



Beginning a Career in Academia: A Guide for Graduate Students of Color

Mack, Dwayne A.; Watson, Elwood; and Camacho, Michelle Madsen, eds.

Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015

Book Review

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Touting itself as “the first scholarly volume to exclusively mentor graduate students of color” (x), this collection of essays offers invaluable insights for navigating the academic job market and working as junior faculty.

This volume is divided into three sections. The six chapters comprising the first division, “Practical Advice for Finding Success in the Academic Job Market,” provide concrete examples of how to deal with various aspects of the job application process. For instance, Michelle Camacho outlines steps from submitting a CV to negotiating terms of hire. Her sample messages illustrate proper email etiquette.

The second part of the book, “Identity, Fit, Collegiality, and Secrets for Thriving in the Ivory Tower,” includes four chapters of advice for avoiding career derailments commonly faced by tenure-track faculty of color. Various professors share their experiences of both hardship and success. Nayeli Chavez-Dueñas and Hector Adames challenge the reader, via “ten reflective questions,” to introspect concerning motivations and commitment to a career in academia (124). Furthermore, their tables “Skills Required for Entry-Level Academic Positions and Alternatives to Strengthen Application” and “Seven Psychological Strengths of People of Color” (132-133) can be referenced daily, for goal setting and encouragement. Every academician would be wise to avoid the pitfalls Elwood Watson highlights in his essay “Fifteen Missteps That Can Derail Faculty Early in a Career.”

The final five chapters make up the segment entitled “Work-Life Balance: Strategies for

Transitioning From Graduate School to the Classroom.” It addresses decisions that scholars of color should make early in their careers to effect sustainable work-life balance. The articles urge both students and faculty to develop healthful ways of being.

A few additions to the volume would enhance what is already a strong collection of essays. An article on the role of social media in the hiring and tenure process for scholars of color would be a welcome expansion. While Watson warns of the dangers of inappropriate social media posts (113), graduate students are also grappling with how to use social media to enhance career prospects. Similarly, a full chapter on crafting and presenting a conference paper would be an elucidating follow-up to Nadine Finigan-Carr and Natasha Brown’s insightful chapter “Navigating Professional Conferences.” Finally, while Tom Otieno’s essay “Transitioning Strategies from Graduate School to Early Career Faculty” explicates different types of academic institutions (74), an expanded orientation to the field would also be beneficial. This could include more explanation of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s classification system (74) and definitions or etymologies of terms such as “research I universities” (9).

This volume is a great resource for new initiates to the academic job market and workplace, as well as for those who already have some familiarity or experience. The short, engaging essays, which can be read in any order, invite scholars to revisit this guide often for help to land a new job or maintain a healthy work-life balance.

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