percent in each category!

Bibliography

Carper, William B., Carl Gooding, Jim Pope, and Ernest b. Uhr, (July 2006). “Academic Street Smarts,” *Decision Line*, Volume 37, No. 4, pp. 4-8. ■