



education review // reseñas educativas

editors: gene v glass gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

November 8, 2010

ISSN 1094-5296

Shaw, Victor N. (2008). *In View of Academic Careers and Career-Making Scholars: Innovative Ideas for Institutional Reform*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Pp. xiv + 197

ISBN 978-1-59311-885-3

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Making an academic career is to socialize oneself in a field of knowledge domain (p. xi). But the knowledge enterprise proliferates so rapidly over time that mere aspiration and diligence are far from enough to gain an entry to academia, not to mention to make a successful career. What else should one take into consideration when pursuing academic career? What the society as a whole can and ought to do to facilitate the individual career making?

In his new book, *In View of Academic Careers and Career-Making Scholars*, Victor N. Shaw examines the general social context of academic careers in contemporary society and the career-making endeavors of academicians, to further explicate how the individual academic career making is linked to the contexts of

Citation: Fan, Minmin. (2010 November 8) Review of *In View of Academic Careers and Career-Making Scholars* by Victor N. Shaw. *Education Review*, 13. Retrieved [Date] from <http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev990.pdf>

academia. The subtitle, *Innovative Ideas for Institutional Reform*, well summarizes what the book is all about: reform suggestions for academic institutions to improve their normal processes and therein to “enhance productivity, facilitate performance, and improve experience” (p.xii). As Shaw insightfully points out, the “larger system has an inescapable responsibility” to ensure that scholars “grow, develop and perform to the best of their potential” (p. xiii), and “answers to this focal question often lie in different levels of organizational units involved in academic operation” (*Ibid*).

In View of Academic Careers and Career-Making Scholars can be taken as a guide for individual learning and practice, and is particularly meaningful as a thought-provoking reference for institutional innovation. In sixteen chapters, Shaw first identifies five stages of main academic career pathways: initiation, routinization, secularization, solidification and graduation (Chapter 1); then he explores the key requirements for academicians to make a career, which include educational preparation, job search, institutional placement, and professional networking (Chapter 2-5); later Shaw studies the career structure and lists out the essential elements – ranging from academic degree, position, publication, teaching, presentation, service, grants, awards, and membership in academic associations, to tenure - for scholars to build and maintain a career identity (Chapter 6-15); finally he analyses the compartmentalized versus multifaceted orientation in the construction of a scholarly identity (Chapter 16).

Different from quite a few other volumes engaging the similar thesis, this book is uniformly structured in a reader-friendly manner. Each chapter starts with a brief review of the existing literature, usually in one or two paragraphs, before rationally subjecting an issue to further discussion in two sections. The first section provides a clear overview and analysis of the practical settings of each intellectual perspective. Using a systematic framework, Shaw explains key concepts, addresses fundamental issues, or presents common senses that have long been realized or practiced. Delving into how present social forces manipulate and impede individual productivity and performance, Shaw in the second section offers innovative suggestions for institutional reforms and

reorganization upon a concise description of the status quo and followed by description of reform significance. Due to this uniform organization of the content, readers can easily pinpoint the information in need even without reading through the whole book.

Out of his personal preference, or, more likely, bounded by the painstakingly uniform of content, Shaw proposes five reforms in each chapter, which, albeit their multifaceted and multilayered presentations, in fact, are mainly revolving two key words: standardize and systemize. According to Shaw, standards should be made, clarified, strengthened, and “standardized” to ensure a successful academic career. For example, in Chapter 3 Shaw emphasizes the importance of job search and change by saying that “the position found places one in a work environment that may determine one’s productivity, contributions, and quality of life” (p.27). Therefore he calls for to standardize the fragmented job advertisements in a discipline by listing all job openings in a special publication. Then in the following Chapter Shaw suggests to make faculty exchange a standard practice to “diversify their [faculty] institutional experience” (p.43). In Chapter 5 the author believes that to standardize student evaluation can make teaching evaluation more objective, substantive and effective (p.103). In Chapter 10 he poses the reform to strengthen academic standards for annual associational conventions “to ensure quality participation by serious practitioners on a long-term base” (p.112). When talking about service in Chapter 11, Shaw announces that it should no longer be in a far less important position than teaching and/or research in academic life; it is time that organizations standardize service recruitment to “ensure service openness, fairness, quality and integrity” (p.124). To help individuals build up a scholarly identity, in Chapter 12 Shaw poses that an institution should first clarify its standards applicable in the real world to present the employee a clear image of itself.

