The Academic's Handbook

FOURTH EDITION

Revised & Expanded

Lori A. Flores and
Jocelyn H. Olcott,
EDITORS

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Acknowledgments

Many thanks to all the wonderful authors in this volume who generously contributed thoughtful, creative, often provocative ideas about how to approach various aspects of academic life and life beyond the academy. Duke University Press put together its characteristically expert team to bring this volume into the world, starting with soliciting reports from two very helpful anonymous readers. Editorial associate Alejandra Mejía shepherded this volume through its complicated journey. Project editor Ellen Goldlust carefully directed the production process, polishing prose and eradicating typos along the way with Suze Schmitt. Chad Royal, Christopher Robinson, and Matthew Tauch and Courtney Leigh Richardson also assisted with getting this book into print. Above all, Gisela Fosado brought the two of us together and inspired us with her vision for a new edition of *The Academic's Handbook* that would reflect the many ways the academy has changed as well as the many ways it has yet to change. It has been an honor to endeavor to live up to that vision.

Introduction

LORI FLORES AND JOCELYN OLCOTT

What might I be able to negotiate for when accepting a new job? What service requests are okay to say "no" to? What goes into writing a renewal, promotion, or tenure letter (my own or somebody else's)? How do I successfully balance my work and personal responsibilities? How do I get funding for my research and publish my research? What strategies will make my teaching more manageable and pleasurable? This handbook helps demystify academia and answer common questions we encounter over the course of our careers.

The amount of time and physical and emotional energy required to make it through graduate school, and then pursue and keep a career in academia, is significant. Most of us embarked upon our academic journeys because we love the combination of research, writing, and teaching; helping others learn and being lifelong learners ourselves; saying something valuable to our discipline or the wider public; and being able to live—to varying degrees—a "life of the mind." It can be hard, however, to remember that passion when you encounter the realities of sustaining an academic career. There is Impostor Syndrome ("Everyone will discover that I don't really belong here"), isolation ("Is anyone else here? Am I the only one feeling this way?"), the uncertainty of the job market, burdensome teaching loads, financial strain, the need to navigate delicate political relationships, and the challenge of building a supportive network that promotes your intellectual vitality and personal wellness. Academia itself has changed so dramatically in recent years that trusted mentors may be struggling themselves to navigate this new terrain.

This Fourth and Revised/Updated Edition of *The Academic's Handbook* aims to provide helpful advice to academics at every career stage, from entering the job market, through one's first job and (for those on this track) the process of getting tenure, and then onto negotiating the challenges of accepting leadership and administrative roles at their institutions. The last edition of the handbook was published in 2007, and we are excited to offer an updated edition that reflects important changes and trends in academia over the last decade. We not

only prioritized the gathering of contributors who more accurately reflect the diversity of scholars in the academy but also have included essays that acknowledge the reality that there is no longer a "conventional" or "typical" academic or academic position. This edition tackles topics such as the increasing "adjunctification" of the academy; the debates around technology, social media, and free speech in classrooms and wider campus communities; successful publishing and grant-writing strategies in a changing landscape of resources; and the rising number of mental illness diagnoses among students, staff, and faculty.

Between the last edition and this one, there have emerged many useful academic advice essays, blogs, websites, books, and coaching services. So, what is the added value of a handbook like this one, in an age when you can type in a question or phrase into a search engine and find multiple sources of wisdom? This handbook serves as a complement to these other resources, offering a curated collection of advice from a diverse array of academics and a starting point to formulate questions for an online search or a professional coach. We envisioned, and believe in, this handbook as a tangible thing you can hold in your hands, keep on and pull off your bookshelf, and read and mark up in those times when you want to unplug from the digital realm. Presented together in one volume, these essays will hopefully encourage you to step back and look at your present situation in terms of the longer arc of your career and the wider community of academics. We want this handbook to be not only a gift to the new academic as they embark on their first position but also a resource and comfort to those who have labored in academia for longer—perhaps approaching challenges and opportunities for the first time or perhaps seeking new ways to navigate them. If you're feeling stuck or alone, or wondering about how to take a next step, or want to be inspired by the words and suggestions of your peers, this handbook can be useful in all of those moods and moments.

