

I recently had the chance to chat with James Miller, one of my former communications professors, who still teaches at my alma mater, Hampshire College. Jim's thoughtful guidance was invaluable throughout my undergraduate career. The following are Jim's reflections on the rich experiences of his more than thirty years in the academic trenches. In concert with the articles in this issue of *Peer Review*, his comments speak to the necessity and challenges of supporting faculty as their roles evolve in the twenty-first-century academy.

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY

When Hampshire offered me a job, I held the contract long enough so I could sign it on my birthday. This was a big deal, becoming a professor. Full-time, regular, tenured faculty—the *New York Times* recently reported we are a minority in the academy—lead a charmed life. True, most of us are not getting rich, but we have phenomenal independence to pursue what interests us. And student interest often spurs us to explore new subjects. To do this sort of creative exploration as a job is a unique and profound privilege.

My own work has meandered over time, starting with a focus on media policy and technology and the work of journalists to settling now more on questions of political culture. Along the way, I've been involved in Canadian and European studies, which have made my work comparative and internationally oriented. That really pushed back my horizons. I've been able to lecture, collaborate, and conduct fieldwork all over Europe.

New technologies have definitely changed the way I work. It's common to use the Web in class instruction. All my courses have Web sites where most of the readings are available in PDF form and students put together digital video and PowerPoint

presentations at the end of each semester. My office phone almost never rings. Now it's e-mail, 24/7.

Students these days, most people seem to agree, come to college less prepared—or maybe less ready in different ways—than students in the past. The serious challenges we all face are basic and persistent ones: students who arrive lacking the skill and discipline to read thoroughly and write analytically, and who don't possess reasonably sophisticated general knowledge. Maybe, too, much of youth culture is anti-intellectual, and that can breed a bad attitude toward academic expectations.

My advice to new professors requires reflecting on one's own career, and that in turn makes it clear how, like the rest of life, work trajectories have developmental patterns. When you start teaching, you're only a few years older than your students. Now, after more than 30 years, I'm teaching the kids of Hampshire graduates, and some of my earliest students are in the middle of work lives marked by extraordinary accomplishment. The conditions of your personal life change, too, over the decades, sometimes unpredictably, or in ways that make your work harder than it should be.

The big question is whether to advise someone to become an academic at all. The emerging higher ed world is filled with challenges: online instruction and part-time faculty are becoming the norm to cut expenses; the culture at large often lacks an appreciation for the value of the liberal arts, instead favoring narrow occupational training; and faculty compensation often falls far short of what business pays and what a PhD deserves. These are tough working conditions. Maybe the academy that we baby boomers knew as students and experienced as members of the professoriate will turn out to have had a short but historically significant life. For the sake of our future students, let's hope not.

—James Miller