



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

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Good Start: A Guidebook for New Faculty in Liberal Arts Colleges

by Gerald W. Gibson, Roanoke College
Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company,
1992, 247 pp.

Reviewed by Victoria Voytko

Drawing on his 25 years of experience as a university teacher and administrator, Prof. Gibson has created an informative and practical handbook for the novice academic interested in teaching at a liberal arts college. *Good Start* is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the small college experience from the perspective of new and rising faculty members. Prof. Gibson begins by advising newly-minted Ph.D.s on the ins and outs of securing a good teaching position at a liberal arts college. He offers practical advice on (1) how to select institutions suited to your talents and ambitions, (2) how to convince a favored institution to hire you, and (3) how to secure the best terms of employment once an offer is made. These initial chapters of the book are informed by Prof. Gibson's conviction that researching the specific needs, expectations, and institutional eccentricities of a prospective academic employer is crucial to a candidate's success, especially in today's tight job market. Of course, many of the strategies effective for negotiating with liberal arts colleges will also work with universities.

The central sections of *Good Start* aim to equip new faculty members with the skills necessary to survive in the distinctive institutional culture of the American liberal arts college. The relative importance of teaching and

research to tenure and promotion decisions is given thorough consideration by Prof. Gibson, with a consistent emphasis on practical matters—such as the degree to which student teaching evaluations affect institutional decision-making. Specific strategies for developing these crucial teaching skills receive, deservedly, a considerable amount of attention as well. In this portion of his book, Prof. Gibson is once again most adept at pointing out the personal and professional hazards that beset faculty members in the early years of an academic career.

In the final chapter of his handbook, Prof. Gibson takes the long view and considers life beyond tenure, advising his readers on how to maintain the professional edge that makes a secure teaching career consistently interesting and challenging. Though the natural audience for Prof. Gibson's book is made up of job candidates and untenured faculty, his discussion of the mature phase of a teaching career is wholly relevant. By taking this longer perspective, *Good Start* offers the sort of complete picture that fledgling academics need when attempting to get their teaching careers off the ground and plan intelligently for a successful future.