

Looking for Work in the Halls of Academe

Finding an Academic Job

By Karen Sowers-Hoag and Dianne F. Harrison
Sage Publications, 1998, \$22.40 (paperback)

Reviewed by: Kerry S. Webb

Scholars spend years preparing for a faculty assignment at an institution of higher education. But very little, if any, of this training deals with the real life issue of finding an academic position in higher education.

So it was a joy to discover this recent publication by Karen Sowers-Hoag, a professor of social work and dean of the College of Social Work at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and Dianne F. Harrison, dean and professor at the Florida State University School of Social Work.

The two have produced a solid effort that offers practical insights into every step of the process of acquiring a full-time faculty position.

Finding An Academic Job begins with a brief preface that describes the readership for whom the book is written—graduate students and recent doctoral graduates. Throughout the book, the authors, with 35 years experience in higher education between them, give candid and useful advice.

In chapter one, "What Colleges and Universities Look For in New Faculty," the authors explain that faculty shortages began in the mid-1990s and are projected to continue into the next century. They empha-

size the importance of fit between institution and individual and offer a cursory explanation about the differences among higher education institutions.

The authors then provide an overview of the contents of the remaining six chapters and epilogue, before closing with a brief summary. The remaining chapters also conclude with summaries that don't seem to serve any real purpose. Otherwise, the book is well written, easy to read, interesting, and extremely practical.

Chapter two, "Preparing Your Credentials Early," advocates a strategy that includes obtaining the doctoral degree and establishing a track record that will appeal to employing institutions.

The authors encourage graduate students to begin assembling a portfolio of their best efforts as they work toward completion of the doctoral degree. They place special emphasis on developing and perfecting one's teaching skills.

The authors also encourage graduate students to build a reputation of successful achievement through course evaluations, publications, paper presentations, grant writing, departmental service, and networking.

Chapter three, "Matching Your

Credentials and Preferences to the Job Market,” goes into greater detail about “good fit.” The authors stress the importance of knowing the job market in your discipline and how your credentials and qualifications match with current job openings.

The book offers practical strategies for gathering information in this area and lists a number of factors to consider before deciding on what kind of institution you want to approach. Readers will find an excellent overview of institutional characteristics here and a discussion of the academic supports and resources that job candidates should consider.

This chapter closes with a discussion about matching one’s personal characteristics to the institution under consideration. The book’s emphasis on the compatibility of individuals and institutions is insightful and thought-provoking.

Chapter four, “Your Search and Preparing Your Portfolio,” offers a step-by-step explanation of how the search process works, from both the university’s perspective and the candidate’s end. The reader will find detailed instructions for conducting an effective search using traditional methods—and also some advice on using the Internet and other electronic tools.

The authors leave no stone unturned in their description of the job search process. You may know little about this process before reading this chapter, but you’ll be equipped to respond like a veteran once armed with this new information.

The authors offer advice on designing an effective cover letter and a complete explanation, followed by step-by-step instructions

for pulling together a curriculum vitae or resume. This chapter reads much like a “how to” handbook and contains invaluable information for the academic job seeker.

Chapter five, “Applying For and Getting the Position,” discusses the various steps of the interview process. The authors offer tips on how to respond during each phase of the interview process, from initial telephone screening to the face-to-face interview.

Also included is a comprehensive overview of both the face-to-face interview and the campus visit—the most critical phases of the job-seeking process. Candidates will face their first interview with complete confidence once they’ve equipped themselves with the information in this chapter.

In chapter six, “Negotiating a Job Offer,” the authors encourage candidates to work diligently on the search for a faculty position until they receive the kind of offer they desire. There’s important advice on how to respond to a phone call from a university offering the candidate an academic position.

The authors discuss when to give an answer, how to ask questions and clarify information, how to negotiate for the things you really want, and what to do when the institution offering a position is not your first choice.

The last part of the chapter deals with accepting and rejecting job offers. Through all the advice, the authors encourage a positive, straightforward approach that displays character, honesty, and integrity.

Chapter seven, “Dual Career Issues,” focuses on problems for dual professional career couples

and offers strategies and potential solutions to many of the challenges these job candidates faced when considering a job offer.

The book's epilogue addresses what to do if you can't find an academic position, offering practical advice for improving your marketability and bolstering your resume. The authors' suggestions are creative and encouraging and may increase the earning potential of the graduate student when the search for a full-time faculty position finally results in a job offer.

Sowers-Hoag and Harrison have sought to provide a useful resource for academic job seekers

who hope to join the ranks of faculty in higher education. They have created a resource that every serious-minded candidate should own. The information is comprehensive, well-organized, easily understood, and—above all—useful. ■

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