

BROWN BAG LUNCH
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Dr. Melanie Roudkovski
Professor of Psychology, Chair of the Psychology Department
LeTourneau University

TIPS

1. Relationships

One of the most important aspects of the doctoral program was building relationships with faculty and peers. Early in the program Dr. Philip Coyle told me I needed to be a serious student. That made me angry because I thought I was doing pretty well, but it turned out to be a defining moment that changed my life. Relationships with professors are important in moving forward, not just in the program but in your career. Professors believe in you and walk with you through the program and encourage you to do it.

Relationships with peers are important because they will be your colleagues forever. They will be the ones you go to for references and consultation along the way. Church relationships also have been valuable, as were relationships in the music department during school.

Philip Coyle, chair of my guidance committee, left. Everything had to be renegotiated. After finishing seminars and going through the proposal and prospectus approval, I was ABD and no longer had to go to seminars. Even though I had not entered the program to become a teacher, I realized how prepared I was to teach. So I started looking through the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for job postings. I prepared a CV and began sending out applications to state and other secular schools. I was surprised when I received a call from the University of West Alabama, which was looking for an assistant professor and director of the counseling center. When I interviewed, I didn't know what a job in academia would look like, but I knew I was called to this kind of work. The situation turned out well because they didn't know what they needed; it was a new position, as they were just opening a counseling center. I was thinking, from seminary, how do I make a state university believe I can do the job? The first question the provost asked was, "If I hire you, can you assure me that you are not coming to this campus to proselytize students?" My calling is to educate students who are seeking a degree, so I use my work as worship. I was on that campus for almost three years, and I never had to cross that line. God orchestrated conversations through questions students asked in classes.

In my position as head of the counseling center, I saw more faculty and staff than students. I was able to talk about how their spirituality affected their lives. If you see an opening and feel led to apply for that opening, don't ever limit what God can do with it. Also, I realized I was as competent as other individuals from other schools. I have heard comments from colleagues that NOBTS graduates are clinically prepared and competent, and have more integrity than students we have seen from anywhere else.

2. Leverage your connections.

I had been at U of West Alabama for nearly three years when my husband, Viktor, received a call from a friend at LeTourneau who had been in the PhD program in New Testament with him. She said, “Your wife was in counseling, right? We have a position open at LeTourneau. Isn’t her family from around Shreveport?”

I’ve been at LeTourneau for eight years now. It’s a Christian school, and I am one of 13 women on a faculty of 90 professors. When I came, they had no maternity policy because they had not needed one until I came. LeTourneau had been primarily an engineering school, and my coming caused the administration to realize that with the growth of the institution and the counseling program, more women faculty were likely; and having females is different.

Women make decisions based on job flexibility rather than money. When I moved from a 9-month contract to an 11-month contract due to taking on more of an administrative role when I became chair of the psychology department, we had to address flexibility questions. Whereas I had had summers free, I began needing to spend the summers developing programs because there was no time to do that during the school year. I learned that I had to fight for my family. I had to convince the administration that I could still do my job even working from home while caring for young children. You have to ask. Other women colleagues asked why I was getting special treatment. My job is to do my job and to do it well. Men are more likely to negotiate salary. I became a good negotiator. Develop confidence as a professional and ask for what you need.

Also, don’t get into a rut of just teaching the classes and doing the required activities. I learned at NOBTS is that there is always more we need to be doing. Believe that you have competence and take it to the next level. This may be a personality trait, but creativity enabled me to have influence in academia. You have to be creative to show students how your courses are relevant to their lives. You need to push students to the next level. I tell my students, “Don’t let me expect more of you than you expect of yourself.”

Who can give you references? They need to be credible enough to give you a good reference. We need to nurture relationships with the persons God puts in our lives. Sometimes they are there for future purposes. Intentionally make a difference. Don’t think your relationships don’t matter. Even if circumstances aren’t what you want them to be, God has something for you to get out of them.

I volunteered to serve on task forces and committees, and I was part of the search committee for a provost the year I was head of the faculty organization. At a conference I was speaking with my former mentor, Dr. Coyle. I said to him, “You should consider being provost at LeTourneau.” His response was, “No way.” But his wife, Judy, and I ganged up on him and said he at least should look at the job description. He has been our provost for three years now, and he’s the greatest supporter of our department and the bane of my existence because he’s in my field. I am fortunate to have this long-standing relationship with him that began when I was a PhD student.

3. Maintain balance in your life.

Keep God, family, and career, in that order, as priorities to keep your life in balance and manage stress. Work hard, don't give up, and remember that there is no limit to what God can do.

QUESTIONS

1. How did you prepare for an administrative role?

I'm funny—I like institutional effectiveness and writing curriculum! But you prepare for administration by being a strong researcher and taking adjunct teaching positions. Look now.

When I taught my first contract course here at NOBTS, it was awful. I wondered what Dr. Coyle was thinking putting me in there. He somehow thought I knew what I was doing, but you don't know how to teach until you do it, right? As the semester progressed, it turned out fine. You have to start somewhere. Adjunct positions and teaching contract courses at NOBTS are safe places to start.

Schools aren't going to ask you to teach; you need to ask them. Their Web sites and *Chronicle of Higher Education* are good places to look for job postings. You usually can tell how good a school is by the organization of their Web site. If it's not good, they usually aren't very organized. When you send a CV to the contact person on the job listing, also send one to the department chair. That contact usually gets a quicker response than just sending it only through the administrative route.

We need adjuncts at LeTourneau now—you can email me your CV before the end of a semester. If I get an application in October or November, I usually can process it and get you a course for January.

If you develop a reputation for being organized, getting good student reviews, and submitting grades on time, the administration assumes you can handle the challenges of an administrative role. I stay organized by keeping a to-do list and setting a goal of doing six items every day.

2. We have some couples in our doctoral program. How do you handle which person's career opportunities to follow?

That's a good question. While I was in discussions with LeTourneau, Viktor was contacted by another institution that wanted him to teach. Our discussion centered around two things. First, we believe in honoring our word. I already had committed to the process at LeTourneau. The second consideration was geographic: where did we want to end up? We had done the two-year stints of taking whatever jobs we could to get by in school, and now we were ready to settle down. Ultimately, LeTourneau was closer to my family and where we wanted to be.

3. Following up on that question, my husband is a pastor. Could we send both of our CVs in response to a job posting and try to negotiate a twofer deal?

Absolutely. I wish I had thought to do that when I was interviewing with LeTourneau. Fortunately, within two years at LeTourneau, Viktor also had a teaching position in the theology department. That may have worked out at the other school as well—who knows. When we at LeTourneau get applications from couples, we try to make it work. For example, we needed to fill a position in nursing and ended up hiring a gal whose husband is an NOBTS grad in psychology and counseling. So we worked it out to hire both of them. Obviously if we had had a problem with either of them, that would have necessitated a different conversation and been a deal breaker for them.

One of the reasons we did PhD work was for flexibility. Each of us could teach, and Viktor also could pastor and I could have a private counseling practice. So while both of us may not always be teaching, each of us could have some other gainful employment.

4. We are crowded into a small house. How do you make space to work when there is no space?

We were in that situation between moves. We had to realize the situation was temporary, and we made some rules about when and where we could work. When I took my first position at U of West Alabama, I promised my family that I would keep work at work, and my time at home would be for fun. There were times I couldn't follow that rule, but we both waited until the children were in bed before we began working, and we set a deadline for stopping. We also made sure to clean up the dining room table and put everything away each night after we finished working. I think our children appreciate these rules.