

# **Words of Wisdom for Beginning Scholars**

**(formerly known as “The Other Graduate Handbook”)**

A highly idiosyncratic selection of actual examples, with commentary

**Alison E. Rautman**  
Rautman@msu.edu  
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Remember: “Not all advice is good advice”*

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Update to Preface: With my administrative and physical move to the Center for Integrative Studies at MSU, I decided to demote the reference to the "graduate student handbook" to second billing. Although the ideas herein were originally phrased as advice to graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at Michigan State University, in fact they enjoy more general applicability.

AER Fall 2009

## Original Preface (2007)

With the second edition of the “other graduate handbook” out, I realize that a word of explanation is needed. As part of my job as Assistant Chair in the Department of Anthropology at MSU (1998-2008), I update the Department’s graduate manual, which outlines the graduate program requirements, provides helpful links to various University and Graduate School websites, and outlines when and how students and faculty are supposed to fill out various forms. In doing so, I realized that nowhere is there a place for the most important instructions of all—how to behave.

I myself was a very shy and clueless graduate student in my day, but I was fortunate enough to have an advisor and also a more senior grad student apartment-mate who simply told me what to do— go to the brown bag lectures; go to the department parties; be sure to talk to these faculty members and tell them what you’re up to; schedule in the time to see and be seen around the department.

At the same time, as someone who enjoys a good story, I was keeping a mental list of my colleagues’ commentary about each other, job-interviewees, and students. I also had some of my own favorite wry philosophical expressions, born from (sometimes) bitter personal experience. In addition, at some point I wrote out some lectures about “how to read an article” for my students. I threw it all together and lo, “the other graduate handbook” was born.

It is worth emphasizing that every single example presented is (supposedly) true. I did not make anything up—in fact I’ve left out the most amazing stories of people’s totally deranged behavior, figuring that if one abides by the “2 drink maximum” advice, one will probably not need them. (Then again, I’m not sure that explains why one graduate student at Unidentified U would wear her S-M outfit for her dissertation defense....)

This handbook is addressed primarily to the basically polite and well-meaning, earnest but clueless, shy, concerned, self-reflective, and deferential beginning graduate student and beginning professional. The others, whose more entertaining behaviors are described here, aren’t going to pay any attention to advice anyway.

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*Remember: “Not all advice is good advice”*

## **The Top 5 Take-Home Messages**

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1. Be able to code switch between different cultural contexts  
(When you aren't sure; err on the side of formality)
  2. Be honorable at all times (even in difficult situations)
  3. Be proactive in making, sustaining, and rescuing professional relationships
  4. Be the “calm assertive confident leader” when dealing with students
  5. Be careful of email and any web-based or electronic communication.
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## Acknowledgements

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Many thanks to my colleagues who (unwittingly or not) contributed anecdotes, provided general encouragement, or inspired me by example (both good and bad). Most importantly, I will be forever grateful to my graduate advisor

Dr. John D. Speth

for providing explicit instruction on how to succeed in graduate school:

*“Show up for the brown bags.”*

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## **PART I. BEGINNING GRADUATE STUDENT SKILLS**

### **1. How to read an article.**

(thank you, Prof. Sherry Ortner)

1. What is the author trying to do?  
Is this a research article, a report, an overview, an essay, a programmatic statement? It's unfair to judge an author for not doing something they didn't plan to do anyway.
2. What is the author's basic argument or question (in one or two sentences)?
3. What kind of evidence does the author think will contribute to answering this question?
4. What methods are used to deal with the evidence? (linkage between data and interpretations)
5. What inferences does the author make from these results?
6. How does the author know when he/she is done?

### **2. How to ask important research questions (for papers, theses, dissertations)**

1. Ask: "Under what conditions?"  
Avoid letting people put you into a position where you have to argue either/or. The tendency to create dichotomies often oversimplifies an argument. Think: "under what conditions" would that suggestion work? In what context would that argument be more suitable? In what ways does this idea help us understand some phenomenon?
2. Ask: "What is the underlying issue that connects these ideas?"
3. Or, ask "what different variables are involved in this one general concept?" In what way(s) is this concept or idea involving more than we thought at first? Would it be more helpful to disaggregate the concept into different component parts (e.g., "mobility" into "residential mobility" and "logistical mobility"). Conversely, is this concept really just one aspect of a larger issue?
4. Try to find some sort of paradox or seeming paradox that you propose to resolve.  
Example: "the theory of empires predicts X, but in this example, we see Y happening. I'm going to investigate what is going on here." (That is, what is special about this case study such that our general expectations don't work? Under what conditions....).

The University of California-Berkeley has a wonderful web site for writing a dissertation proposal that explains more about this step.

5. Avoid yes/no arguments in research. What if the answer is “no” or your data won’t let you test yes/no. Frame your research so that whatever you find out, it will be a contribution to the field.

### **3. How to “engage with the literature”**

At the annual evaluation meeting, the faculty always talk about how the student is or is not “engaging with the literature.” Frankly, I have no idea what this means. But from context, I think that they want the student to:

1. Relate the given article to previous ideas discussed in the seminar. Think: “why are we reading this article in THIS course?”
2. Relate the ideas in the week’s readings to the organization and structure of the course as a whole (shown by the organization of the syllabus). Think: “why are we reading this article or person NOW in the course?”
3. relate the ideas to general issues in the field. Think: “why are we reading this article at all?” Or, more specifically, “what is the most general topic that this article addresses?” and “what does this article reveal about the author’s general view of this general topic?”
4. Relate the ideas to your own potential research (not your personal life). Think of the important issues in your subfield, geographic area, or topic. How might this article relate?

### **4. How to talk in a graduate seminar**

Similarly, faculty comment about how a student is or is not “participating in class.” I don’t know what this means either; all my graduate courses were lecture. My impression, however, is that they want students to:

1. Develop the ability to speak clearly and articulately in a professional setting with their peers and also with professors. This is a skill and it comes with practice.
2. Stay on-topic professionally. Do not wander off into personal anecdote. Relate ideas to other ideas in the course, NOT to your personal life or personal experience. Use data or evidence from the course readings or from other professional contexts (other articles, current events, ethnographies, etc) to support, refine, or refute an idea.
3. Articulate how general ideas play out in specific circumstances, or (alternatively) how specific case studies or events (described in the article) relate to a general concept. (That is, articulate the connections across conceptual scale)
4. For assertive, Alpha-types: Link what you are saying to what previous people brought up—that is, join the discussion, don’t crash into it.

5. For shy, deferential types: If you're truly clueless, make an appointment with the professor. Say how interesting the class is (or at least the topics that are covered in that class, right? That's why you're in graduate school) and that you want to do well. If you've never had to talk in class before, say that and ask for help. After an exam or paper, ask the professor to explain the comments and ask how you could improve next time.

**Don't grovel** or be apologetic or self-deprecating about your lack of skill, background, or practice; just be matter-of-fact and professional. It is difficult for even the most jaded professor to resist a student who conveys genuine "respectful eagerness to learn" and is asking how they might improve.

**Follow through**—at some later time, tell the professor exactly what you think you have done to improve and ask whether your strategy has helped.

*Postscript:* it does seem that lately more students are faulted for being too assertive and too aggressive in class—the shy and retiring grad student seems to have been culturally selected out by the educational process. For the shy and retiring, a word of encouragement: I did it, and you can do it. Soon you'll be lecturing to 300 students and holding your own with Alphas at professional meetings without even thinking about it.

## 5. How to write an article.

### 1. "No one cares"

No one cares about your own specific work except you. You have to put it into a context in which they WILL care. You have to make your article something that other people can cite about their own work. It's *your* job to make them care. You do that by linking your research to a larger issue: a theoretical "Big Idea"

### 2. "Think Big"

Would you want to read a book called "agricultural strategies for risk avoidance in seasonal crop yield to cultivated land ratios in southeastern Michigan during the late prehistoric period? *Boring*. But you would want to read about *Prehistoric Farmers: a case study*

Why? Because you can relate it to YOUR research on farming. Basically what you are always doing is a case study of something else. Think of your title as "BIG IDEA: a case study using the blank blank blank situation".

### 3. "The reader is dumber than you think"

The reader is not going to read your article or draft by lovingly lingering over every word. The reader has to get the point the first time through, reading as fast as he/she can, while thinking about the million other things they'd rather be doing. Therefore, *YOU* are the one who has to make the points you want to make obvious to the reader. You can do so by strategic use of headings and subheadings, tables, bullet points, or lists (1), (2), (3). If the reader can't get it, it's YOUR responsibility to make sure your writing is clear.

## 6. How to succeed in graduate school for the first two years.

### The Annual Review.

What do you want the faculty to say about you at your annual review? These are skills for success in graduate school. Are they the same as “Skills for Success in Life”? It depends, I guess. I compiled these comments over many years of listening to faculty talk about students at annual review time.

