



On becoming and being...

By Professor
Peter Hogg

a professor

I was inspired to become an academic, and particularly a professor, in 1985 and 1986. This was as a direct consequence of working with a clinical scientist (physicist) and a professor of medicine. Initially, I was intrigued by their commitment to their work, and after a short space of time I understood why, as I too become infected with the same values and beliefs.

At that time, radiography was not a graduate profession and, as such, I was unaware of university processes and requirements and, lacking a mentor, I set my sights in a direction that I considered to be suitable to achieving an academic position, such as a professorship. The next decade and a half consisted of continuing my day job (as a nuclear medicine radiographer and subsequently as a teacher) and in my spare time I wrote articles for journals and professional magazines and also delivered many conferences papers.

With hindsight, I would advise anybody wishing to aspire in the academic world to acquire themselves a mentor/coach, because this would help with focusing time and energy into the meeting of requisite targets. My approach was shotgun and, as a consequence, certain targets were not achieved as adequately as I would have liked and others were over-hit.

On first application for promotion to professor in 2000, I was rejected because I applied to be a research professor and did not meet all the criteria. The criteria for a research professor at my university are very stringent and, generally speaking, to be able to meet them you would have to have been working full time in research, at a quite advanced level, for many years. I was not deterred in my professorial application because my vice chancellor encouraged me to re-apply under the banner of 'teaching and learning', as this was a better match for me (comprising professional work, teaching and learning and, of course, research). I reapplied and on this basis I was successful. I was appointed a professor at the University of Salford on 1 August 2002.

On appointment, I was not allocated a mentor, neither did I seek one, and, as such, the manifestation of my role was down to giving myself direction. Once again, with hindsight, I would advise any new professor to seek themselves a (professorial) mentor/coach

who would help with the focusing of work-related efforts into what the expectations of a professor would be. Thankfully, my interpretation of what a teaching and learning professor should do is in line with my university's aims and I was pleased to demonstrate this fact to my peers at my belated inaugural lecture in December 2006.

There were three points in time when I wrangled with the concept of being a professor, and maybe this 'coming to terms with professorship' was linked to attaining the position at an early age (39). Incidentally, it is quite unusual for a professor to be appointed below the age of 40. These points in time were: shortly after my appointment, and two and five years later. On appointment, I was not entirely clear what I should be doing to demonstrate my title. Consequently, I went into overdrive in my



university and professional roles. I attempted to hit targets of research professors and as many targets as possible of teaching and learning professors – and I made a reasonable attempt at both.

However, with this came a significant personal cost. For instance, the time I gave to my job was considerable, often reaching 100 hours a week. I routinely flew back from conferences on overnight flights from the States and would go straight into work. For one particular conference paper in the States, I came back by return flight, only being on American soil for 14 hours.

In terms of international presence, particularly between the summers of 2002 and 2004, I presented at many international conferences and, in a one-year time frame, I took 74 flights to places as far flung as New Zealand. In late 2003, I took on the editor-in-chief role of *Radiography*, an international peer-reviewed journal, the work of which was, and still is, conducted in the evenings. Surprisingly, in spite of all this I still continued to deliver the outcomes of my university-based roles.

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By the summer of 2004, when I stood down as academic head of department, I was worn out. There followed a few months of reflection, including a questioning of whether I wanted to continue as a professor, because at that time I saw the role as being far too demanding. Additionally, my family, friends and colleagues advised me that I was likely to be shortening my life expectancy with my reckless approach to life. At that stage, a pro-vice chancellor spent some time with me, in a mentorship capacity, and he helped me to re-focus on what was important and achievable.

Simply put, I acknowledged that I was human and that, as far as the professorial role went, I needed to resign myself to not being able to meet all of the professorial outcomes all of the time. Around the same time, I realised that it was important to help people establish a realistic expectation of me and, similarly, I started to acknowledge that my expectations of others were often too high.

Five years on, I am in a reflective phase again. I believe I have clarified in my own mind what a teaching and learning professor is and I have noted where I have legitimate overlap with a research professor. Even though I am becoming fairly mature as a professor, I feel I still need to identify a mentor who is sensitive to what I am about and in this regard I am on a quest to find one.

In recent times, I have engaged in discussions with consultant radiographers and I was surprised to find that we have much in common. In particular many of them too, being new to consultantships in a profession where we have a paucity of them*,



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are concerned about making sure they deliver what is expected from their post. They too reflect on their performance across a broad range of role requirements. They too constantly question themselves on whether they are making the grade and a consequence of this is that they too worry about whether their capability and output matches the role requirements.

Being a profession fairly new to academia and increasingly having more and more demanding clinical responsibilities, I suppose it is not unreasonable that in our formative years we reflect and question ourselves on whether we meet the role requirements. I suspect this critical self reflection and uncertainty will reduce over time until a point is reached when we establish ourselves more firmly in these new fields.

** I am not certain how many radiographers hold professorships in the UK, but I suspect it does not exceed eight.*

Personal high as a professor: being formally acknowledged in America for my leadership abilities (December 2003), and also being recognised by the American Society of Radiologic Technologists as a significant catalyst for the introduction of advanced practice for radiographers throughout the USA and the subsequent development of masters programmes in support of these roles (December 2006).

Personal low as a professor: failing at anything.

Humility as a professor: a week after being appointed, I gave an invited conference paper in Birmingham, Alabama, USA. I was proud of being professor and wanted to let the Americans know. The Americans said: "Peter, everybody is a professor in America – for instance, all school teachers are called professor". As such, I use the title little, and often people do not know.

Most supportive person on becoming and being a professor: my wife

About the Author

Peter Hogg is a professor at the University of Salford. He is course leader of the MSc Nuclear Medicine and of the Nuclear Medicine Image Interpretation award.

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Further reading

Peter has written an extensive article on how to become a professor, the different types of appointment, and what is expected when you are in post. To read the article in full go to www.sor.org/members/pubarchive/pub_search.htm