

Surviving and Thriving Beyond Your Degree: To Students

Earning your degree and getting that first job is an enormous rush – you survived, you are on your way. This is the culmination of your years of hard work. For graduate students heading into academic jobs, earning a tenure-track position is especially exciting in times when these jobs are hard to find. Your professors and



Lawson

peers have encouraged you to achieve this goal, and everyone is thrilled for you. However, a recent column in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Bradshaw, January 2005) titled "The Bachelorette in Academe" speaks to the underbelly of this exhilarating moment in your career. In my conversations with junior members of our profession, I know that our academic culture is not always as welcoming as it should be. The *Chronicle* piece focuses on the experience of a single woman as she moves to her first job in a small town. However I think her story raises cautionary lessons about feeling lonely and being unsure of how to navigate her work environment that resonate much more broadly.

Our departments can indeed be lonely places for new arrivals. In this column I suggest that we take a careful look at the culture of our departments and institutions and at how we prepare our students for this transition. Academics need and value having space and time for their work. We put a lot of energy into creating quiet space whether by working at home, closing our doors, working in a research office away from the department and so on. We set boundaries to protect our time because of institutional priorities that reward "productivity" in research and teaching. To survive in this environment a junior person must figure out how to negotiate entitlements; how to protect her time, how to say "no" appropriately, how to gain access to funding opportunities, negotiate appropri-

ate teaching loads, etc. But at the same time, our new colleagues need our support as they build a social life, perhaps figure out how to balance starting a family with this consuming work, and are trying to find that elusive work-life balance. While I am focusing on early careers here, it is important to realize that there are

other stresses and struggles that come in mid-career, since so many incentives are now provided pre-tenure (grist for another column).

We need to build/improve our programs of orientation to professional life. Part and parcel of doing this well involves being open to seeing the exclusions built into our current environments (Linda Kerber, March 18, 2005 *Chronicle of Higher Education*). Academic life in particular has an impenetrable culture that is steeped in white, middle class cultural codes. In order to create inclusive and supportive workplaces we need to build more open "communities of practice" which allow us to reflect on how existing practices have made our workplaces unfriendly to many. This is important work because it those who have felt excluded: women, people of color, gay/lesbian people, foreign-born, those who were first to attend college in their families, the "physically challenged" and others, can teach us a great deal about what is dysfunctional about our communities by understanding where they don't fit in and thrive.

Two of our AAG initiatives can provide some leadership in building healthy departments and in diversifying the discipline. However, the real work of changing disciplinary practices must go on in departments themselves. We want to work with you to create more open, ethical work environments that support full and humane lives. Within our depart-

ments and our institutions we need to develop programs that prepare students for transitional moments in their careers, programs that deal with professional ethics, that create supportive and open environments for learning, career planning, time management, and balancing work-life. We need to provide guidance on the issues facing dual career couples and on questions about starting a family in graduate school or pre-tenure. We need to work to take family care (not just child care) out of crisis mode by creating flexibility and recognizing that care-work as an integral component of all our lives (Lawson, November 2004, *AAG Newsletter*). Not only is care-work constantly present for all of us, but this work contributes to retention, our individual creative work, as well as the health of departments and our society.

The AAG is leading a new National Science Foundation project called "Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography" (Solem, "From the Meridian," April 2005, *AAG Newsletter*). This project focuses on enhancing department's effectiveness in preparing graduate students for their professional lives. Michael Solem, Ken Foote, and Jan Monk are leading this research and will issue an open call for departments from across the country to participate. This work is an extension of the Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA) directed by Ken Foote at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The GFDA, which focuses on early-career faculty, has revealed the crucial importance of department culture—meaning the social and professional dynamics of a workplace—for achieving successful and rewarding careers. This project has discovered that junior colleagues thrive when they work in departments that practice democratic openness, provide clear guidance on expectations for success, have a chairperson who mentors, includes all fac-

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James B. Campbell, professor of geography in Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources, has been named Outstanding Scholar in Geography by the Virginia Social Science Association in honor of his lifetime achievements in the discipline. Campbell, a member of the Virginia Tech faculty since 1976,



Campbell

served as Head of the Geography Department head from 1993 to 2002. His research efforts concentrate on areas such as land use, soil and landscape variability, and land reclamation, from the vantage of aerial photographs and related images collected by aircraft and satellites. A full

press release is available at www.vtnews.vt.edu/story.php?itemno=673.

