

A Conversation with Professor Anne Schneider

During a wide-ranging conversation conducted February 15, 2006, Dr. Schneider talked about a variety of topics, including the job market, interviewing for academic positions, and the tenure & promotion process. Anne Schneider is a Professor of Justice Studies in Arizona State University's School of Justice and Social Inquiry. She served as Dean of the College of Public Programs from 1989 to 2004. As Dean, Dr. Schneider oversaw Schools of Human Communication, Journalism, Justice Studies, Public Affairs, Social Work, and the Department of Recreation Management and Tourism, and thus, she offers a senior administrator's perspective and a senior faculty member's perspective on academic life that may be of interest to junior faculty members working toward tenure and to graduate students on the job market.

This interview was originally printed in *Social Problems Forum: The SSSP Newsletter*, Vol. 37, Issue 1 and Vol. 37, Issue 2. The original interview can be found at <http://sssp1.org/extras/Summer%202006%20Newsletter.pdf> and <http://sssp1.org/extras/Winter2006.pdf>

Social Problems Forum: Can you give us some of your thoughts on changes you've seen in the academy that might be of interest to those seeking their first academic job, and what advice you might have for them?

Anne Schneider: Well, the questions most people on the job market were most likely to ask me, and that they should ask were: 'what's the future of this department?' ... 'What's this department like?' 'What's its intellectual basis?' Almost always the home institution prompts candidates to ask such questions. [laughing] And if they don't the department that they are interviewing with probably tell them to ask the Dean if we're going to get more lines.

SPF: Right, and [laughing] ...

AS: And the answers you are going to get are really going to depend. In universities where colleges are really large, where liberal arts are all together, the person you are talking to probably isn't the Dean, it's probably the Associate Dean, and that person may not have much knowledge of that department at all. In such cases, there is no way they are going to say much to you about the future of that department, but it is probably still worthwhile to ask. If you are interviewing at a place like a social science college where deans have a lot more autonomy and their own budgets, you may get more answers to those questions. Another question people sometimes ask, and I think it is appropriate to ask is, 'is this place a snakepit?'

SPF: How would a person finesse that question? You wouldn't want to put the person on the spot.

AS: Sometimes people will just come right out and ask. But you can ask, 'what is the collegiality like?' Or they might say, 'this seems to be a group that really gets along well. Is that the case?' But I would never have answered, 'Yes, this is a snakepit. You don't want to come here.' ... But if it wasn't a snake pit, then I would tell them and that would be a plus for the department.

SPF: Right, would you say is this pretty much universal for deans?

AS: Oh, when you are a dean at a big university as I was, your job isn't really to decide whether this is the best candidate or not, because I wouldn't have nearly as much contact with the candidate as the faculty would, or the chair and the search committee, and I wouldn't try to second guess them unless I thought there was something strange going on. ... So my job really was a recruitment job, and that was to convince candidates that this is really a good place to be. You want people who interview for a job to go away with a really good impression.

SPF: Right, because otherwise the potential candidate has ...

AS: That's right. And they will take stories back about what kind of a place this is so if you want your university and department to have a good reputation, then the Dean has to do that.

SPF: Okay, let me ask you this. Do you think that is true for most deans or associate deans or upper level administrations you speak with during an interview? Is their function really more as a recruiter or cheerleader or ?

AS: It is really hard to say. I know that at some big universities things are changing. In some places, things are becoming much more hierarchical, and some upper level administrators at universities seem to think their job is to make sure the departments don't hire unworthy people.

SPF: But, as they define unworthy, right?

AS: Right. The whole thing is flip-flopping in some universities ... There is nothing wrong with a job candidate asking a dean what their role in the process is, and in many places, a dean is in the best position to explain the tenure process. And that is another question that is good to ask: 'How does the tenure process work?' 'Is it an open process?' 'Does the [tenure and promotion] candidate know year by year how they

are doing?’ ‘Or is it all a big surprise at the end?’ That question needs to be asked and answered.

SPF: Are there other questions that you were regularly asked by candidates or that seem appropriate to ask?

