



Ask Academic Abby about what's bugging you right now. Send details to [Ask Academic Abby](#) or use our [Submission Form](#).

Dear Academic Abby,

Pressed for cash and hearing of the glories of online texts, our institution is seriously thinking about doing away with textbooks in favor of all embedded material. Additionally, they are seriously contemplating that all materials must be "texts" freely available on the Internet. In the meantime, we're expected to submit all our syllabi for the fall in the next two weeks as well as have our plans for assessment in place and approved. How does one handle such potentially massive changes in such a short time while still dealing with a normal workload (the normal load here is five courses a semester)?

**Signed,
Anxious in Texas**

Dear Anxious,

You ask about how to manage a massive institutional change in a short period of time. There are personal and institutional dimensions to your question. Is it possible for you, or allies with secure positions, to suggest that the administration hold off on any change until it can be implemented thoughtfully? If you raise possible concerns (for example, about fair use and copyrights), will they think twice? At a personal level, if the change is inevitable, there are several strategies that you might employ to address your administrative demands.

Strategies for Making the Move to Electronic Materials:

1. As you make changes to your fall syllabi, we suggest looking at the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion for [syllabi](#) that use online resources effectively.
2. Discuss with your campus librarian electronic databases that would be beneficial for your subject material (like JSTOR, ATLA, Proquest). This visit with the librarian can help you find texts in the public domain as well as texts made freely available by their authors on university access sites (for example, www.academia.edu)
3. Be aware of copyright access so that you know what you are allowed to use for your course and what “freely available” will mean for your campus community.
4. Discuss with your department having access to research assistants or masters or doctoral students that can do the research for you. If these types of researchers are not available in your department, find out if your department has access to work-study students or other forms of resource assistance.
5. Keep in mind any Internet links that you put in your syllabus must be rechecked when the course begins to make sure they still work.
6. Leave space to adjust for potential bumps in the road as students adjust to e-material as well. Some students may prefer videos, blogs, songs, multimedia, etc., in courses, but not properly prepare for nonprint materials.

You might also reframe your current extra work by recognizing that there are certain benefits to putting more materials online for a course. The students save money — which could increase the number of students who are able to access your course material and prepare for class — students with disabilities can often read a computer screen more easily, and ultimately you will be participating in the democratization of access to academic knowledge.

Good luck,

Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I am on the job market this year and expect (or, should I say hope!) to have some interviews at the AAR conference. If I make it to a second-level interview onsite at the institution, I have some concerns. I have a one-year-old son who I still nurse (all day and all night) so he needs to come with me. And, if the baby is with me, a caretaker for the baby will also attend so that I can focus on my interview duties. How should I inform the schools that I will be bringing along some guests with me? Or should I try to keep it from them? Also, should I be responsible for paying for any additional costs?

**Yours,
Dr. Mom**

Dear Dr. Mom,

Congratulations on getting interviews at the AAR conference and good luck securing follow-up campus interviews. You are absolutely right to be thinking about possible complications associated with traveling as a nursing mother. One of the coauthors of *Professor Mommy: Finding Work-Family Balance in Academia*

(Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011;

[click here for review](#)

) recounts a crazed job interview situation complicated by the need to pump, given the infant was left behind. In retrospect, the coauthor realized that trying to hide the fact of her young child created unnecessary stress. Many other new mothers, however, believe — with some justification — that asking for accommodations during the interview process might subtly prejudice some faculty against them.

Whether you travel with your child or not, you will have to prepare for disruptions to your usual nursing schedule. Campus visits typically involve long days of back-to-back meetings with faculty, students, and deans — not to mention the job talk and possible classroom lecture.

