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The Compleat Academic: A Career Guide (Second Edition)

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The Compleat Academic: A Career Guide (Second Edition) Edited by J.M. Darley, editor., M. P. Zanna, editor., and H.L. Roedigger, editor. 2004. American Psychological Association. 422 pages

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The Compleat Academic, edited by Darley, Zanna, and Roedigger, offers fascinating insights into the formal and informal rules for succeeding as an academic. Written as a compilation of advice by successful psychology faculty, it covers the academic career progression from graduate school, to postdoctoral fellowships, to early and tenured faculty positions. The authors provide a realistic job preview of academic life and offer helpful suggestions for navigating potential pitfalls. Moreover, the book also offers specific advice for special interest groups including women and minorities.

As a first year graduate student, I found this book to be an exceptional introduction to the culture of academia as well as setting my expectations for graduate school and a career as a professor. This book clearly articulated steps for academic success that

helped focus my efforts. For example, *The Compleat Academic* brought to my attention the point that a well-developed *curriculum vita* is more important than a stellar grade point average for career success. This observation has led me to place more emphasis on research pursuits than I would have otherwise. I feel the audience of this book, however, reaches beyond the new graduate student to both individuals more advanced in their academic careers and individuals evaluating the appropriateness of academics as a career choice. Individuals further into their careers will benefit from sage advice for acquiring jobs and balancing the many priorities of academia. Undergraduates evaluating a career in academics will be treated to a representative depiction of life as a professor.

Written in a colloquial manner, *Academic* is neatly organized into six areas including: starting a career, teaching and mentoring, research and writing, diversity in academia, and managing your career over time.

The first section, starting a career, covers the unspoken rules of graduate school, weighing the option of a postdoctoral position, the academic hiring process, and a look at jobs outside of academia. The common thread tying these areas together is motivation. The authors point out that motivation is the highest correlate of success. Furthermore, they offer specific ideas of how to take advantage of opportunities that will allow the reader to jump-start his/her academic career. A simple example is frequently updating one's *curriculum vitae*. When done regularly, it is not time consuming, and encourages consistent improvement and assessment of goals.

The second section, teaching and mentoring, discusses tips for effective teaching as well as some thoughts on mentoring students. This section will be of assistance to anyone who wants expert advice on developing a teaching style, or tips for balancing the conflicting demands of teaching and conducting research. The discussion on faculty-student mentorship may be especially helpful for graduate students who are looking for a reliable mentor. For instance, the authors recommend that starting faculty take on no more than three or four graduate students at a time. Students may want to refer to this section when it comes time to select an advisor.

The third section, research and writing, covers the design and

establishment of a research program, grantsmanship, writing for an empirical journal, and copyright issues. The initiation of a strong research program can catalyze a successful academic career. The areas covered in this section will empower the reader with the information needed to create the ideal laboratory and establish a strong publication pipeline. The authors of this section place an emphasis on collaboration for the purposes of creating new empirical advances through a multi-disciplinary approach. Taken as a whole, this section reiterates the maxim that motivation is the key component of a successful career.

The fourth section, orientation to the academic environment, is a behind the scenes look at academic politics. The main thrust of this section is to provide insight into how departmental decisions are made. It addresses such questions as: Who makes the decisions that affect my career? And, how do I gracefully balance my research program and the direction of my department? The authors suggest that the best way to conduct a research program is to understand the context in which that program and the institution function. The authors assert that institutions differ in their specific political make-up, and provide guidelines for discovering the rules of the political game.

The fifth section, diversity in academia, is a discussion about the role of women and minorities in the academic field, as well as the challenges they may face. Many of the essays in this section describe academia in terms of its culture. The essays give insight into how women and minorities can adapt to the “culture” of academia through steps such as possessing a strong personal identity, understanding the culture’s beliefs and values, and communicating clearly in the language of the culture. Academics at every level will appreciate this section for its honesty and insight.

The sixth and final section, managing your career over time, is a guide for planning an academic career. The authors break the career path down into its respective parts, and point out common snags and methods of avoidance. Few graduate students realize that within a month of obtaining a new faculty position, the demands of that position can easily triple those of a graduate student. While this can be a daunting prospect, anticipating these demands, and

understanding the rules of the academic game has infinite value. This section clearly lays out the transition that a starting professor will make from researcher to a more administrative appointment. A fascinating chapter of this section is devoted to the years shortly before and after retirement. Options for staying involved in academia after retirement are discussed.

I feel that the only weakness of the book is a lack of detail concerning graduate school. Graduate students could further benefit from a lengthening of the first section. However, it appears that the authors are currently working on a new book entitled, *The Compleat Graduate Student*. I am greatly looking forward to the release of this addition. *The Compleat Academic* provides the reader with a roadmap to a successful career. The authors highlight key success factors at various career stages, allowing the reader to align his or her efforts with appropriate career goals. For those interested in an academic career, this book will be an invaluable resource.

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