AS: I would often get asked questions that were department questions. ‘What’s the travel budget?’ ‘What’s the teaching load?’ ‘Do you get a course reduction during your tenure years?’ ‘What’s the service expectation?’ At ASU those were really department questions. When I was asked a question like that, I would explain that those were department questions, but I would also usually be able to tell them how that department works.

SPF: But that isn’t universal. I’ve been on a number of interviews, and in some, the department faculty told me to ask the Dean about things like reduced course load while working toward tenure, travel budget, etc., since those decisions were made at the college level. [laughing] And in a couple of interviews the Dean told me to ask the Department Chair about some matters that the Department Chair later told me to ask of the Dean ...

AS: Another thing that is useful to ask a Dean is, ‘How do junior faculty get acquainted across departments?’

SPF: That is a very good question. I don’t think I ever asked that question on an interview.

AS: And ask what kind of mechanisms are there? ASU certainly had formal ways to do that. We did in our college. I had lunch with the junior faculty once a month, and that was a way for them to get to know one another. Women’s groups are a good place for the women to get together. The guys had a little tougher time making cross-department connections because they don’t have men’s organizations. But ASU put together a new faculty orientation, and that group got together four times a year.

SPF: Right.

AS: When you are looking for that first job, you want good colleagues. Basically, you want the best university you can get an offer from. But if you’ve got comparable offers, then look for good colleagues, predictable tenure processes, and predictable tenure processes [that] are more faculty-based. [Tenure processes] get less and less predictable as they get more and more authoritarian.

SPF: Okay, let’s shift gears a bit. For those seeking to become junior faculty members, for people going on the job market, do you think it is better to use the shotgun approach for job applications, or to really focus on a few key jobs that seem to fit?

AS: Given the tightness of the job market — and I think it is really tight — there is no point applying for jobs where you’re not in that field or where you don’t fit the job description.

There is really no point, because you won’t be very competitive. Take your own case, you did a lot of shotgun.

SPF: Oh yeah [laughing] ...

AS: Did you ever get much response, or did you hit it lucky?

SPF: I think I hit it lucky. The job I have is in sociology and I tell my students jokingly, but it’s true, that I’ve never completed a sociology class in my life and I’m here as an associate professor of sociology teaching you [laughing].

AS: But what was the job description? It was in an interdisciplinary program and that’s the difference. So in some ways you did fit that job.

SPF: I did. ... Right, so you have to look beyond the surface.

AS: For example, if you are a political scientist trained in international relations and globalization and they’re looking for an Americanist ... then don’t apply because you won’t be competitive. On the other hand, if a job description is unusual, then it may be worth taking a fly at it because they aren’t likely going to find anyone who fits very well.

SPF: So the odds may be even or there may be a more level playing field.

AS: Yes, if it is a real unusual job. But let me say a couple of other things about getting on the job market. The letters

people write for you are really important. And one of the things you should try to get them to do is to talk about your work substantively. If they will spend a page outlining your dissertation, what’s in it, or if you’ve written some articles and they talk about those, then that will be good. When you write your own letter, there should be a long paragraph or two about your dissertation, about any articles you’ve published, because they may not read these, but they will read your cover letter. And you need to make your scholarly work come alive in your letter by describing it.

SPF: Okay.

AS: Most of the time, in doctoral programs you are coming out of a particular doctoral culture that may, in retrospect, seem very biased in certain ways. You get accustomed to their jargon and to the way they look at things and you may think that’s the way it is, but it isn’t. So, being way out, being narrowly defined, is not a good idea. If you just really love qualitative work, don’t say you hate quantitative work.

SPF: Right, leave it open. Things can be left unsaid.

AS: Right, leave it open. Be a lot more open to different perspectives, because most departments are going to be fighting some of those battles themselves. If you come down and walk right into the midst of departmental factions that you don’t even know about, you’re not doing yourself any favors. Another thing, another reason to avoid the shotgun is because you don’t have time. If you are more focused, then

"When you are looking for that first job, you want good colleagues. Basically, you want the best university you can get an offer from. But if you've got comparable offers, then look for good colleagues, predictable tenure processes, and predictable tenure processes [that] are more faculty-based."

you can look up those professors at the places you apply, and read something they've written.