There will likely be a few meals scattered in there. If you are lucky, attentive faculty members will remember bathroom breaks and possibly give you half-an-hour to breathe deeply before your public talk. If you want to carve out space during your interview visits to nurse your child, you will need to make that clear during your scheduling discussions. Or, even if you note that your child will be accompanying you, you may want to plan to nurse only at night, once safely back at your hotel. It's one thing to let the chair know you'll be accompanied by a child and her or his caregiver; quite another to have them meet you in the department lounge in between meetings. However unfair it may be, it is also the case that some faculty who would consider it reasonable for you to travel with and nurse a four-month-old will disapprove of breastfeeding a toddler. On the other hand, if you are very open about your choices, it is likely you will only get offers from welcoming and supportive departments.

Whatever you decide about openness, you cannot expect any institution to pay travel costs for your child or caregiver, though they can probably share your lodgings without additional expense.

Best of luck,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I am a female junior faculty member with a short list of publications (three articles, three book reviews, and a translation project). I plan to publish my first book this year. Unfortunately, I may also be getting a divorce and I am faced with the dilemma of what to do with my name. (I currently have my husband's name). Do you think that my publisher will be adverse to having a different name on my book than my publication record? Is it better to change it now, rather than down the line if, say, I were to get remarried? Will it impact my book if no one recognizes that it is me who wrote it? Is it better to change it early in my publishing career than later? Or should I just keep it and deal with the emotional aspects of repeating it every day for the sake of publishing/career continuity?

**Signed,
Why Did I Ever Change It?**

Dear Why,

The most important issue here is whether you want to take back your birth name. If you do — and it sounds like you do — the sooner you do it, the better. I cannot imagine that the publisher will have an objection to your using a different name. Undoubtedly, they agreed to publish your book because they were interested in its subject and believed in its quality, and that is not changed by a name change.

It is not uncommon for female academics to change names. Valerie Saiving's well-known article was originally published under Valerie Saiving Goldstein, and there are many other examples. Sometimes an author will put a past name in parentheses to lessen the confusion. But it sounds as if this is the perfect moment for you to make the transition as you are publishing your first major work. You can indicate on your vita the name you used for your other publications.

Good luck with this,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

How much do academics use LinkedIn and similar sites? Everything I hear about them is framed in terms of the business world, where there is perhaps more speed and flexibility in the hiring process. For tenure-track teaching jobs, institutions conduct national searches through established channels. Is there any benefit to my having a LinkedIn page in addition to my CV, references, and publications? What if I am looking for other kinds of jobs — adjunct work, academic support jobs, library jobs, and so forth? Do academic institutions use LinkedIn to look for candidates?

**Sincerely,
Semi-Luddite**

Dear Semi-Luddite,

A survey of colleagues suggests that academia has been slower to embrace online social networking than many other fields. At least at present, a profile on LinkedIn may help you more

with certain jobs outside of the academy. If you do maintain a profile on LinkedIn, Academia.edu, or another site, your CV and other related information should be consistent across sites. Many institutions will undertake a basic web search for you once you have applied for a job. Given how much information about us may be found on the web, you do want to exercise as much control as you can over the information about you that may be found in a standard "Google" search. A website easily locatable via search engines, with syllabi, CV, links to publications, and maybe even a blog if that interests you, would be far more useful than LinkedIn.

Good luck in your future online ventures,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I recently graduated with a PhD in religious studies. As I have begun to send out applications, I have often thought that my CV would look more compelling if I were to leave off the MDiv degree I obtained many years ago. Is this okay to do or am I ethically compelled to list all degrees obtained?

Signed — Unsure Applicant

Dear Unsure,

A CV lists relevant professional accomplishments. People of good will can differ over what is relevant, how comprehensive a CV should be, and how much one ought to tailor a CV for particular purposes. Some people list all their newspaper op-eds; others only articles in refereed journals. Some list dissertation title and doctoral advisors; others think once the dissertation has been published in book form, earlier information should be stricken. It may help to note that some grants require one to trim a CV to a certain number of pages, forcing one to be selective. Leaving something off a CV is not inherently a problem. If your MDiv degree is not relevant to the jobs you're seeking or the work you're currently doing, you can omit it in good conscience. Do think about, though, whether those three years will leave a gap in the chronology of your career that you'll be asked to explain.

