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Developing Career Paths in Legal Academia: Prospects and Challenges

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"DEVELOPING CAREER PATHS IN LEGAL ACADEMIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES."



THE ACADEMIC & CAREER ADVANCEMENT SYMPOSIUM (ACAS) 2019

HELD AT THE

FACULTY OF LAW

ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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DELIVERED BY:

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INTRODUCTION

- ▶ The essence of legal education is to acquire in-depth and broad-based knowledge of the law and its operation, creative enough to be used to better the lot of humanity and mankind. The knowledge acquired through the study of law should be used to inspire, develop and promote social justice and improve the living conditions of those who have come to be referred to as the bottom millions.

Cont.

- ▶ However, there are those who undertake the study of law in order to earn a living. The starting point in developing a career in any discipline whatsoever requires, first and foremost, getting a sound and broad-based education in the chosen field of study. Education of any sort is a mine of information, knowledge and inspiration. A robust education affords an opportunity to the recipient all needed opportunity and exposure to a body of knowledge that will equip him/her to perform academic and professional duties much more qualitatively, efficiently and effectively.

Cont.

- ▶ Anybody who desires to join the academia and make a good and respectable name in the legal academic career must strive, first and foremost, to attain a very good degree, preferably a terminal degree in the field of law; stay focused and consistent in research and publication, as well as develop collegiality among academic colleagues.

LEGAL ACADEMIC CAREER, KEY POINTS?

- ❖ Academia - a unique form of service to humanity, a calling, a vocation – not necessarily a money-making venture.
- ❖ At the centre of legal academic career are legal scholarship, researching, writing, and publishing.
- ❖ Some legal systems require at least a law degree, in addition to bar licence.

Cont.

- ❖ In many parts of the world, graduate law degrees (LL.M, Ph.D, S.J.D, J.S.D) are required for a law teaching job.
- ❖ The United States of America does not require a graduate or doctorate degree to secure teaching in a law school.
- ❖ Most people undertake teaching and research, others not out of choice, engage in research work only with limited or no teaching commitments.

SOME CRITICAL PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Know yourself and your capabilities
2. Honestly identify your strengths and weaknesses
3. Identify your strongest skills and those you enjoy using most
4. Possession of substantial interest and passion for academia as a career
5. Literature reviewing – finding, reading and analyzing complex legal documents
6. Qualitative research –getting information from interviews

Cont.

7. Developing an international perspective – working and collaborating with foreign academic colleagues
8. Writing conference papers, articles, etc.
9. Mastery of foreign languages to facilitate effective research and publication on an international and comparative scale.
10. Possession of oral communication skill for large audiences, to small groups or just chatting about your work
11. Disposition to specialize in particular field(s) of law by which you can be recognized nationally and internationally

WHEN, WHERE AND HOW TO BEGIN AN ACADEMIC CAREER?

- ▶ Make a decision early to become a law lecturer while a student in the university or law school as the case may be.
- ▶ Once decision is made, hone writing and research skills
- ▶ Ensure possession of desired personal discipline as the academic path entails
- ▶ Identify a good academic mentor early, no matter where he comes from for inspiration, guidance and encouragement.

Cont.

- ▶ Be disposed to undergo apprenticeship in academia under an experienced and acknowledged academician (not easy to get to the top overnight).
- ▶ Get involved in courses on legal research and writings offered at the undergraduate law level.
- ▶ Attend academic and scholarly conferences – highly necessary for networking. For example, in the USA, AALS Annual Conferences offer important contact points for young academic aspirants.
- ▶ Inquire, research and apply for legal academic vacancies and positions

LEGAL ACADEMIA: DIFFICULTIES & CHALLENGES

1. Academic politics and jealousy manifest (experiences in Nigeria and US)
2. Under-appreciation of an academic scholar
3. Burdened with so much teaching and administrative work
4. Struggle to engage in research and publishing activities imperative for permanent employment
5. Unpaid obligatory extracurricular activities e.g. meetings, e-mails, mentoring, weekend examinations, orientation sessions, admission processes - all on your own time

cont.

6. Attending international conferences require huge financial resources
7. Racism, discrimination, etc. in the academia
8. Salary Disparities
9. Limited or lack of financial resources to look for vacancies
10. Lack of adjunct/visiting teaching opportunities

Cont.

11. Lack of research or graduate teaching positions
12. Difficulties in getting articles published in reputable law journals without showing institutional affiliation.
13. Professor/Superior Exploitation
14. Nepotism/Corruption/Brutal Suppression of intellectual aspiration
15. Stiff Competition Path

TRANSLATING ACADEMIC SKILLS INTO BUSINESS

- ▶ **Academia and business may seem poles apart but you may be surprised how portable your skills are. You can translate your skills from academia into business.**

- ▶ **SUBJECT EXPERTISE**
 1. Research for external bodies
 2. Consultancy
 3. Academic Publishing
 4. External examination and assessments
 5. Journalism (print and online)
 6. Private tutoring
 7. Expert witnessing in Courts

CONCLUSIONS

USEFUL TIPS

1. Develop likeness, pride, respect for the students under your charge to whom you render service
2. Always keep in mind that the young shall grow in future
3. Investment in legal human development is the best investment in life
4. An academic without successors is unsuccessful
5. A successful academic is never in want or need
6. Practice humility to remain a permanent student
7. Show gratitude, love and respect to those who helped you get to where you are, remember your teachers/mentors, talk about them, write about them, promote their names.

Cont.

8. Respect other categories of staff helpers along the way – cleaners, typists, messengers, etc. treat everybody well, show people respect.
*Ingratitude is a SIN!
9. Encourage and help those who are lacking academically and not too bright
10. Imbibe the best ethics of the legal academia – professionalism.
11. Aspire to use law as a tool for promotion of social justice, fight corruption, sexism, racism, indiscriminate and promotion of human rights. Use law as a tool to foster development not for personal accolades

cont.

12. Fight academic malpractices/vices in all forms and shapes, more importantly, do not practice it! For examples: sale of grades, callous imposition of plagiarized materials in the form of hand-outs, glorified handouts miscalled “books” – involve theft, deceit, oppression and injustice).
13. Strive to avoid the seven deadly sins of the academia – sartorial inelegance, procrastination, snobbery, lust, arrogance, complacency and pedantry.

➤ Finally, know your God and make Him the centre of your academic pursuit.

19

**THANKS
AND
GOD BLESS YOU**