

Taking Care of Business: Planning Your Career Now

Difficulty writing your dissertation can be caused by fear about the future. Writing an academic career plan based on a business model can highlight areas that need work in your career planning. Do you want an academic career? Have you begun forming relationships with others in your field? This article will give specific information about how to clarify your career plan so that you can finish your dissertation with a clearer mind.

Don't Let Fear of the Future Derail Your Dissertation Writing

When you think of your career, do you feel excitement, apprehension, or dread? Or do you avoid thinking about it altogether? One reason that some ABD's find themselves unable to complete their dissertation is fear about the future.

Face Your Fear

The best way to tackle a fear is to face it head on. I like to use the model of a business plan to help people look ahead in their academic career. Business people write a plan to convince themselves and others that their plan is reasonable and doable. Furthermore, steps that are written down are more likely to get accomplished.

Write an Academic Career Plan

Write your responses to each section below. Don't be too critical or analytical. Aim for a vision that is exciting to you. The responses in italics are by a fictitious ABD.

Academic Career Overview

What do you hope to accomplish in your career?

I will be a tenured professor at a small Midwestern Romance Language Department, specializing in Romanian.

Vision

What is your vision of your career? Be grandiose if possible.

I will publish one article a year, speak at two conferences a year, and become known for my theories about teaching Romanian. Students will clamor to be in my classes. I will travel to Romania every other year to study the dialects found in the Transylvanian mountains, and publish a seminal piece in this area. My textbook "Readings in Romanian" will be the gold standard in teaching Romanian literature.

Market

What is the market for your area of specialization; what could you do to make yourself more marketable?

There are not many openings for professors

of Romanian, but my ability to teach French, Spanish and Italian, and my unique knowledge of the Transylvanian dialect will help me get hired. I am willing to work in any area of the country. I could also teach Portuguese.

Competitive Analysis and Strategy

What are the specific characteristics of the competition? How can you make yourself stand out from the rest?.

Competition is a problem, although I believe that my ability to interview well, my great teaching skills, and my interest in Romanian dialects will help me stand out..

I'm a little worried about recommendations – maybe I should talk to my mentor about other relationships to cultivate within the department. I could get that friendly Italian professor to read my latest draft of chapter one.

Marketing and Public Relations

How will you get known?

I need to attend more conferences and network more. I noticed that there was a post doc that I could apply for that would increase my prestige. Perhaps I should consider it.

Create an Action Plan

Your Academic Career Plan will reveal areas that need more effort. Identify one area where you realize you need to change.. What one small step could you do immediately? The action step should be small and doable. One small step, repeated many times, can reap big rewards. For example, if you need to network more, spend 2 minutes tomorrow chatting with a professor on your committee, or email someone about your work.

Monitor your plan over time: it will change. Keep track of what areas need attention, and tackle them a little at a time. It will pay big dividends in the long run.