

Administering the academy

Professional Paths After Graduate School

College of Arts and Humanities
Office of the Dean



Top Five Tips for obtaining a position in academic administration

David Eubanks (English)

Assistant Director, Center for Teaching Excellence
University of Maryland

David Eubanks has taught American and British literature, composition, and folklore as a Graduate Teaching Assistant and a Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Maryland, and he has worked as an Intern and an Instructor in the English Component of the University of Maryland's Academic Achievement Programs.

In March 2004, he joined CTE as Graduate Media Coordinator and began editing Teaching & Learning News. He became the Center's Assistant Director in 2006. At CTE he organizes and leads workshops for the campus and for departments, consults individually with faculty and graduate teaching assistants, coordinates a number of professional development programs, and facilitates several faculty and graduate student learning communities. He co-teaches the University's graduate seminar on college teaching and learning.

Eubanks holds a BA in English from Rhodes College and an MA and PhD in English from Maryland.

1. The line between faculty and academic staff can be remarkably blurry, primarily because we share significant commitments and responsibilities.
2. Always bear in mind that many academic staff are Ph.D.s and can consume information in scholarly ways. In other words, they are critical readers. Collaborating and communicating with almost anyone working as academic staff or as a university administrator requires a sharp sense of others' priorities, needs, and objectives. While you may not be able to think like a physicist, you are able to write like a scholar, and that is a strength.
3. Know how your work connects with institutional character and purpose. Just as you should be able to offer a clear and listener-friendly summary of your research, it helps to be able to explain why your program is important.
4. Be able to translate your experience convincingly. If you want to work in the office of civic engagement, persuade the hiring committee that you integrated civic engagement in your teaching in ways that actually improved the course. If you want to work for the office of general education, persuade the hiring committee that your work as the graduate rep on your department's curriculum committee was meaningful.

Tanya Jung (Art History)

Assistant Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
University of Pennsylvania

Tanya Jung received her Ph.D. in art history from the University of Maryland in 2007. While she was working on her degree, she served as the graduate assistant, assistant director and then director of the Honors Humanities Program. Currently, she is an assistant dean in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania where she works as an advisor and administrator in the areas of general curriculum, study abroad, and judicial matters.

1. **Become a generalist as well as a specialist.** Many administrative careers in the Academy cross disciplines, schools, departments and offices. While expertise in your field is important, having an interest in and understanding of how the Academy works as an educational and interdisciplinary whole is just as important.
2. **Research the niches:** Know what administrative options are available in the Academy and know the scholarship on higher education. There are a lot of niches including assistant dean, dean, director, and provostial and jobs in everything from student life to academic affairs to international education to admissions. Some good places to start your research include *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (you can even pick "administrative" as a search criterion in the jobs and advice sections); the Association of American Colleges and Universities; the American College Personnel Association; NASPA — Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education; and NACADA—National Academic Advising Association.

3. **Network:** Get to know administrators in your university either by directly contacting them for informational interviews or through programming, events and service on campus. Similarly, extend your network beyond your university and join professional organizations like the ones listed above—if your budget allows. This will expand your knowledge base, help you develop your communication skills and give you more access to job opportunities once you graduate.
4. **Diversify your experience.** Though you need to develop your teaching portfolio through teaching assistantships and adjunct opportunities, remain open to graduate assistantships that involve other aspects of higher education (e.g. administration, advising, residential life or institutional research). Look beyond traditional assistantships for volunteer opportunities in your department and university (e.g. mentoring undergraduates and incoming graduate students or joining graduate student associations and advisory boards). Consider paid and volunteer work outside your university.
5. **Stay balanced and focused.** Remember that even if you have a diversity of experience and you are certain you don't want to pursue a tenure track position, you will still be more marketable with a graduate degree than without one. Find the best way to pursue alternative opportunities while making the completion of your degree your primary goal.

