

**College Music Society Newsletter May 2004**  
**Professional Life Initiative: Task Force on Associate Professorship**

**ARTHUR J. HOULE (BOISE, IDAHO) - CHAIR**  
**CAROL PADGHAM ALBRECHT (UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO)**  
**JONATHAN BELLMAN (UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO)**  
**BRUCE DALBY (UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO)**

Given the variety of backgrounds of the so-called “typical” professor, mid-career could be anywhere from 35 to 55 years of age. Many faculty members enter higher education quite late, perhaps after a period as an orchestral musician, opera singer, or public school teacher. Many associate professors are assuming leadership positions either on their own campuses, in professional societies, or both—and the majority of them are tenured, although not necessarily blessed with total job satisfaction. In fact, after the initial post-tenure euphoria, it is possible that many are beginning to feel jaded with their institutions.

Perhaps the essence of the associate professorship today can be characterized by two conundrums. The first conundrum is the associate professor who is still trying to develop the performance experience, composition portfolio, or body of research necessary for both self-esteem and promotion. But there is much more “stuff” in the way than there used to be—not only more committee assignments than in the pre-tenure years but more institutional mechanics which take up increasingly more time.

The greatest change over the past decade is the “student as consumer” atmosphere pervading many institutions of higher learning and, along with that, the reliance on student evaluations as an indicator of a faculty member’s effectiveness (whether or not the students are qualified to make this judgment). More college and university presidents than ever either hold MBA’s (or act like they do) or try to run their schools on the “business model,” equating numbers of students enrolled or graduated, courses offered, etc., with productivity. During this time span, there has been a great deal of curricular change in music and in core curricula. The associate professor, therefore, has probably had to adapt to the reality of his or her “own teaching situation” (a euphemism for having to teach either ephemeral or peripheral things in order to justify the specialization for which the associate professor was initially hired).

The second conundrum occurs at mid-career. With tenure comes the satisfaction of having achieved a certain degree of approbation from one’s senior colleagues but lacking the rank of full professor. One still has to be wary of the political ramifications of one’s actions. Like people outside of academia, mid-career associate professors are likely to be heavily burdened financially trying to educate smart children who will want to attend expensive schools; yet they simultaneously are trying to fund their own research and save for retirement.

As the economy waxes and wanes, associate professors will be concerned over job security and will feel pressure from their institutions to continue to “do more with less.” Individual music faculty members may be expected to teach more courses, teach in more different areas, and work with more adjunct faculty members to fill in as funding becomes more difficult. For those of us who have been battling to restore positions lost twenty years ago, this is a great concern.

In general, many associate professors are quite happy at their institution and with the nature of their work, but their greatest concern is fending off the barrage of institutional demands which eat up their practice, composition, and research time—time needed for making a strong contribution to the cultural life of the campus and community and for developing the portfolio necessary for promotion to full professor.

Issues facing associate professors are:

**Money** - For faculty salaries and institutional support for research and creative endeavors.

**Load management** – To counteract both the “do more with less” and the “all things to all people” attitudes that plague many music departments so that one can maintain one’s level of performance, composition, and/or research.

**Declining academic standards** – To take more time to teach undergraduate and graduate students than it did even ten years ago because one has to spend more time teaching basic writing and what is referred to as “study skills.”

**Gentrification** – To hire or promote an accomplished artist without a doctorate can probably be achieved more easily at a prestigious music school than a lesser one. Schools of lesser prestige usually require a doctorate since they try to upgrade their image through strong faculty credentials. Many schools now have carefully articulated “standards” as to what constitutes faculty rank, with the warning that “the hill gets a lot steeper” as one approaches the summit of full professor. Apparently, the more moderate the institution, the steeper the hill. The catch, however, is that the full professors who would potentially judge your work often have not had to produce at the same level.

**Sweeping institutional change** – There can be a substantial change in institutional attitude between hiring and promotion. This can be caused by a new president, new music director, new curriculum (especially if motivated by external funding), or substantial change in a department’s personnel due to retirements and new hires. The institution may no longer resemble the department joined a few years earlier.

**Stasis** – To recognize the reality in our profession that the job market determines where you go, geographically. By mid-career it has become extremely difficult to move and it only gets worse later, since universities tend to hire only at the entry level. Also, sometimes musicians stagnate when their institutions continually favor mechanics over actual content in one’s teaching.

For the sake of our field, associate professors could benefit from:

**Advocacy for financial parity** with faculty in other, more lucrative fields within one’s own institution;

**Assistance in obtaining sabbatical and research funding.** Many faculty do not renew themselves intellectually and/or artistically, because sabbatical leaves tend to be underfunded — a situation that too often affects people with children.

**Commuter marriage** might bear some investigation. It is prevalent in all academic departments to some extent but seems potentially more so in music, for it is often difficult to find even one faculty position. Finding two together is often nearly impossible, unless one member of the couple teaches piano or voice and is willing to do this in an adjunct capacity. Can more spousal accommodation be possible in the music field?

**Balancing multiple specialties** by paying attention to a job description. The role models in our field generally teach only one specialty (either an academic field or a performing medium, but not both). The reality of many jobs, however, is that one teaches and produces in both a performing medium and an academic area. Who are the faculty members who have been successful in this situation, and how do they keep the juggling act going?

The College Music Society  
312 East Pine Street · Missoula MT 59802  
phone: (406) 721-9616 · facsimile: (406) 721-9419  
e-mail: [cms@music.org](mailto:cms@music.org) · www: <http://www.music.org>