SPF: And really tailor your application toward those people?

AS: Well not so much your letter, it describes you, but you don't make silly mistakes in your presentation. It may make a lot of difference in how you present your work to know something about them.

SPF: I know for my own interviews I would go and look up who has published what recently so that in conversation during the interview I could ...

AS: yes, and then when you are having the conversation they may be very impressed that you have read anything of theirs. And besides, it broadens your perspective because you are probably reading people in a area that you haven't looked at in years, if ever.

SPF: I know from my own experience, just the opportunity to see what other people are doing gives me a sense of whether I would fit in the place. For example, if everyone was doing qualitative work and I'm all about quantitative research, well, then this might not be a good fit.

AS: Well, but maybe they need someone to do qualitative work. What if the department really needs someone to do such work?

SPF: Right, but there is a question of your own personal fit. If you are the odd person out in a program then you might want to take that into account.

AS: Yes, then you would have to make a lot of personal adjustments.

SPF: Exactly, for example, many sociology programs think, or at least they used to think that they need to have a Marxist or feminist scholar to be well-rounded, but the rest of the faculty doesn't necessarily respect such work. That brings up the question, would you really want to be in such a place?

AS: And yet you're not going to find a whole department of Marxists, so if that is your identity, you just have to live with it [laughing].

SPF: Okay, how about the question of what a graduate student should do in order to prepare for the job market. You said that if a person is published, they should bring that up in their cover letters. How important is it to publish before going out on the job market?

AS: It makes a lot of difference. Unless you are from a really top tier university, you may not even get a second look unless you've published.

SPF: Okay. How about teaching? Some people go through graduate school on fellowships that allow them to concentrate on their studies without providing any opportunity to teach. In fact, they may be discouraged from teaching.

AS: That really varies by department. From my experience here, most departments here figure you are going to be able to teach and they make judgments based on your presentation to the faculty. Others will place a big importance on whether you've had any teaching experience. And if you have, they will want to know if you are any good at it. But, I would say experience

teaching is important because of the amount of time it will save you when you finally get a job.

SPF: I know I was grateful for having taught a few classes while a graduate student once I had my first job, [laughing] but at the time in graduate school ...

AS: Yeah, that's right, because until you learn how to teach it can be extremely time consuming.

SPF: Right, not that it is really an either or proposition of publishing or teaching for many people.

AS: Some of both is probably a good idea. But graduate students, if they can, need to get into some classes where they are writing research proposals and actually writing research papers, and beginning to figure out some kind of data, whether it is qualitative or quantitative or textual as in the case of research using textual analysis, or whatever. They need to get something that they can try to convert to a conference presentation and then send it off some place. It's really important to make that progression.

SPF: Shifting gears quite a bit, for those working towards tenure and promotion, do you have any insights or thoughts that you can offer?

AS: Well, the first thing to do when you get to a new job is to talk to your colleagues about how the process works. Because your colleagues and your chair may not have that much experience with new faculty, especially if the program hasn't hired in quite a while. And they may not realize that there are things you need to do that you don't know about. For example, you may not know that unless you keep your teaching evaluations, they won't be available in some institutions. Or that unless you keep track of how many times you spoke on the radio or went down to the speak to a local group, no one is going to know that, and yet community service is part of most tenure and promotion applications. [Laughing] I know of one person here who got a great big box and she tossed all of those kinds of things in that box — thank you letters for having spoken to the Red Cross, etc.

SPF: Yes [laughing] I have friends who did similar things.

AS: She kept all of her teaching evaluations. In most departments there will be a staff person who'll do those, but not everywhere. So you need to find out how that works and you need to collect the stuff. The other thing is, if there is an annual performance review. You need to find out whether the criteria are the same for it as for tenure and promotion. If so, that can give you some guide as to how well you are doing, or you can figure out how much of a guide the annual performance review can be. Most places today have either a second year review or a third year review which is kind of a many tenure review with the exception of external letters.

SPF: That is what I experienced. I had a two and four year review before going up my sixth year, but it was only for the sixth year that external letters were solicited and used.

