

Career transitions: Preparing for what comes next

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Outline

- Background to me and my work
- What to expect (based on my research and experience)
- What is expected
- How to prepare*

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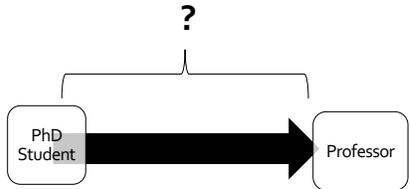
About Me

- Undergraduate in psychology, MLIS, PhD in information science
- PhD in Australia (2012-2016)
- Lecturer (equivalent to assistant professor) in Scotland (2016-2019)
- Assistant Professor at McGill (2019-current)



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Dissertation topic



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graph LR; A[PhD Student] --> B[Professor]; C[?] --- A; C --- B;
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Transition

- A transition is a “passage from one life phase, condition, or status to another” including “process, time span, and perception” (Chick & Meleis, 1986, p. 239)



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Academic transitions

- Changes to
 - Job roles
 - Professional identity
 - Personal identity
 - Context (geographic, institutional)
- Including
 - Increase in the number of duties
 - Increase in the complexity of work
 - Increase in responsibility



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Influencing Transitions

- Expectations
 - Based on previous experience or anticipated meaning (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994)
- Preparation and planning
 - Can help facilitate change; relies on knowledge (Meleis et al., 2000)
- Knowledge and skills (Meleis et al., 2000)
- Resources
 - Available resources play mediational role (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994)



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What to expect



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"I really don't think universities do a very good job of preparing you for – graduate education does not prepare you for many [things], like writing a grant. I had no idea how to write a grant. It was a nightmare. And it was three times the amount of work I thought it was going to be and it was insane. But we didn't learn that sort of stuff. We didn't learn how to apply for jobs."

"Jesse," (Canada, social sciences)



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Importance of expectations

- Little discussion of what it's like to finish a PhD
- Some PhD students have unrealistic expectations of academic jobs
 - Academic positions are not like the PhD
- Unmet expectations cause anxiety and stress
- Realistic expectations allow you to prepare*



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"And of course, support in that moment where you're finishing your PhD, where you finish your PhD and you're having a glimpse of the abyss on the other side and for that moment is especially rough and ... we have a sense that we just made it through, right? It's basically like people who went out of the Normandy debarkment and just made it on beaches and so like, I don't know how that happened but I'm still there and I'm still dazed by that experience."

"David" (Canada, social sciences)



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What to expect when finishing the PhD

- Multiple aspects of uncertainty
 - Examination process, sector to work in, jobs available, where to live, etc.
- Exhaustion and anxiety
 - Like running a sprint after a marathon
- Challenges finishing and feeling anxious, uncertain, and exhausted, is normal
 - This does not last



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"And I'd seen people who were very capable and very intelligent, and who didn't make it, basically. It was a real fear for me. There was a lot of sleepless nights. I'd also realised how much I liked it and I didn't really want to do anything else, you know. And so it was a pretty scary sort of 18 months or so between submitting my PhD and getting the job here."

"Jason," (Australia, social sciences)



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What to expect when looking for a job

- Uncertainty
- Precarity in the job market
 - Lack of permanent positions
 - Working short-term contracts
- Marginalisation and invisibility
 - Academic standing is tied to position
- Mobility may be expected



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"I find the biggest problem is I feel like a manager now. I've got people running studies and doing things and I just have meetings all the time. ... when you're a PhD student it's like, "I've got the next five days to think about this problem," and there's no time to do those sorts of things. ... I'm coordinating people and projects and money and budgeting and all these things I didn't have to do before."

"Jesse" (Canada, social sciences)



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What to expect when starting a job

- Many new roles, responsibilities, projects, etc.
 - A lot more administrative work
- More security ... but still precarious
 - On contract or probation
- Intense affective experience
 - Feeling stressed and overwhelmed
 - Frustration



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What is expected*

*Generally speaking



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What is expected

- Research
- Teaching
- Service
- (Engagement & Impact)



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What is expected in research

- Demonstrate original research and research programme
 - What is your niche?
- Apply for (and eventually) win grants
- Publish in peer-reviewed venues
- Present at conferences
- Supervise research students



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What is expected in teaching

- Teach full courses
- Create class materials and assessments
- Receive good teaching scores
 - Department average or better
- Engage in professional development



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What is expected in service

- Active participation in department, faculty, and/or university
- Active involvement in disciplinary associations and conferences
- Peer reviewing for conferences and journals
- International engagement and recognition



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What is expected

- Demonstrate you can do the job before you get the job
 - Do not have to be expert, but need to demonstrate understanding and progress



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How to prepare*

*Consider getting your CV out now and look at it critically



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How to prepare

- Get information about the job you want (what are they asking for?)
 - Examine job ads
 - Look at CVs of those who have jobs you want (many academic CVs are online)
 - Talk to those who have the jobs you want
- Recognise that you need to build incrementally to get you where you want to go



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How to prepare

- Get a variety of perspectives
 - Talk to your supervisors and senior scholars about expectations in the field
 - Talk to people who have served on search committees
 - Talk to people who have recently been on the job market
 - (People like me)