Student is a Workhorse	Shows responsibility (but not too self-reliant)
OR Student is a Powerhouse (also good)	Engages others (but not reliant on others)
Comfortable with new ideas (but appropriately critical)	Mature (but not yet cynical)
Humble, (but no groveling)	Confident, (but not over-confident)
Good listener (but not silent)	Not reticent (but not too talkative)
Brings others into discussion (but has own ideas)	At ease (but respectful)
Motivated (but not mindlessly driven)	Determined (not driven mindlessly)
Enthusiastic (but not overwhelming)	Focused (but not narrow)
Shows initiative (but not overbearing and bossy)	Performance is consistent, synthetic

Please notice that most of these characteristics are describing a student’s personality. These desirable characteristics are great if you have them already, and some will develop them as they go along in life.

Do not despair! Even if you can’t change your personality, there are a number of BEHAVIORS that the faculty also admire. I suggest paying the most attention to issues of behavior that you can in fact do something about, regardless of how mature, responsible, determined, focused, etc...you are right now....

When faculty say...	How do you show this trait?
“engaged”	Participate in class (but let others participate too) Seek out instructor Ask what to do to improve Follow through—ask for feedback, respond to feedback Go to dept functions and parties; mingle; ask people what they do Go to the dept brown bags in MCD; mingle; introduce yourself Seek outside funding if possible Seek out your advisor Get to know other faculty - it’s ok to just make an appt to chat Make use of mentors/faculty Be open to new ideas; be courteous to your fellow students Recognize what you don’t know yet
“writes well”	Identifies key questions
“is analytically rigorous”	Make new linkages between authors or between author and idea Looks at an author’s background assumptions Notes relevance to other texts Uses resources such as writing center Takes advice to heart and shows improvement

**Here is another perspective on “professional behavior” from the business world**

Reference:

Cornelius Grove & Willa Hallowell,  
 2002 The Seven Balancing Acts of Professional Behavior in the United States  
 A Cultural Values Perspective. Professional Knowledge Center  
<http://www.grovetwell.com/pub-usa-professional.html>  
 Accessed 9/06

The following article appeared in the 3rd Quarter 2002 issue of *Focus Europe*, a supplement to *Velocity*, the magazine of the Strategic Account Management Association (SAMA).

You can access the article to read some examples of the balancing act...but here is the outline:

**In work-related situations in the United States, professional behavior is. . .**

1. Individualistic yet restrained.
2. Egalitarian yet respectful.
3. Assertive yet sensitive.
4. Accurate yet tactful.
5. Punctual yet patient.
6. Warm yet "cool." (That is friendly, but reserved and calm)
7. Optimal yet practical.

**Following are four additional components of professional behavior:**

- Presentable (meaning physically presentable re: dress and grooming, manners)
- Reliable
- Conscientious
- Nonjudgmental.

## **7. How to Read Cultural Anthropological Theory**

### **That is, how to “interrogate the sources fully”**

I had no idea what this meant, so I asked Dr. Mindy Morgan to explain specific phrases (January 2008). This represents my understanding of what she said:

#### **“Read deeply”**

I think this means: don't take the author too literally when he/she defines a word for the first time. See if the author follows through, using his/her own definition in the later writing. Does the author actually follow his own advice? Does he/she use their own terms correctly? They may talk the talk, but do they walk the walk?

#### **Cite evidence**

I think this means: quote supporting evidence or contrary evidence from the data from the course, not from your life or experiences, or other readings. Use the author's text itself to discuss that author. Do not use outside evidence.

#### **“Engage with the author”**

I think this means: imagine that you are watching the different authors talking to one another. What would Anthropologist A say about some topic? What would anthropologist B reply?

## **8. How to Write a Good Paper for an Anthropological Theory Class**

### **That is, for MSU's required first year course: “Roots of Contemporary Anthropological Theory”**

Student papers admired in Roots seem to involving choosing a “topic” that the author apparently is interested in, or alternatively, what you yourself are interested in. A one-word topic will do: “environment,” “gender.” “Use of space,” “hierarchy,” “identity” “subjectivity.” (“Subjectivity” is the new “identity,” my colleagues tell me)

Now see how the author's assumptions and background affect his/her treatment of this issue. Even if the author never says anything about that particular word, the writing will reveal his/her position. That is what you are doing when you “interrogate” the author.

Example: “sooo, Professor Blank, what do you think about, say, gender?” you ask the article/book. What does the article or book reply?

## 9. Different Kinds of Class Papers

Scholars recognize different types of “engagement”, meaning different kind of papers that one might write as a graduate student. Professional articles are a different story (see above).

**1. The “engage with the authors” concept** in which the reader imagines the authors talking with one another about each other’s ideas. This is fairly inward turning and self-referential as a discussion. I suspect this approach is more literary and borrowed from the humanities.

**2. The kind of paper in which one asks (figuratively speaking) one author to comment on a given issue or topic.** This can represent the author at a given point in time (e.g., a limited group of articles) or alternatively, the idea of “change over time” in an author’s thinking or assumptions.

This is again fairly inwardly focused, since no other resources are needed outside the original readings, but does ask each author to comment on something outside their original examples or discussion. It reminds me of the WWJD (“what would Jesus do?”) bracelets: the paper asks, “what would Prof. X say?”

**3. The “apply the theory” paper** --For some papers, you need not come up with brilliant theory yourself, you need only report “What did Prof X say about this general situation?” And then you bring it down to earth in a case study to exemplify it:

First: very general expectations from this author’s ideas

Second: so how would I see this expressed in my situation/ geographic area/ etc

Third: so did I see those things? Or not?

Fourth: so what does that tell me in general about this author’s ideas? This kind of paper is more specifically focused on “the author” and “the author’s ideas.”

**4. The even broader kind of paper that presents you as a researcher USING (one or more) author’s ideas to address a new issue, or analyze a new situation.** On our imaginary continuum, I see this approach as the most outward-looking and social-science-minded of the papers, since one is not particularly concerned with the author’s clarity or lack thereof, or changes in his/her ideas over time—just “how can I use these ideas, or modify them, to help ME do MY research” Or, “in what ways does this author’s work provide a useful perspective on MY data.” This kind of paper is broader, concerning “MY CASE STUDY.”

Papers #1 and #2 are more focused on student learning. I realize now that #3 is the kind of paper we wrote in Dr. Sherry Ortner’s wonderful Contemporary Theory class at UM; much professional writing is probably #4.

## PART II.

### WHAT IS “PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR”?

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The WINNER of the “*isn't this common sense?*” award

“One must wear some sort of shoes at a professional meeting.”

Just in! The runner-up

“One should wear some sort of shoes when interviewing for admission to graduate school”

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#### 1. Code switching

Cultural context is important: be able to be friendly and fun loving, but also be able to turn it off and be formal, dignified, and intellectual in the appropriate contexts. A colleague explained it humorously this way:

Assistant Professor level: code-switch at one second’s notice when challenged by colleague or graduate student

Associate Professor level: code-switch time is less than one second after three drinks; demolishes challenger easily

Full Professor level: demolishes the opposition in no more than 2 one-syllable words, while motioning the bartender for another drink

Distinguished Professor level: order the challenger a drink, too. Co-author next article together.

#### 2. “Student” changes to professional

Convey “respectful eagerness to learn” during the class-taking phase of your career, and then you must change to a “calm assertive confidence” when you are writing your own work. YOU are now the expert.

- ◆ Alpha personalities will know how to do this naturally and have done it for years. Skip to the next section. Word of wisdom: be aware that Alpha can slip into Arrogant and Annoying and ultimately to Professional Crash-and-Burn.
- ◆ Helpful hints especially for shy, deferential, unassuming, non-Alpha personalities: Carry yourself as if you were the Queen of England, nodding graciously to the underlings. Stand tall, make eye contact.

Pretend you are ending every professional statement with an unstated mental “F\*you”. With a bit of practice you can see that this gives you that (for some people) elusive note of authority. You can be polite and confident at the same time. After a while you won’t need this crutch.

Never apologize for or denigrate your professional work, opinion, or writing. No groveling. Be matter of fact: “here is my paper.” Not “I hope you like my paper.” Groveling elicits a “kick the dog” response from Alpha personalities.

Some people (particularly Alpha personalities) interpret “I’m sorry” as an apology (see above). Don’t use “I’m sorry” except in sympathy cards. Use “I apologize” for actual apologies. Use only when called for by your behavior.

### **3. Err on the side of formality**

- ◆ Address all senior scholars by their title unless they specifically request that you use first names. Refer to senior scholars in the third person by their title when speaking to students; you are modeling professional behavior. The senior scholar sets the tone of your interactions. “You can never be criticized for being too polite.”
- ◆ Senior scholars set the pace of the relationship in terms of shaking hands vs. hugging when greeting at meetings, chatting in the bathroom, and so forth.
- ◆ When in doubt, use the more formal option.
- ◆ Being on a first-name basis with people does not mean that they have forgotten your respective professional positions. You should not forget it either.
- ◆ Professional seniority usually trumps age and gender.
- ◆ React in a matter-of-fact way to power games. Being a junior colleague does not mean that you have to grovel or put up with unreasonable behavior. (see “thinking on your feet”)

### **4. Professional social graces: department parties and beyond...**

- ◆ Spouses and Significant Others.  
NEVER ignore the spouse or significant other of a professor. You have no idea what they do or how their various connections may be of use to you. Plus, they do tend to express their opinions to their spouses, who tend to respect their opinions.

