

Book Review

Solem, M., Foote, K., & Monk, J. (Eds.). (2009). *Aspiring academics: A resource book for graduate students and early career faculty*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. ISBN 978-0-13-604891-6. 240 pages, \$35.20.

Introduction

Aspiring Academics emerged primarily as a result of two National Science Foundation (NSF) funded projects: the Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA) and Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE). The book explores academic professionalization in geography and also provides theoretical and practical knowledge for new career faculty aimed at facilitating their success in research, teaching, and service. Through summer workshops, follow-up seminars, panel discussions, and paper sessions held at professional meetings of the Association of American Geographers (AAG), and the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE), graduate students and early career faculty have enhanced their knowledge and skills for career accomplishment. Both projects provide the book with a disciplinary foundation of empirical data, practical resources, and insights from graduate students and early career faculty on the needs of contemporary academic geographers and how their future growth would require support from different academic bodies (Solem, Foote, & Monk, 2009). The broader goal of the book is to provide a comprehensive guide to graduate students and early career faculty on topics quintessential for a successful academic career. A number of authors, most of whom participated in the two projects, contributed chapters on various pathways to academic success.

Organization of Sections

The book comprises three sections: the first encompasses five chapters focusing on preeminent issues essential for long-term academic success. They include time management, career planning, developing collegial relationships, balancing personal and professional lives, and tenure success. Although most of these themes have been addressed by other scholars, the book's integrative approach, emphasis on moderation, and balancing personal and professional lives allows a more lucid comprehension of issues revolving around career planning and personal management. The second section constitutes five

chapters focusing on enhancing teaching and advising skills. Areas that are of paramount interest to contemporary geography educators such as active learning (learning by doing), designing significant learning experiences, underscoring learning as a constructive rather than a receptive process, teaching ethics, and accommodating diversity and inclusion in teaching are examined. Diversity in teaching, research, and community service leads to a more creative solution to American education challenges in the 21st century (Schwieger, Gros, & Barberan, 2010). The extended role of an advisor and links between advising, teaching, and research are also discussed. The third section comprises four chapters that encapsulate a very crucial component of academic accomplishment: research opportunities and responsibilities. Research-related issues addressed include a practical guide in designing a successful grant proposal, ethical research in practice, academic publishing, and interdisciplinary research. The chapter on academic publishing amplifies the general mechanical aspects of manuscript writing and also pinpoints esoteric activities that occur after manuscript submission. Understanding processes such as the editors' yardstick in evaluating manuscripts, the essence of peer-review, and challenges in revising manuscripts to address reviewers' concerns are paramount in getting one's work published. Increasingly, the ability to secure external grants and engaging in interdisciplinary research are pivotal. While it is unquestionable that interdisciplinary collaboration is on the ascendancy, a major challenge is that participation in such programs is not adequately considered during promotion and tenure decision-making (Solem, Foote, & Monk, 2009, p. 198). Ten actions for a successful proposal are also discussed and in-depth activity guides on two of the actions: 'Start with a Good Problem' and 'Achieve and Communicate Coherence' serve as invaluable strategies to success, especially for those at the budding stage of their academic career. A companion website, (<http://pearsonhighered.com/aag/>), with numerous materials for professional development and community building is also available.

Conclusion

A major contribution of this book to geographers and other professionals is its consistent reinforcement of the inextricable links between research, teaching, and services rather than treating each as tangentially related to the other. Although scholars are aware of the importance of these three pillars of academic success, an integrated approach provides avenues for early academics to understand how teaching as a research process can enhance

teaching effectiveness and aid services. Although the book calls for greater consideration of teaching in tenure and promotion, it gives little attention to the role of student evaluations as a yardstick for appraising teacher effectiveness. The need for new faculty to enquire about the format of student evaluation forms and discern the relative importance of global and specific items would be useful as they seek to improve the quality of teaching/learning (Hobson & Talbot, 2001). On the whole, the book would serve as an integral component of the toolkit for academics that are at the embryonic stage of their career.

References

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