



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



There Is a Time for Everything

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Blog Series: Stories from the Front

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Tags: critically reflective teaching | vocation of teaching | faculty well-being

Editor's note: Today's blog is Roger's final individual entry for this year of Stories from the Front of the Classroom. Look for our final collaborative post on Tuesday May 19.

As my yearlong sabbatical in Korea comes to a conclusion, I have been thinking about the multiple seasons within a career in theological and religious studies education. A single class period can run like a miniature season: announcements, presentation, experiential activity, discussion, then repeating the cycle for the next class. An online class rhythm typically runs weekly. The academic year runs by its own season, from the first day of the Fall to the celebratory graduation, then off to our summer plans, whether they involve writing, conferences, rest, or—for more and more of us—more teaching.

Recently, I have become more aware of the “big” season: that is, the season of our academic careers from PhD to retirement. Most of us in Wabash Nation are in community with colleagues at every point of this academic trajectory. I have a friend defending her doctoral dissertation in June. I have another friend retiring from academe in two weeks. Many of us will eventually experience the hopes and fears of both milestones.

I am somewhere in the middle. When people ask me how long I've been at George Fox Seminary, I, myself, can't believe my own answer of *seven* years! On my first day of class, George W. Bush was still president, no one had heard of *The Hunger Games* because the book had not yet been published, and there were still *only* three Fast and Furious movies.



Last fall, the walking path near our sabbatical apartment in Seoul.

As I prepare my return to the US, I must acknowledge that I have clearly entered the “mid-career zone.” But for some reason, I don’t feel “mid-career,” despite experiences that clearly place me at this stage: mentoring younger faculty, getting tenured, attending the **Mid-career** ATS Faculty conference.

But as my graduate school years fade farther and farther behind me, spending significant time away from my institution and country has given me space to think about what mid-career means for me and how I will relate to my colleagues as I return to George Fox Seminary.

I am beginning to intentionally ask myself many questions about mid-career:

- How are my own identities shifting as I enter this season?
- How do I advocate for important emerging issues like pedagogical diversity?
- How does the trifecta of teaching-scholarship-service play out during this stage for me?

These individual questions are tied with broader communal questions that I must have in conversation with my colleagues:

- How can we adjust to financial constraints, demographic shifts and technological advances?
- What are the teaching innovations that will lead us to thrive in the coming years and decades?
- What will theological and religious education even look like in 2035?



The same walking path this spring.

For my senior colleagues, I wish to honor their role and legacy in our shared institutional heritage and the ways in which the institution has benefited from their courage and grit. I need to acknowledge and name their important

contributions. I also must partner with them when this institutional tradition stands in the way of our progress, or even survival.

Turning to my junior colleagues, I realize that the privilege of tenure comes with the responsibility to actively promote decisions that will allow younger professors to thrive in their vocations. I realize that the lessons learned in my own 2010-2011 Wabash Workshop should extend to my own institutional community. The younger faculty will benefit from the shared spaces of dialogue that have pushed, stretched and formed my own teaching career.

Seasons continue. I'm selecting my Fall 2015 textbooks, and unbelievably, "Fast and Furious 8" has been announced. Someday, I will transition to the winter season of my career. There is a time for everything.

<https://wabash.center/2015/04/there-is-a-time-for-everything/>