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SMALL IS . . . DIFFERENT

A Guide for Newcomers to Small Colleges

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Many of the academics for whom, I hope, this *Handbook* will prove useful will find themselves, by accident or by design, working in a smaller college or university. For some, this will represent a return to a familiar ambience; for others, it will be an entirely new institutional context. For most, it will be a startling shift from a Ph.D. program at a research university. One effective approach to such a new setting is that of the field-based anthropologist: think of the small college as a self-contained culture, explicable primarily through its own rules. The wise field-worker tries to restrain or suppress the customs and patterns of her own cultural context and seeks the underlying mechanisms of the society under investigation unhampered by prejudices.

What follows, then, is less a taxonomy than a laboratory manual or field guide. While lacking the specificity of a Peterson's bird guide ("look, chirping over there, it's a Southern, co-ed, Quaker-affiliated moderately selective private liberal arts college!"), it may, at least, help the neophyte investigator distinguish fin from feather, or, to beat the anthropological metaphor into the dust, matriarchal agricultural society from patrilineal industrialism.

I

Small colleges and universities are "different." They are different, as a class, from large universities, and they are different from each other. Much of this discussion will focus on the first of these sets of differences, trying to make useful generalizations that embrace at least most smaller institutions. But it is vital to remember that small institutions may well resemble each other no more than they resemble their larger kin.

This idiosyncrasy is, in fact, one of the chief characteristics of smaller col-

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leges. There is a sense in which the very comprehensiveness of larger institutions guarantees a certain uniformity: one such school is likely to "comprehend" pretty much the same as another. While there are certainly important (and endearing) individual traits that distinguish even our mega-universities, small colleges tend to be far more unique, even quirky. Because they are not even remotely comprehensive, their strengths and weaknesses—indeed, their inclusions and exclusions—are definitive and essential. What languages are taught? Which sciences? How are humanities departments organized?

A concrete example: even in faculties of roughly the same size, departmental proportions, and instructional personnel may vary dramatically. This can be crucial to an incoming faculty member. Thus, a new anthropologist at one small university may be joining a five-person anthropology department; at another she may find herself the sole practitioner of her discipline in a three-person sociology/anthropology department; at a few institutions, such an anthropologist might be the only person in anthropology *and* sociology in a six-person department of social science. My point is not that any of these arrangements is superior to the other but rather the stark importance of ascertaining *which* one is joining before, rather than after, the fact.

Small institutions are more idiosyncratic, too, because they are usually further from the academic mainstream than major universities. As students of language dialects know, isolated societies tend to develop and evolve in highly individualized directions. Many faculty members at small colleges enjoy being somewhat removed from the intellectual fads (or, depending upon one's perspective, the latest developments) which tend to sweep through the disciplines, and they delight equally in what often appears to be a refreshing absence of careerism. Others, though, chafe at what is undeniably sometimes our parochialism and worry about losing touch with mainstream academe. Happily, a good number strike a reasonable and productive middle course: staying in touch with scholarly trends but not feeling compelled to be constantly au courant.

One key way in which small liberal arts colleges are often different from each other has to do with the extent to which they actually practice the "liberal arts," at least in an old-fashioned, curricular sense. Small colleges and universities, private and public, have been subject to severe strains during the past three decades, and often their nature has changed in response. Some would say that missions have "evolved"; other, more cynical voices proclaim defection. The former president of a fine private liberal arts college, David W. Breneman of Kalamazoo College, finds that over the years the number of institutions truly belonging in that category has shrunk dramatically (to 212 by his count in 1994).¹ He disqualifies institutions in which the majority of undergraduate degrees are awarded in

"vocational" areas. This is a standard which some (including me) may criticize, but the point remains that at many liberal arts colleges, the traditional subject-matter disciplines have been overwhelmed or at least seriously challenged by career-oriented fields such as management, accounting, computer science, environmental studies, sports medicine, statistics, atmospheric science, administration of justice, music recording technology, and so on. (All of these are areas in which it would be possible for students to major at institutions where I have worked which were, in my opinion, genuine liberal arts colleges.) In practical terms, young faculty members must be prepared to put aside purist definitions of liberal education or confine their job search to a small proportion of smaller institutions.

