



## Early Career Psychologist Council

### *Q&A with the President*

Fall 2012 edition, President Norine Jalbert

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As our Early Career Psychologist (ECP) Council has been collecting data on the needs of fellow ECPs, one need that has consistently been raised is the desire to hear the perspectives of more experienced faculty on how they handled ECP issues. Thus, we are beginning an annual “Q&A with the President,” which we will include in each Fall issue of the STP newsletter. A month ago we solicited questions from the ECP listserv and we asked Norine Jalbert to answer some of them. Although she felt that many of the questions required more complex answers than could fit in this column, she agreed to take a stab at it (and even solicited input from other executive council members as well!). We published an excerpt from the Q&A in the Fall newsletter, but we provide the full version below.

*\*Please note that additional questions/issues are welcome for discussion on the ECP listserv or the STP listserv more broadly.*

#### **ECP Question:**

*What is your advice with regard to working with summer students at small colleges? For example, how can ECPs balance the research needs of junior faculty (summer writing, working on grants, travel to conferences, meetings with collaborators, etc.) with those of students (e.g., one-on-one time with students in the lab)?*

#### **Response:**

I’m assuming that whoever asked this question is not talking about teaching summer classes but, rather, does have summer students who wish to work on research projects. If I’m incorrect and you are talking about summer classes, then I guess the answer to the question of balance really amounts to deciding whether you want to do your own research versus earn extra money in the summer by teaching summer classes. To a large extent your financial situation will dictate your decision, but I would think long and hard about taking on time consuming summer teaching if you have important research goals and objectives that need to be completed during the same time frame. What you don’t want to do is run the risk of not fulfilling your research goals and objectives and not fully meeting the needs of your students.

On the other hand, if my initial assumption is correct and you’re asking about working with a select group of summer students who wish to work on research projects under your supervision, then the most common way of handling this question of balance among people I know is to figure out a way to incorporate the students into your own research agenda. I understand that this is easier said than done, but the people I know who have taken the time to bring students into their research endeavors have generally been the most successful in moving forward with their research and in their teaching. Needless to say, undergraduate students require more attention

and supervision at the beginning, but if these same students stay with you and your research program for more than a year then you will reap the benefit of having seasoned undergraduate researchers to help you with the training of the next crop of students. So, if you can survive the first summer, then subsequent summers become a little easier (I hope).

**ECP Question:**

*Relatedly, during the academic year, how do you balance your time between teaching/research/service?*

**Response:**

Much of what I stated in the previous answer would seem relevant here, especially the second paragraph of my response. However, during the academic year, everything is indeed ramped up, because you're teaching more students while trying to continue your research efforts, and you have the added responsibilities of department and university service. Unless you have boundless energy (and some remarkable people do), I don't believe that "balance" is possible. What's more likely to happen is a periodic readjustment of priorities among the three demands of teaching, research and service, so that whichever has first priority will consume more of your time than the other two. How you set up your first rank ordering, and how often you change your rank ordering, will depend on the demands and expectations of your institution and the extent to which these demands and expectations are clearly articulated. I was fortunate to work in an institutional environment where the priorities were articulated in our collective bargaining contract (teaching, research, service), so that is the rank ordering I initially focused on to earn tenure and my first promotion. Even then, though, there were occasional semesters where my focus got diverted so that university and professional service took higher priority than research. Over the years, even though our collective bargaining contract has not changed on this issue, times have changed. Today, it's a given that our new faculty will be good teachers, so greater emphasis is being placed on research and service. What new faculty need to pay attention to, though, is that research is listed second so it trumps service. Which brings me back to my response to the previous question – you need to find a way to incorporate students into your research agenda. Think about it. When students work with you on your research, you get to talk about how well you're teaching and mentoring them, then you get to talk about the research that you're presenting and perhaps publishing with student collaborators, and then you get to talk about what a service it is to the department and university because you and your students are representing the institution in the outside world.

**ECP Question:**

*I am going to be teaching a large enrollment course this term and will be supervising a very large number of TAs (8). Do you have any advice for how to minimize the time spent on email facilitating them (without a head TA)? More generally do you have advice about supervising a large number of TAs?*

**Response:**

Let me start first with a disclaimer. I personally have never taught at a large university nor have I ever taught high enrollment classes where I needed to supervise TAs. However, I will take a stab at offering some sort of response.