Good luck,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I am a PhD student in religious studies. I have recently learned of the existence of a "guys' night" in our department — a weekly social meeting to which one has to be male to be invited. As I understand from talking to a male colleague, the group is mainly students and alums, but a few of the male faculty members are on the e-mail list as well (whether or how much they attend is unclear to me). I don't have a problem with the idea of men meeting together. As a female student, I have found it very enriching to meet with my female colleagues to discuss issues that relate to gender, so I can well imagine the value for men. However, when I hear that networking is taking place, specifically of the type that would potentially give some students more access than others to information, job opportunities, relationship-building, etc., I am concerned. Not only are women obviously not invited, but not all the men in the department have been invited either. The fact that our department chair, who is also my advisor, is one of the faculty in this group, has me doubly unsure as to how to bring up this concern.

Signed — Calling for Parity at Parties

Dear Calling for Parity,

First of all, let me say how disturbed and saddened I am by the many ways that things have changed so little over the last decades. I had hoped that the situation you are describing would have long been an impossibility.

I can think of several ways that you might respond:

1. You might want to begin by having a further conversation with the colleague who told you about the meeting to find out how the group started, how the invitees were chosen, and what its purposes are. If it was meant to be a male consciousness-raising group, for example, that's very different from a networking group.
2. Is there a female faculty member you could talk with about your concerns in order to reflect, strategize, and maybe get some inside information?
3. Does your university have an ombudsperson who can offer information, strategies, and possibly mediation? Such a person may also know whether this has been a problem in the past or in other departments.
4. You mention that you are in conversation with your female colleagues. Do they share your concerns? It's always more effective to get together with others to try to bring about changes in

a department's ethos. Indeed, if there are men who have been excluded, you may also want to include them in the conversation.

5. It is unclear from what you say whether your advisor has gone to these meetings. Ultimately, it will be important to talk with him. If you don't know how involved he is, it should be possible to inquire in a fairly neutral way, making clear your concerns. If you know that he has attended these meetings, it would be preferable to talk with him along with a couple of other students in the department so it's clear that your concerns are shared.

6. Try some guerilla theater. Show up at a meeting of the group with an ally from inside and other women and men who have not been invited. Maybe you can carry signs that say: "1962 or 2012?" or "It's 2012: Duh!"

Good luck to you, and let us know what happens.
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I have an upcoming on-campus interview for a tenure-track position. During the time of the interview, I will be about six months pregnant. How do I inform the hiring committee of my pregnancy? (The initial interview was a very formal phone interview). Your advice is greatly appreciated.

Signed — A Graduate Student in the Southeast

Dear Graduate Student:

I assume that your pregnancy will be obvious when you arrive, so the question is how to tell them in advance. Is that correct? What about just sending an e-mail before the interview saying something like, "I didn't want you to be surprised by the fact that I am six months pregnant. I am expecting a baby in...but plan to begin teaching in the fall."

All the best to you,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I am a PhD candidate who will be going on the job market this year for the first time. A year or so ago I contributed a book review to a well known journal. I was very interested in the premise of the book, but found it to be unevenly executed and, on the whole, disappointing. When I submitted the review, I worried a bit that it could cost me the goodwill of the book's authors, but I decided that not giving my real opinion would be academic cowardice — so I sent it in. Now (of course) the exact scenario that I worried about has come to pass and there is a job that I want to apply for in the department where some of the book's authors teach. My question is: should I leave the book review off of the CV that I submit to them? I don't have any idea who is on the search committee (it is a large department, and chances are good that none of them are). But if I were on a committee and saw that an applicant had reviewed my book, I would look it up. I don't think I said anything that was unfair, but it was critical, and if I were that committee member it would not favorably dispose me to the young job applicant. On the other hand, taking it off of my CV definitely seems like academic cowardice — if I'm afraid to stand behind my words, then I shouldn't have written them in the first place — and also potentially embarrassing if by some chance the person is on the committee, did happen to read the review, and connects my name to it, then sees that I left it off the CV. What do you think I should do?

