**Advice for My Younger Teaching Self**

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Even though you wore a tweed blazer for the occasion, you’ll shake from nervousness the very first discussion section you lead as a teaching assistant. You’ll forget how to spell things, and a student will have to tell you how to spell “alleviate” (you had just asked the class what literature can do for us, and someone had said that it can alleviate suffering.) You’ll begin to feel better when the students chime “thank you!” one after the other, leaving that first meeting.

Learn how to keep your meetings as professional as possible because students will be confused. They’ll ask you to dinner during office hours; they’ll want to meet at a coffee shop to discuss their paper and ask if that was a date. Handy phrases to signal that the meeting is professional, and that you won’t stay just to chat: “how can I help?” and “Is there anything else you want to discuss?”

Stop telling yourself that you’re not patient enough to be a good teacher. It’s not true.

The first semester of TAing will go well, and to your surprise, your evaluations will be rather positive. This early success will lead you to think that you’re the exception: issues that affect other female instructors of color don’t apply to you. When you eventually realize that you’re *not* an exception, try not to beat yourself up too much. You got lucky, and you didn’t know better.

Don’t gloat, or feel relieved, when course evaluations are good. Instead, cherish those comments that speak to your commitment, approachability, and ability to incite new questions students didn’t even know they could ask. Compile your favorites and read them from time to time. (You’ll use them for a teaching portfolio when going on the job market, too).

Don’t overprepare because of imposter syndrome. Making sure the students understand the main ideas is enough, and you’ll see how students *appreciate* it when you say, “I don’t know.”

It’ll feel cheesy, but it’s okay to do ice breaker questions well into the semester. Students will confess to enjoying them, and it’ll help to build community while also lowering the bar for participation.

Students will like exercises that allow them to move around. The barometer exercise is a good one.

Cold calling is totally fine if you do it with a warm tone and a smile—and especially if they can skip.

You need to be prepared to respond to male students—always male—when they:

tell you that your discussion question is badly formulated

tell you that you don’t seem to know what you’re talking about

tell you that you look nice, that they feel a special connection to you

tell you that they can comment on your appearance because they’re not *your* student

tell you that the other (white male) TA is the better TA

tell you that the assigned readings are “infantile”

tell you that they’d be “more than happy to come to office hours and attempt to teach you about [the topic of the course]” when you give them negative feedback on their work and ask to meet

ask you whether they can use the white board, produce a complicated looking chart, and when asked what they’ve just drawn, smugly answer that they were bored with discussion and wanted to doodle

ask you whether you’re *sure* that Nietzsche said such-and-so because they read something online saying otherwise

ask you whether you’re *sure* that “artifice” means *that* because they’d never heard that before

ask you whether you work out because you look like you do

ask you if they can close the door while they’re visiting office hours

ask you if you’d like to go on a walk sometime, or grab coffee sometime

Each time, you’ll panic and laugh it off. Don’t do that. (You *really* need to stop laughing when you’re shocked. You even laughed when someone rear-ended you!) Work out how you’d respond in these scenarios *before they happen* so you’re not caught off guard again and again.

You’ll note a curious pattern: some of the worst behavior will come from Asian men. Don’t waste your time trying to guess why. (Because they’re comfortable? Because sexism is rampant in their home countries?) Also don’t waste emotional energy feeling betrayed.

You also need to be prepared to respond when folks at the ID office ask, and ask again, whether *you’re sure* you need the faculty card, not a staff card.

Staff at your new school will refuse to help with printing the day before class, thinking that you’re a student. They’ll apologize when they learn who you are. A postdoc, visiting scholar, and emeritus professor will all react with surprise upon learning you’re a new faculty member at the first colloquium. Don’t be annoyed. At least they’ll be nice afterwards (but is it because I’m a professor, not a student? Or because they simply feel bad? Neither will feel good).

Strangers, upon learning what you do, will repeatedly ask whether you teach freshman—because, you know, how could someone who looks like you teach upper class students who might need more expert instruction?

Learn how to deescalate. Some students will resist, and resist forcefully, when you give them negative feedback. It won’t matter how warm, constructive, or justified it is. Learn how to calm your pounding heart. Learn how to wind down to sleep while angry. Learn how to eat while indignant.