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How to prepare

- Be in a position to make connections and get involved
 - Get on listservs – look for opportunities
 - Join associations and SIGs
 - Go to talks and events
 - When at events and conferences, talk to people
 - Ask you mentors for introductions
 - Volunteer for opportunities
 - Ask for feedback when you aren't successful
 - Be bold (but aware of boundaries)



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How to prepare

- Look critically at your CV
 - Evaluate your research, teaching, and service
 - (and perhaps engagement/impact)
 - Discuss with mentors about how to fill in missing pieces



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How to prepare your CV

- Consider the job application – and amend accordingly
- Carefully consider the categories
- Carefully consider the order
- Be accurate!
- Keep track of everything you do!
 - All professional development
 - All jobs - roles, projects, skills, start and end dates
- Update it regularly

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CV example

Research - Publications

Journal Articles (Refereed)

Rowley, K. & **Willson, R.** (in press). Scotland's public libraries are nothing but practical when it comes to deselection. *Library and Information Research*.

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Willson, R. & Given, L. M. (2020). "I'm in sheer survival mode": Information behaviour and affective experiences of early career academics. *Library and Information Science Research*, 42(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2020.101014>

Willson, R. (2019). Transitions Theory and liminality in information behaviour research: Applying new theories to examine the transition to early career academic. *Journal of Documentation*, 73(4), 838-856. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-12-2018-0207>

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Given, L. M. & **Willson, R.** (2018). Information technology and the humanities scholar: Documenting digital research practices. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 69(6), 807-819. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24008>

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How to prepare for research

- Disseminate your research
 - Be strategic – what, when, and where to publish
 - What do you want to be known for?
 - When do you need publications published?
 - Who are you wanting to reach?
- Research on your CV
 - Ensure your publications tell a story
 - Ensure you highlight important aspects (e.g., # of citations, award-winning papers, etc.)



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How to prepare for teaching

- Need to have experience TAing (at least)
- Find opportunities to guest lecture
- Consider experience with technology for teaching/online teaching experience
- Teaching on your CV
 - Clearly indicate your duties if you were a TA
 - Include professional development

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How to prepare for service

- Apply for volunteer positions
- Be strategic – service roles are an opportunity
 - What can you get out of service (in addition to contributing)?
 - Build a network
 - Increase responsibility
 - Learn/demonstrate a skill
 - Consider breadth and depth
- Service on your CV
 - Ensure you have a position with some responsibility
 - Ensure your contribution/role is clear

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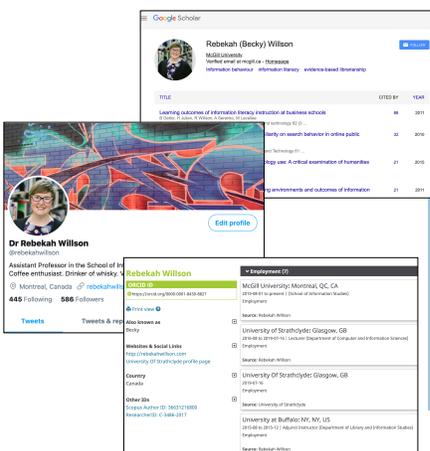
How to prepare your digital presence

- Be Google-able
- Keep it simple and keep it updated*
- Get a proper headshot
- Consider including a CV
- Google Scholar, ORCID, ResearchGate, etc.
 - What is standard in your (sub)discipline?
- Social media
 - Is it standard in your (sub)discipline?
 - Professional vs personal accounts
- Consider your email signature (and address)



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Digital presence examples



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Email example

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Recent publications:
 Willson, R. & Given, L. M. (2020). "I'm in sheer survival mode": Information behaviour and affective experiences of early career academics. *Library and Information Science Research*, 42(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2020.101014>

Willson, R. (2019). Transitions theory and liminality in information behaviour research: Applying new theories to examine the transition to early career academic. *Journal of Documentation*, 75(4), 838–856. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-12-2018-0207>

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How to prepare your website

- Create a website that is manageable for you
- Keep it simple, clean, and updated*
 - Ensure links open in a new tab
 - Ensure it has contact information
- Get it "peer-reviewed"
- Include important aspects from your CV
- Consider how you can go beyond your CV (if you want to)
 - Multimedia work
 - Links – to university/lab pages, social media accounts, etc.
- Consider how much "personality" you want to include



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Website example

rebekahwillson.com

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How to prepare to be in-person

- Show up to things (workshops, talks, events, etc.)
- Get business cards – and give them out
- Dress professionally (for your field)
- Until you get a job, you are always “interviewing”
 - Don't pick intellectual fights
 - Don't get drunk at conferences

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How to prepare to be a good colleague

- Search committees are looking for good colleagues
- Be known
- Be known for the right things
- Be dependable
- Be professional

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Finally

- Make use of opportunities
- You can't do everything – be selective
- A CV is built over time
- Create a support network

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Thank you!

Questions?

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Schumacher, K. L., & Meleis, A. I. (1994). Transitions: A central concept in nursing. *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 26(2), 119–27.

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