If, by TAs, you mean graduate students, then I think you need to meet with your eight TAs and have them discuss with you how to organize themselves, including perhaps electing one person to serve as official liaison with you. I say this because I'm assuming that graduate students have a sufficient knowledge base that they can work more independently than undergraduate students. Even then, some sort of regularly scheduled meeting with all TAs would make sense. If, on the other hand, you're talking about undergraduate TAs, then you must of course interact with them more regularly. If any one of them is more capable and experienced than the others, then you could appoint that person as the official liaison with you. One suggestion from an executive committee member is that you set up a Blackboard (or similar) system where you can post instructions, they can post questions that you only need to answer/post once, etc. To some extent, virtual meetings can take the place of regular meetings, but I would be cautious in depending solely on virtual meetings with undergraduate TAs. After the first time around, your instructions and Q&As can be the basis of a "workbook" for future TAs. Good luck.

**ECP Question:**

*How do you balance your career with starting a family?*

**Response:**

The flippant answer is "not easily." Once again, I have to declare that I have no personal experience with this dilemma because my husband and I have no children. This was a choice based in part on our career choices. For those who choose to have children, based on my observations and discussions with colleagues over the years, I think the question should not focus on balance in the abstract. The high demands of career and family put balance out of reach unless several other factors are present in your situation – chief among them is flexibility. Flexibility in your career goals and objectives and the speed with which you can reach them, flexibility in your family goals and objectives and the extent to which you can actually accomplish all of them, flexibility in your relationship with your significant partner and your family members in terms of shared duties and expectations, and flexibility (hopefully) within your institution in respecting your life situation. You can't necessarily control institutional flexibility, but you should try to get a sense of how "they" really feel about people who take advantage of the provisions of the Family Leave Act, use of sick days, and so forth. To a large extent, the other flexibilities are under your control, and my recommendation is to reach a mutual understanding with relevant family members as early as possible before habits and expectations become entrenched and difficult to reverse. Somehow, after 38 years of marriage, I can't figure out how or when my husband forgot how to cook anything but the most rudimentary of meals, and trying to re-teach him the skill seems to involve more effort than I care to exert.

**ECP Question:**

*Relatedly, do you have any advice on whether to "stop the tenure clock" when starting a family? Some institutions automatically add a year to the tenure clock, whereas at others it seems that women who stop the clock are less likely to eventually get tenure.*

**Response:**

On this issue, the answer really depends on your institution and what their institutional culture is willing to support. I would recommend that you make a concerted effort to solicit information and opinions from a variety of colleagues on campus before you make a decision to stop the

tenure clock (hmmm – this might actually make for an interesting research survey). I would also pay particular attention to the people and committees involved in tenure and promotion decisions, since they are ultimately the ones who would be rendering judgments on your application. On my campus, I've noticed that tenure and promotion decisions can vary from year to year with just a small change in committee membership, and people who have strong positions, one way or the other, can sometimes exert considerable influence in the decision making process. In social psychology, we have a saying that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, so you need to find out at your institution what they've done in the past in these cases.

**ECP Question:**

*How does an ECP get involved in STP? What is the value for ECPs of serving on external (divisional) committees versus internal (institutional) committees?*

**Response:**

STP is always looking for volunteers for committees, working groups, taskforces, etc. so the biggest challenge facing an ECP is to find out about them. The STP website does have a "get involved" link on its homepage and this is one place to find out about some of our openings. Joining the STP ECP group is another way of getting involved in STP and in social networking with other early career psychologists. A third way to get involved is to submit papers to present at STP or STP-supported programs at national and regional conferences. Again, our website is the place to start to find out about these conferences. Lastly, you need to make an effort to meet people in STP, especially people involved in STP leadership, when you are at conferences and let them know that you're interested in getting more involved and what kinds of things you're most interested in. Social hours are the best place to do this because no one is usually rushing from one session to another.

As to the question of serving of external versus internal committees, the answer depends on your institutional goals, objectives and expectations. As an ECP, you clearly have to establish a presence on your own campus with regard to university service. Try to be selective. I think it's better to serve on one meaningful committee than to list three or four committees that everyone on campus knows seldom meet or seldom do much of anything. If you're selective with campus service then perhaps you'll free up some time to be involved externally because external service to your profession rounds out your credentials. It documents that you're someone who is interested in your profession beyond your ivied walls and it brings credit and recognition to your institution if you get appointed or elected to a leadership position.