Life at a Regional Teaching University: Pitfalls to Avoid

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What I’m going to talk about

• Who am I?
• University of West Georgia
• Getting Tenure at a Teaching-focused Institution
  • Teaching Expectations
  • Research Expectations
  • Service Expectations
• Problems I Encountered
• Mentorship
• Career vs. Personal Life
Who am I?

• Born and raised in suburb of Atlanta, GA
• Married with 2 children
• B.A. in Biology with Chemistry Minor from LaGrange College, LaGrange, GA — 2002
• Ph.D. in Physiology from Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA (now Georgia Regents University) — 2007
Who am I?

• Postdoc: Debi Fadool, FSU — 2007-2009
• Associate Professor, UWG Biology Department, August 2009-present
My Job Search

• My Ideal Job: Biology tenure-track position at smaller institution with focus on teaching, lots of faculty-student interaction, and smaller research component

• 2008-2009 application season — during economic recession period in academia

• Applied for 16 teaching positions (1 non-tenure track; 2 positions at UWG) and 1 science writer position

• Invited to interview at 5 universities — 4 teaching + 1 science writer
  • Non-tenure track search cancelled after interview
  • Science writer position was not what I was looking for
  • Accepted job at UWG before 4th teaching interview took place
• Located in Carrollton, GA (~ 45 minutes west of Atlanta near Alabama state line)
• Public university
• ~ 12,000 students (95+% undergraduate)
• Majority of students are Georgia residents — largest concentration from western region
• Biology is in the College of Science and Mathematics
About UWG

• I have the only current NIH grant on campus (R15 awarded by NIDCD)
• A few NSF grants for research or equipment
• A few independent contracts for research
• Some internal grants for research — most < $5000 and only cover student stipends
• Most grants (internal and external) are for education/teaching initiatives—the main focus of the institution
• Small start-up package: $10,000/year for first 3 years
UWG Department of Biology

• Diverse faculty interests across major biology disciplines
• 17 tenure-track/tenured faculty, 3 lecturers, 5 instructors
  • 3 Assistant, 8 Associate (3 new as of Fall 2015), and 6 Full Professors
• My responsibilities:
  • Teaching—primary goal of fall and spring semesters
  • Research—bulk occurs during summer; some during fall/spring
  • Service—expected but other categories hold more weight with teaching being most important
Getting Tenure at UWG

• Excellence in Teaching—Most important
  • Good student and faculty peer evaluations
  • Develop new courses
  • Incorporate innovative teaching techniques

• Research
  • ~3 published papers during review period (not necessarily all first author)—collaborations are encouraged due to limited campus resources
  • Undergraduate students involved in research
  • Grants are positive influence, but not essential
Getting Tenure at UWG

• Service—Least important
  • Usually limited to 1-2 department level committees during review period
  • Although more service can alleviate some slower progress in research area
Teaching

- 9 hour loads (Fall/Spring) with 3 hour research release
- One class prep to start with multiple times to tweak during review period with additional class preps added over time
- Most courses cross-listed with graduate level courses (usually 3-5 graduate seats in addition to undergraduate seats)
- No TAs for upper level courses—Professor design and run labs for majors
  - Graduate TAs reserved for all introductory biology labs
  - Undergraduate TAs teach freshmen biodiversity labs
Teaching

• My typical course load
  • Fall: Human Physiology with Lab & Neuroscience
  • Spring: Vertebrate Histology with Lab & Senior Seminar

• Other courses taught on as needed basis
  • Graduate seminars
  • Independent studies
  • Cell and Molecular Biology
  • Research credit

Physiology and Histology Teaching Lab
Research

• Most conducted in summers
• Limited time during fall and spring unless you have well-trained students who stay with you for multiple semesters
• Small spaces that often require improvisation
  • Design projects that can be done on minimal budget and with limited equipment
• Share equipment/resources with peers
• Collaboration off campus is essential
My Research Lab Spaces: Main Lab
My Research Lab Spaces: Tissue Culture (Shared Space)
My Research Lab Spaces: Animal Room
Service