An important lesson: never assume one small college is like another. It can be dangerously misleading to presume that an idyllic memory of undergraduate days on a small campus is a reliable template for the entire spectrum of institutions of, say, 500 to 3,000 students.

II

Small colleges tend to have small departments, and this is a fact of constant consequence. A professor in, say, a history department of four, or an economics faculty of three, or, for that matter, a music or classics program with a staff of one (I worked at a good liberal arts college which did, in fact, have single-person "departments," complete with full-fledged departmental majors, in these two areas) will face a different kind of teaching load than does the member of a department of twenty-five, fifty, or a hundred. Most teachers at small colleges teach "out of their field," if by "field" we mean the subject specialty in which doctoral research was done. An English professor with a dissertation on non-Shakespearean Renaissance drama will probably teach Chaucer, freshman composition, introduction to the humanities, and British literature survey; an ichthyologist will face classes in introductory biology; an Islamicist might teach courses with titles like "Religion in America," or "The Old Testament," or "Varieties of World Religions." Those of us who love small colleges delight in this demand for generalists. It keeps us alert and learning. But it also tends to mean that we find it easy to drift away from staying current in non-Shakespearean Renaissance English drama, ichthyology, and Islam.

It is also the case that in many smaller institutions, faculty members will teach so far "out of the field" that they are, in fact, out of the entire ballpark. If the institution has a large core or interdisciplinary program, our hypothetical Ph.D. in Jacobean tragicomedy will find himself instructing a course in "Interdisciplinary Studies 101" or "Christianity and Culture," or "Humanities I: Classical

Antiquity." Many thrive on such opportunities to integrate and "stretch"; many others find the experience disorienting, at least at first.

Another obvious implication of small departments at small colleges is the dearth of colleagues in a faculty member's specialty area. The ichthyologist or Islamacist will perhaps find herself or himself the only scholar with such an interest on campus. So, for example, it is often impossible to find a colleague on a small college campus who can give a careful and professional reading to a draft of an article or paper (though increasingly, in the era of e-mail and attachments, this is less and less a problem). It is easy to solicit the response of interested amateurs, or a critique of the style, but the subject matter will usually be foreign to departmental peers. Graduate students are often habituated to deep and intense discussion of the latest research or theoretical development within their subdiscipline. On the small college campus the absence of such interactions may be lamented. It is important, therefore, to ascertain the level of faculty development support available at an institution to fund travel to professional meetings, leaves, and the like.

At most small colleges, the normal teaching load is six to eight classes per year (although some range as low as four per year, and others up to ten), three or four per semester. Usually, these loads are not reduced for unusual research assignments, or other burdens, although course relief may be possible. In a given semester, two or three of the courses taught will have different preparations—for the neophyte faculty member, this may mean three or so new preparations a term for a while. A bizarre but instructive anecdote: at one point early in my teaching career, a sudden illness of one departmental colleague and a failure in the hiring process designed to add another to the college roster resulted in my teaching six different courses, each with a separate preparation, in the same semester. I survived; I still wonder if my students learned much that term.

Concatenating the size and the shape of a typical faculty load at a small college, we have a pattern that might manifest itself thus. A member of the biology department, with a Ph.D. in freshwater ichthyology, might teach a year-long introductory course ("Biology 101"), with lab, surveying both botany and zoology. First semester, that instructor would perhaps also have a midlevel course such as "Principles of Animal Biology" and an advanced section in, say, "Animal Physiology." Second term would see the second semester ("Biology 102") of the introductory course, another more advanced offering, say, "Aquatic Ecosystems," and potentially an interdisciplinary contribution, for example, "The Sea in Science and Art." This hypothetical situation is by no means extreme. Add to such a schedule the potential for a dozen major and/or first-year advisees, service on a college-wide committee or two, work on a departmental curriculum review, weekly department meetings, monthly faculty meetings,

and nomination to an ad hoc committee preparing for regional reaccreditation. This is a workload designed to combat boredom; it is not one likely to facilitate finishing that first scholarly book, research project, or an article derived from a dissertation!