Thanks — Regretful Reviewer

Dear Regretful Reviewer,

You articulate very well a dilemma facing young academics: publishing reviews — particularly in prestigious journals — is a good way to begin to build a CV, but there is always a danger of antagonizing a more senior scholar with a critical review.

It seems as if you know what to do. You had the courage and integrity to write a critical review; you should now include the review on your CV. As you yourself point out, if the author in question is on the committee or should see the vita, it will look worse not to include it. Most authors are careful to follow reviews, so it is likely that the person will have seen it. This does not necessarily mean that you won't be considered for the job. Scholars vary in their fairness, their sensitivity to critical reviews, and their enjoyment of good arguments.

One way of avoiding the conflict you're experiencing in the future is to agree to review only those books you honestly think are good. Of course, if everyone followed this policy, book reviewing would be less useful to the scholarly community. But there is nothing wrong with protecting yourself at a vulnerable stage in your career.

Good luck to you,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

When applying for jobs when you currently have one, should one use the letterhead of your current position?

Signed — In Letterhead Limbo

Dear Letterhead Limbo,

As a general rule, you should not use your current school's letterhead to apply for a new job. In a similar vein, it's better not to use your institutional e-mail account. (Your CV will show your current position, which of course you should discuss in your cover letter.) However, an exception to both the letterhead and the e-mail rule might be if you are employed in a fixed-term position (one year "visiting lecturer" or post-doctoral fellow) where everyone at your current institution knows you're going to be leaving and expects you to be applying for other jobs.

Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I have several journal articles (no books), great teaching evaluations, and I just received tenure. The thing is, my spouse and I dislike the area the college is in and the workload is pretty rough. Conventional wisdom says it is extremely difficult to move once you have tenure. Any advice on what to focus on professionally in the coming years in order to open up some possibilities? What do search committees look for in midcareer positions?

Signed — Halfway There

Dear Halfway There,

First of all, congratulations on your tenure; it's exciting to have reached this watershed moment. At the same time, for faculty members who would rather be elsewhere, tenure can undoubtedly feel like a trap.

Especially if you are applying to other teaching-oriented institutions, great teaching evaluations are certainly a plus. But it is very difficult to move to another tenured position without a book. Your professional efforts over the next few years are best focused in that direction. Perhaps one or more of your articles could form the core of a book.

Sometimes, people who are unhappy at their institutions give up tenure in order to move. Obviously, it is a serious drag to begin the process again (although you would normally receive at least some credit for the years you have put in), but it can be worth it to be happily settled for the long haul. Only you can decide on your priorities in this regard. But in this situation too, it would be important to have a book to strengthen your case for tenure a second time.

Good luck to you,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

Our institution is in the middle of a teachout. We have employed many adjuncts in the extension that is being closed. Are these adjuncts free to take their course syllabi, remove the name of our institution, and teach them for someone else? Or does my institution “own” the syllabi? Has anyone ruled on this issue in the past?

Signed — Wondering about Syllabi

Dear Wondering,

I'm not sure from your question whether your institution has made an issue of this, but professors bring syllabi from one institution to another all the time. It's hard to imagine not continuing to use at least parts of syllabi that have been successful. Even in the case of a common syllabus that a professor is assigned, unless there are specific copyright stipulations (which would be highly unusual), there is no reason a teacher cannot teach a course elsewhere. People regularly share their syllabi and borrow from those of others. That's part of the point of the AAR's Syllabus Project, which will soon be merged with the Wabash Center's Internet Guide to Religion. See http://www.aarweb.org/programs/Syllabus_Project/.

Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

Do you have any advice on how much overlap is appropriate in publications? For instance, I have just given a paper that will likely be published in two years but want to make use of the material as part of a longer article for a journal. Should I rewrite this material or can I keep it reasonably intact? Also, knowing that response times for

submitted articles can be long, what is the best strategy to prevent articles from sitting on my desk while avoiding submitting the same article to multiple journals?

Signed — Quizzical about Publishing

Dear Quizzical,

I don't think there is any rule about overlap. There are people who publish significant sections of articles or books over and over, and there are people who try to frame things differently or use different language even when they are dealing with issues they have addressed before. I have always felt that if you are citing yourself verbatim, that ought to be acknowledged. If you are untenured and your published articles contain substantial repetitions, then that could be held against you. Also, given the lead time at many journals, a paper appearing in two years might come out roughly the same time as a journal article, which is potentially awkward. You can always summarize your argument in one place and footnote the other.

It is not acceptable to submit the same article to multiple journals simultaneously, but it is an excellent idea to have a list of three or four journals that might be appropriate for a particular piece. Then if the first journal rejects it, you can see whether the readers offer any advice that you want to implement and, rather than stewing, quickly send the article on to the next journal on your list. You want to be clear in each case, however, that you meet the submission guidelines — in terms of length, notation, topic, etc. — for each particular journal.

Some journals have reputations for quick turn-around, others for keeping people waiting. You may want to consult with colleagues about the journals you have in mind. If you do not hear from a journal within three months, it is entirely appropriate to politely inquire when you might hear from them.

Abby

Dearest Academic Abby,

I am an MA student and new to the field of religious studies (I hold a BS). I am overwhelmed and frustrated by the demanding writing standards in the field and find myself at a loss and in the dark most of the time. English is my second language and the combination of reading and writing is beginning to be disheartening. Other than annoying my professors with this matter, what other resources or suggestions would you advise me to pursue in order to improve my writing for this field specifically?

Signed — Losing Hope

Dear Losing Hope,

You are right to be concerned about the importance of reading and writing for the field of religious studies. Kudos for taking steps to address your lack of preparation so that you can excel in your MA program. There are many excellent references for things like grammar, which will be helpful to you as a non-native speaker (and reader and writer) of English. One standard work is Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Seventh Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). Another good choice is Jay Silverman, Elaine Hughes, and Diana Roberts Weinbroer's *Rules of Thumb: A Guide for Writers* (4th edition, McGraw-Hill Companies, 1998). But as a first step for writing in the humanities and social sciences, you may find Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's guide *"They Say / I Say": The Moves that Matter in Persuasive Writing* (2nd edition, Norton, W. W. & Company, Inc., 2010) a good place to start both for understanding readings that are assigned to you and in crafting your own papers. Another great reference for writing is William Zinsser's *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2006).

As for not bothering your professors with your concerns, that is precisely what you should do as it is part of their job. They will have noticed your difficulties with writing and will appreciate your taking steps to improve your skills. You can ask whether they are willing to discuss paper outlines with you or read drafts of your papers and make suggestions.

You should also find out whether your university has a writing center where help is available to students. Many universities have these centers where students can bring drafts of papers or talk through conceptualizing them. Writing center staff members can help you with individual assignments and, in doing so, teach you how to approach the process.

Good luck,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I am beginning my second year as an adjunct instructor of ethics at a small, private — but not religious — college. Last year I covered gay marriage as one of six current ethical issues in American life. I hold in-class debates on the issues, assigning students to the “pro” or “con” side, so that many students have to take positions that they do not personally hold. Due to a student complaint, I have been asked to remove this lesson from my curriculum because “gay marriage should not be a debatable issue.”

I feel censored for several obvious reasons, but my tenuous position as a semester-to-semester professor does not leave me confident to oppose the dean. I have discussed with my program director that I am an enormous advocate for gay rights and that I personally agree with gay marriage; but it nevertheless remains a current ethical issue in America — hence the forty-five states that do not allow gay marriage — and should therefore be discussed in class if we want to change people’s minds.