On the other hand, it is also a mistake to pay too much attention to a significant other or in fact any one person at a party. Parties are for mingling. Your job is to chat up a variety of people at the party, not hang out with people you already know.

If you absolutely must troll for conquests at professional meetings and parties, at least realize whom it is you are hitting on, and (even more importantly) their role in the profession and/or to whom they are married.

- ◆ Professional Parties.  
Professional party attire is usually “teaching attire”. Not “revealing little black dress” Again, err on the side of business formality rather than cocktail party attire. You want

to look professional without eliciting jokes about the “oldest profession.” Take it easy with the sequins and/or leather.

- ◆ Greet and shake hands with the host/hostess of the party upon arrival and upon leaving. Take a formal leave of both.
- ◆ **Two drink maximum in any professional setting.**
- ◆ Be polite to the departmental staff, building staff, janitors, everyone. You never know what they know, whom they chat with, to whom they might be married, or what they do outside their university job.

Along the same lines, be careful of public settings such as restaurants in college towns. You never know what dean is sitting at the next table, whose child your server is, or whom they might know.

## 5. Professional privacy

- ◆ What happens in grad school stays in grad school. Ditto regarding the more interesting behaviors exhibited at departmental parties or professional receptions. Professional honor and generosity require that the legendary stories about that certain party are told WITHOUT names and identifying details.
- ◆ Inappropriate party photos are not suitable for professional meetings. Think CONTEXT. Save it for a grad student reunion with your buddies.
- ◆ What happens in the field stays in the field. Ditto.
- ◆ When trapped in someone else’s inappropriate story, you can laugh and say “good times, good times” in a tolerant, reminiscent tone of voice. This lets the audience know that you can’t be blackmailed later.
- ◆ “Everyone is sleeping with everyone else”—  
Although of course humorous, this aphorism captures an important concept. You can interpret this expression literally or metaphorically.

**First**, this means that if it’s none of your business, then don’t worry about it.

**Second**, this reminds you that in fact you have no idea who is or was or will be personally involved with whom (re: sex, marriage, friendship, collaborations, co-authoring or whatever else).

Translation: Know your audience before criticizing or complaining to them about someone else. You don’t know where their loyalties lie.

- ◆ It is bad manners to talk shop with a colleague in a context in which one or both of you are not wearing professional attire. That is, cornering a colleague or administrator at the YMCA in the shower to discuss graduate student funding is just too weird. If you must, at least ask “is this a good time for me to ask you about my research budget?”
- ◆ Use a sensible email address for professional activities. Keep your [sexybaby@yahoo.com](mailto:sexybaby@yahoo.com) address for interactions with your friends.
- ◆ **Be careful of FaceBook** and other web-based data-and-photo-postings. Do you REALLY want your colleagues and potential colleagues knowing all that about you? As an undergraduate, you’ve benefited from a certain “leeway for learners” in that some behavior is greeted with a tolerant knowing smile by the world. As a graduate student and professional, you may wish to re-consider your public persona.

Don’t forget that electronic media (twitter, email, texts, photos, voice mail messages) are NOT private and these files NEVER go away.

## 6. Professional courtesy

- ◆ When reviewing an article or grant, focus on “what needs to be done here to make this manuscript publishable?” Focus on WHAT to do to improve the article, not on all its inadequacies. It’s up to the author to decide if he/she wants to do all those things that you advise.
- ◆ Do not discard the drafts; if you must save them, don’t circulate them; never discuss an unpublished article/grant with another person using names or identifying details. If you think it’s that great, send a copy of your comments directly to the author and ask the author for a copy.
- ◆ If you are writing an article that criticizes someone specific, or addresses specifically some one person’s work (positively or negatively), it is polite to provide the person with an advance draft. You can present a fait accompli—you need not ask for response. But it is considerate to give a head’s up that this is coming out in print, so they don’t hear about it from someone else.

Basically, people don’t like surprises. A considerate professional knows that.

- ◆ No one is so important or famous that they don’t appreciate hearing about how great they are. If you honestly think someone’s article /book is the greatest thing, why not tell them? (You never know when they might be reviewing something of yours—what goes around comes around). This only works for your real opinion, however. Use it sparingly—no more than once per year at the most, and probably once per recipient’s lifetime.

- ◆ Extra credit: Acknowledge when a professional friend gets something published—send an email that says “hey, I see you got an article in X; good for you”. You don’t have to read the article or like it to acknowledge their accomplishment.
- ◆ It is extremely poor manners to criticize a scholar’s personality or refer to anything personal in print. It makes YOU look bad, not them. A good editor would make you take it out. Here is a thought to consider: “A bland and deadly courtesy is infinitely more devastating, don’t you think?” (D.L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night*)

## 7. Separate Professional from the Personal

### ◆ Don’t take it personally.

Whatever IT is—article review, job search, etc. This is a tough one, but it’s true. You have no idea what the larger context was/is or how you might be being used as a tool in someone else’s fight.

### ◆ Professional friends.

Be aware that professional friends are not necessarily personal friends, and vice versa. They may in fact have to vote against you, or be professionally honest in an evaluation. That is their job.

Similarly, you may have to act publicly against a professional friend some day. If so, be courteous. Do not surprise anyone in public—give a head’s up privately that unfortunately, you are in a position where you will have to vote the other way on this issue.

Along those lines, be careful of role confusion in different social contexts. This is sometimes difficult when your neighbor may also be a colleague or upper-level administrator. Just be aware that information provided by “just chatting” may find its way into an unexpected professional context.

In addition, just be aware that professional friends do come and go. Sad, but true. Remember that the friendship was in fact based on shared professional goals and proximity, and a certain amount of inescapability. When one of those variables changes, the relationship will probably change. It may morph into a personal friendship, or one may have to just let it go.

### ◆ Use the Process.

Do not subvert the established chain of command in the organizational hierarchy. Translation: when you have a problem, ask your most immediate superior first. If you’re a student, that means discuss the problem with your class professor or your Guidance Committee Chair first, and THEN go to the Department Chair if the problem cannot be resolved. If you are a faculty member, deal with administrative issues via your Chair.

Chairs (and Deans) take a very dim view of faculty who go over departmental heads to the upper administration. You should skip a level in the hierarchy only if the problem involves specifically that person (e.g., your Guidance Committee Chair, or department head).

## 7. Professional Honor

Behave honorably at all times, even in difficult situations. This means that sometimes you will take the high road when everyone else is taking the low road. Why bother? Because one hopes it will pay off somehow in the long run.

Honorable behavior includes:

- ◆ **Be aware of other's opinions but form your own.** Be aware, be cautious, be careful. But ultimately you must base your interactions with an individual on YOUR relationship with that individual.

You have no idea what “really happened” in any argument, situation, or problem. You don't need to know, and you can't know. All that you can really know is the interaction that you yourself have had with that person.

- ◆ **Professional ranking:** The higher the rank of the individual, the more likely it is that at some point he/she will have had to pull rank and make a decision that made someone angry, hurt, resentful, or vindictive. Some people classify pulling rank as “acting like a jerk.” Appreciate that sometimes a person has to act a certain way because of their professional position, not their personality.

A corollary is that when some people complain about the professional qualifications or administrative skills of a colleague or higher-up, they may simply be annoyed that the colleague is not doing something THEIR way. You have to form your own opinions.

Another corollary is that, if appropriate, and if you end up in a position where you must evaluate the situation, you might privately ask the apparent evil-doer for their version of the story. You may find out that they were doing the best they could or were legally or ethically allowed to do.

- ◆ **Watch out for email.** As my sainted mother used to say, “Never write anything down that you don't want published on the front page of the newspaper.”

Be generous: delete the less-than-suitable-for-public email messages that you receive from friends. Hope that they do the same for you, but don't plan on it.

Be careful to distinguish “reply” from “reply all”

CC and BCC can help you deal with problems. Briefly, use BCC (blind carbon) to give someone a head's up. Use CC to let the recipient know you have involved this third party

When forwarding inappropriate You-Tube clips to your buddies, at least delete your “return address” identifier at the bottom. Be generous—delete your less-than-careful buddy’s name from the bottom of the clip they sent you before passing it along to all your other friends.

- ◆ **If you make a professional mistake, be proactive.** Admit it immediately, preferably before anyone notices the mistake. Apologize directly to the affected parties (using the words “I apologize”) and tell them how you are fixing it.

If your group, organization, or larger social unit makes a mistake, apologize on their behalf, even if it wasn’t your fault. You represent the group.

Along those lines, if you hear gossip that so-and-so is annoyed with you, or you get that feeling, you must not let it slide. If this is an important professional relationship, you must be proactive in protecting it.

- ◆ **“If you strike at a king, you must kill him.”** There are two implications here.

1. The first is “Pick your battles.” Do not waste social, emotional, and professional capital on fighting an issue that you cannot win.
2. A second meaning is: “be sure of your facts before you come out swinging”. If a fight is worth a public venue, then you must be committed to see it through.

