

A Word to Those Considering a Career as a Professor

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As in considering any position, potential leadership professors, who are usually school administrators, would do well to spend time doing their homework before they launch themselves into a job search. Here are a few tips:

1. Interview a few full-time faculty members to see what the job entails and what might be expected.
2. Teach a couple of classes as an adjunct faculty member to see if you enjoy the work and the students and if your colleagues respond well to your teaching. I've found that some administrators have not kept up with newer teaching techniques; lecturing and theory alone do not serve an instructor very well today.
3. Read the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#) to see what jobs are available.
4. Attend faculty conferences. The University Council for Educational Administration ([ucea.org](#)), the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration ([ncepa.net](#)) and the American Educational Research Association ([aera.net](#)) are excellent places to meet faculty, check out available jobs, and learn the latest in the field. California administrators might care to join and attend conferences of the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration.
5. Begin writing for professional journals. Keep careful track of your teaching, writing, presenting, and grants. You will find that the typical university curriculum vita is very lengthy, as compared to a three-page administrator resume. Begin to shape your resume to look more like a vita. Ask a couple of university colleagues to share their vitae with you.

The university interview usually includes two or three meetings with groups of people, sometimes includes teaching a class, and nearly always requires a presentation based on your research, or at least an area of high interest for you. Then, it is time to sign a contract. Be prepared for a few things to be very different from work as a school administrator:

1. You are negotiating with the Dean. Salaries are not set by schedule. Ask for what you want—salary, computer, support for travel o conferences, graduate assistants, time for research. This will be your only chance.
2. Clerical help is nearly non-existent. You will type all your own material. Help is available, however, for writing grants, and for learning technology. Sometimes new faculty are provided a mentor. Seek assistance from your faculty colleagues; you will probably need to ask for their help.

3. The culture of the school or college and the department may not seem particularly collegial. Professors typically work alone, find a niche for research, and write alone. In some places, collaborative presenting and writing are becoming more acceptable. And in some departments, folks really do work together. If that is important to you, find one of those places.
4. Do not wait to begin developing a research agenda and starting to write. It is easy to get caught up in program development, school district collaborative, and various university committees and projects. The tenure clock is ticking, and you must heed it.
5. Except for your writing and department responsibilities, no one sets an agenda for you. The freedom to determine your own work and time is exhilarating. I remember being interviewed by two wonderful professors from California State University—Hayward, Linda Lambert and Jodi Servatius, who warned me that I would get busy very quickly and that the time to read that I eagerly anticipated probably would not be available. They were right.
6. Of course, your salary will be considerably diminished. Then again, what price would you put on freedom to plan your own work, teach, influence, and contribute to our field?

[For more information, see Diane Yerkes' chapter, "Building Collaborative Relationships, Working with People," in the ACSA/CAPEA book, Quality School Leadership Begins with Quality Preparation Programs (2006). See that book for other stories about the careers of higher education faculty in educational leadership, or contact Dr. Diane Yerkes at Yerkes@cox.net]