



The Coach's Guide for Women Professors: Who Want a Successful Career and a Well-Balanced Life

Seltzer, Rena
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Book Review

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Graduate schools produce a good number of well-educated women who then go on to become successful professors, published authors, and administrators in institutions of higher learning. Women in academe are expected to do it all, do it well, and have well-balanced lives outside the work place. Graduate schools do not prepare women for the numerous challenges they encounter in the various facets of academic life. This book identifies challenges and issues related to women's lives in academe and suggests practical and studied tactics to help women thrive in the academic world and in their own lives.

Rena Seltzer has extensive experience as an academic coach and has gathered a compelling amount of data and first-hand experiences from women professors. She acknowledges that surviving in academia is not easy, especially for women and under-represented minorities. Oftentimes, women feel isolated and are not aware that some of the challenges they face are not uniquely their own. By identifying such challenges, Rena Seltzer achieves the goal of bringing awareness to these common experiences. In addition to identifying these challenges at the different stages of academic life, the book offers a deeper analysis of the issues and obstacles of academic life as well as provides practical advice on how to overcome them.

In ten chapters, Seltzer addresses the following topics: How to have more time; Establishing a productive writing practice; Teaching; Work-life balance; Networking and social support; Tenure, promotion, and the academic job market; Authority, voice, and influence; Negotiation; Life after tenure; and Leadership.

The book includes numerous practical tactics, from how to phrase effective emails to how to say no to attractive projects and roles that would overtax an already crowded schedule. This ability to say “no” when appropriate leads to a more productive and balanced life, thereby reducing stress. Each chapter offers a variety of further sources the reader may wish to investigate. The author’s style is engaging and friendly, and her voice comes through as wise and reassuring. Chapters can conveniently be read independently, as fits the reader’s interest.

While the book addresses topics shared by most women across academic disciplines, it can be particularly useful for faculty who teach religious studies or theology since these fields rely heavily on self-reflection and self-giving. The balance between such theologically and pastorally motivated attitudes and the demands of academic and non-academic life is especially challenging.

Anecdotally, all female academics I have shared this book with have expressed great interest in it and admitted they would like or need to read it. One said, “I wish this book was around when I started out!” The book is recommended to all women in academia but also to any faculty at any stage in her or his career who is experiencing some of the same challenges.

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