AS: Yes, and then they ought to find out from their senior colleagues what they expect. Is it really important that you publish in the very best journal in your field or is it more

important that you publish four or five things in more mediocre journals? Are they going to think it odd that you never sent something to the very best journal in your field or will they think it odd that you kept sending it there [Laughing] and never got in to it? You've got to remember that the turn around on research is very long, always longer than it seems. You need to find out if people think peer reviewed articles are the same as book chapters or whether book chapters are in fact much lower in the hierarchy? You need to find out whether an authored book is enough to get you tenure, or if it isn't enough, how many articles do you think that you need as well. I think it is risky in the social sciences to put all your eggs in the authored book basket. I really do. It's risky. If you want to convert your dissertation into a book, then it's probably a good idea to pull a core part of it out to publish as an article and start getting that floated around. And don't worry, your book will be different anyway. And then get started on your book, but at the same time get some other project started that is a little more narrow gauged from which you can publish something.

SPF: Is this advice from Anne the dean or from Anne the faculty mentor? I ask because at my institution we were strongly advised not to publish a book.

AS: Because it would slow you down too much?

SPF: Yes, that was their thinking. And it became, in my mind, almost a prejudice. There are times when a book is more appropriate given the topic or argument being raised. For example, I forewent working on my dissertation and turning it into a book until after I was granted promotion and tenure. I would have published it earlier and without having to go back and update it so many years later. I wonder if at the Dean's level, there is some wiggle room for different interpretations on the value of articles over books.

AS: Oh, you'll get the same kind of divergence of perspectives among Deans as you do among different faculties. Some of them are in fields where books are important, and some of them aren't.

SPF: So really, then, you should sound out both the faculty and the Dean in those institutions where deans play a greater role in hiring decisions.

AS: Exactly. And another way to do that is to seek out an exemplary tenure and promotion profile. Sometimes departments put together a profile of what they think is a really good case. [Laughing] Now that can also scare you to death.

SPF: Right [Laughing] I bet it can.

AS: But one thing is for sure. Simply looking at the tenured faculty around you and saying, "well, if I'm as good as them then I can get tenured" is a big mistake. It's a mistake because those people got tenure on the basis of standards that are constantly changing. And that means they are going up, not down.

SPF: Okay, but that is good to know since I remember conversations with junior colleagues at conferences talking about this very subject.

AS: No, don't ever make that assumption. Don't make the argument, "well, I'm as good as so and so, that so and so is a full professor and only has X." That won't get you anywhere.

SPF: Yes, that argument won't hold water.

AS: And people need to learn how to teach, and teach well enough so that teaching isn't a barrier to tenure.

SPF: For those people who focused on their research and publication to the detriment of their teaching as they worked toward tenure, and as a result, their teaching evaluations are mediocre, are there things they can do to improve their teaching or at least to show that they are committed to improving.

AS: Well, they need to find out from their annual reviews how much weight there is on teaching. The other thing is to take advantage of teaching workshops that some universities and departments hold. Some of them are very good. Student evaluations at most universities are certainly a part, maybe big, maybe small, but they are a part of the tenure requirements. You don't want students not being receptive to your teaching, and workshops can help.

SPF: There's a controversy or claim by people who teach statistics that they feel they are at a disadvantage when it comes to teaching evaluations. And there have been studies, in fact, that have shown that students sometimes take out their fear of statistics on instructors by giving them lower teaching evaluations. Is there something from a Dean's perspective that can be done to address such concerns?

AS: Yes, one that you can do is have your department compare your evaluations against other similar courses, if they don't already do so.

SPF: Right, as opposed to comparing such courses against all courses.

AS: And that goes for stats classes and any required classes.

SPF: And women's studies classes might be appropriate too. For example, women's studies classes may be classified as diversity-focused or diversity-centered by some and thus attract students who might not otherwise be interested in the topic, or even be hostile to the topic.

AS: Yes, that goes for diversity-focused courses as well. Sometimes it is appropriate to get a cluster of teaching evaluations for that class to see where you are.

SPF: Was that your experience as the Dean? Would you facilitate that if people asked? Was there a policy in place?

