



Young Faculty in the Twenty-First Century: International Perspectives

Yudkevich, Maria; Altbach, Philip G.; Rumbley, Laura E., eds.
SUNY Press, 2015

Book Review

Tags: faculty development | faculty preparation | faculty well-being

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Date Reviewed: November 30, -0001

This is a book about teachers and not about teaching. Furthermore, it is a book about data on mass populations of teachers in higher education from ten different countries unadorned by local anecdote or illustrative portraits of a faculty person in real working conditions. The reason this book is worth paying attention to in this forum is that it shines a comparative light on the perils and possibilities that face new entrants into the academic field – some of whom will be your colleagues. Or rather, because this book is of more interest as a reference for hiring committees and deans, it tells you of the challenges your candidate has faced to reach your attention in the first place. That is if you are open to exploring how to move from even national inbreeding to internationalization of faculty recruitment.

We find here the results of a ten country participative research program into the realities of career preparation, openings and market transparency, prospects and permanence, of the academic life, individually presented and analyzed and then cumulatively assessed by the editors in the final chapter. The countries are Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Norway, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, and the U.S. There is of course a vast difference in contexts – from massive increase of student demand and a dearth of faculty, to a tedious and precarious shuffle of young faculty into middle age before a realistic prospect of career stability and something coming close to middle class lifestyle. (This latter is an unquestioned normative standard even as it is evident that the status of the academic profession in many societies is falling.)

A number of thematic emphases emerge throughout the chapters, specifically the impact of hiring practices and terms of employment on female faculty, the difficulty of inbreeding and

the social burden of academic networking, as well as more common experiences of young faculty such as heavy teaching load and administrative obligations with less time for research. It is agreed that contract and temporary employment with attendant uncertainty is the newest but also most detrimental aspect of current higher education. Some gems, of course, emerge from the textual detail. Male professors can get paid more in India after undergoing a vasectomy, a PhD will get male students out of military service cheaply enough in Russia, females are in the majority of doctoral students in Portugal.

As a foreign born and trained academic teaching abroad, and given the international prospectus of the book, I shall concentrate a few remarks on the international (and not just national) data. Norway is concerned that too much of its government investment in doctoral work funds foreign born scholars, Portugal experiences a brain gain and often requires doctoral students to have international experience, France is relatively closed as a system, whereas South Africa welcomes PhDs from abroad in large number. Interestingly the chapter devoted to the US paid no attention to its cohort of international faculty. Perhaps this is so because international faculty are imagined to be ubiquitous, but alongside collegial anxiety about brain drain from abroad this disregard of the good or otherwise of international recruitment was noteworthy. India and Brazil have fewer foreign imports but radical differences in conditions for young faculty in public (better) or private (worse) sectors. India has a massive teacher shortage whereas the EU experiences long waits for civil servant professors to retire, and in the US there is not even a retirement age.

If teaching religion is to benefit from an international perspective, as I believe it does, it is going to mean pursuing scholars from very different educational settings and looking (for US job searches) beyond easily accessible US-based guild networks. (I leave to others the judgment, case by case, as to whether US-trained international scholars are as international as those trained abroad.) It will mean understanding different pressures faced by potential job candidates from other countries. This book is a great resource for this purpose. Its data may also facilitate the comprehension of institutional pressures that affect the success or otherwise of international scholarly networks and projects as faculty from one country interact with faculty from another. I think of my current project with colleagues from Brazil where the broad data of Elizabeth Balbachevsky's chapter contextualizes what I have picked up in conversation.

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