



3.5.1 Arrived! But new challenges

“It took me a while after completing my degree to really begin to see myself as “faculty” and not “recent graduate”. This transition happened for me as I began to empathize more with my fellow faculty members, and to take on my responsibility to both support and set boundaries for the students.” (Holly)

As this quote from Holly reminds us, it can take time to complete the transition from PhD candidate to academic. Our research participants found they needed to make adjustments at home as well as at work.

Work within your broader life

Taking on a new position often involves moving universities, sometimes cities and not infrequently countries. Clearly this impacts on many aspects of your day-to-day life. Ginger’s experience is not uncommon as she dealt with ‘having moved to a new city, started a new job, and that first term I was teaching five brand new courses.’ Nellie found herself losing the daily support of her family: ‘having to leave my family and going into uncharted waters—it’s scary.’

You may also have family or caring commitments, which can add to the challenges you face and adjustments you need to make. For example, CM and Fracatun were concerned about their children dealing with English as another language. Fracatun also revealed how relocation can seriously affect partner employment, as reflected in this quote about his partner’s search for work in a new country:

But the most difficult part really is with my wife because [it was] more difficult for her to find a job than what we thought...she really had to start from scratch in a way because she has to learn [the language] first and to reach a good level, and she has been doing this for one year now and she still has another year to do this.

Anticipating and planning for the changes beyond work will help you, and your family deal with the transition.

Work itself

Often you will need to join a new organization with different institutional policies and departmental practices. You will need to spend time finding out how things work (within and beyond your department) and identify reliable sources of accurate information. This will help to navigate your new institution and strengthen your local network of contacts.

Investing in learning about the resources and policies in your new organization runs alongside other tasks: a) fitting in, b) learning to carry out your range of responsibilities, and c) building your external profile (if you are doing research).



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Fitting in: Of course, as part of the selection process, you will have already shown how you think you ‘fit’ the job description. But the task now is fitting in with your colleagues – not always easy as Brookeye notes:

One worry of mine is there is one colleague that I think I could collaborate with a lot and we just don’t communicate in the same way and I’m co-teaching with this person as well ...so I’m a little bit worried about that, but I think it will come around after a little bit of time and more discussion, or at least I hope.

Carrying out your responsibilities: Newly appointed academics in our research were frequently surprised by the breadth of their multiple responsibilities, which Brookeye described as ‘ramping up.’ One frequent surprise was the responsibility for administrative work. As Barbara noted:

I’m balancing some administrative work with teaching and then grant applications and conference proposals and, you know, a lot of teaching in graduate/undergraduate ...the administrative jobs ...I work on the annual report for the department ...My daily life, you know, I’m working with students, correcting grant proposals, like writing ...I’m working on the committee level ...

While many people enjoy the opportunity to be involved in a range of activities, you will find yourself having to set priorities; this exercise distinguishing urgent and important activities might be helpful.

Building your external profile: While you will likely have been working on this already, it is good to continue to invest in networking, always with the goal of creating reciprocal relationships, as Epsilon describes so well:

You present [at conferences], certain people take notice, and you start discussions ...you end up with meeting people who have similar interests ...and once you ...build up that network, you have the ability to call on them to answer certain questions if there is something in their work you don’t understand, or ...if they have some data that you would like some access to—your approach versus their approach—they are open to that because they know you and they like to get cited – so it works both ways.



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