Most small-college teachers are in their campus offices most of the day throughout the workweek. Many do not even have a functional office elsewhere. Evenings and weekends on campus are not uncommon (the political science awards dinner; a reception for parents on the Saturday afternoon of Family Weekend). The research university model of a division of time between campus office, classroom, private study, and research library or site tends to break down at the smaller institution, with the first two becoming dominant, even all-consuming.

III

Small academic departments also shape the social and general intellectual lives of academics in small colleges. The young academic in a research department of seventy-five, with its own building, parking lot, coffee and mail dispensaries, and the like, will find herself fraternizing mostly with departmental colleagues. In some situations, only the occasional university committee assignment, an accident of residential neighborhood proximity, or a shared school or child-care provider for kids will bring together institutional faculty from different departments or divisions. It may well be possible, at an Ohio University or University of Minnesota, for a French teacher to spend an entire career without the opportunity to interact with professors of electrical engineering or agricultural economics. This is far less likely, indeed, often downright impossible, at a small college. Most institutions with fewer than a hundred faculty members, for example, have democratic as opposed to republican faculty governance procedures: the monthly or weekly "faculty meeting" is a meeting of the entire college faculty. Four or five departments, sometimes with no apparent organizing rhyme or reason, will be housed in the same building; a central campus coffee shop will serve as meeting place for the entire community; and so forth. At one institution where I once worked, one building housed the art department and the campus art gallery, the leadership programs office, the management and accounting department, an outreach program for senior citizens, a small conference center, and the university development office! At many small schools, faculty members make their deepest friendships — and sometimes their most interesting and gratifying intellectual relationships as well — across departmental or divisional barriers. Indeed, those "barriers" are usually permeable membranes.

By way of contrast, at the Twin Cities campus of the University of Minnesota, for example, faculty and students of engineering are across the Mississippi River in Minneapolis from the law school, and those in social work or veterinary science are a pleasant bus ride away in Saint Paul.

Often, the sorts of interdisciplinary or core programs cited earlier will greatly facilitate such diverse patterns of personal and professional association. Many such courses are deliberately staffed and planned by faculty members drawn from the widest possible departmental constituencies, and at some institutions, virtually the entire faculty is, over time, drawn into these curricular ventures.

A good tip-off regarding this dimension of institutional culture for the prospective faculty member is to heed carefully the staffing of the search process. If interviewing for a position in political science involves extended discussion with chemists, economists, theater historians, and professors of sports medicine, it is a pretty good sign that the potential employing institution values and expects frequent and deep extradepartmental contacts.

IV

It is always important for new employees, within and beyond academe, to ascertain with accuracy the standards and procedures by which they will be evaluated. Those standards and procedures will be different between small colleges, and there will probably be pronounced generic differences between small and large institutions. Almost all higher education enterprises affirm that excellence of classroom teaching is an important criterion for reappointment, promotion, and tenure. Some actually mean it. There are still many small colleges in America today where, practically, pedagogical quality is the sole basis for major career decisions. In the majority of small institutions it is the most important factor or at least a very important factor. This means that classroom teaching should and may be evaluated with thoroughness and rigor: student course evaluations will be heeded; classroom visitations by deans or chairpersons will be regular and more than perfunctory.

Note whether or not actual teaching, to actual students, is an important element of the hiring process: if it is, chances are it will also be a significant element in the review process as well.