Another most frequently mentioned word in this book is “systemize”: systems in academia should be created and established. To facilitate their academic employees in life long drives towards success, institutions are suggested to establish a career-sensitive reward system (p.9), set up a career-consistent evaluation system (p.10), and “systemize career-related publications” (p.15). To build up a better

organizational network, Shaw advises to create a duty-indicative ranking system (p.46). Three out of the five reforms for a more efficient and effective professional network are about creating information networks and service-oriented system on funding and publishing (p.58, 60, 64). Establishing a general rating system for all academic publications is helpful to guide scholars and institutions in their selection and judgment of scholarly work and products (p.90). A floating tenure system across academia is recommended to “create an open field of free choice for both individual and institutions” (p.172).

While suggestions for institutional reform are addressed from a variety of perspectives and approaches, not all ideas are fully developed. For instance, in Chapter 1, Shaw initiates a reform 2 of setting up a career consistent evaluation system to challenge the existing power relations which is controlled by the senior scholars but “monitor, manipulate, and even torture newcomers” (p.10). Shaw goes on to say that under the present evaluation system, many senior academicians “are more likely to do their best” and “will do the best they can in line with prevailing academic norms, standards and practices” (p.11) when they were juniors. Therefore, Shaw suggests revamping the evaluation system “to loosen control over newcomers” and carrying out more routine and meaningful post-tenure review (p.11).

But the author seems to have forgotten to make pertinent recommendations for junior scholars who are neither novices nor old guards. To those aspirants halfway along the academic career pathway, what specific review and evaluation should be made to enhance their productivity? Should they be evaluated as usual as under the present system? Should they be given a tighter or looser net of external restrains in their scholarly endeavor? In terms of frequency, how should the institutions evaluate the research, teaching and service of the junior scholars? Limited discussion on this issue may foster a lack of instruction for this special population.

Again reform 4 of Chapter 5 would have been strengthened by greater integration of its topic with the discussion of roles of and interactive relationship among book writers, book agents and book publishers. In this chapter, Shaw suggests to have a new profession of agents

to free academic workers from hard labor of publishing of academic books. According to Shaw, a clear task division should be made: scholars write manuscripts, publishers publish manuscripts, and book agents serve as go-betweens. Shaw suggests book agents first to receive complete manuscripts from individual academicians and then to locate publishers upon the market investigation on each manuscript, and even to coordinate in printing process if necessary; publishers act “upon only complete manuscripts collected by book agents from academic authors” so that they “would no longer worry about the gap it so often sees between a wonderful book proposal and a not so wonderful final manuscript as it reviews” (p.63); in this way Shaw believes that academic authors can obviously focus on making contributions to scholarship and no longer waste time on chores.

However, this is a situation fairly idealized. An individual academician can't help wondering how qualified the book agents can be to locate his manuscript, and a publisher may also doubt how professional the agents can coordinate them with authors on matters pertaining the substance of the book. Though Shaw briefly mentioned that a degree or certain skills are required to be a qualified book agent, readers would like to see more emphasis on how to guarantee the scholarly endeavors of writers and the requirements from the publishers well bridged by the book agents. And a weaker point of this section is that Shaw only explains how agents should work upon complete manuscripts, but neglects that very often market also pushes publishers to solicit compositions before scholars fully realize the demands and turn out complete products. Few more lines on how agents can help publishers recognize the market trends including readership and competition, how they would decide a pool of scholars specializing in relevant fields, and how they can coordinate authors with publishers on their expectations of the book will be appropriate.

Readers of *In View of Academic Careers and Career-Making Scholars* may also realize that though this book focuses on changes, the author in fact doesn't pay much attention to their implementation. Reforms like providing opportunities for student exchange and transfer (p.25) or sponsoring regular publication contests at disciplinary associations (p.92) sound not difficult to be realized, but

other proposals including stopping a formation of a part-time teaching profession (p. 47) and creating a common grant market (p.132) obviously involve more questions of “who”, “when” and “how” to bring them into effect. Undoubtedly discussion of the feasibility of his innovative reforms will require more and may develop different books.

Usually reforms are suggested to solve problems under the present system, but any change or reorganization will unavoidably bring out both positive influences and side effects. One or two paragraphs on the significance after every reform suggestion is part of the uniform organization of Shaw’s book. However, the book can be more instructive and practical if the author could have added a few lines upon the potential side effects, or one or two more paragraphs about how to incorporate a specific reform into the other “can-be-maintained” fields of the present system.

Despite the shortcomings, this book is still impressive. Shaw has successfully compiled major sociological perspectives for explaining a general academic career making pathway. In one volume he provides an overview of almost all the fundamental issues involved in an academic career. With a clear focus on change, Shaw gives inspiration for creative innovation and provides a blueprint for institutional reform. This book is a helpful desk reference from which both individuals and institutions can develop more informed ideas of future operations in negotiating a path to career success.

About the Reviewer

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