Additionally, I feel the classroom is a safe environment to discuss differences, and at this particular school the male student body is not necessarily tolerant of different sexualities. Studies show that individuals who personally know a gay person will tend to favor gay rights, but the suppression of such a topic is only driving the issue underground, and has been the cause of at least one student leaving the school on account of his sexuality.

What can I do to keep the gay rights conversation alive, without violating the dean's wishes?

Signed — An Activist without a Platform

Dear Activist without a Platform,

First of all, let me affirm your view that the classroom is precisely the right environment to address controversial issues and that it is absolutely appropriate to ask students to debate the question of gay marriage. I agree that debates are an excellent way to get students to open up to positions that challenge their previously-held beliefs. It has been my experience that students are more willing to do this when they feel that a variety of perspectives are being presented.

That said, as an adjunct — and especially a relatively new adjunct — you are certainly in a very vulnerable position. It seems as if your dean is more concerned with avoiding complaints than with defending values fundamental to education. You mentioned that you spoke with your program director — a wise move. What was her/his response? Perhaps, if the program director thinks your argument makes sense, the next step would be to have a conversation with the dean to see what was in his or her mind and to share your own point of view in a nonconfrontational way.

You will want to weigh carefully the dangers and possible benefits of speaking with the dean. If you decide to do so, it might be useful to frame your argument for using same-sex marriage as one of your case studies in a way that highlights your educational rationale rather than activist objectives. You might emphasize the importance of using a contentious topic about which there are widely diverging basic assumptions as a way of teaching students that differences of opinion can be approached in a rational, empathetic, and above all informed way. You also could share

the AAUP report on “[Freedom in the Classroom](#)”, but be aware that it might well cost you your job. Do you want to continue teaching at this institution? How difficult would it be to find another adjunct position?

There are possibly extra-curricular ways that you could keep the conversation alive without violating the dean’s wishes. Are there student clubs, for example, that might sponsor a speaker or a conversation? Is there a club on LGBT issues? Are there students interested in starting one? Might your department be willing to invite someone to speak? Of course, you need to decide whether, as someone who is probably being underpaid to teach a particular course or courses, you want to be involved in activities outside the classroom. There is nothing shameful about seeking other forums to express your activism than the one in which you’re trying to earn a living.

In short, there is no easy answer to the question you raise, but there are avenues to explore. Good luck to you.

Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

I am nearing the point in my doctoral education at which I will need to begin the job search. In some ways, I am very excited. However, I have one pressing concern. I am a lesbian, and my partner and I have recently married.

Up to this point, I have never disclosed anything about my personal life to anyone in my academic department. As of now, I do not plan on being “out” during my job search, especially since my academic work does not involve LGBT issues. However, I am concerned that once I find a job, the need to be out in my new academic community will be more pressing — especially since my partner and I intend to have a child within the next few years, and it will be difficult to hide an entire family from my colleagues. Could you offer me any advice on being an out lesbian within the religion academy? How concerned should I be about the potential effect of being more open about my sexual orientation once I find a job?

Signed — Concerned Scholar, Wife, and Mother-to-be

Dear Concerned,

Congratulations on your recent marriage. Especially since you make clear that you are not generally out in your academic life, you are probably correct that it makes sense not to come out at a job interview unless you receive clear signals that it is fine. But being out once you have a job is a different matter. You don't say anything about your graduate program or the kind of job you are looking for. If you are seeking work at a conservative Christian institution, you may have to remain closeted. But at any liberal seminary, most secular institutions, and probably many Catholic colleges and universities (though certainly not all), being out in itself is unlikely to be a problem. (This is not to say that people who write on LGBTIQ issues or who are gay activists do not face repercussions.) Indeed, once you are hired, colleagues may well want to get to know you as a person. Informal gatherings can be important to institutional socialization, and people who aren't forthcoming about their families can appear “uncollegial.” (See Stacey Floyd-Thomas's article on the problems surrounding collegiality in the [October 2009 RSN](#).)

