



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

Hotel D, 24 East Range (434) 982-2815 trc-uva@virginia.edu <http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/>

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The Market Potential for Excellent Teaching: Using Your Skills as an Educator to Find Employment

by Andrew Ceperley, Assistant Director, Office of Career Planning & Placement and Former Teaching Assistant in the Department of Rhetoric & Communication Studies

George Bernard Shaw once claimed, "Those who can, do. Those who cannot, teach." For those of us who have established careers in education, this edict elicits outrage. We remember the difficulty we experienced designing our first syllabus, leading our first discussion section, and defending our grading criteria to a disgruntled student. We remember nervously pouring over our first set of student evaluations in hopes that we would be rewarded with a consensus of "thumbs up." Our experience has taught us that *to teach* is indeed *to do*. Yet still, we may wonder how our efforts toward excellence in teaching might help propel us forward in non-academic careers.

At the University's Office of Career Planning & Placement, we advise graduate students daily on how to position themselves for employment opportunities in today's challenging job market. We herald the importance of "communication" skills, and we question students on the word's denotation. To "communicate" is to write, to persuade, to train, to present, to inspire, to inform, to entertain, and yes, **to teach**. Surprisingly, many graduate students fail to convey adequately their prowess as communicators, too often downplaying their

teaching assistantships in discussion or merely listing them without explanation on their resumes.

Yet emphasizing one's background as a teacher when job hunting is essential. After surveying 513 employers representing business, industry and governmental agencies, Michigan State University's 1991-92 Recruiting Trends reports that a significant shortcoming among today's college graduates is the inability to communicate effectively. This perceived weakness represents a window of opportunity for the advanced degree candidate with teaching experience. If described thoroughly and strategically, one's teaching can, and often does, generate an impressive list of transferable skills valued by a variety of employers.

How to define your teaching skills

A senior consultant with a Fortune 500 corporation who was interviewed for Groneman and Lear's Corporate Ph.D., reflected on the transition he made from a Ph.D. in Far Eastern Studies to management consulting:

I know how to organize myself; I know how to work well independently; I know how to use the library. I lecture; in fact, I'm a better lecturer or presenter now than I was before because there is attention given to it here...; it's just second nature to me. Running a client interaction is no different from running a college seminar.

This testimony lends credence to the concept of

transferable skills. Simply defined, a TA who succeeds in facilitating seminar discussions may also succeed in facilitating board meetings. Career author Anthony Medley quoted Shakespeare to drive home the point: "Your past is prologue."

Before going on the job market, consider your actions as a teacher, and brainstorm an applicable list of active verbs. Steve Bennett suggests in Playing Hard Ball with Soft Skills that your list might look something like this:

- _ translating and explaining concepts
- _ defining course objectives
- _ locating, retrieving, and evaluating potential materials
- _ evaluating performance.

Bennett manages to identify at least one dozen additional transferable skills that relate to teaching. By building such actions into your resume and describing in interviews the ways in which you took such actions, you persuade employers that the value you added as a teacher can be replicated in their workplaces. You explain to them literally what it means to teach (because many do not know).

One Ph.D. in English Literature recently met with an OCPP counselor to review his application for an editorship with the Federal Government. He discussed his teaching experience in a manner that created an active image of what he did:

I have drawn upon my own experience composing a book-length dissertation to teach students how to analyze and communicate in writing. I held office meetings to develop and shape their ideas. I assisted them in outlining and drafting. I then commented in detail on those drafts, and, finally, I graded the final product and composed written evaluations for each assignment and for the semester as a whole.

Career development support

Submerged in the hillside beneath Garrett Hall lies the University's Office of Career Planning & Placement. OCPP is open throughout the academic year and summer, and its staff provides advice and assistance as you inventory your teaching accomplishments and synthesize them into an employment plan. For the academician, OCPP's credentials supervisor will catalogue your letters of recommendation and mail them per your instruction to the academic employers you are pursuing. If the scope of your career interests is broader than jobs in the academy, OCPP's counseling staff can help inform your search for careers in the business, media, nonprofit or government sectors. We can assist with self-assessment testing, resume critiquing, mock interviewing, and job search strategy. OCPP's career library houses an extensive collection of resources, applying a one-week checkout policy for most books.

Whether you are a new TA or a seasoned graduate instructor, the skills you develop as a teacher are invaluable. Along with an appropriate job search plan, they position you for industry, for nonprofit, and for many other career areas you may choose to pursue.

Additional job search publications available in OCPP:

- _ Academic Job Search Handbook, by Mary Morris
- _ Alternative Careers for Humanities Ph.D.'s, by Lewis
- _ Career Doctor: Preventing, Diagnosing, and Curing Fifty Ailments that can Threaten Your Career, by Neil M. Yeager.
- _ Corporate Ph.D.: Making the Grade in Business, by Carol Groneman and Robert N. Lear.
- _ Educator's Guide to Alternative Jobs and Careers, by
- _ Educator's Job Change Manual, by Jacqueline Yorgen
- _ Hot Tips, Sneaky Tricks & Last-Ditch Tactics: An
- _ Humanities Ph.D.'s and Nonacademic Careers: A Guide for Faculty Advisors, by Roger E. Wyman and Nancy Risser.
- _ Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed, by Anthony Medley.