

Roundtable on Surviving and Thriving in a Temporary Academic Position

Sponsored by ISA Professional Development Committee

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Attendance: 4

Welcome and introduction by Spencer Willardson

Eric Cox, Associate Professor, Texas Christian University

Background: Held 2 temporary positions. The first was at a liberal arts college, and the second was in academic affairs.

Advice:

- Publishing is an absolute necessity. It is the primary signal on the academic market.
- Do not bank on any temporary position turning into a tenure-track position unless you have that in writing.
- No offer is real until it is in writing. That means you do need to save all correspondence that you do receive regarding positions as well.
- If you have a high teaching load (which is the norm in most visiting positions) see if you can negotiate for fewer preps so that you can also have time for research.
- Don't take on too much service while visiting.
- Ask for help from others. This includes advisors, colleagues, friends, and others.
- Do a good job while doing less work. Be a good teacher without that being your sole focus - because in order to move into a tenure-track position you will need to publish.
- Apply broadly to open positions while visiting.
- Be careful of the cost of moving from one visiting position to another.

Nicholas Grossman, Adjunct Lecturer, University of Iowa

Background: hired to a temporary position as part of a spousal hire.

Advice:

- Publish where you can. Have multiple papers in the pipeline.
- Make sure that you get your contract details in writing.
- Try to get a sense of the politics of the department so you can avoid pitfalls.
- Provide value to the department. If given the opportunity to develop your own course, teach courses that are high enrollment and that are not offered by other faculty members.
- Try to teach your own course as a graduate student.
- Be able and willing to teach online courses as they are often profit-generating/value-adding for departments.
- Don't freak out. Academic milestones are like childhood development milestones. If they are missed, it does not signal the end of the world or the end of your career.
- Be prepared and willing to revise your career expectations.
- Be aware of the costs of moving, starting in a new department, etc.

Tim Peterson, Assistant Professor, University of South Carolina

Background: Visiting position turned to tenure track.

Advice:

- Publish
- Set aside research days where you do not let the demands of teaching intrude on your work-flow.
- Visiting positions, even more than tenure-track positions, rely on networks.
- Visiting positions often have a much different hiring process - phone and skype interviews as opposed to full job talks and fly-out visits.
- Try to negotiate teaching loads down, if possible.
- Be a good department citizen by attending meetings, talks, and other functions, without becoming too involved in service.
- Try to present your own research in department as a practice job talk.
- Visiting positions can be stressful because they are, in essence, an extended interview.
- Be a good teacher, but use as many provided/available materials as possible. Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Don't do things halfway. Do good work.
- If you have a two-body academic issue, there are other roles that spouses can sometimes fit into outside of adjuncting/visiting in the same department. Look at interdisciplinary fields, academic centers, etc.
- Temporary positions are a delicate balancing act.
- Be upfront about asking what you need.

Spencer Willardson, Visiting Assistant Professor, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Background: Visiting position, first post-PhD position

Advice:

- Concurred with the advice already given panellists.
- Have publications in the pipeline before you move, and plan on having little research time for a period of time.
- Don't underestimate the start-up costs of moving institutions.
- Work to publish.
- Be a good department citizen, without becoming involved in department politics.
- Plan on the time required to teach (heavy loads), research, participate in conferences, and remain on the job market.

Questions and answers from audience and panel touched on all of the above topics.