This does not, of course, mean that research, publication, community service, and other factors will be excluded from evaluative decisions. It is, therefore, very important for the faculty member at an early point on the career path to come to a clear understanding regarding the relative weighing of these criteria in the decision-making process, and the means by which effectiveness — as a teacher, scholar, community citizen, and so on — will be assessed. This under-

standing may not be easily reached. In many institutions, official pronouncements in this area may not always conform to practice. At small, informal, non-union campuses, the regulatory/descriptive faculty handbook is notoriously uneven; some are accurate, others flamboyantly unreliable. The wise newcomer will seek to discuss the evaluation and review process with a few trusted colleagues who have themselves relatively recently been through it, as well as with those who will administer it. Find out what seems to have made a genuine difference, for good or for ill, and be prepared to find that, more often than not, teaching makes the biggest difference of all.

Tangentially related to evaluation are salary and compensation issues. Expect the salary scale at most smaller institutions to be demonstrably lower than at larger and/or public institutions of roughly comparable status. While many small colleges and universities have generous benefits packages that supplement base salary, they are sometimes not as comprehensive as state-mandated programs in the public higher education sector, although usually well above the standards of commercial employers. Expect, too, that (in the private sector at least) salaries will be formally private but in fact virtually public knowledge, and the subject of much semi-informed discussion within the campus community. It is rare for a private institution to publish faculty salaries, but it is even rarer for it to be difficult to get a pretty good idea of individual compensations levels. In sum, you probably won't be paid much, your benefits status will probably be decent but not spectacular, and most everyone with whom you come in contact will know it.

It is also often less expensive to live in a small college town than a major university center, and the events—athletic, cultural, intellectual—of the institution are often free, or almost so, to faculty members, a not-insignificant benefit, especially in smaller, somewhat culturally or recreationally impoverished communities.

v

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, American small colleges exist in a very wide spectrum of religious emphasis. Given the religious origins—indeed, often, the origins in religious fervor—of very many small colleges, this is not surprising

At one end of the scale, there are a number of small colleges that are overtly nonsectarian in foundation and contemporary manifestation. Today's public liberal arts colleges were created as agents of the state. While public small colleges often do provide outlets for religious expression for students, faculty,

and staff, participation tends to be wholly at the choice of the individual, and usually those voluntary options cover some spectrum of religious inheritance. Certainly public colleges teach courses about religion, as an academic discipline—history of religion, philosophy of religion, and the like. But such public colleges will make no denominational claims, at least officially, on students or employees and keep clear the constitutional barriers between church and state college. Similarly, a number of small private colleges, such as Reed College in Oregon, were created as secular institutions and have remained consistently adenominal.

At the other pole are small collegiate institutions that are wholly or primarily in the business of educating clergy for a specific denomination. So, for example, Columbia Bible College confers 100 percent of its undergraduate degrees in "Theological Studies," or Lancaster Bible College (Pennsylvania) "exists to educate Christian men and women to live according to a biblical worldview and to serve through professional Christian ministries."

Many faculty members at Christian colleges are convinced that they have more academic freedom than their colleagues in the nonsectarian institution. Mary Ellen Ashcroft, in an article about teaching at Christian liberal arts colleges, says, "The teacher's responsibility is to make the classroom a safe place for students to bring out their beliefs and look at them and argue about them and decide what they hold dear."² And, she believes, that is far more the case at the Christian institution than at the state university. Comparing sectarian and secular institutions where she had taught, she states, "I feel much more freedom in the classroom, in my office, in the halls at Bethel than I ever felt at the University of Minnesota." She cites James H. Daughdrill, former president of Rhodes College: "Today, research universities are thoroughly secular and comprise one of the few places in America where openly acknowledged religion is not a life option. Consequently, academic freedom has become a casualty at these institutions."³ It is also the case that many of the evangelical colleges require an affirmation of religious conviction of all students and/or faculty, a condition some might find restrictive of academic freedom.