The amount of daily interaction among colleagues is dwindling, not because we want it to, but because of the increasing demands upon our time and attention. Our present culture of "busyness" and overcommitment, as well as the corporatization of higher education, has resulted in us feeling as if we cannot give ourselves the permission to slow down for something that won't appear on our annual reports, to have longer conversations with our peers and reflect upon how our life is going inside and outside of the workplace. We all have to come to realize that academic work is never done, and will take up as much time and space as we allow it. While we often consider scheduling flexibility as a perk, it can easily foster the feeling that one *should* be working all the time on a big idea, a pile of grading, or an inbox full of email. Think of this handbook as part of your support network as you balance your life's particular set

of responsibilities. It holds within it the voices of multiple colleagues who, in wise and accessible language, affirm for you what is exciting and fulfilling about academic work while reminding you that maintaining boundaries around your labor is not only okay but necessary.

Our contributors—who represent a wide range of personal experiences, disciplines, job titles, and career stages—have generously shared their thoughts because they care about professionalization, demystification, and reckoning with the changed realities of the academic landscape. First, the students we are encountering and teaching have changed. Since 2000, the number of low-income students enrolled in college has increased 15 percent; the number of students who identify as female, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native American/Alaskan Native have each increased 29 percent; the number of Black students has risen by 73 percent; and the number of Latinx students has increased by 126 percent. In 2015, 41 percent of college students were 25 or older.[1] Our students are diverse not just along these lines of race, sex, class, and age, but able-bodiedness and learning ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, religious and political ideology, immigration and citizenship status, and can range in educational background from "legacy" to "first-gen." In their essay "Teaching the Students We Have, Not the Students We Wish We Had," Sara Goldrick-Rab and Jesse Stommel point out that "Today's college students are the most overburdened and undersupported in American history. More than one in four have a child, almost three in four are employed, and more than half receive Pell Grants but are left far short of the funds required to pay for college."[2] These challenges are only compounded by other personal concerns such as being a transfer or international student, a student in need of learning accommodations, someone who has experienced trauma, or someone who lives with the constant fear that they or their family members will be deported. Faculty members must give attention, care, and compassion to this wide range of students.

Academia has not kept up, however, with recruiting and retaining faculty members who meet and reflect this level of student diversity. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the fall of 2013, Asian/Pacific Islander faculty made up only 10 percent of full-time faculty at postsecondary degree-granting institutions, Black faculty only 6 percent, Latinx faculty only 4 percent, and Native faculty less than 1 percent (these numbers exclude faculty who identified as multiracial). In 2015, the number of faculty members of color (including adjunct and visiting faculty) stayed fairly consistent at 23 percent. When we count only tenured faculty, the number falls to 17 percent.[3] Women, though they are getting hired almost on parity with men for academic positions, suffer a tremendous pay gap upon hiring that follows them throughout their

career if unchecked. Their numbers also drop upon tenure (only 38 percent of tenured faculty were women in 2015). If one is a younger woman or woman of color, statements that directly or indirectly communicate "you don't look like a professor" have sparked Twitter hashtags and movements such as #ThisIsWhatAProfessorLooksLike to demand the same respect and recognition readily conferred upon many white male faculty members.

This failure to retain and promote underrepresented academics is multifaceted. Real sexism and racism are at play, along with the burnout of faculty of color and women through too many service and mentoring demands. For many of us, these requests appeal to the aspirations that first drew us to academia, but they also can leave us feeling overburdened and exhausted. In addition, a lack of robust mentoring structures and transparency about expectations may result in many feeling as though they aren't properly "clued in" to the game of academia and how to reach its continuously moving goalposts.

A second sea change that has taken place since the last edition of the handbook has been the increasing casualization and precarity of academic labor. The recession of 2008 had tremendous ripple effects that have been compounded by the 2020 pandemic. Graduate school applications increased, while a backlog of people already looking for academic jobs piled up as presidents and deans instituted hiring freezes. Today, the academic job market is fiercely competitive, as immensely qualified scholars contend for a shrinking number of jobs and an even smaller number of tenure-track jobs. Some of the essays here discuss academic life off the tenure track and its different destinations, which range from leaving academia altogether to embracing and thriving in a non-faculty position in an educational setting. Those in privileged tenured positions must become better attuned to how to advocate for their colleagues and students in more vulnerable positions, even as they endure their own pressures and frustrations. Very few academics today can enjoy comfortable travel and research funding, or take for granted the autonomy and stability of their departments and programs.

