

## AWSS Newsletter, July 2012

### AWSS Mentoring – We Are Eager to Hear from You!

By Cynthia Simmons, Boston College

With this issue, the AWSS Newsletter is resuming the mentoring column. When we surveyed our members to determine which issues deserve the attention of the Organization, mentoring ranked high on the list. We wish to continue efforts we have made in the past (some after considerable hiatus)—mentor support through our website

(<http://awsshome.org/mentors.html>) and the roundtables on women in academia that are held every year at the annual meeting of ASEEEES—and to consider and develop new initiatives.

In this effort to increase our support for members dealing with various issues related to the finding employment and career development, we are eager to hear from you. We encourage suggestions, questions, and offers to contribute to this column. Please contact me at [simmons@bc.edu](mailto:simmons@bc.edu), or you can write to [awssnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:awssnewsletter@gmail.com) noting “Mentoring column” in the message line.

The column can be a forum for discussion of a variety of issues, e.g., a suggestion submitted to the column editor can be disseminated on the AWSS list serve, and responses can be gathered and summarized for a future column. Or a member may wish to author a column on some topic of interest to the membership. I have already contacted those colleagues who in our survey expressed an interest in contributing to the Newsletter, but we do hope others will respond as well.

It has been interesting for me to reread a contribution I wrote for the Newsletter in 2006, when Angela Brintlinger was editing this column. I related my experience of (then) 26 years in the profession with some of the most challenging aspects for women faculty in the 1980s and 1990s, such as balancing the responsibilities of a junior or even mid-level woman in Slavic and the demands of family, and of private life in general. At that time I sent the column to some women colleagues at Boston College, who then exchanged stories of their own experiences. It became apparent that as I had assumed, there had been significant changes over this approximately 25-year span. By and large women in academia are now guaranteed various kinds of support at the early stages of their careers in both their professional and private lives. A certain amount of maternity leave (and often paternity leave!) are standard, and often junior faculty members (and not just women) receive pre-tenure leaves of some sort or reduced teaching and administrative workloads to provide more opportunity for research. These are all changes for the better.

What we all know, however, is that the situation in academia, particularly in the humanities, has in general, since 1980, worsened. While support for tenure-track faculty has risen, tenure-track jobs have become scarcer. The AAUP reports that non-tenure-track positions of all types now account for 68 percent of all faculty appointments in American higher education. At the same time, the requirements for the granting of tenure have risen. Two books? Major grant? International recognition? These “conditions” more commonly applied, in the past, to the discussion of promotion to full professor. The situation for non-tenure-track faculty is even more troubling. New Ph.D.s face a situation in Slavic where they are likely to endure a lengthy and arduous application and interview process for the prospect of a one-year replacement position. Often they are forced to consider part-time employment—a salary paid per course, with

few or no benefits. Such an unstable situation can persist for years, and even if these younger colleagues are fortunate enough to continue to find employment, they face the reality of being “tainted” by a string of replacement or part-time positions. These are issues facing academia as a whole; yet, they are more pronounced in Slavic, a field that in most institutions is constricting. This reality is the impetus for the topic of this year’s panel at the ASEES annual meeting in November: “The Reality and Future of Part-Time and Temporary Teaching Positions.” This topic certainly deserves discussion, also, under our rubric of mentoring, and there are certainly others that pertain to the reality of academic life for junior faculty.