On the other hand, some times you have to stand up for what you believe is right. Consider Professor Dumbledore’s statement (*Harry Potter and The Sorcerer’s Stone*, as he acknowledges Neville Longbottom’s courage):

“It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies,  
but just as much to stand up to our friends”

Or in fact, probably even more. The sad truth is that you may lose a friend. Or the relationship may be changed forever. See below “Advanced Professional Behavior”

- ◆ **Have zero tolerance for destructive gossip.** Basically, you need to decide what you will classify as fun gossip and destructive gossip. Here are some guidelines:

#### **Fun gossip**

Fun gossip includes entertaining stories about oneself (“the time I got chased by a bull”) or about the personal foibles of another person, preferably those foibles or eccentricities of which they are most proud (their tough grading; their tight discipline; some specific skill; the time they told off the Prince of England). If you would happily tell the same story in that person’s presence, that is fun gossip (“a good story”)

### **Institutional gossip**

Institutional gossip includes stories that are so old or so iconic that no one cares if they are true or not--they are just good stories.

Long ago I decided that some stories were so much fun that it didn't matter if they were true. Rather, one should think of them as "it is true that there is a *story* that..." and tell them that way.

### **Destructive gossip**

Destructive gossip is any story or commentary that might damage a relationship. Relationships include professional friendships, personal friendships, marriages, dating relationships, co-authorships, collegial relationships, and so on. An honorable professional will not listen to this kind of gossip, will squelch it firmly among the younger generation, and will never pass it along.

**When a personal or professional relationship is at stake, truth is completely irrelevant.**

Here are some sample squelchers:

"I saw things a different way" or "I remember the story differently"

"I'm not sure that anyone knows the whole story"

"That doesn't seem like the person that I know."

"There must have been something else going on there that we can't know"

### **Serious Ethical Discussion**

Destructive gossip also includes questioning the professional competence, professional values, and professional judgment of a colleague. This is not done in a public venue such as a restaurant, bar, or hotel lobby. If there is a real problem, there are other venues for addressing them through one's professional organization or University. Go through these appropriate channels if it concerns you. AND check your facts.

### **Public news and facts**

Public information is not gossip. News includes:

"They divorced in 1999"

"Professor Strange was his major advisor"

"She works on human rights in Africa"

"She and her partner just adopted a boy from China"

"He now goes by the name 'Donna'"

### **Personal commentary and speculation**

Personal comments on news and facts fall under the rules of Gossip. **There is a difference between news and commentary.**

## 8. Advising students

- ◆ Never give advice—that makes you potentially responsible. Lay out the options, as you understand them, and the consequences of those options. Then the student can choose the course of action. Of course, this whole document is advice, but there it is---“a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” (R. W. Emerson). As a recipient of advice, realize that not all advice is necessarily good advice.
- ◆ “Pay it forward.” As a student, your advisor’s role was partly to protect you from embarrassing yourself in public. Carry that role forward to your own students. That means you provide your student with opportunities to be successful.

Your job is to manage the professional context (say, in an oral defense) so that your student can show off what they do know and minimize their bumbling around stupidly where they don’t know. You protect them from unnecessarily aggressive interrogation by the loose cannon members of the committee. You keep the other committee members, the audience, and the student from wandering off the point. You structure the situation; the student does the performance.

- ◆ Letters of recommendation are crucial. If you agree to write one, you have committed to writing an honest one, and to getting it in on time. In some cases, it may be appropriate to ask the student to write a first draft—this saves you some time and may alert you to important information. Of course, you can then edit the letter any way you wish.

## 9. Thinking on your feet

- ◆ Have some polite phrases ready for difficult situations when your brain goes blank. Here are some good ones to memorize:

For personal issues:

“I appreciate your concern”  
 “How kind of you to take an interest”

For professional issues:

“I’ll have to get back to you on that”  
 “You’ll have to remind me about...”  
 “I’ll make a note of that” or “Let me write that down”  
 “Thank you for bringing that up”

- ◆ Being polite and honorable does not mean you have to put up with any kind of behavior from a colleague. You have a right to expect to be treated fairly and courteously as well.

◆ You may be caught by surprise by what you interpret as a deliberate power game or possibly a momentary peevish snap. Here are some sample responses, ranging from responses to a friend’s harried mistake to a full deliberate verbal attack:

(1) One option is to stare at the person silently while they recover. This works well and is easy to remember when your mind goes blank and gives you time to assess your options.

(2) Another easy-to-remember response is to repeat what was said in a flat, matter-of-fact tone of voice. Often that will help them realize that they sounded abrupt, rude, or inappropriate.

(3) You can ask them clarify their offensive remark (“I’m not sure I understand ...” or “You’ll have to explain...”)—use a slow, even, deliberate tone of voice while staring directly at them.

(4) Once when I snapped irritably at a professional friend, he stared at me and said in a conversational tone, “Hmmm, I wonder---did you say that or did you just think that?” This is another good option that gives the person a graceful and dignified way to back down and exit their bad mood without having to apologize or discuss anything.

(5) For totally out-of-control individuals or totally inappropriate personal remarks: stare directly at them with your eyes very wide open in a surprised look. Drop your mouth down in exaggerated surprise and say “WOW” in a flat, even tone. Leave the open eye-open mouth expression on your face for just one nano-second longer than necessary.

Then turn around pointedly and walk away. If you can’t escape, just turn your back and start a conversation with another individual. Do not reward them with engagement. Congratulate yourself on taking the high road, rather than doing whatever it was that you really felt like doing.

For more serious issues, ask for help from a colleague, your Chair, or organization (look under “human resources”). Begin a paper trail—you may need it later. The Human Resources people have told me that a paper trail recording memories of past incidences is better than nothing.

◆ **Paper trails: theirs and yours.**

Be aware of the power of the paper trail. It is very helpful to have a paper trail for these situations:

In dealing with a student issue, use email with bcc to your Chair to make sure that people know how you are dealing with a potential problem.

Do not hesitate to confirm facts. You don’t need to believe everything you hear about laws, rules, regulations, and expectations. There are many offices on any campus to help you—Student Services, the Health Center, International Center, the university lawyers, the

teaching support people, and so forth. They are there to help you and help you protect yourself. Use them.

For all “difficult” issues: start a file folder. Print out the emails and save them. Save them on your computer. Start a log of your actions and the other persons’ actions. If the issue concerns a student, ask for advice from your Chair and from the teaching resource people. If the issue concerns a peer or supervisor, you can ask to talk to someone at the Faculty Development office or at Human Resources. Even your notes based on recall are important. Focus on descriptions of actions, not your interpretations.

Be aware of your own paper trail. “Never write down anything that you don’t want published on the front page of the newspaper.”

## 10. Job Interviews

- ◆ See “party behavior.” Err on the side of formality.
- ◆ Thank everything that moves. Send an email thank you to everyone after the interview.
- ◆ No more than two drinks at dinner. In fact, if everyone is having two, then drink one and let the second one just sit there. Don’t order anything messy.
- ◆ Do NOT discuss: your family, your other jobs and other interviews, your therapist, your legal troubles, your health or medications, your sexuality, your disputes with your professors or other colleagues.
- ◆ Be forward-looking. What are you going to do after the dissertation?
- ◆ Be honest. If you are not willing or able to teach something or other, or to confine your research to a particular area, then they need to know that. You *really* don’t want a job where you’d have to do something you *really* don’t want to.
- ◆ Do NOT radiate angry resentment about your misfortunes in life—e.g., being unemployed, working at a bank, working at Undesirable University. Your body language should convey calm pleased confidence and a “looking forward to contributing here at Desirable University” sort of idea.
- ◆ Your body language should say to them “I’m interviewing you, too, to see if I want to come here”. No one from junior high school on is particularly attracted to someone who conveys “I’m incredibly desperate and needy.”

## 11. Professional meetings

- ◆ “Err on the side of formality” regarding greeting behavior, bathroom conversation, etc. See “professional party behavior”
- ◆ When talking to people, do not look past them to find someone more important or interesting to talk to.
- ◆ Give up and ask if you can’t remember their name. Don’t try to fake it. Don’t stare at anyone’s chest in a vain attempt to read the nametag.

Corollary: Have mercy. Volunteer your name and context whenever you re-encounter someone who may not remember you.