Although academic life has changed radically since the previous edition of this handbook, we still have the capacity to shape the terms of our employment (as ever, in conditions not of our own choosing) through the choices we make about where to dedicate our time and energy. To that end, the three parts of the handbook offer aerial-view and close-up advice that will help you feel better prepared for changing times. Part I, "Your Career Arc from Grad School to Retirement," opens with an essay that guides you from the job market to signing a job contract. The essays that follow address how to negotiate contracts, navigate departmental politics, and consider a variety of careers. For those who pursue a career on the tenure track, two chapters explain how to make strategic

choices along the way to tenure, and words of wisdom about how to keep working in a healthy and sustainable way after this milestone is reached.

Part II, "The Trinity of Academic Life: Research, Teaching, and Service," delves into these three components of faculty life. The section opens with practical pieces of advice about how to find and apply for sources of funding for your work, make the most of the modern research library, and develop ethical research practices. It continues with seasoned advice on how to prepare your scholarship for journal and book publication, particularly in the changing world of e-publishing.

Amid debates on the usefulness of the lecture and "flipping" the classroom, several contributors offer their take on what works for them when they teach. Two contributions take up the thorny question of how to handle the presence of digital devices in their classrooms, with one describing the benefits of banning them and another stressing their value for promoting inclusivity and neurodiversity. A pair of chapters provide concrete strategies for teaching in large lecture halls and smaller seminars, one of the creators of the #FergusonSyllabus attests to the power of crowdsourcing, and we experimented with crowdsourcing to gather suggestions for creative assignments. Along that vein, we have included a compilation of assignment and assessment ideas that we crowdsourced from professors over social media. Several contributions in this section offer advice about how to make classrooms welcoming to all students, including those historically underrepresented in college classrooms. The final four pieces in the section on teaching explore ways to take teaching into the broader world, whether in your home communities, local prisons, or on another continent.

The section about service discusses mindful mentorship and advising; the significance of peer evaluations; questions to ask yourself before deciding to take on a service commitment; and how to design a course that engages with and serves the wider community.

Part III, "Issues in Today's Academy," discusses the big questions we might have about fashioning our identities and lives as academics. Two public intellectuals discuss their relationship with social media, while another essayist discusses academic freedom and free speech. The following piece considers another aspect of the digital revolution's impact on academia, pointing to the need to redesign student evaluations in the age of internet bullying. A co-written piece on balancing work and family, penned by two professors who adopted children in the United States and in Scotland, provide a transnational perspective of academic parenthood. Essays on the corporatization of the university, sexual harassment, and building up intellectual community and town-gown relations round out this final section.

The experience of meeting each other and working together on *The Academic's Handbook* has taught us so much about the need for dialogue and collaboration, on multiple levels. We come from different personal backgrounds and teach at different kinds of schools, but we share important observations about what's exciting and what's problematic about academia that made us eager to update this volume. We want our readers (and ourselves) to be able to pick up this handbook when it's been a hard day, when we need some inspiration in our classroom or department meeting, or when we need to remind ourselves that it's okay to say a "yes" or a "no" to something. This handbook is a part of your community of support, and we look forward to continuing to update this work as it is needed. While there is so much more to discuss beyond what is covered here, the essays here continue much-needed conversations and hopefully extend the promise that academia can be a profession you can navigate, shape, and enjoy.

NOTES

1. Manya Whitaker, "The 21st-Century Academic," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2 January 2018 (https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-21st-Century-Academic/242136/).

2. Sara Goldrick-Rab and Jesse Stommel, "Teaching the Students We Have, Not the Students We Wish We Had," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 December 2018 (https://www.chronicle.com/article/Teaching-the-Students-We-Have/245290).

3. Whitaker, "The 21st-Century Academic."