

## ***Transitioning to a Faculty Role - Advice from DSP Alumni***

- Introductions
- DSP has been around almost 30 years and quite a few of our scholars have gone one to faculty and administrative roles – they’ve successfully made that transition from graduate student into the faculty and had successful careers.
  - Dr. Ramon Stuart – President & Provost of Academic Affairs at Fort Valley State University (RS)
  - Dr. Betina Wilkinson – Professor at Wake Forest University (BW)
  - Dr. Annice Yarber-Allen at Columbus State University (AYA)
- What was the biggest lesson learned in transition to a faculty role?
  - AYA
    - One of the biggest lessons I learned – when I graduated, I was an empty nester. I had a career prior to pursuing my PhD, I had been an adult student. I saw my transition as the opportunity for me to pursue another career. The difference between graduate school and your first position can be – when you’re a student, there’s some information that can help you as you transition. Understanding organizational structure is important because it will probably look similar at your next institution. There are other things going on beyond your dissertation – the individuals in departments are who you could end up working with. You want to find a place that will be home to you, and it’s important to understand what that structure could look like. I saw myself on an administrative trajectory, so I aligned myself with folks who could help me move in that direction. Understanding how you fit in a structure is really important.
  - BW
    - I am where I am because of Dr. A, Dr. Belle, and Dr. Carrie – they were influential in my life. The biggest lesson I learned was remembering that my time is the most valuable thing that I have. Organizing my time is incredibly important. What are my ten-year goals? Five-year goals? One-year goals? Daily goals? What do I need to do to accomplish those? How can I set up my schedule to achieve my goals? That was really helpful.
- What does “service” mean in the context of being a faculty member, to you?
  - BW
    - This has to be answered in terms of where one is and where they want to go. I wanted to know how much service mattered in terms of my evaluation. I would encourage individuals to think about that. Women and women of color overwhelmingly have more service, both given and feeling like they have it to take them on. If your job is judging you on research and teaching, those need to be your focus. The first few years at Wake Forest I was not expected to conduct service. I mostly did service as a way to connect with students and other faculty members and my chair was very supporting of that.
  - RS
    - In my Provost and VP hat on, I review people’s tenure and promotion dossier. You need to determine what type of institution you’re at and what the

expectations are. Being at Wake Forest, a Research I, there's probably a sense of publish or perish. You have to determine if you're at a teaching or a research institution. Spend some time with IPEDS and College Navigator to understand college types. Know how you will be evaluated- you can't win a game if you don't know the rules. My school, we focus heavily on teaching and service so you need to focus on those things. Try to find ways to kill multiple birds with one stone. Serve on committees that also teach you other aspects of the university and connects you in a way where you serve but also grow and get a deeper understanding.

- AYA
  - The only thing I would add that thinking of service as not just what you receive but what you are giving to the mission of that institution. I value service because as a faculty member I could express myself and knew I was serving and giving and knew that what I was seeing was heard, then I felt good.
- How did you identify or develop your personal professional development plan as a junior faculty member?
  - AYA
    - I came into the academy with an idea. But I was a bit unsure. I had to look at the structure, get to know my peers. To develop my plan – at my first institution, there was no conversation about that. To implement the plan I wanted, I ended up learning how to connect with other colleagues around campus who could help me institute it. Part of the plan includes getting tenured and promoted. I think that one of the things that Dr. Betina said, is making sure you know what that looks like and ensuring your steps are working towards that goal. That drove my plan, understanding tenure and promotion standards. Understanding there's' steps within the academy. I also had a mentor who in the first 2 years said, don't worry about service so that you can achieve your plan. It's nice to have a mentor who can help you with that. My dissertation committee was also very helpful, and they helped me shape the plan I had into a more doable form
  - BW
    - The first few years, and even today, I've focused on being strategic and efficient with my time. Specifically, in trying to do things that check off more than one box – for instance, teaching classes I have to and also teaching classes related to my persona research, so that I teach myself the stuff and then teach the students and help me with my research. Also, if you can, find a way to work students on research projects. I had some exceptional students and I loved working with them on research projects. I was also advised to limit my teaching load my first few years, and that worked for me.
  - RS
    - If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. While it may not be as cut and dry as some of us, I'm an engineer and I love a plan. But in the academy, we get to the finish line in a variety of ways. Plan for success and the only time success occurs before work is in the dictionary but when you have those plans – they help you develop things where you can combine your work, research and teaching,

working with students. Also remember to find a quality mentor – that should be plural. Different people can give you different things, and allow them to shape and mold your container and let them pour into you.