- ◆ It is safest to ask, “do you have a family?” if you end up in a more personal discussion. Some people actually keep notes on the names of kids and spouses of colleagues. Asking “how is the family?” or “how are things with you?” is a safe and polite option unless you know that you are up-to-date on their life.
- ◆ **Always attend the business meeting of the professional society. It’s important to see and be seen there, and it’s important to keep up on the housekeeping of the profession.**
- ◆ If you really need or want to visit with someone at the meetings, make an appointment ahead of time. Don’t try to catch them there.
- ◆ **Never pass up an opportunity to make a new professional friend or acquaintance.** Mingle at the receptions, chat with the person next to you in line or seated next to you at a session. If you liked someone’s paper or it seems relevant to your work, go up after the session and introduce yourself. Go see the posters and chat with the presenters. This is called networking. Be generous in introducing your friends, students, and colleagues to others.
- ◆ Two drink maximum at professional gatherings and receptions. Someone will be counting. You can go out and have more with your buddies later.
- ◆ Again, be careful about bad-mouthing colleagues, students, programs, or Universities in a restaurant or while walking down the street. You have no idea (without their badges) who might be a colleague, or know a colleague, or be married to one.
- ◆ **NEVER assume that a woman is pregnant. Let her tell you.**

## 12. Dealing with editors and granting agencies

- ◆ When you receive reviews of your article, it is ok to write a cover letter to the journal editor explaining why you did not follow Professor Awful's advice. Often you can simply say, "While these comments are very interesting and perceptive, dealing with all these issues is beyond the scope of this paper."
- ◆ If you do not understand a comment or part of a grant application, it is OK to call or email and ask. If it is a complicated issue, probably calling is better. Do not harass the editor with multi-page single spaced emails.
- ◆ Practice difficult conversations on your colleagues. Move up the ladder of intimidation—start with a friend, move on to a helpful senior colleague, then a more intimidating one. Write down helpful crucial phrases that they suggest so you have them in front of you while phoning.
- ◆ Do try to accommodate the reviewer's suggestions unless they are way off track. Something about what you wrote was irritating to them or wasn't where they expected to find it. Figure out what it was and fix it.
- ◆ If the reviewer signs the review, it is appropriate to thank them for their help, both directly and also in the acknowledgements.
- ◆ ASK about deadlines if you have a problem. Some "deadlines" are "drop-dead deadlines" and there is absolutely no leeway. Others are "target dates;" others are "suggested deadlines" or "the date when we'll have a meeting."
- ◆ Make life easier for yourself and everyone else. Choose a professional name with your first publication and stick with it.

## 13. Co-authorship

In Anthropology, and most of the social sciences, an article will rarely have more than two or three co-authors. Usually in the social sciences, each co-author has made a substantial contribution not just to the general project, but also specifically to its research design, the analysis and interpretation of the data, drafting of the manuscript, AND could explain and defend the research to others. Co-authors are also co-responsible for the integrity of the analysis, the results, and conclusions.

In practice, the first author is generally the person who initially conceived of the project AND who actually sits down to write the first draft of the article. Do check your university or professional organization's website for any specific guidelines or expectations. Some organizations provide a sample written agreement for co-authors.

- a. *As a student*, make sure that you understand your role in the project. Ask your professor exactly how they see your contribution to a particular project and what will happen regarding authoring any report. In general, if you are doing quite a bit of the

analysis and descriptive write-up on data that someone else obtained, or got the money to obtain, you should clarify your contribution as a second author, and re-visit the discussion as the project unfolds.

- b. *As a junior faculty member*, you must be sure that you are first author in order to build a successful case for tenure. Make sure your graduate students understand their role(s) and yours. Consider backing up your understanding of roles with a written statement, either a formal signed agreement, or via (saved) email.
- c. *As a senior faculty member with tenure*, you have more latitude for generosity beyond the call of duty. It is unethical and ultimately unkind, however, to include junior personnel as courtesy authors unless they are really prepared to defend the results and interpretations. Remember, their name will be associated with that article forever, for good or bad.
- d. *Among peers*, you can't go wrong by discussing explicitly your mutual understandings of your roles, and confirming your understanding in writing via email. Often co-authors who work closely together on a long-term basis take turns with first authorship.
- e. *International collaborations* require even more attention to professional courtesy: specifically, being explicit regarding the role of other researchers or contributors to the project, and their authorship status. ASK senior colleagues to get a sense of these expectations and the accepted etiquette in your discipline and geographic area, and/or the requirements of your permit, granting agency, or inter-organizational agreement.

#### **14. Students in the field (or any subordinates)**

- ◆ Give students authority and room for initiative. Announce the extent of their authority in public. Then you **MUST** back them up when they do show some initiative.
- ◆ Praise in public, criticize in private.
- ◆ Assign tasks so that in fact one person is “in charge” of whatever it is: a job, a piece of equipment, etc. Make a public list. Expect them to be responsible and accountable. They will rise to the occasion.
- ◆ Give your problematic students something truly important to do. They will (usually) rise to the occasion.
- ◆ Work in terms of tasks to accomplish rather than micro-managing their time. Make them responsible for as much as possible of their work and decision-making.

- ◆ Don't take any chances with health and safety issues when you are responsible. That is a case for zero tolerance. Think: "how would this look if I had to write it up in a report?"

*Corollary 1:* The drivers of any vehicles will have zero blood alcohol content.

*Corollary 2:* Don't ever park a university vehicle in front of a bar. Or in fact any place where you will have to explain why you were or weren't in fact there. It may be legal, but think, "How would this look...." You represent your project, your institution, and your profession.

*Corollary 3:* No illegal activities EVER-- no matter how seemingly trivial. Be clear that you will not permit any illegal actions of any sort by anyone on your project. Do NOT give second chances for illegal actions (e.g., speeding, students in back of pickup truck on the highway, illegal u-turns etc), even if they're the kind that you yourself do every day (see above "How would this look...").

- ◆ Be clear and specific about other behavioral expectations and where those expectations do and do not apply (e.g., on day's off). Be specific about the consequences ("I will take you to the airport and send you home"). Make sure participants know that their behavior represents the university, the discipline, and the research project.
- ◆ Tell students the rule about "what happens in the field, stays in the field." You have to trust them and they have to also trust you. You are in this together.
- ◆ Make the students do the work. In archaeology, we say: "If you dig it up, you write it up." If the student does a laboratory analysis, have them write it up completely, including the data files as appendixes. Even a descriptive report is good.

Have them write a descriptive report before they leave the field. Then all you need to do is add the introduction and conclusion to finish the field report. Put all your data files into it as appendixes. It forces you to get organized and then you have something written that you can send to an agency, to your colleagues, and put on your vita.

## **15. Do your best in difficult or ambiguous situations**

- ◆ This is Advanced Professional Behavior. Life can be complicated. Just keep it in mind for now that, even if you find yourself in what might be considered a difficult legal, political, economic, social, ethical, or moral situation, there is a path of honor within that situation. Take it.
- ◆ Do not go it alone. Ask for advice from a variety of sources, including appropriate officials at your institution. Be aware of when you legally MUST act, the limits of confidentiality, and the limits of your authority. Realize that not all advice is good advice.
- ◆ Corollary: you cannot control what other people will think. Don't try.

- ◆ Sometimes you will lose a friend or someone's respect. That can happen.
- ◆ Sometimes you will lose *your* respect for a former friend. That can happen, too. The heart of another may be "a dark forest," but you also have a right to withdraw your esteem and friendship from someone who does not deserve it.
- ◆ Sometimes people really do change. Sad, but true. Set aside some specified time alone for a private mourning ritual to say goodbye.
- ◆ **Do the best you can** with the knowledge, information, background, advice, and perspective that you have at that time. **When it's over, let it go.**
- ◆ Consider the words of wisdom from other people included in "Part VI: Words for Quiet Moments of Professional Despair." You may appreciate these time-honored perspectives regardless of the background theology.
- ◆ Advanced Professional Behavior, Part II. At some point in your professional life you will probably have to consider the appropriate time and place and context for each of the following options. Ultimately, you alone must decide the contexts within which each represents your path of honor within a difficult situation.
  1. Action
  2. Silence
  3. Discretion
  4. Stout denial

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*There are few situations in life that cannot be honourably settled,  
and without loss of time, either by suicide, a bag of gold,  
or by thrusting a despised antagonist  
over the edge of a precipice upon a dark night.*

Ernest Bramah, *Kai Lung's Golden Hour* (1922)

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## PART III

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: STRATEGIC CAREER MANAGEMENT

Here are some observations that I have heard from various administrators, and advice from my own faculty members. While the details of career management vary, these generalities seem to be fairly timeless---

**Choose ONE professional name** and stick with it. Decide if you want to use your middle initial, all your names, or what combination. Use this name on all your professional publications. It does not have to be the same name that you use socially. It probably helps to use this name on your legal documents, but I would doubt that you'd have to.

#### 1. Grad school strategies, positioning yourself for a job

##### a. Professional Organizations

Join your professional organization as you become ABD. Many people take this sign of commitment very seriously. If you are marketing yourself as, say, a medical anthropologist, people will expect you to belong to the general organization (American Anthropological Association) and a specialty organization (a medical anthro section or organization). They will look you up.

##### b. Teaching experience

Get some very general teaching experience if you are headed for an academic career. How many schools have your specialty program? How many schools need someone to teach ANP 101?

##### c. Address the broadest audience

Remember at your job interview that most of the people there, and those who are making the hiring decision, are likely NOT in your subfield or specialization.

##### d. Prepare for disaster at the interview

At your job interview, you may or may not have a reading light to read your paper or notes. Your powerpoint lecture may not load; everything may go wrong. Be prepared to wing it. You are also being interviewed for your teaching and public speaking skills, and coping skills. So don't just read your paper—if you must, at least expound some details ad lib

Along those lines, every interview you have is an opportunity to network. Even if you don't get the job, you've made important professional connections.

