

Prof 101

How to survive as an assistant professor at UW.

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed here are not necessarily shared or endorsed by other members of the department, the department as a whole, or the University of Washington. I encourage you to solicit opinions on all topics from a variety of sources. - SLK

TALKING TO YOUR COLLEAGUES:

- When faculty ask “do you want to have lunch?” say yes whether or not you eat lunch. It is your opportunity to ask questions and bring up concerns. When faculty get busy and forget to drag you out of your office to lunch, invite them instead.
- It is worth figuring out who will be on your tenure committee, and spending time over lunches to educate them about your research.

SAFETY:

- Consider which heavy desk you will dive under during an earthquake. Consider which books or equipment will fly off of your shelves.
- In case of volcano (isn't that hilarious?), enclose dust-sensitive equipment in plastic bags and go home. If a lahar belches out of Mt. Rainier, it probably won't reach UW. If you're nervous, seek high ground.
- You do not need to walk alone across campus at night. Do not feel shy about calling the UW night escort service at 685-WALK (9255). If you feel unsafe, do not feel shy about calling 911. UW is generally a quite safe place, but scary things sometimes happen.

OUTFITTING YOUR LAB / LAB SPACE

- Apply for an office computer through the Faculty Workstation Initiative. Ask.
- UW maintains many software licenses (e.g. MS Office). Don't buy them.
- Helpful book: "At the Helm: A Laboratory Navigator"
- HHMI lab management + safety: hhmi.org/resources/scientists.html
- Ask for discounts or quotes. Bid companies against one another. List price is rarely the actual price.
- Any order >\$3000 counts as equipment and is subject to bid. To avoid this, write a 'sole source' letter to convince UW purchasing office to buy the model you want. Good justifications are a) your model matches somebody else's model or equipment brand at UW, and you need your results to be consistent (give a UW part number of the existing equipment), and b) your desired equipment has attributes that no other piece of equipment has (list those specifically!). Most companies that sell to academia can give you hints about things to include in a sole-source justification, so ask.
- Items over \$1000 may be exempt from state tax, which adds up. Ask. Items over \$2000 are equipment and are not subject to UW overhead.
- The UW surplus office is located down by the water, near the Agua Verde restaurant. They have office equipment and computer parts available for purchase with a UW purchase number. You have to haul your loot away.

BUDGETS, MONEY, AND WRITING GRANTS

- You must attend a mind-numbing UW tutorial on how to administer grants. Opt for an online session. Audit people reportedly like two things. **1)** Review any budget sheets you receive. Write “OK” on each and toss it in a binder. **2)** Pay items in the proportion to how you use them. You can’t buy all gloves on one account, and pipettes on another, and then use gloves and pipettes on both projects. Instead, charge both as 50/50, or whatever logical %.
- Writing a proposal? First, get help on your budget. Second, get help submitting a UW eGC-1 form. Third, finish your proposal before the due date. Staff at UW would like 3 weeks in advance to assemble and route your proposal. Each grant is routed to a minimum of 8 other people for approval. You can watch the routing process online. If you are sharing grant money with another department, add another week to your routing time.
- With the NSF, you submit electronically through Fastlane, and you need an account. For the NIH, you need an eCommons ID (ask about it). The software hoops that you and your secretary will need to jump through to submit and NIH proposal are daunting.
- You may get a call from the NSF/NIH program manager asking “Can you write me a new budget for your submitted proposal? I think you really need \$X thousand less.” Be happy; they are about to fund you.

MONEY, continued...

- If you have a 9-month salary, budget to receive no summer paychecks unless you submit a form to have funds put away for the summer. If you pay yourself summer salary, be aware that a 2-week “vacation” is built into your summer pay. The same bizarre hiatus happens to summer TAs. Warn students on TAs to take a vacation, or pay them as an RAs for the 2 weeks. Ask how other faculty deal with it.
- A UW program gives faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences summer salary or a small grant (\$5000?) twice during pre-tenure - once during your first two years, and again after reappointment. You have to remember to apply for it, and to ask your HR person to set up your summer salary. It will not automatically happen.
- Some faculty will let you borrow their proposals. If a colleague knows about your field, he/she might actually read your proposal and give you advice.
- Thefts are more common around graduation. If students are not in the lab, keep doors locked. Lock your office when you step out, even if for a minute. You have the option to insure your equipment. Scales, cameras, and flatscreens evaporate more quickly than other objects.

SEMINARS

- It is challenging to find out about seminars in other departments. The UW-wide listing stinks. Contact various departments to get on their e-mail lists, or find seminar lists on their websites.
- UW physics faculty have a bizarrely high occurrence of color-blindness.
- If your department sponsors a prestigious named lectureship, host one of these and invite a hot shot in your field before you come up for tenure.
- When hosting any speaker, beat the bushes to get a good audience. Remember that it is difficult for faculty outside of your department to hear about your seminar. If your seminar is potentially of interest to those faculty, don't be shy about directly e-mailing them notices or posting flyers in their elevators.

