



Essential Tools for Prospective and Early Career School Psychology Faculty

BY DANIEL NEWMAN & THE NASP EARLY CAREER WORKGROUP

The majority of recent school psychology graduates are employed in school-based settings (Guiney, 2010), while only a small number choose to pursue academic careers. Accordingly, there exists a shortage of school psychology trainers (Little & Akin-Little, 2004). Despite awareness of the shortage of academic career pursuits in school psychology and the potential relationship this has to challenges in tackling such a role (see Little & Akin-Little; Stark, Perfect, Simpson, Schnobelen, & Glenn, 2004), few if any resources currently exist to support early career school psychology faculty. The following are some key considerations for prospective and/or current early career academics.

IS AN ACADEMIC POSITION RIGHT FOR ME?

Upon graduation, you may have several employment options, such as working in the schools as a school psychologist, postdoctoral positions, research positions, or working with a specific population of students. When deciding whether an academic career is the right choice for you:

- Discuss your options. Identify trusted individuals with whom you can talk about your decision including university faculty, practicum or internship supervisors, mentors (e.g., former supervisors), colleagues, peers, and family.
- Remember, every academic position is different. Positions vary in terms of expected emphases of the role, composition of faculty, opportunities for mentorship, degree offered to students, and program culture. Instead of deciding whether or not you want to be an academic, decide if a particular opening matches your interests and skills.

WHAT ARE THE CENTRAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FACULTY?

The three primary roles of faculty include teaching, scholarship, and service. Although expectations for each role may differ per university, there are three primary areas of responsibility typically expected of faculty. These include:

- *Teaching.* Quality instruction and advising, the development of curriculum, and supervision embedded within courses
- *Scholarship.* Research, publications, presentations, and grants
- *Service.* Service to the institution (e.g., serving on committees), to the profession (e.g., involvement in state or national organizations such as NASP), and to the community (e.g., consultation with a local school district)

HOW DO FACULTY MEMBERS ACHIEVE PROMOTION AND TENURE?

The tenure process has unique features at different institutions; however, becoming tenured typically requires successful achievement of faculty roles and responsibilities. Tenure-track faculty can apply for promotion and/or tenure approximately every 5 years and, if successful, move from assistant to associate to full professor. Some institutions allow for promotion and tenure earlier. Institutions also vary with regard to allowances for maternity leave prior to submitting tenure applications. It is advisable to talk with experienced colleagues early on to prepare for this process, and to learn the specifics regarding promotion and tenure at your institution. Here are some examples of what may be required:

- *An annual plan.* Work with the department head to develop an annual plan including goals and benchmarks in the areas of instruction, scholarship, and service.
- *Documenting progress.* Documentation may include development of a personal statement supporting your work as well as artifacts evidencing accomplishments (e.g., course evaluations, articles, presentation slides, program contributions). This is typically completed annually and reviewed by the department chair.
- *Submission of a tenure dossier to be evaluated by promotion and tenure committee.* This is completed upon application for promotion and tenure and reviewed by colleagues.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES OF BEING AN EARLY CAREER ACADEMIC?

Being an early career faculty member brings several challenges. First of all, a steep learning curve includes: (a) learning how to be a teacher even though your training may have emphasized being a practitioner, (b) developing content knowledge and staying up-to-date with advancements in the field, (c) learning how to navigate the politics of the university, and (d) learning how the educational system functions in your new state. Second, eagerness about jumping into the new role can lead to taking on too much at once, and feeling overwhelmed. The following are a few tips for preventing and tackling some main challenges faced by early career academics:

- *Observe.* Sit in on colleagues' classes and incorporate effective practices into your own instruction. Visit schools to learn more about the role and function of school psychologists in your area. Engaging in field visits for practicum students or interns presents a strategy to accomplish this early on.
- *Seek out professional development.* Become involved in local, national, and international professional organizations, including attending workshops and conferences. Subscribe to journals and discuss what you are learning and reading with your new colleagues.
- *Network.* Maintain connections with old friends and colleagues. Simultaneously spin webs in your new academic community.
- *Define your expertise.* Determine what your specific area(s) of interest are and push an agenda forward. Use your expanding network to connect with collaborators. Since your experiences are new, write about them; this is one way to produce scholarly work.
- *Ask questions.* When in doubt, always ask questions. If you are asked to do something and are unsure if you have the time, it is acceptable to state, "I will think about it and get back to you," and discuss it further with your supervisor.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST REWARDS OF BEING AN EARLY CAREER ACADEMIC?

The rewards of being a new faculty are innumerable and include:

- Engaging in an ongoing learning process
- Offering fresh perspectives to colleagues
- Bridging between research and practice
- Developing mentoring relationships with students and faculty
- Impacting future generations of school psychologists (directly) and the individuals they will serve (indirectly)
- Benefiting from tuition reimbursement for dependents, professional development stipends, and typically excellent health benefits
- Enjoying a flexible schedule

In sum, despite some challenges in taking on an academic role, a faculty career can be seen as an opportunity “to do it all” (Stark et al., 2004, p. 395)—teaching, supervising, scholarship, and practice. Given the shortage of trainers in school psychology, the decision to become a school psychology program faculty member is not only a personal choice; it is one that can make substantial professional contributions to our field.

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