##### e. Apply for a grant

Apply for grants in graduate school. Any kind of grant, any amount. Start small. You are showing that you can make a budget and be responsible for money. No one is going to give you millions or even thousands of dollars without a track record.

**f. Publish something, even an “on file” descriptive report.**

You should end graduate school with at least one publication, however feeble it is. A co-authored descriptive report in the gray literature is fine. When you get back from doing research (fieldwork) sit down and write a descriptive report. It is a low-anxiety way to get something written, and then you have a document to send around to colleagues. Present something at some professional meeting somewhere. You are laying the foundation.

When you present a paper, write some sort of paper or handout to go with it, even if it is just the photocopy of your poster. Whatever you have, mail or email a pdf copy to 20 colleagues who work in your geographic area or on your topic of interest. Include a cover letter of two or three lines that says something like “I know you work on this topic so I thought you might be interested to see this paper.” This is called marketing.

**g. Watch out for Facebook and other electronic media**

People will look you up on the web. You should have deleted all that stuff as a graduate student anyway.

Remember that nothing electronic ever disappears. Watch out for twitter, email, text messages and cell phone photos and messages. These are NOT private. Telephones and cell phones also leave an electronic trail of calling/receiving.

Google yourself. Find out what is there and visible to job-interviewers and your students. You can’t do anything about heritage postings from the past, but at least they won’t be yours and they won’t be current. (See above regarding inappropriate stories and avoiding blackmail).

## **2. Publishing**

**a. Authoring.**

For tenure, you need to have some articles that are solo-authored. You need to have some in which you are first author. Otherwise you risk people saying, “yes but can he/she do anything alone, or is he/she always riding on someone else’s coattails?” You cannot have everything co-authored with your advisor—it looks bad.

**b. Go for the Top**

Don’t waste time—hit the top journals first. You can always go down the scale if you are rejected. Some people have a 48 hour rule—after the rejection letter, they give themselves 48 hours to send it out again to another journal.

**c. Tailor your paper to the journal**

Identify your journal first and then write the paper so you can tailor it to the audience and general issues that the journal covers. Check out a few articles to see how they are structured.

**d. Get your name out there**

Try writing a “comment” on an article in your specialization, or a book review. Contact the editor and ask if you could write one. A well-written, perceptive, and courteous comment or book review can get your name out there and on people’s radar.

**e. Review a manuscript.** If possible, contact the journal editor and say you are willing to review manuscripts. That’s another good way of seeing how things work, making contacts, and adding to your vita. Even unpublished reviews are important, because it shows that you are the go-to person in your field.

**3. Grants and Research Projects****a. Get your own grant.**

Again, you need to have some sort of grant in your own name, no matter how small. Being one of a dozen co-PI s is not good in the social sciences. Being second author with your advisor is often required for dissertation funding, so don’t worry about that as a predoctoral scholar. But in general, as soon as you can, go for first author or solo author at first.

**b. Establish your presence in the discipline**

Dean Marietta Baba (MSU, College of Social Science) astutely observed: first you have to establish yourself IN your discipline, and then later you can be the disciplinary representative in some inter-disciplinary work. People need to see that you really are an Anthropologist, Sociologist, Political Scientist, Economist, etc.

**c. Just write the grants.**

So you get rejected. Revise and resubmit as long as the granting agency will let you. No one knows or cares that you got rejected several times—at worst, it still shows “effort.” The granting agency will let you know when they are tired of you.

**4. Teaching****a. Be the Instructor**

Alas, no one cares that you were a TA in whatever course, or whatever you did in that course. You need to have the title Instructor and actually be the Instructor of Record. Sometimes being the Instructor pays less than being a TA. It’s unfair, but there it is.

**b. Go for the Intro course**

Don’t go for your specialized topics if you have a choice. Go for broad courses that all your potential employers can see in their own programs. It takes about three times through to settle in with a course.

**c. Number of Preps**

Number of preps is different from number of courses. If you can, keep it to “2 preps” even if you have to teach more courses. Big courses can be less work than little courses, too, especially if you use machine scoring. Not every course a student takes has to help them improve their writing. Save the writing-intensive courses for your small enrollment courses.

**d. Network and Learn**

Make use of any help the institution provides in training for teaching, grants, and so on. Not only will you learn something, but (more importantly) you'll make CONTACTS. This is networking. Those other faculty members may be the ones sitting on YOUR promotion and tenure committee at the College or University level.

**PART IV.**  
**FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS**

**Words of Commiseration and Encouragement**

**1. “The Irreducible Five Percent”**

If you tell a class “the answer to question 5 is D” and you announce it several times during the test, and write it on the board, 5% of the class will still get it wrong. That’s the irreducible five percent. Don’t worry about it

**2. Students will pay the closest attention to the comments you make that are the least important**

You can make a casual comment that 90% of the class will be able to parrot back word for word. They won’t have heard anything else you said all semester except one trivial comment or completely zany example. Don’t worry about it

**3. You are “planting the seed”**

No one is going to learn anything in your course that they are not already primed to learn—by previous experiences, life history, previous coursework, and so on. Some times you’re not even at the stage of seed-planting with them. Some times you are the dynamite breaking up the bedrock. But you never know. Some other student may be just the fertile ground in which your wonderful ideas may fall and you will Change Their Life Forever. You’ll never know. You will despair because you never get to harvest any fruit. You won’t even see any seedlings. That’s life

**4. The semester in which you pay the least attention to your classes is the semester that you’ll get the highest evaluation scores.**

That’s life. A certain amount of benign neglect is probably good for students, as it is for offspring

**5. Not every student is in your class to get an “A.” Some are just trying to pass.**

Others are putting the most effort into some other class. That’s ok, too

**6. The topic that you care the most about it is the worst to teach.**

It is agony to have to make gross generalizations that you KNOW are not strictly speaking true and to leave out all the lovely details that you know. It’s easier to make broad sweeping generalizations about a topic that’s not your baby.

Similarly, it’s easier on your nerves to read butchered exam answers about a topic that’s not your baby: “Oh, well, I always get mixed up about Upper and Lower Egypt, too. What the heck, they got it in the right continent.”

## 7. Professional privacy for teachers

It never fails that one of your past or present students will be the checkout clerk when you are purchasing some strange collection of rope, toilet paper, vodka, and onions. Don't worry about it. Think of the great stories that they'll enjoy telling. Practice your "weak smile" for these occasions

Resign yourself to the fact that you are now a public figure and will be discussed on the web and ranked in terms of your sexiness and other personal characteristics. Don't worry about it. No one of importance in your life takes any of that seriously. Or, you can get a grad student to sign you on to those web sites and then you both can have a good time giving all your friends red-hot chili peppers (rating their "hotness"). Give some to your crabby colleagues, too—maybe it will cheer them up

It's ok that you have a personality, whatever it is. Students can deal with it, as long as you are genuinely whatever you are

## 8. Expect them to be wonderful, cheerful, and eager to learn.

Tell them why you love teaching this class. At the very least, you can honestly (one hopes) tell them why you love the ideas in this field of study, and how these ideas are found everywhere you might look in the world.

Tell them about how great previous classes have been and how much fun you had telling them about this subject, which is your favorite thing to think about in the whole world.

Find something to praise about them-- tell them that they are doing really well and why they are your favorite class. Maybe they're cheerful, or on time, or ask good questions, inspire you to think more deeply about your research, or fill in the machine scoring circles really well. I've found that this cultivates a "go, team" mentality in which they compete with other (imaginary or past) classes to rise to your expectations.

My personal idea is that students in a class are like very sleek, elegant Siamese cats. They need honest, sincere praise and attention, of course, but what they really respond to is highly ceremonial, ritualized and extravagant admiration (along the lines of "You are the most *beautiful* cat in the world" or "Go, team, you're the *greatest!* or "*This* class is the *best* section of Anthropology 101!"). They know perfectly well it's way over the top, but they seem to thrive on it anyway, and will go far beyond the call of duty to fit this view of themselves. Caveat: This ritual praise is for large group situations only, not for small groups or with individuals

If you have a problem with them, ask them to help you figure out a solution. You can call up a half-dozen students after each class for a little focus-group check on how things are going for them..

**Even if they get nothing else out of the class, you will have modeled for them that it is possible to be interested in the world of ideas.**

## Classroom Management

### 1. “The younger the teacher, the larger the class, the more symbols of authority needed.”

Symbols of authority are primarily formal dress and posture, formal address (using prefixes and last names), formal language.