AS: Most of our departments already did that. They made an analysis of some classes that way.

SPF: Okay, I'm trying to think back to when I was doing this, to my fears and the trepidations about the process

AS: [laughing] You know, you just got there yourself. It really is a nerve-wracking process. At some universities it is very predictable, you can tell what's expected and how the process works. You see who gets tenured. Another thing that is important for junior faculty members is getting to conferences and getting to know people in your area is really crucial, because they'll become your outside reviewers. It is a big

mistake to think that conferences are a waste of time, or that a conference presentation is a real publication — it isn't. But going to give a paper with other people, particularly from places with faculty that you respect and admire is a good idea. Or if you want to be strategic about it, figure out who the very best people in your field are, find out what panels they are on, and go.

SPF: Go to the sessions? And ask questions?

AS: Yes, make sure to ask questions. And go up and introduce yourself afterwards. It also gives you an opportunity to see where they are going with their work. That's one of the reasons to go to a conference. Those papers won't show up in print for a couple of years, plus you get to put a face with a name.

SPF: Yes, and vice versa. That was one of the big things people advised me to do, to make myself visible. People are a lot less likely to say "Yes, I'll be an outside reviewer for this person's promotion and tenure petition" if they have no idea who you are. But they may be more likely if they have had some contact with you. Not that they should be buddy-buddy with you, since that would likely disqualify them from serving. But if they have some familiarity with you from having met you at a conference, or having presented a paper on a panel with you, etc., that can be a good thing.

AS: And have you ever heard of my three envelope rule of publication?

SPF: No, I don't recall that I have. Let me hear it.

AS: It goes like this. You write a paper, and as you write the paper, you need to decide what's the best journal.

SPF: [laughing] Oh you and I are completely opposite on this point.

AS: No, you need to ask yourself, what is the best journal I can get this into. Then you do some reading of the journal, and make sure you cite the people that publish there who are doing the same thing you are, because they're probably going to be your reviewers. But then you also pick out a second and third journal that you're going to send it to

SPF: Right, for when your first choice rejects you or whatever, you can send it to your second choice [laughing].

AS: When you get the rejection back, you read the review, quickly, because they are usually quite insulting. [laughing] You commit yourself to a weekend or two to fix anything that is fixable and that you agree with, and you do that. And then you put it in the second envelope and send it off. And you repeat the process until at least a third envelope.

SPF: [laughing] Before you consider that there might a fatal flaw?

AS: [laughing] Yes, it could just be a bad paper, but reviewers are very idiosyncratic. On the other hand, you ought to fix things that you agree with and that you can fix. But if

someone says, "this paper really asks the wrong question, the important question to ask is this," well, you really can't fix that too easily, or perhaps at all. And a lot of the fixing you can do in footnotes. But it's worth turning papers around very fast.

SPF: That's good advice. I took the other strategy. I usually write the paper first and then I go fishing for the outlet, but that is often frustrating.

AS: Well, you can do it that way, but when you find the outlet, it's really worth taking some revision time to cite people who are doing similar work in that particular journal.

SPF: I agree, and I actually do that before sending out the paper. But when you spoke of selecting the journal first, it made me think of people I know who review journals for particular stylistic formulas or organizational trends, and then tailor the presentation of their essay to meet that formula.

AS: Yes, that's all right. You're not altering the content then, you are just altering the presentation. I actually had this

happen once. I don't remember if it was between the first and the second envelopes or the second and third envelopes, but one of the reviewers said "I've already reviewed this essay for another journal and I thought it was a great paper then, but the author could have paid a bit more attention to my comments last time."

SPF: Oh very good, very, very good [laughing]

AS: That's a true story. It is kinda funny [laughing]. So at least pay attention to the simple comments, the ones that are easy to fix.

SPF: Yes, but if the comment is something like "This question is obviously inappropriate," then you can't address that.

AS: No, you can't address that. Or if they say, "the author needs twice as large a sample," you can't address that.

SPF: Of course, the data is collected in most cases and you can't go back and recollect data.