Between the nonsectarian public liberal arts colleges and the denominational seminaries, there is a full spectrum of religiosity. Some institutions, such as Westmont and George Fox, profess a very strong religious character but offer majors and studies in a wide variety of nonreligious subjects, as well as studies in Christian history, theology, the Bible, and the like.

Many colleges retain some elements or vestiges of their religious origins without affirming an overtly sectarian mission. An institution may retain some seats on its board of control for nominees or representatives of a founding denomi-

nation. Some still receive significant or symbolic financial support as a result of historic religious affiliation. Some private small colleges still employ a chaplain, commonly linked to the founding church. Cultural practices of the church may continue to influence life at institutions of religious origin. At Salem College, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the traditional Moravian tea ceremony at Christmas time is celebrated. Just a few miles away, Guilford College in Greensboro, a Friends' college (but with fewer than 10 percent Quaker students), practices government by consensus at every level, from student organizations and faculty committees to major decisions of the senior administrative leadership and the board of trustees, and all meetings begin with prayerful silence.

Roman Catholic institutions are a special class of religious institutions (see *The Academic Revolution* by Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, for a full and thoughtful, if occasionally opinionated, discussion of American Catholic colleges).⁴ Some Catholic schools (Notre Dame, Villanova, Georgetown) have achieved university status. Others, particularly very small, poorly funded, single-sex institutions, have closed or suffered in recent years (e.g., Mt. Senario College in Ladysmith, Wisconsin, and Sacred Heart College in North Carolina). But there remain many small Catholic colleges, coed and single sex, which continue to play a significant role in the American higher education community. These schools (the College of New Rochelle, St. Mary's of California, Notre Dame College of Maryland, St. Scholastica of Duluth) maintain a strong, overt, Catholic emphasis, in population, curriculum, and mission. While certainly "religious colleges," these institutions seem on the whole less assertive about their religiosity than the "Bible colleges" and the more fundamentalist Protestant institutions.

In the 1970s, when I was a young assistant professor at a Methodist-related liberal arts college, I served on a presidential search committee. Among other questions we put to each finalist was one about the candidate's sense of what the college's religious heritage meant at the end of the twentieth century. The successful candidate, Dr. Phil Secor, gave what struck me then and strikes me now as a profound response. He said that the greatest virtue of working at a college with a religious heritage was that it gave one a sense of humor about that work. What he meant, he explained, is that at such colleges, there is always an implicit understanding that no matter how important the daily business of the college—and that work is important—there is a larger theological, cosmological perspective from which the challenges, irritations, triumphs and tragedies of the academic world are little more than a grain of sand.

VI

There is a pronounced difference in the kinds of relationships that develop between teachers and undergraduate students at large and small institutions. At the larger schools, a faculty member may develop a close, mentoring relationship with a handful of strong undergraduate departmental majors. Usually, though, the closer relationships will be with graduate students. In a small college, it is not uncommon for a teacher to teach the same student in courses throughout the undergraduate career, from first semester to graduation. Some such students will not necessarily be majors: it may be, for example, that an accounting major will take two or three theater courses and act in a handful of plays, under the tutelage of one drama professor. Many relationships, with students of varied scholarly bents, will develop at the small college. And often faculty members are deeply involved in student organizations and co-curricular activities. One of the joys of teaching at such schools is the frequent, recurring opportunity to watch undergraduates grow in intellectual and emotional depth during a period of some four years. There is a kind of maternalism about this relationship that some find cloying, but most see as deeply satisfying.

Some of its consequences can be amusing, some touching, and some downright irritating. There are institutions, for example, where it is considered acceptable behavior for students to call professors at any hour of the night and day to discuss out-of-class personal problems, where the pastoral model of the student-teacher relationship is still held by a majority of the faculty, students, and staff. It is also the case that at many institutions the progress and foibles of shared students is a prime topic for faculty conversation. For good or for ill, the passage of higher education privacy legislation has seemed to have little effect upon professorial conversations about students at small colleges around the backyard barbecue cooker.