Make sure you don’t skip lunch if you have a 3-hour seminar! You *will* run out of steam by the second hour. Of course, being nervous isn’t appetite-inducing. Still, force yourself to eat something and caffeinate.

Document how many students are coming to office hours, or just stopping by, or knocking on your door when it’s closed.

Keep Kleenex in your office; students will cry in your office. Also brush up on your CPR skills because one will have a panic attack and you’ll worry whether you’d be able to revive her if she stops breathing.

Document a student who sends you an email with how he’s feeling that day, with pictures of the sunset, and then pout that you don’t “seem interested in talking to him” when you don’t reply.

When students repeatedly send aggravating emails contesting a grade, forward them to your professor (when TAing) or chair. They’ll be appalled, and the students will drop it as soon as a male professor gets involved.

The most Twitter-famous you’ll be is when you receive an atrocious email from a student. Two million people will see the tweet, and ten thousand people will “like” it. The deans will get in touch with you. Friends and strangers will reach out to commiserate with you and thank you for sharing what they, too, experienced. The trolls will come for you, too, of course. All in all, though, don’t seek moral support on social media.

Your chair will tell you that your job is so much harder than his, that his ten years of teaching didn’t bring any of the stuff that you experienced in the first two years. You’ll feel sheepish and say that you didn’t mean to fish for a comment like that; your chair will assure you that he said what he said precisely because you don’t seem to understand the extent to which the jobs are different. Let this kind point anger you, but let it soothe you more. You have allies who support you, and sometimes that means getting you to acknowledge what really is the case.

It will be tempting to cultivate an underlying sense of resentment. That’s not a good use of your emotional energy, so find fellow women—and women of color, if you can—to vent to.

But don’t always go to them, or at least don’t always go to the same one. Friendships will feel strained (though maybe that’s just your social anxiety).

Go to AAPT sessions at the APA. Take notes, try out techniques you learn from them, and follow up with speakers to report how things went. Valuable friendships will develop from those sessions and conversations.

BIPOC and gender minority students will come to you. Relish these relationships and be fed by their presence. They need to see someone like you thriving. Receive their care with gratitude.

It doesn’t matter if *you* feel bright-eyed and alert at 8 AM; the undergrads, especially first years, are *not* ready to engage with Plato or Xunzi or Nozick at 8 AM intro to philosophy. Aim for mid-morning classes.

Don’t introduce the Buddhist no-self view to first years by dropping terms like “mereology” and “part-whole relations” and “identity conditions.” Just… don’t.

You can’t get to every student. Sometimes they just don’t click with philosophy. Sometimes they like the material but just can’t engage with it deeply because they’re dealing with other personal matters. Not every student will make visible progress while taking your class, and that is okay. It’s not a reflection of you.

Try not to take it personally when students lie or cheat. They’re probably really stressed. Instead of wasting time stewing in indignation, revise the syllabus to make policies even clearer. Make it very, very clear what constitutes plagiarism.

You’ll first come to pedagogy to troubleshoot issues (How do I make sure all students have the chance to succeed? How do I handle the emotional toll?). But sometimes, pedagogy will feel less like problem-solving and more like self-revelation. In one AAPT workshop, you’ll answer fifteen autobiographical questions—what did your family eat to celebrate? What did your room look like when you were twelve?—and be challenged to consider how your answers relate to your pedagogy. In that workshop, you’ll feel as if lightning struck you because you’ll realize that you’re not a disembodied mind trying to write and teach philosophy. It’ll be a revelation that your unique history and embodied experience are assets that allow you to teach in a manner that others can’t. You’ll feel as if you’ve been given a secret golden key to teaching.

It will feel like you’re flailing, but you’ll be learning and improving the whole time. One day, graduate students will dissect your classroom practices and tell you they’ve learned just as much about teaching as they did about the topic of the course.

Do what you can, and that will be enough. I want to say that you’ll survive, but there’ll be more than that. Future you will be proud of you. She will reach out, feeling tender and protective. You are not alone.