SECRETARIES AND ASSISTANTS

- If you have an assistant, he/she will appreciate it if you can give him/her a specific estimate of your deadline required on all jobs. As an example, I used to tell my assistant that things were 'no rush' and she had a different interpretation of what this meant than I did, through no fault of her own. Try to be specific and to say "I need this in X weeks/months."

TEACHING (See handout too)

- If a student collapses from illness, call 911 on a cell phone (yours or a student's). In 2007 I had a weird experience: Students noticed that a male grad student was taking notes on a female undergrad. Don't wait to talk to your chair... call the police. All was OK. The older student was conducting UW research involving the younger student, and did not tell us as required.
- Pass out teaching evaluations before the last week. Evaluation scores correlate with students' estimates of their grades. Slacker students who blow off class all term show up the last week. When they realize that they should have done more work, they give you a bad evaluation. Rumor has it that it is better to start off with mediocre evaluations and improve than the opposite.
- Do not post names or full student ID, to comply with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. Instead, post using the last 4 digits of the student ID.
- Fix grade submission goofs by submitting a form in your departmental office.
- Consider not giving your final exam back. (This does not guarantee that your questions will not find their way into a fraternity file cabinet!).
- Freshmen often don't understand grading curves. Make exams worth more than 100 points (e.g. 80/120 rather than 40/60) to decrease wailing.
- I've heard complaints about Kane Hall and that it helps to meet with the hall's tech people to show you the ropes. Ask other faculty for advice.

TEACHING (continued...)

- Decline requests by individuals who want to make announcements during your lecture. If you set up a “GoPost” online thread (through “catalyst”), students can make their own announcements online for lost books, etc.
- Explicitly define cheating/plagiarism in your syllabus, and what your reaction will be. Incoming students are often confused. For example, can text be shared for lab reports? Will you give a “0” for an exam with cheating? Will you forward all cases to the UW disciplinary committee? See the UW faculty handbook on grading for how to assign grades and how to speak to students who might have cheated (<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/>). If you think a student has copied from another, do not return their exams - make copies. A common cheat is revision of exams before a regrade. Make a pdf of exams before returning them. Or instruct graders to make a line at the end of the student work and on page backs. Regrades for work below the mark are bad.
- Students will ask you to grant or help them with an “incomplete” grade, an “X” grade, or hardship withdrawals. Do not agree to anything. Do not even say “I’ll have to ask” or “I’ll think about it” by e-mail. Talk to someone. There are rules about when you can grant these things. In the same vein, students will e-mail you saying that your grading is unfair. Respond politely that this is an important matter, so you are forwarding correspondence to your undergraduate or departmental chair.

SALARY (THE ELEPHANT IN THE CORNER)

- UW salaries are public record, and found in the 'salary book' in Suzzallo (and also apparently online). Few people look at the numbers. That is likely wise.
- A common method of raising your salary is to secure an outside offer from a competitive institution. Typically, UW meets your salary halfway between your current salary and the outside offer. You will be asked to promise that you will not negotiate a pay raise due to another outside offer within 3 years. Unless you are really considering moving, the distraction may not be worth the effort.

YOUR TENURE PACKAGE

- Show a distinction between your postdoctoral and faculty work.
- When you collaborate, make it clear who did what. Grants are also important.
- You will write up a little narrative. Ask if faculty who have just gone through tenure will let you borrow their package so you can see what this looks like.
- Both teaching and service are important for being a good departmental citizen. Do it, and do it well, but don't go crazy at the expense of your research.
- After your department votes on your tenure case, your case goes to the college council, then to the dean, then to the president who informs you that you have been approved for tenure. You get a 7% raise when tenure finally happens (nearly a year after your department vote). Throw yourself a party.

HAVING CHILDREN

- You can get a break from teaching if you (or your spouse) has/adopts a child.
- Call ADVANCE to enquire about any programs to help you and/or your lab while you are involved in caring for a newborn, or during other personal challenges in life. Your department/dean will need to provide matching funds.
- There are rooms around campus in which to nurse or pump breast milk. Some rooms have their own pumps. Tell your group members/staff.
- The waiting list for the nearest UW daycare center ("West Campus") is currently > 2 years, so sign up early. Are you even thinking about having a child in the future? Then sign up. Many faculty love the University Temple Methodist Church daycare. The bad news is that they only accept kids older than 12 months. The good news is that you can easily walk there.
- If you are paying for child care for a kid younger than 13 (I think), you are eligible for the UW dependent care assistance program, which allows you to pay for daycare and/or afterschool care with pretax dollars. It is easy to enroll. You have a choice to either opt for this or the IRS tax break for child care, but I believe that you cannot do both. See here: <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p503.pdf>. My spouse and I file our taxes separately (rather than jointly) so we are eligible for the UW program, and not the IRS program.