It is also worth noting that faculty members and students at small institutions will be interacting in numerous ways outside the classroom, on a constant basis. The student one taught in the morning class on *Hamlet* might well be on the Stairmaster next to yours at noon and singing in the concert you attend in the evening. That student whose paper on Plato was really excellent may well turn out to be the school's star quarterback or volleyball shot blocker. Faculty members at small colleges tend to know students as complete persons, not just as classroom personas, and for most of us, that is a great satisfaction.

VII

Faculties at large institutions and at small ones have always played an important role in the governance of institutions of higher education. At small institutions, that role is likely to be sharply different than at larger ones.

A majority of the major institutional governance tasks remain the same, regardless of the size of the school: all colleges and universities need a curriculum committee of some sort, need a personnel review process, need a faculty athletic committee, a library committee, an admissions committee, an academic standards committee, or some general equivalent to these and similar groups. At small colleges, thus, roughly the same number of tasks is distributed among a much smaller pool of workers. While the volume of work is perhaps proportional to the size of the college, the breadth remains more or less constant. Therefore, the faculty member at a small college may find herself serving on committees, study groups, task forces, fact-finding bodies, search committees, and similar institutional extraclassroom organizations in bewildering (and sometimes intimidating) number and range. In one sense, this sort of "community service" often gives to the faculty of small colleges a demonstrable role in directing the destiny of the institution that can be gratifying and educational. (Also, it can be at times frustrating, to faculty and administrators, that small colleges seem to suggest that everyone should have a voice on everything.) On the other hand, such assignments, often contributing little directly to either teaching or scholarship, can be distracting and frustrating. Every small college vows periodically to revamp its committee structure so as to eliminate this problem. The record of permanent solutions is remarkably slim.

On a related tangent, let me also note that faculty members at small colleges will tend to have much more constant and closer contact with others who work at their campuses than might be the case at larger institutions. College presidents and janitors will probably have lunch at the same campus café as faculty members and students fleeing the food service standard fare. Most faculty members I have known at smaller schools have known student affairs staff and often developed close working relationships with them in areas like service learning. Consequently, the level of mutual understanding and respect between diverse campus faculty and staff constituencies is frequently refreshingly high.

VIII

Many of the founding fathers of small colleges sought locations for their institutions that safely removed impressionable young students from the temptations of city life. (Anecdotal evidence suggests those enterprising young people

found plenty of quite satisfactory temptations in rural venues.) Garrison Keillor's portrait of New Albion College in *Lake Wobegon Days* is only slightly exaggerated for the purposes of humor!⁵ There are consequences of this questionable choice, which may face the new faculty member at such schools.

First, at some smaller, isolated colleges it may be necessary—and it is occasionally still required—that faculty live in the small town that houses their employing institution. The informality and potential closeness of such arrangements is inviting, often especially so for young families. It is not, however, without compensatory difficulties. If the college has "anti-nepotism" policies, it can be exceptionally difficult for a spouse or partner to find satisfying employment, especially in a two-academic-career family. Also, these communities are often somewhat homogeneous, especially compared to major cities and large university towns. They do not tend to be culturally stimulating, at least not in the big-city way. If a steady diet of major dramatic and symphonic performances and first-class art exhibits is a necessity, life in Mt. Vernon, Iowa, or Gambier, Ohio, or Collegeville, Minnesota, may seem inadequate. Often the cultural opportunities of a small college community are those provided by the college itself, along with, perhaps, a single movie theater. (A major compensating virtue is the opportunity to become an important player in the cultural life of a small community—community bands, local theater groups, affinity organizations, all are usually eager for participants, and one usually need not be an accomplished professional to be energetically welcomed.) Be prepared, too, for over-the-fence discussions of house painting and plumbing projects, kid's swim teams and the scandal at the local church more often than analyses of the ballet performance last evening. The prevailing cultural and political climate in such towns, at least outside the immediate college community (and sometimes within it, as well), is likely to be more conservative than in major university cities.

