

Transition Part One: 1999-2004

William Douglas Woody, University of Northern Colorado

I am still in transition from graduate school to the professoriate. I completed my PhD at Colorado State University (CSU) in 1999. I spent two and a half years at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire (UWEC), and then I transferred to the University of Northern Colorado (UNC), where I have worked for the last two and a half years, earning tenure in May, 2004. Both universities are regional public universities with approximately 10,000 undergraduates. UWEC enrolls nearly 500 graduate students, and the Carnegie Foundation classifies it as a Masters University I; UNC enrolls approximately 3000 graduate students and is classified as an Intensive Doctoral/Research University. In both positions, my workload has officially been 60% teaching, 20% research, and 20% service. My transition from graduate school to the professoriate has been academically challenging but culturally difficult.

Teaching

As a graduate student at CSU, I had more opportunities to teach than most graduate students, and the extra experience has paid dividends. First, in Wayne Viney I had an exceptional advisor who is an inspiring master teacher. Second, I completed an excellent interdisciplinary course on university teaching from Frank Vattano and Jack Avens. Third, I had several other strong teaching models throughout the department, the university, and the region, including Edouard Thai, Michael Losonsky, Edie Greene, and Michael Wertheimer. Fourth, I taught at or beyond a full load throughout graduate school, and I was able to gain experience in a variety of contexts including laboratories, large lecture classes, senior-level capstone courses, and interdisciplinary seminars.

As expected at undergraduate-oriented institutions such as UWEC and UNC, teaching occupies the majority of my time. Preparing, teaching, reading and incorporating new ideas, assisting students, meeting with teaching assistants, and grading can be overwhelming.

Additionally, conducting research and preparing presentations with students takes time. Most of my Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays fill with class and teaching-related activities, even when I continue my graduate tradition of eating at my desk while working or meeting with students. Although I had my eyes open as I entered the professoriate, teaching requires more time than expected and remains the most demanding and the most rewarding of my daily duties.

Research

Wayne Viney truly enjoys working with graduate and undergraduate students, and he provided a model that I followed even before I finished my degree. As expected at undergraduate-oriented institutions, I mentor advanced students in research projects. Additionally, I involve students in each aspect of my own research work from the development of an experimental design through data collection and analysis to a final presentation. Productive research collaboration with students is encouraged at UNC, and UWEC is the UW-System Center of Excellence for Student-Faculty Collaboration. UWEC rewards faculty members with grants as well as with department, university, and state-wide recognition for collaborative research with students. The experiences I had in graduate school helped me prepare for the organization, time commitments, and general challenges involved in conducting quality research with undergraduates.

Advising

As a graduate student, I did not advise undergraduates, and my introduction to academic advising came in seminars combined with advice from senior colleagues. Most of my learning happened on the job via legwork and helpful colleagues. Individual advising meetings with students require a surprising amount of time, particularly during the spring and fall advising seasons when a line of students streams out my door and down the hallway. The time demands of advising often slow my productivity in other areas.

Service

I was least prepared for service, and I walked blindly into my first faculty meeting. More extensive preparation would have been helpful; my introduction to parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules of Order (2000) came in meetings. Additionally, environments are rarely apolitical, and my political fears preceded me into meetings. Such concerns remain paramount for untenured faculty, and learning the political landscape involves intimidating challenges. Despite my initial fears, I have been pleasantly surprised by my colleagues at both universities.

The Unexpected

Faculty positions incorporate many duties, and I have been prepared for a large part of what I face on a daily basis, but for some events preparation is not possible. For example, a student started and ended a paper with theologically-based attacks on William James's pragmatism. Between his opening and concluding paragraphs, however, he devoted several pages to an excellent exposition of conditional truth as a process based in time, context, and available methodologies, and he described how truth can genuinely change as the world progresses and our knowledge grows (see James, 1907/1975a, 1909/1975b). After he read my comments on his paper, he entered my office and faced a personal crisis as he grasped the conflicts between his views of truth and his understanding of his faith. I was unprepared to face this predicament with him.

Throughout the professoriate we may also face more than just intellectual crises. A student-centered approach has been extremely helpful, but emotional crises occur. Knowing the available campus resources for registration, financial aid, and counseling services at my universities has been vital.

Cultural Change

The most significant facets of my transition have been cultural. When I arrived at UWEC, I was shocked, surprised, and a bit frightened. Students, administrators, and my colleagues respected me as an autonomous person with integrity. My colleagues expressed

hope that I would succeed and contribute to the success of the department and the university. I did not handle this situation well.

In Mark Twain's classic, *Puddn'head Wilson* (1894/2002), a slave secretly exchanged a European-American infant and her own infant, who remained a slave because he was 1/32 African American. More than twenty years later the truth became known. Although the transition was excruciating for the newly enslaved adult, his counterpart, the newly freed slave, suffered extensively. "He could not endure the terrors" (p. 178) of the parlor in the house that was now his, and "[t]he family pew was a misery to him" (p. 178) after years of sitting in the slave section of church. Sudden respect and recognition of his personal integrity proved to be more than he could easily face. My transition from graduate student to faculty member, while obviously less severe, has followed similar patterns.

For example, at the conclusion of one of my first department meetings at UWEC, the department head announced that a second meeting would begin and that this meeting would be limited to tenured and tenure-track faculty. I left. I was eligible to remain, but this meeting involved people in whom the university invested, and this group, surely, did not include me. Afterward, a senior member of the department invited me to future meetings, but my feelings persisted. After living through graduate school without recognition of professional integrity, I could only slowly accept my new status, and, as the freed slave learned in Twain's work, the respect and value associated with my faculty position remained uncomfortable.

The environment of graduate school encourages overwork, exploitation, and mistreatment of students (Woody, 2004). Although many graduate programs today allow more autonomy than was typical in the 1950s or the early 1900s, graduate students continue to be devalued as teachers, as researchers, at conventions, and in everyday life, and this devaluation affects them personally as well as professionally. Even those of us blessed with amazing advisors are not immune to the pressures inherent in academic culture. Emerging from what is, for too many individuals, the darkness of graduate programs into the light of faculty positions can be difficult. As the protagonist in Plato's (1961) allegorical cave learned,

not until we emerge into the light can we understand the degree of the darkness. After graduation or, for some, after tenure, many faculty members must relearn to believe in themselves. For many of us, the process moves slowly. For me, it has been only five years. I hope that Transition: Part Two will go more smoothly.

References

- James, W. (1975a). *Pragmatism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1907)
- James, W. (1975b). *The meaning of truth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1909)
- Plato (1961). *The republic*. P. Shorey (Trans.). In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *The collected dialogues of Plato including the letters* (pp. 575-844). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Robert, H. M., III, Evans, W. J., Honemann, D. H., & Balch, T. J. (2000). *Robert's rules of Order: Newly Revised* (10th ed.). Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.
- Twain, M. (2002). *Pudd'nhead Wilson; and those extraordinary twins*. New York: The Modern Library. (Original work published 1894)
- Woody, W. D. (2004). Universities, psychology departments, and the treatment of graduate students. In W. Buskist, V. Hevern, & G. W. Hill, IV (Eds.), *Essays from e-xcellence in teaching* (Vol. 3). Electronic book available at <http://teachpsych.lemoyne.edu/teachpsych/eit/eit2003/index.html>