• Advising of biology majors (~30 students per semester)
  • Requires a lot of time

• 2 Department committees per academic year with 3 year memberships (Chair in 3rd year)
  • Graduate Curriculum and Instruction (Chair)
  • Space Allocation (Chair as of August)

• IACUC Chair (2013-present)

• UWG Preview Day Biology Representative
Service

• Advisory committees for MS students (thesis and non-thesis tracks)
• COSM Representative for Faculty Senate and Intercollegiate Athletics Committee
• Volunteer for student organizations and athletic events
• Biology Faculty Search Committees
• Textbook and Journal Reviewer
My Path to Tenure and Beyond

• August 2009
  • Arrived at UWG
  • Taught Human Physiology for first time (every fall)
  • Set up research lab for histology
• January 2010
  • Taught Vertebrate Histology for first time (every spring)
• April 2010
  • Awarded internal grant for undergraduate stipend (received several for period: 2010-2013)
• June-July 2010
  • Collected preliminary data at FSU with MS student
  • Co-author on several abstracts related to postdoc research
My Path to Tenure and Beyond

- August 2010
  - Taught Cell and Molecular Biology for first time (last taught August 2011)
- September 2010
  - Co-authored paper published related to postdoc research (#1)
  - Presented 2 seminars at UWG
- October 2010
  - Submitted R15 grant to NIH
  - First author paper published related to postdoc research (#2)
- April 2011
  - Abstract presented by UWG undergraduate and MS students at campus research day
My Path to Tenure and Beyond

• May 2011
  • Awarded R15 grant (Sept. 2011-August 2015 with 1 yr no-cost extension)

• September 2011
  • Set up lab for electrophysiology and began work establishing animal facility and IACUC

• April 2012
  • Presented work of UWG undergraduate and MS students at international meeting
  • Abstract presented by UWG undergraduate students at campus research day
My Path to Tenure and Beyond

• June-July 2012
  • Training to develop online courses through UWG Faculty Development Office

• April 2013
  • First author paper published related to postdoc research (#3)

• April-July 2013
  • Medical leave of absence—reason for no-cost extension for R15 grant

• August 2013
  • Taught Human Physiology course completely online
My Path to Tenure and Beyond

- November 2013
  - Presented seminar at UWG
- January 2014
  - Taught Senior Seminar for first time (every spring)
- May 2014
  - Co-authored paper published related to postdoc research (#4)
My Path to Tenure and Beyond

• August 2014
  • Taught Neuroscience for first time (every fall; will also teach online version summer 2016)

• November 2014
  • Presented seminar at UWG

• April 2015
  • Awarded internal grant to generate preliminary data for R15 renewal application
Problems I’ve faced and how I dealt with them

- Teaching
  - Class/Lab prep and grading require big chunks of time
- Advising requires time at specific points in semester
- Students don’t buy textbooks or prepare ahead of class
Problems I’ve faced and how I dealt with them

• Research
  • Lack of administrative experience to adequately support federal funding requirements
• Adapting to limited resources
• Undergraduate students have very little time to be in lab with class schedules
• Lack of internal funding for supplies
Importance of Mentorship

- Debi Fadool
  - Research collaborator
  - Sounding board
- Department Chairs
  - Limited new courses and service to start
  - Found resources for equipment purchases
  - Fought administrative hurdles blocking my research
- Department Faculty Peers
  - Shared resources (teaching and research)
- COSM Mentor Program
  - Outside feedback and support
My Role Mentoring Students

• Identify what their goal is after UWG

• Plan courses and other action steps they can take to get there

• Be available for advice, but encourage them to do the footwork themselves

• Provide possible alternate plans when needed
Career vs. Personal Life—Find Balance

• Family time is important
• On campus 4 days a week for classes, research, & service activities
• 1 day a week and weekends I try to dedicate to family
Questions?