- What was your work-life balance like as an early career faculty member? What advice would you provide for scholars trying to maintain balance?
  - RS
    - I accidentally entered the professoriate at 24 – I didn’t have anything to do but work. I also didn’t know that much about academia and Learned along the way. I do coach new faculty members I hire – this university was here before you, here doing you, and long after you go. Make sure that when you leave this university, you’ve done your best to leave an indelible mark on it – because when you go, it’s going to keep going on. The university is not going to stop for you. Put your values together and make sure you understand who you are and allow your profession to be heightened because you know who you are and the contributions you want.
  - AYA
    - I, much like Dr. Stuart, I came in at 44. So, part of what happened with me, I was an empty nester – the world was mine, I could do what I wanted when I wanted. I loved teaching and working on materials for hours staying up did not bother me. But one thing I have noticed, in this role and especially in this time, that I think is especially relevant for this transition – the pandemic has made so our home and work life have merged in many ways. In the University System of Georgia, I do work at home now. This work life balance is real. Learning how to structure you and your time, giving yourself boundaries is extremely important. To be able to say – this is my personal time. I have to take that time. Find the time for you and then protect it with everything you have to ensure you take care of yourself. Be reasonable but don’t let it be infiltrated. Design clear syllabi with communication expectations. Good time management is crucial
  - BW
    - Remember to eat nutritious meals, exercise regularly, sleep at least 6 hours. One thing that was told to me that hit home – remember who will be at your funeral and think about those people. It’s heartbreaking because I’ve had colleagues get divorced, lost family members, and regret their actions. This is a wonderful profession but it can break you. Remember what matters in life. You have one body and one life, make it the best that you can. I know that’s a lot, but I have to say it. I’ve seen so many people suffer through it. Focus on the things you have to do and make sure you can do the best you can without losing the things that are most important to you. Try to multitask as much as you can – I love to work out with my kids.
  - AYA
    - I spoke about the life balance but another way to balance is to be part of the conversation about course scheduling. If you are part of that conversation and you can get them on a specific schedule and schedule it in hours that work best for you, that is very helpful. I sectioned out specific days for solely teaching and

others days for service and research. Every institution will be different about how engaged you can be, but if you can I think that gives you an opportunity to have agency and ability to take control of your life.

- RS
  - I would also add a word of caution – there you truly need that discipline. Coming out of doctoral program, now you're in a marathon and not a sprint. Commit to at least 8 hours each day. You need to plan for your tenure, and do not put off for tomorrow what you should be doing today.
- Early career faculty often struggle to understand tenure requirements – what helped you understand that process?
  - AYA
    - When I accepted a tenure-track position, I was told get one publication in 5 years. There was nothing written about expectations. It was laissez faire. However, during the time I arrived and went up for promotion, there was lots of hoopla about the lack of transparency and clarity around tenure and promotion. So by the time I applied, standards were instituted and they were different from what I had started with. But the person who was mentoring me, they helped guide me. If the standards aren't clear, really search for clarity – what have people who did get promoted have? Have that conversation when you first arrive.
  - RS
    - I would encourage everyone to determine institution type and look at institutional policies. Read the faculty handbook. If it's decently written, it will have expectations and if you understand the generalities of those. Remember that tenure and promotion is not just about what you do, it's about the relationships you have in your department and the university. There is a human aspect to the tenure and promotion process.
- How did you seek out mentors or advisors as a young faculty member?
  - RS
    - I find people who are smarter than me and figure if I learn by osmosis, I'll be okay. I find people who are or have been where I want to go, and ask them to show me how they got there. Listen twice as much as you talk.
  - AYA
    - There is also something organic about mentorship. Sometimes you meet someone and the relationship just occurs.

## Q&A

- Is service important for postdocs?
  - RS
    - I do not think it would be that high because you're not on a tenure track. But I would observe the people you're working with and the culture.
- I'm a second-year postdoc who just received a tenure-track job offer, can you discuss the challenges associated with negotiating your salary, start-up funds and summer salary? What is some language you use to make a counter-offer? Thank you!

- RS
  - The academy in the COVID era, with shirking budgets – getting an offer right now is a big thing. Negotiating is hard because typically we don't have as much discretion as you might think. Willing to share my email and phone to give 1:1 advice for those negotiation but right now those are pretty challenging.
- AYA
  - Ultimately it is the provost who provides those guidelines. Budgets are tight. I can tell you right now, I'm in the midst of a negotiation, someone wanted a lot of things and the answer was we're in a budgetary crisis and I'm not able to support all those things. It's real.
- RS
  - Be careful not to price yourself out – it's a competitive field. It's important to understand how you can advance once you're in there. While you may not get everything you want on the front end – we're cutting people and personnel right now.
- AYA
  - And correct me if I'm wrong, but institutions typically don't low ball.
- RS
  - Yes, usually what I offer is what we have – I'm not trying to hold a little money back, it won't help me fund another person. Research 1's have the funding right now but things are going to get cut in the next few years. It's going to be 3-4 years before things are back to a normal. Someone who is bringing you in is likely giving them everything they have.