

# The Compleat Picture

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Book Review: From Professing to Publishing, Department Politics to Getting Grants, The Compleat Academic Is There

## **The Compleat Academic: A Career Guide Second Edition**

Edited by John M. Darley, Mark P. Zanna, and Henry L. Roediger, III  
APA Books, 2004

I acquired my 1984 edition of Zanna and Darley's *The Compleat Academic* when a long-tenured professor was giving away books from her collection. It was a treasure passed along to me for which I am grateful. Unfortunately, it is perhaps a book to which many current graduate students are not regularly exposed. This, I believe, should change.

The 2004 edition of *The Compleat Academic: A Career Guide*, which includes Zanna, Darley, and Roediger as editors, is once again a *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* of postgraduate education and employment. It is reorganized, expanded, updated, and utterly useful. Two decades following its debut, this revised volume still speaks effectively to sophisticated professionals who are early in their careers as psychologists.

This edition has five main sections (the first edition had three), each with several chapters written by a variety of leaders in the field. The broad areas covered include starting a career; teaching and mentoring; research and writing; orientation to the academic environment; diversity in academia; and managing your career over time.

Roediger provided an early assessment of the revised book in a 2003 *Observer* [Presidential Column](#), in which he alluded to an upcoming review by "members of one of its intended audiences, graduate students." I am a doctoral student in clinical psychology. While my program prepares its students to be successful academics (in my humble opinion), the program cannot always provide personal mentoring on every topic covered in this volume. Thus, I invite graduate students across subdisciplines in psychology to recognize the value of a text which synthesizes varied perspectives on these important components of an academic career.

Section one of the new manuscript gives special attention to "leaving the nest" of a graduate training program. This is a time when important decisions are made between applying for postdoctoral training or assistant professorships. The authors provide practical information that demystifies the "job talk" experience. They also acknowledge the wide range of job opportunities available for psychologists outside of academia and discuss relevant concerns.

Graduate students funded through research grants and scholarships may not have practiced or developed fundamental teaching skills. Hence, Section two begins with a chapter called "Tips for Effective Teaching," an important "back-to-the-basics" guide to running a classroom. The section quickly moves

into discussion of the more complex roles psychologists can play as mentors. The chapter alerts young professors to potentially problematic situations and offers guidelines on handling such situations, should they occur.

Becoming a laboratory director may be the long-term goal of many behavioral scientists. Once you have negotiated for your physical space (explained in an early chapter by Darley and Zanna, called “The Hiring Process in Academia”), there is one clear message from most research institutions: Show me the money. Thankfully, section three provides considerable detailed information about obtaining a research grant from both the granting agency’s and the applicant’s perspectives. This section also includes ideas about polishing your rough conglomeration of brilliant ideas into a manuscript worthy of publication for its contribution to the science of psychology.

In section four you will discover secrets about the inside workings of psychology departments. As many of us have learned, often in unpleasant ways, department politics are ever-present and part of an unavoidable power structure. Knowledge of technology for research, teaching, and applied work is a new currency of power. The authors of these chapters discuss the skills necessary to navigate these occasionally dark waters of command and authority. If students were to read only one article early in their careers, this should be it.

Clearly, the field has embraced diversity and the importance of multicultural awareness, and section five is devoted to this paradigm shift. Consistent with the culture of the time, the first edition dedicated four pages to “If You Are a Minority Group Member or a Woman.” This second edition devotes more than 60 pages, approximately one-sixth of the book’s material, to diversity in academia. This updated volume not only speaks to the foundation of appreciating individual and group differences, but the authors take the discussion to a new level of depth with regard to translating abstract theory into action.

A multitude of topics related to race and gender are addressed clearly and extensively. Psychologists name their struggles regarding which “group” they represent or where they are expected to have expertise. The perilous balance of work and family is examined from multiple perspectives that allow readers a glimpse into the myriad ways psychologists can integrate their lives. The demands of this career path cannot be minimized, yet the authors provide encouragement for its potential rewards.

In section six, Shelley E. Taylor and Joanne Martin speak to some of the brutal realities of the tenure-track life. This chapter offers a series of warnings and reminders of the countless ways that a career in psychology can, at times, feel like an overwhelming juggling act, with teaching, doing administrative work, researching, staying current with the literature, writing, and reviewing often in need of simultaneous attention. While the tone of this chapter occasionally borders on morose, there are one-liners worth repeating: “[D]o not be paranoid,” “... allocate a minimum of about 10 hours a week for writing,” “Treat your scheduled writing time as sacred,” “Decide how many students or how many projects you want to cope with simultaneously. Say no when these limits are exceeded,” “It goes without saying that you should never — that is, *never*, — get involved with a student,” and “Your private life is private.” The authors lead us through an entire career in one chapter, with pearls of wisdom for each phase.

The book is brought to a conclusion with a hopeful outlook and bulleted reminders of its essential messages. Roediger and David A. Balota, the authors of the final chapter, are in the esteemed position of

holding long-term perspectives on the careers of psychologists. They teach psychologists how to do what many psychologists teach others to do: develop short and long-term goals, identify and utilize resources, and recognize and respond to barriers to success. This is the kind of mentoring that improves overall performance in the workplace, and the kind of mentoring from which each student will benefit.

Before I learned the history of the Oxford English Dictionary, I believed there had always been such a resource for writing. Similarly, before I spoke with tenured professors about the role of this book in their lives, I did not fully realize that until *The Compleat Academic* there were no published guides for what an academic career entails. Graduate students in the 21st century are fortunate to have an improved version of a classic that promises to truly enhance the professional career and library collection of any aspiring psychologist.

*Author's Note: H'Sien Hayward, who does research at the University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center, contributed to this review.*