On March 24, 2005, **Grant Thrall**, professor of geography at the University of Florida made a presentation to the Florida Board of Governors showing South Florida universities won't be able to keep pace

with the number of college-aged students predicted to enter the higher education system. Thrall's work as a hired consultant to the board is chronicled in a March 25, 2005 article by the *Gainesville Sun* entitled "University heads try to size up Fla. Boom." Thrall's report to the board is available at

<http://web.clas.ufl.edu/users/thrall/fbog/index.htm>.

Paul Sutton, assistant professor at the University of Denver's Department of Geography, was quoted at length in a March 28, 2005, online CNN story entitled, "Exurb Growth Challenges U.S. Cities." The story is available at www.cnn.com/2005/US/03/27/urban.sprawl/index.html.

AAG fifty-year member **Brian J.L. Berry** was honored by the College of Arts and Sciences at his alma mater, the University of Washington, as an alumnus who "embodies a commitment to lifetime learning and active citizenship."

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ment and urbanization. The assembly of geopolitical empire featured prominently as a central theme in the series' first three volumes and returns again in *Global America* with a critique of the process of expansion, the embrace of Alaska and Hawaii, and the compromise of Indian, Hispanic, and African American cultures. The book's concluding section returns to the global scale to review America's imposition of political influence on Post-War Europe and Asia. This work is a treasure of precise detail and provocative generalization.

Meinig works across all scales to portray the distinctive processes and patterns created by America's nation-building. This book contains ninety-four illustrations, many of them original maps drawn from unconventional perspectives to create a very persuasive cartographic rhetoric. Considering the 345 illustrations in the four volume series, Meinig has also provided his readers with a comprehensive atlas of America's historical geography. Written with clarity and verve, this book, together with its companion volumes, comprise an

unparalleled contribution to American geography.

The Jackson Prize was established to encourage and reward American geographers who write books about the United States that convey the insights of professional geography in language that is interesting and attractive to a lay audience.

To nominate books for the 2005 Jackson Prize, send nominations to the Jackson Prize Committee by December 31, 2005. Further details are available at www.aag.org/Grantsawards/jackson_prize.cfm.

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ulty in governance and advocates for junior colleagues. We are taking these insights directly to department chairs at the 2005 Healthy Departments Workshop in Maine.

GFDA research also demonstrates that mentoring programs can have very positive impacts. My own best mentors have been outside my own department, where evaluation and mentoring are not blurred together. The AAG has networks already in place that could form the basis for mentoring. We have many specialty groups and listserves that bring like-minded geographers together. These groups could easily organize mentoring programs which reach well beyond our home departments

and that deal with all aspects of living as an academic, surviving our first job and building balanced and rewarding lives.

I wanted to address this column to students and new faculty, but of course these concerns and the need for changes can benefit all faculty and the overall health of departments. I don't intend to send a depressing message, quite the opposite. I want to highlight that the AAG and your senior colleagues recognize these challenges and are working to make positive changes. This is work worth doing for all of us because it improves retention, harmony, and the overall health of our departments. I encourage you as students

and new faculty to reach out to networks that already exist for support, and to remain involved with the AAG because the Diversity Task Force, the Healthy Departments Initiative, the EDGE project, and the specialty groups provide numerous opportunities to build professional networks and to be involved in committee work and leadership that provides professional experience and allows you to work on issues you care deeply about.

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