It is worth remembering that a good small college library may have 300,000 volumes. If that college is located many miles from the nearest city and/or university, access to significant library resources (or super-computer terminal or specialized laboratory facilities) can be exceedingly difficult. Careful planning and time allocation may be necessary just to accommodate an occasional commute. Many librarians at smaller institutions are exceptionally helpful with programs such as interlibrary loan, but the graduate student who is accustomed to popping into a library of 3.5 million volumes to check an obscure citation will be easily frustrated in Deep Springs, California, New London, New Hampshire, or St. Leo, Florida. Of course, the increasing utility of electronic resources such as the Internet can do much to moderate this bibliographic dearth.

While the cultural connotations of working at a small school in relative geographical isolation are fairly obvious, the implications for personal social life

are less clear. At some such schools, a young, single instructor, or one with an unconventional lifestyle, may be uncomfortable. A faculty of, say, ninety members may have three or five members under the age of thirty, and another half-dozen or so between thirty and thirty-five. There may not be many other individuals in this age group in town. A very young faculty member may feel more social affinity with mature undergraduates than with the majority of middle-aged colleagues. But often there will be strict codes or conventions governing social relations between students and teachers that (rightly, in my opinion) will tend to discourage or forbid contacts more intimate than an informal afternoon softball game. Especially in a small pedagogical universe, the real and perceived power differential between faculty and student makes social contact with even a hint of amorous possibility taboo.

Some careful observers have noted, as well, an interesting but sometimes disconcerting phenomenon regarding small college community mores: the pairing of political liberalism and social conservatism. There are those of us still around (albeit, tottering) who can recall settings in which it was acceptable to proclaim one's self a socialist or an anarchist (at least in theory) but still necessary to hide wine bottles in layers of newsprint buried in the weekly garbage set out for collection.

At many more urban schools, and for many individuals, these constraints are inconsequential, but for a few they are real and occasionally devastating. Well-rounded lives extend beyond the classroom and faculty office. Prospective faculty members are wise to ascertain if the extramural conditions of potential employers are a reasonable match with personal needs.

IX

Sometimes those entering the professoriate will ask if it is wise to accept a position at a liberal arts college or a small university, "on the way to" a more desired job at a research institution. This is a difficult query to handle. On the one hand, any academic employment is probably preferable to none at all, at least over an extended period of time. A five-year employment hiatus in a resume will probably be a red flag in any hiring process. Also, many young academics come to a smaller institution intending to move on, find themselves captivated by the attractions and challenges of their entry level post, and stay on indefinitely.

Others, however, for whom a small institution is a clear second choice, are unhappy and consequently do not do very well. Certainly, being denied reappointment and/or tenure will not improve the likelihood of career advancement elsewhere.

Of course, there are many instances of young professors coming to small in-

stitutions for a few years, building a good reputation as teacher and scholar, and moving on to larger, more research-oriented, schools. There is much variability in the perceived quality of liberal arts colleges, and in the open-mindedness of search committees. Certainly it will be easier in most cases to secure employment at the University of Michigan coming from a job at UC Berkeley than from, say, St. Mary's College of California. On the other hand, the candidate employed at Kalamazoo College may have some advantage based on regional familiarity. The more well-known the institution, the more likely favorable reactions from the search committee: a few years at Reed, Oberlin, or Grinnell are unlikely to hurt a candidate at the state universities of Massachusetts, Ohio, or Iowa.

Naturally, it will be important for those seeking to follow this route to make a substantial effort to maintain personal contacts with the "larger world" of professional scholarship and to keep publishing. Staying in touch with the dissertation adviser is a good idea; attending, even at personal expense if necessary, major professional meetings is certainly helpful, especially as a program participant.