AS: Yes, that is right. So you may need to acknowledge that the sample is small but the findings are worth it. Another issue in many departments is that there are various factions. Junior faculty need to understand the games that academicians play, that they can play. And junior faculty need to know that not all academicians necessarily play these games. Still, you may find yourself being recruited to different sides or to different factions, and you need to be extremely wary of the claims they make for themselves and the way they characterize others. Some may say they have standards ...

SPF: Yes, they may say they have standards but others don't. People really need to stay out of that, to avoid being sucked into that if they can.

AS: And be wary of such claims. My advice is to be very respectful of all of your colleagues.

SPF: That is very good advice. Very sagely advice [laughing]. Because you don't know who is going to be on the committee

"...You need to ask yourself, what is the best journal I can get this into. Then you do some reading of the journal, and make sure you cite the people that publish there who are doing the same thing you are, because they're probably going to be your reviewers."

that evaluates your tenure and promotion application packet. But seriously, I have a good colleague and friend who warned that new faculty are often quick to judge senior faculty who aren't as productive in terms of publications. He described some unproductive faculty members as the "walking wounded," as victims of university politics and an often harsh and unforgiving tenure and promotion process. That's really stuck with me.

AS: Yes, and it is also just the right thing to do.

SPF: I agree. It is appropriate to maintain civility and collegiality.

AS: Many departments may have some old time faculty members who are there under different kinds of criteria and standards, and there is no reason to be trashing them.

SPF: Right, it is better to look at people for what they bring, not what they don't.

AS: You're not going to be trading in your C minus full professors for A plus assistant professors. That's not the way academia works. That C minus professor is not likely to change, so get to know them as people. Be respectful of what they can do, and don't focus on what they can't do.

SPF: Yes, that makes for a much more collegial atmosphere at work.

AS: I'm trying to think, what else. You know, be willing to do your share of service work.

SPF: As you say that, it makes me think. There have been cases and allegations of gender inequity in terms of committee assignments made at some universities. What advice might you have for female faculty members and faculty members of color who are asked to serve on more committees than others as universities seek to equalize committee memberships?

AS: In general, I don't believe this is as big a problem in the social sciences as it used to be. But this is certainly true for minority scholars. I guess one thing to say would be, when you serve on committees, make sure they are important committees.

SPF: I know that it is particularly difficult for entry level junior faculty to say "no." It is almost impossible to say "no." But maybe the best things they could do is say, "no," because they may be in a culture where they are asked to do more and more and more.

AS: Well it could be that everyone is expected to be on a committee. You need to take that into consideration, and you need to do your fair share. But you shouldn't do more than your share. So you really need to figure out what a fair share is. And try to make your service work important if you can. If you can, make it something that gives you energy, or at that doesn't drain you of energy.

SPF: How do you say "no" to the Dean? For example, what if you've already served on four or five search committees where all of your peers have only served on one or two over the same period of time and the Dean asks you to be on another committee?

AS: Well, you may not be able to say "no," or you may not want to. Or if you find yourself in that situation, you may want to ask your department chair to help you out, and get them to intervene.

SPF: These are difficult questions. I've seen some of my colleagues wrestling with this. I've said to myself, "Oh my God, they're going to work this person to death." But she or he is afraid to say "no." When you are in the middle of it, it's hard to gauge when you can say "no." I know of some faculty members foregoing maternity leave for fear that it might affect their chances for promotion and tenure.

AS: I think it is possible that there are some places like that, but that shouldn't happen. Part of the problem with this is that the Family Leave Act and other formal protections don't help very much at the university because many policies aren't designed with the academic year in mind. They don't fit a semester system.

SPF: I see that our time is running out. Do you have any last thoughts or comments you would like to share?

AS: Yes, there's something I used to always say to junior faculty and it didn't come up in our interview. I used to always say to them that, at some point, they have to figure out what kind of faculty member THEY want to be — not just what everyone else wants them to be. They need to do this even as a junior faculty member, because if they bend themselves completely to everyone else's expectations, then by the time they get tenure, they may no longer know themselves very well.

SPF: As a person recently having completed the tenure and promotion process, I must say that rings very true. Thank you very much for doing this interview. I'm sure our readers will enjoy reading your comments and that they will find them both interesting and provocative.