### 2. “Use your mom voice”

Do not put up with behavior that bothers you—reading the paper, doing the crossword puzzle, talking, eating, etc. Students respond to the voice of authority. People are pack (group) animals—they are looking to you to be their “**calm, assertive leader.**”

*[Cesar's Way: The Natural, Everyday Guide to Understanding and Correcting Common Dog Problems , by Cesar Millan, and Melissa Jo Peltier, Three Rivers Press, 2007]*

### 3. “Don’t let a student challenge you in public”

Don’t put yourself in a position to be challenged. Don’t let them get a public venue. Here is what you can say:

- a. THANK them for their contribution
- b. find SOMETHING to agree with (yes, this topic is controversial, isn’t it)
- c. DEFER discussion to a private time (“Let’s talk about it after class”)

### 4. Don’t challenge a student in public

Always give the student a choice; never issue a public ultimatum

What are you going to do if they say NO? Drag them out of the room bodily? I don’t think so!

Tell them “either quit chatting OR leave the room.” Tell them explicitly what behaviors you cannot stand “It’s distracting to me when I see students doing x (reading the paper, knitting)

Follow through by giving them an option for action: “SO, if you’re going to read the paper, please do it so I can’t see you.” “SO if you want to do the crossword puzzle while I’m lecturing, at least sit in the back of the room.” You can’t depend on their making the connection between the “I” statement and the action that you expect them to take

I tell them: “if you’re going to be rude, at least be subtle.” Or, you can say, “I’m sorry, was I talking while you were interrupting?” It will make you feel better, but in general sarcasm is wasted on the young.

**5. “Actions speak louder than words”**

Act now, discuss later. If a student is talking, you can stop lecturing and stare at them until they stop. You can even discuss staring as a threat used by all primates (and many other animals) while you’re doing this. If you catch someone cheating, just take the exam away. Talk is for later, in private.

**6. Don’t put a student into a threatening and awkward position.**

It can be highly threatening to students to ask for comment on a personal issue (even such a simple idea as “your family”) or a loaded topic (“gender, race”). Assign them a role to play to try out different perspectives

“What MIGHT a person say about that?”

“What have you heard **other people** say about that?”

“What would Foucault/Boaz/Geertz say about....”

**7. Give them time to think before responding**

Have them write a response before they have to respond verbally. Exchange written responses with their neighbor, or discuss something privately with their neighbor before they volunteer something in public. It’s not easy to think on your feet in a new subject.

**8. OR, focus public discussion on more structural or background issues**

rather than THE ANSWER, especially for topics where there may be no one “right” answer or when the topic is controversial. Here are some examples

“Did you and your neighbor have the same response?”

“What issues were important in forming your ideas?”

“What else would you want to know to make a more informed decision?”

**9. Have in-class “office hours”**

In large classes, reserve 10-15 minutes at the end of class for “office hours” time. This will reduce your traffic of students during office hours, and it also is much more convenient for students who are tightly scheduled. It also eliminates the excuse that “I couldn’t do [fill in the blank] because I couldn’t make your office hours.” Besides, I need my office hours to prepare for class.

Don’t bother with “extra” study sessions before an exam. Some people won’t be able to make it because they work and then they will complain that it’s not fair. It isn’t. Use in-class time for exam review

**10. Think: “WHAT do I REALLY want them to learn?”**

If you want students to be able to write a good essay question on a test, you have to teach them explicitly how to do that. Show them a sample good answer and explain why it’s good. Give them in-class time to practice, practice, practice. If you want them to learn facts, then give them lots of practice quizzes on those facts. If you want them to apply a concept to new situations, you have to show them how and let them practice.

If you want them to learn to read critically, you must model this process for them and explain what you're doing. Then give them practice time to try it themselves.

**Quit complaining that they can't do "x."  
If that skill is important to you  
(or their lack of that skill is driving you nuts),  
then teach them how to do it**

**11. Make old exams worthless on the marketplace by using them for study guides.**

Post them publicly; go over them in class, talk about why the wrong answers are wrong. If you try to guard them, they simply become more valuable as stolen goods.

It's not that hard to come up with some new questions—that's your job. You can even recycle half of the questions on an exam verbatim (half is still failing), and tell them that you're doing so.

**12. Make the students do the work. This is called "Active Learning"**

Have them come up with relevant examples, rhymes for remembering facts, possible test questions, study guides, etc. Have them look for and present "new" articles about a topic.

If you have them lead discussion, give them some structure for format. Have them present the five take-home messages from an article in a song, a poem, a rap, a one-act play. Use student actors (volunteers) to illustrate ideas and abstract concepts—it's fun and gets their blood circulating to the brain. Plus they will never forget how they enacted "barriers to reproduction" in biocultural evolution class.

If you assign group work, give students in-class time to work together. It's not easy for them to get together outside of class.

**13. Students can read.**

By the time they get to college, they usually can read pretty well. So they can do a good deal of work on their own. If you are clear about what they absolutely, positively HAVE to do, they will do it very happily on their own. They will also happily memorize anything if they KNOW that they HAVE to.

**14. BUT, you MUST follow through.**

If you focus on "x" (memorizing something, presenting something, writing something) you MUST test them on that skill. If students are intellectually "all dressed up and nowhere to go" they get very resentful and your teaching evaluations will go down.

### **15. Reduce (unnecessary) student email**

If an assignment is not clear, or a change in schedule occurs, you'll get hundreds of emails. Before you do anything or say anything, think: "will this action generate a lot of email from students that I will have to deal with?" You can also do a pre-emptive strike by mass-emailing a clarification as soon as you get that first note.

When you give a final course grade, think "will this student be surprised by this grade?" And "if so, is it worth it?" Then at least you have some heads-up when they call/email about their grade

### **16. CC and BCC on emails re: student grade issues**

This is how I use "CC" and "BCC" (carbon copy to.. and Blind copy to..) in student issues. Start out with bcc to your Chair—that lets him/her know that an issue may arise. If the student (more often, parent) doesn't let go, then reply saying "I regret that I cannot do anything more to help you in this situation; please feel free to discuss it with my Chair" Provide the contact information again and CC the Chair so that the parent can see that you have done so. Usually they'll back down at this point. In this case, the "CC" conveys: "any more contact with me is harassment." They'll usually get it.

Make sure parents know that you can't discuss a student's record without their permission. Get the student's permission in writing. Remember to use only the student's university email account for sending/receiving emails—you have no idea who is really using their yahoo account.

### **17. Remind students of the hierarchy involved in teaching**

If a student is persistent in trying to get you to change a grade, explain that, while you are Ms. Nice Guy, a grade change has to be approved by your Chair and by the Dean. Explain that they won't do that unless there is an arithmetic error or a recording error. This can get you out of a difficult situation with a persistent student or parent. Give them your Chair's email address and phone if they'd like to take the issue up with your superior; then give the Chair a head's up email or a BCC (blind carbon copy)

### **18. Serious Issue #1: Protect yourself**

Know the institutional rules about sexual harassment and romantic relationships, and about student information privacy rules.

Avoid any possible appearance of inappropriate behavior, especially with undergraduates of any gender. Translation: no closed doors of your office with undergrads—leave it a little ajar. No private meetings with an undergrad anywhere except in your office or in class. If you must meet at a coffee shop, do it in a group. NO bar meetings with undergrads no matter what their age—it's not worth the possible hassle. No inappropriate pictures/cartoons in your office.

Use email to create a paper trail in case of a problem. Print them out and save them. Give your department chair or a trusted senior colleague a head's up about a problem so that someone knows that you are dealing with it (in case things get worse). Refer to the section on email CC and BCC. (BCC gives your Chair a head's up; use CC when you want the recipient to know that you have notified the other person).

**If a student is in fact posting threats or inappropriate or illegal personal attacks on you via the web or email or anything else, ask your Chair and the University for help immediately.**

A serious corollary is that it is possible that some students (or even faculty) are genuinely mentally ill, on some sort of drug, drunk, or possibly just angry and temporarily out of control. It's not your job to figure out their problems or fix them; your job is to protect yourself, physically and professionally. If something about them seems not right or threatening, trust your instincts. Don't put yourself in a situation that might become dangerous.

**19. Serious Issue #2: Protect your class**

For seriously disruptive students do not hesitate to involve campus police. Put the number on your cell phone just in case. Or use 911. You'll have to use your judgment, but here is one option:

First, ask them explicitly to please settle down. Tell them exactly what "settle down" means— stop talking, sit down, whatever

Second, give them the option of settling down or leaving the classroom. Say directly: "Your behavior is unacceptable. I expect it to stop. Now." Speak slowly and deliberately while looking directly at them. Provide a moment of silence to let the seriousness of the moment sink in. Get out your cell phone, and put it on the podium so they can see it

Three strikes and they're out—this is not just a case of youthful high spirits; there is something wrong here— (usually) alcohol, or (rarely) drugs or mental illness. Again, it is not your job to diagnose the problem; your job is to protect yourself and your class and the educational environment

No comment needed; just pick up the phone (or nod to your TA to) and call the campus police or 911 for help.

**This is another zero-tolerance health-and-safety moment, not only for you, but also for the other students in the class**

## PART V

### FOR BEGINNING ADMINISTRATORS

Even within a department, you'll end up with some sort of administration duties, if only on departmental committees. Most of what you need to do you can find out as you go. But here are some hard-earned words of wisdom:

**Take any possible workshop or training you can** from your organization or university. It's free for you, you'll meet people (networking) AND you'll learn a great deal.