A word of caution: while a lack of candor should never be encouraged, it is important to be very carefully diplomatic about career plans which call for moving to a research setting. Surprisingly often, I have found, beginning college teachers assume that everyone on a liberal arts college faculty would want to be at a major university and is either working diligently to make such a transition or has become resigned to second-rate status.⁶ Partially, no doubt, as a defense mechanism, but mostly for more genuine reasons, the majority of us who work in smaller institutions do so, not because we have to, but because we choose to. Indeed, we are not infrequently supercilious and parochial in our proclamations of the superiority of the type of education we profess in comparison with that offered in the research universities.

In sum, it is not unrealistic to envision early career years in a small college setting as a preface to appointment at a research university; it is important for those seeking such a path to build a scholarly resume which will be impressive to recruiters in coming years; it is not wise to make very public proclamations of such intentions.

X

Institutions which place a premium on classroom teaching, which deemphasize research productivity, which are far removed (physically and/or psychically) from major university centers, and which expect a quick and heavy load of on-campus and off-campus community service labor can be difficult places to

be while one is simultaneously completing a doctoral dissertation. The "ABD" young academic will need to attempt a realistic and hardboiled assessment of thesis completion very early along the career path. It is not enough to guarantee access to computer or lab resources or major library resources, although these are very important guarantees, indeed. Equally important, and harder to weigh, are time and institutional willingness and understanding of the project. What are the expectations of the college regarding summer work? Are there substantial vacations (fall and spring breaks, midwinter holidays, other breaks) during which real progress can be made? Will the department and/or institution view with favor requests for minimal committee assignments for a few terms while the dissertation is completed? These are probably questions that should be asked before the hiring process is complete, rather than after appointment has begun.

This difficulty can be curiously complicated by conflicting institutional expectations. It is not unprecedented for a college to insist upon the completion of the terminal degree before, say, a review in the second or third year of employment—and simultaneously to make such completion difficult for a very, very busy instructor. Here, as elsewhere, it is sensible to seek the advice of more than one knowledgeable colleague.

XI

"Faculty development" at a small college will have a slightly different connotation than at a large university. Most small colleges focus their faculty development efforts on pedagogical issues. Efforts to introduce new teaching technologies and methodologies will receive significant attention. Funding sources such as the Bush Foundation have supported such teaching-centered faculty development initiatives at small colleges generously.

On the other hand, support for research equipment, especially in the sciences and especially at less wealthy institutions, is often very hard to find. Similarly, most small college faculty travel budgets are considerably tighter than at large research universities, where participation in multiple professional meetings annually is not uncommon.

Potential faculty members at small colleges should also examine closely the congruence between their sense of what kind of leave program they need and what is offered by the institution. Most colleges do have sabbatical or study leaves, but often the number and arrangement for such leaves are more parsimonious than in major research centers.

XII

I have tried to sketch some of the features of academic careers in small colleges with accuracy. I hope the picture that emerges is neither romantically rosy nor forbiddingly bleak. For many of us who choose this version of an academic career, it is the quintessence of the collegiate experience: teaching and learning over a broad area, in intense and close intellectual relationships with diverse students and colleagues. If such a culture calls you, you are invited to doff the objectivity of the observing anthropologist and embrace our customs, conventions, and costumes. Teaching in a small college has never been a more difficult, a more rewarding, or a more important vocation.

NOTES

Portions of this discussion appear in my *Old Main: Small Colleges in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).

1. David Breneman, *Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving or Endangered* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994). Interestingly, the Carnegie Commission classification of 2000 lists a nearly identical number—228—of "baccalaureate liberal arts" institutions.

2. Mary Ellen Ashcroft, "Risky Business? Teaching Literature at a Christian Liberal Arts College," *American Experiment Quarterly* (Winter 1999–2000): 24.

3. *Ibid.*, 16.

4. Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968).

5. Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days* (New York: Penguin, 1986), esp. 45–46.

6. For example, "'Coming out of Iowa you're not going to get a job at a research university,' says [a new Ph.D.], who will happily take a job at [a small college in the Northwest] this fall. 'You realize you're going to have to work your way toward those positions.'" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 27, 1994, A16.