Claudia Rector (American Studies)

Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs, George Mason University

Claudia Rector began her administrative career at UMCP in the Department of American Studies, and later served as Director of Academic Program Development in the Office of Academic Planning & Programs (Provost's Office). She earned an A.B. from Wellesley College and a Ph.D. from UMCP, both in American Studies.

1. Remember that the humanities are only one part of a university, and that the values, beliefs, prejudices, habits, and cultures of other units may be quite different. In some parts of the university, being part of a corporate culture or making your work useful to the Department of Defense is considered to be a *good* thing. Most people who go into academia do so because they truly care both about thinking for its own sake and about students, but many units also are under great stress to respond to the business world, and sometimes those things align more easily in other fields than they do in the humanities. Be careful about your assumptions.
2. Likewise, forget how you have learned to write in your graduate program. Spend as much time as necessary to make whatever you write—especially to anybody outside of the humanities—as short as possible. Bullet points are not “cheating.”
3. Learn the tools (Microsoft Excel and Powerpoint) and skills of the business world, and apply them intelligently. There are two good reasons for doing this: first, the business world spends a lot of time thinking about efficient ways to manage and present information, and it's silly to deprive yourself of that; and second, although learned helplessness with regard to technology is sometimes worn as though it were a marker of being engaged with more lofty matters, it's not usually perceived that way by others.
4. Approach your potential workplace as requiring serious anthropological research. Learn to read budgets. Read the major public documents (and learn how to read between the lines) for any institution in which you are employed or interested in becoming employed. Documents such as strategic plans or annual reports have usually been reviewed and edited to be as slick as the shiny paper that they're printed on, but they can still reveal a good deal of important information, especially in the budget figures or organization charts. Look past the superficial message; think hard about what is *not* being said, and if possible compare these documents with those from other institutions.
5. Working in administration without tenure has trade-offs; you will need to make peace with them if you want to be happy. On the up side: you may be able to start with (and continue to enjoy) a salary considerably higher than your peers with teaching jobs; you won't have to go through the miseries and anxieties of the tenure process; and with care you can make yourself almost as layoff-proof as those with tenure (and in some cases, even more so). On the down side: it's much harder to keep a research agenda going than you think it will be; you will probably spend the majority of your time doing work that is not quite as much fun as research in your chosen field; and you will forever exist on the wrong side of a rigid and thriving faculty/staff caste system. There are a lot of ways in which working in administration can bruise your ego, and it's really worth some time thinking about how you're going to deal with these things when they come up.

General Tips (culled from past two *Outside Academia* panels)

- Look for non-academic jobs in the same place as academic job listings.
- Be prepared for anything. Be open to the possibility of getting a non-academic position, even if it is not something you were considering originally. Non-academic jobs may be very fulfilling!
- Do not say no! Take every opportunity that comes your way within your field.
- Do internships. These create experience, and most importantly, networks that will be very valuable to you when job hunting.
- Expand your computer/technical skills.
- If you have flexibility, consider internships or jobs outside of the DC area or a city you would not have normally considered, even in a non-metropolitan area.
- TRY, TRY AGAIN! - Many of the non-academic positions are extremely coveted, just like academic jobs. So, do not give up. KEEP TRYING!
- BE PATIENT! The application process for government jobs takes a very long time and goes through many people.
- There is no seasonality to when govt. positions are open. Often, positions only become open when someone retires.
- Watch news to see what is happening in govt. climate to prepare for possible increases in activity or budget of a particular dept. This will often result in a hiring phase.

General Application Tips

- Make it very clear you would work in the position. Be transparent! (not only about what you know, your special expertise in your field, but specifically how you can USE your knowledge in that particular job)
- Write simply, be direct, even dull. Do not be concerned with “impressive” writing.
- With government KSAs (Knowledge, Skills and Abilities), there is no need to show how well you write – simply address specifically what they are looking for.
- Literally look at the application listing and directly answer each qualification. Do not be afraid to use the exact verbiage from the listing.