As you interview for jobs, you will want to look carefully at the options open to you, weighing the need to have a job with the desire to be out and comfortable. Would you want to be at an institution where you can't be out? Do you need to temporarily take a job at a place where you can't be out while hoping for a job where you can be out? As you speak informally with students and faculty members at different institutions, what sense do you get of the diversity of the campuses and of the norms and expectations concerning sexuality and family life? It would be helpful to contact LGBT centers or organizations at the schools you are considering to discuss the environment for LGBT people and to get the names of queer faculty members with whom you might speak. Stress the need for anonymity as you talk with such people.

There are also a couple of legal issues that it's important to be aware of. As you undoubtedly know, your marriage is not recognized by most states or by the federal government. That means that, unless you find a job in one of the few states that recognizes gay marriage, your partner would not necessarily be eligible for health and other benefits. If you are depending on your job for health coverage, you will need to check out whether any institution you are considering has domestic partner benefits. Sometimes you can find such information on a school's website. You can also do a bit of advance digging by calling the Human Resources office without mentioning your name and saying that you are thinking of applying for a position (no need to say in what) and would like to know if they have domestic partner benefits. You can also raise the question with Human Resources after you are offered a job and before you decide to accept it. Moreover, even if a state and institution recognizes your marriage, you will still have to pay federal taxes on any benefits given your partner. Thus Human Resources at least will need to know of your situation.

Best of luck with job search,
Abby

Dear Academic Abby,

Graduate guides often advise students to start early in “networking” and “getting involved” in professional organizations. How and where do you do this? What’s the point of networking anyway? And how are students supposed to have time for this extracurricular activity in the midst of demanding graduate programs?

Signed — Overworked and Underpaid

Dear Overworked and Underpaid,

In my view, an MA student needs to focus on courses, preparation for exams, and perhaps a Master's thesis. Sometimes MA students are ready and willing to submit papers for conferences, but most are not, and really at this stage it is not necessary. I do think MA students should talk with professors about which conferences they attend, and should get in the

habit of checking conference websites, reading calls for papers, and even attending association annual meetings, if possible.

PhD students really do need to begin submitting paper proposals, attending conferences, and networking, because at this stage the job market is palpably looming. Conference participation and networking are ways of establishing yourself as a serious thinker and gaining the friends and peers who will help you throughout your career. There are many graduate student conferences every year, many of which will be relatively local for you; these are great for introducing you to conference culture, and for meeting colleagues at or near your own level of intellectual development. But I also encourage you to take the plunge into the national conferences that best platform the kind of research you are preparing yourself to do. Again, I suggest you choose conferences in consultation with professors you respect.

Why network? Because this is how you will meet other established and new professors in your fields of study, as well as other graduate students like yourself. Networking is not some abstract “good” in and of itself, but refers to the vibrant, strenuous, and inspiring relationships we have with other intellectuals who are interested in the kinds of things we are interested in. Sometimes the overlapping interest is directly tied to the books we hope to write; other times, the overlap lies more in our shared concerns about gender or race, or in shared administrative obligations, such as developing undergraduate curricula, departmental policies, or the like. The academy, like our seminar classrooms, operates through dialogue, and through the push-pull between interest and need. Networking is, in a sense, developing your own ongoing “seminar of the academy.”

Finding the time for conferences and networking is difficult. But, then, juggling the multiple demands of academic life will always be difficult. In part, your ability and desire to attend conferences should align with your career goals. For some teaching positions the institution will expect you to be active professionally; figuring out how to juggle this expectation in graduate school will thus serve you well in obtaining such a position. For other teaching careers, institutions will praise you for attending conferences, but will not necessarily expect it, and for still others the institutions will discourage you from spending your time in that way.

Let your own career goals help you decide how to parse your time, then.

Abby

To ask a question without having it published in , please e-mail it to

This e-mail address is be