**Invest in two books.** Most of the rough spots in administration have to do with difficult people and difficult conversations. Here are two excellent resources:

*Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*

by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler, and Stephen R. Covey  
McGraw Hill, 2002

*The College Administrator's Survival Guide*

by C. K. Gunsalus  
Harvard University Press, 2006

This is what I learned:

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1. **Process is your friend.** The administrative process is there for a reason. One reason is to protect you. Use the process. If there isn't any process, create one.

2. **Be aware of what emotional stories** go charging through your head in any situation. It is probably better to react to the surface situation than to waste a lot of time thinking about the subsurface deeper meanings and implications. Stay on the surface; avoid drowning.

3. **Think to yourself:**

“What do I *really* want to happen in this situation?”

“So how would I behave if that is what I *really* wanted?”

4. **Know your (potential) enemies.** If you are proposing to change something, think first “who is likely to be most invested in the status quo?” Then consult with them before springing a proposed change on them in public. People don't like surprises. They're the ones who are most likely to shoot it down, so you'll have to get them on your side sooner or later. Sooner is better. Dr. Thomas Summerhill (Director, Center for Integrative Studies, MSU) said it best:

“Get as many fingerprints as possible onto the gun”

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**Be careful of email and other paper and electronic trails.** In administrative emailing, less is more. Calling or meeting in person is better.

**Take the high road. (see also Advanced Professional Behavior).** Someone has to be the adult around here, right? As the administrator, that's you. If everyone else is over-reacting and flying off the handle, they NEED you to be the "calm assertive leader" (see also Classroom Management). They are depending on you.

### **Surviving a Difficult Conversation**

If you end up in a situation where you end up in a difficult conversation, you need to prepare. Review the books above, and write down some helpful words and phrases so you'll have them in front of you in case you lose your train of thought. Meanwhile, here are some helpful ideas.

**1. Prepare.** Write down your introductory statement to get you going. Why are you having this conversation? to find out facts? positions? to "touch base"? to report?

**2. Establish your boundaries** (regarding time, outcome, topic)

"I have a half hour right now to meet with you, but we can schedule another meeting later if we need to"

"Right now I'm just asking how you see the problem"

"Is there anything else you wanted to discuss with me about **this issue**?"

**3. Focus on issues and action, not motives, analysis, or interpretation. Stay on-message.**

This is a lesson from politicians. Simply ignore statements that take you away from the issue.

**Don't bother denying, just ignore.**

"Well, let's focus on what we can do now to resolve **this** problem"

"What do you see as the next step **here**?"

**4. What is going to happen now? (What action will result?)**

"Now that I've listened carefully to you, I need to find out what others have to say. I'll get back to you after I do that."

"I'm out of time now, but let's schedule a meeting to discuss that issue separately"

"I'm going to write that down; I'll need to consult with . . . , and then I'll get back with you."

**5. Use your reflective listening skills** (from the books above) ("reflect the feeling")

"You've worked really hard on this issue."

"You were surprised when that happened."

"You felt that they misunderstood your position."

"Tell me more about. . . ." "Can you explain more about. . . ."

**6. Recap the facts and the purpose of the meeting.**

"Let me see if I have the basic facts correct here. . . ."

"These are all good things to be aware of"

"I appreciate your giving me more background on this issue"

### **7. For conversations that are going nowhere:**

“What action do you seek from me?”

Conversation ender: “Well, I guess you need to do what you need to do.”

### **Apologies: yours and theirs**

Common cultural understanding requires four steps to an apology for people to feel satisfied.

Whether you are giving or receiving or advising, it helps to be aware of this expectation:

(1) Responsibility (2) Remorse (3) Reform and (4) Recompense (restitution)

See the advice above about when to use “I’m sorry” and “I apologize.” Use “I’m sorry” only in sympathy cards.

### **Be the Calm, Assertive Leader**

To recap briefly, people (and most primates) are group animals. If you are in a leadership position of any kind (teaching, or being an administrator), they are looking to you to be the “calm, assertive leader.” Remember the old saying that there are two people in your life from whom you never want to hear these words:

“Oops,” or  
“Oh, my GOD”

They are your airline pilot and your surgeon (or dentist).

Or indeed, anyone in a leadership role. Why do you think that airline pilots adopt that reassuringly unflappable Southern drawl? The idea is to convey a mood similar to “now, folks, not a problem; we’ll just land this here little air-e-o-plane onto that nice big old wide river there.” That’s the measured, competent, commanding tone you need to convey.

**PART VI**  
**QUIET THOUGHTS**  
**FOR MOMENTS OF PROFESSIONAL DESPAIR**

Despite having all this advice, at some point in your career you may wonder if “it” was worth it. This stage includes pointless questions of self-doubt, such as:

- Why didn't (or did) I stay home with the kiddies?
- Would they have turned out better if I had (or had not)?
- Why didn't I publish/ earn more?
- Why didn't I go to med school/ law school/ dental school?
- Why did I waste my life in academia? in grad school? in this relationship?

There are several solutions: for example, buying a red sports car can be helpful. But here are some other people's words of wisdom that are perhaps worth considering.

These quotes concern ideas and attitudes that are good to consider when faced with Advanced Professional Issues involving loss---loss of an issue, a battle, an institution, a program, an ideal, one's professional innocence, a professional friend.....And in helping you move on without dragging along a lot of useless emotional baggage of bitterness and despair. It's ok to have some emotional baggage in your carry-on for old time's sake, but spending a lot on excess emotional baggage charges seems a bit of a waste.

All these quotes illustrate things that have happened in my professional life, and I think of them often in moments of professional despair.

The exact wording of this first quote is debated, as is the “final analysis” part and the addition of “God” in the last lines. However, I consider that the basic sentiments are simply a description of honorable behavior-- use as you see fit.

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### **The Paradoxical Commandments**

*People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;*

*Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;*

*Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true friends;*

*Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;*

*Be honest and frank anyway.*

*What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;*

*Build anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;*

*Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;*

*Do good anyway.*

*Give the world the best you have, and it will never be enough;*

*Do your best anyway.*

*You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God;*

*It was never between you and them anyway.*

Kent M. Keith 1968  
modified by Mother Teresa

[http://www.paradoxicalpeople.com/paradoxicalpeople/2006/02/what\\_was\\_on\\_mot.html](http://www.paradoxicalpeople.com/paradoxicalpeople/2006/02/what_was_on_mot.html)

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## Leadership

*As in any endeavour, great leaders lead and nudge, mediocre ones, coerce.*

*To quote H. Gordon Selfridge:*

*The boss depends on authority;*

*The leader on good-will.*

*The boss inspires fear;*

*The leader inspires enthusiasm.*

*The boss says "I";*

*The leader says "WE".*

*The boss fixes the blame for the breakdown;*

*The leader fixes the breakdown.*

*The boss says, "GO";*

*The leader says "LET'S GO!"*

[http://www.scienceandyou.org/articles/edit\\_07.shtml](http://www.scienceandyou.org/articles/edit_07.shtml)

One can also think about the sentiments expressed in these words of wisdom without worrying about the theological context. The point is to re-focus from pointless writhing agonies of self-doubt into positive action. Even making your dog happy with a long walk is better than beating yourself over the ego. (St. Francis would probably approve, too)

## St. Francis' A Simple Prayer

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.*

*Where there is hatred.....let me sow love*

*Where there is injury.....pardon*

*Where there is doubt .....faith*

*Where there is despair .....hope*

*Where there is darkness ... .light*

*Where there is sadness .....joy*

*O, Divine Master,*

*Grant that I may not so much seek*

*To be consoled.....as to console*

*To be understood ....as to understand,*

*To be loved .....as to love*

*For*

*It is in giving . . . .....that we receive,*

*It is in pardoning.....that we are pardoned,*

*It is in dying . . . .....that we are born to eternal life.*

Here is something to consider when you are dealing with a difficult situation...

**Giving Up and Letting Go**

*Giving up implies a struggle -*

*Letting go implies a partnership*

*Giving up dreads the future -*

*Letting go looks forward to the future*

*Giving up lives out of fear -*

*Letting go lives out of grace and trust*

*Giving up is a defeat -*

*Letting go is a victory*

*Giving up is unwillingly yielding control to forces beyond myself -*

*Letting go is choosing to yield to forces beyond myself*

*Giving up believes that God is to be feared -*

*Letting go trusts in God to care for me.*

Hank Dunn

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*"Hope [or Faith] is not the expectation that things will turn out well,  
but the conviction that something is worth working for,  
however it turns out."*

Vaclav Havel

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*We can only know what things are of overmastering importance  
when they have overmastered us.*

Dorothy L. Sayers  
Gaudy Night

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And, my personal favorite:

***All this self-sacrifice is a sad mistake.***

Dorothy L. Sayers,

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**Postscript:**  
**My favorite student evaluations**

From an archaeology/prehistory class:  
*“Why do we always talk about things that happened so long ago?”*

From a class with a required textbook:  
*“It would have been helpful to have a textbook in this class”*

My favorite totally random comment:  
*The instructor looks like kd lang”*

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