

Welcome to Column 17 of Hey Jane! This is a project of the SWS Career Development Committee. Questions and answers are generated by the committee and SWS members. Answers are compiled from several anonymous sources. All columns are archived on our committee's page on the SWS website <http://www.socwomen.org/about/career.html>

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HEY JANE!

“I’m beginning to think about retiring from academia and I hear people talk about “planning” for retirement – what kinds of *plans* do I need to make?”

JANE SAYS:

First let me say, congratulations on reaching this new chapter in your life. Often when people refer to “planning for retirement” they mean making sure their finances are in order. That is certainly an important piece of the puzzle; however, there are a few other things that you might want to take into account as you transition into retirement.

When to retire

- *You may (or may not) want to consider the timing of your retirement. On a political level, the interests of your department (or specialty area) might be a factor. Will your line be renewed or terminated? Will it remain in your department? Will it remain in your area of specialization?
- *Another issue to consider is that you may need to start planning well in advance in order to take advantage of your final paid sabbatical. The rules at most universities require a person to return for a full year after a sabbatical (see Hey Jane column 13). This means that one has to determine when she is eligible for a sabbatical and plan at least three years in advance to coordinate sabbatical and retirement: a year to apply for sabbatical, a year to go on sabbatical, and a year to come back to campus before retirement.
- * The progress of your graduate students may influence the timing of your retirement. Would you want to be able to continue directing theses and dissertations? Would you be allowed to do so after retirement? Some universities require emerita status in order to continue serving on graduate student committees (more about emerita status below).
- * Grants and grant funds might be an issue as well. Once again, emerita status may allow you to apply for grants to be administered by the university and to use grant funds you have already been awarded. If you are receiving (or expecting) grant money, you should check with your research office and/or the funding agency to clarify the details. You may find yourself in a situation where a grant is postponed until after you are scheduled to retire. You may not be allowed to receive salary from the grant after retirement, but may be able to continue to receive expenses. There is likely to be a great deal of variety depending on the grant.
- * Service on key committees may influence the timing of your retirement. No one is indispensable, but sometimes the right senior person can make a difference on a project or an important committee. Once again, emerita status may allow you to continue to serve on department or university committees after retirement.

Emerita status

Universities handle emerita status in different ways. Some institutions bestow the status as a matter of course, while others consider it to be highly merit-based and require a process similar to the tenure and promotion process for the awarding of this status. Even in the less competitive models, if an institution requires the nomination by a department, there have been cases in which a department declined to nominate a retiring colleague based on past political and personal differences. While benefits that accompany emeritus status vary from institution to institution, some common ones are: library privileges, internet access (web space, e-mail), parking permit, office and/or lab space, permission to serve on campus committees, access to recreational facilities, discounts for athletic and cultural events, and discounts at bookstore. Other benefits less commonly offered include: tuition waivers for family members and permission to work on sponsored grants. Some universities hold a special ceremony for conferring emerita status.

Financial

Clearly financial considerations are significant. How much financial planning one has done and what financial obligations one has are important issues.

*Phased retirement options will vary by university, but in general provide a gradual transition to retirement status. Typically these plans allow faculty to work less than full-time (often half time) for one to three years for proportionate salary. Sometimes faculty retain full benefits, sometimes benefits are also proportionate (or some are full and some are proportionate). Once you decide to enter into phased retirement, you are likely to be locked in to that decision, so plan wisely.

These plans have a variety of names – one retired SWSer mentioned an interesting one:

Retirement Incentive Plan (RIP!)

*Your university is likely to offer financial counseling for retirement. If not, TIAA-CREF offers individual counseling. See their website for more information: <http://www.tiaa-cref.org>.

*Debates about the fate of Social Security aside, for the time being, you will want to find out when it makes sense for you to collect social security. Check out the following website for more information: <http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/>

*If you are fortunate enough to have written a popular book (or books), royalties will continue. You may also consider limited speaking engagements for supplemental income.

Staying involved in sociology

Many people continue to be involved in professional work after retirement. One retired SWSer even commented that she is sometimes so busy with professional projects that she feels she “needs a sabbatical from [her] retirement.” Some suggestions for staying involved in sociology include:

* Continue to publish or edit, or get back to publishing if you have spent many years with a heavy teaching, service, or administrative load. Or, serve as a peer-reviewer or on the editorial boards of journals.

* Maintain membership and be active in professional organizations including, but not limited to, holding office, serving on committees, organizing sessions, being on the program. The American Anthropological Association has an Association of Senior Anthropologists; it’s rather like an ASA section or an official dues-paying caucus in that its members get program sessions and funds for a reception based on the number of people in the association.

*Get involved with new professional organizations. Maybe now is the time to involve yourself in an international organization that you always had your eye on, but never had the time to fully participate.

* Continue to attend departmental colloquia and other events at your university.

* Seek short-term, full-time appointments at other institutions. Fulbright has a senior specialist program - <http://www.cies.org/specialists/>. This program allows you to organize visiting positions for 2-6 weeks. Fulbright pays fare and \$200 per diem. The host pays housing and meals. You can do it once a year for five years.

* Be a consultant or expert witness.

* Volunteer sociological expertise, e.g. doing qualitative or quantitative research for not-for-profit organizations.

* Teach as an adjunct on your own or another campus, maybe even in a different department.

* Be a public sociologist. Write op-ed pieces on topics of interest, give public lectures, organize around social issues.

* Mentor students or junior colleagues.

Maybe you are ready to exit the world of sociology, but want to continue to earn some money and do productive or creative work. Turn a hobby like photography into a second career, start your own charitable organization . . . the possibilities are nearly endless.

Or maybe you are ready for some well deserved rest. Go for it. You've earned it.

Other thoughts

Although many retired sociologists report enjoying the freedom of retirement, a few struggles they mention include:

* Getting re-organized to work at home. What things from your office do you really need?

Should you continue all your journal subscriptions and where should you put all the books and journals (and art work and coffee mugs) from the office.

*Also, it appears that the work-family (or work-personal life dilemma) continues for some people after retirement. For those continuing to pursue professional interests, it's still the case that a grandchild's birthday may conflict with a paper presentation at an international conference.

Many people report that they love being retired. If your body and pocketbook are relatively healthy, retirement allows time to rest, to travel free of teaching schedules, to read novels, to garden, and to take pleasure in all kinds of activities you always wished you had the time to enjoy.

CAVEAT to all professional advice: Always check with your departmental colleagues, chair, dean, etc. to find out what the norms and expectations are in your institution. And consult with your professional mentors to determine what is most appropriate in your specific situation.

I hope this helps! Stay tuned for next month's question on careers outside of academia.

-- Jane

Do you have a question for Jane?

Do you have experience or “expertise” about an upcoming question?
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