

Secondary Considerations:

PhDs on Teaching at the Secondary Level

The Buckingham, Browne & Nichols School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has three Latin teachers at the Upper School (Grades 9-12), of which I am one holding a PhD in Ancient History (Chicago) and for 13 years have been teaching three sections of Latin and one section of Ancient and Medieval History while coaching girls' basketball and tennis at the junior varsity level. At our Middle School (Grades 7-8) we have two Latin teachers, one of whom has a PhD in Classics (Illinois). BB&N is a three campus private school which starts with Beginners at age 4. Our school is very strong academically, and our students are ambitious.

I attended the session on teaching in secondary schools for holders of the PhD at the Boston meeting of the American Historical Association several years ago, and I found the picture the panel painted of teaching in what the industry calls "independent schools" to be very accurate.

Among observations the panelists made: you must truly love children, and independent schools are a lot of work. I taught for 13 years at the college level in both the Classics Department (Brown, Harvard, Tufts) and in the History Department (Iowa State, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Mount Ida College, Bradford College) before I started teaching at the high school level. My undergraduate major was Teacher Education in History/Social Studies with a minor in Latin (Illinois), and I have been certified to teach public school History/Social Studies and Latin in both Illinois and Massachusetts. As a long term substitute teacher I taught English for a half year and Physical Education for an entire year at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, the large public school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I watched *Dead Poets' Society* and *The Emperors' Club* with great interest. I have read *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and seen both movie versions. I enjoy school stories.

If you love teaching young people before they are completely mature enough to value fully what you are doing and you are willing to put in long hours

to do the job correctly, then I would say high school teaching is a great experience. I always tell people my favorite part of my job is the coaching. I do not have to assign a grade when coaching. Students choose to play the sport because it is fun not because it is part of our foreign language requirement (our other language offerings are French starting in the fifth grade, French, Spanish, and Latin in grades 7-8, and Chinese, French, Latin, Russian, and Spanish in grades 9-12). There is no pressure to publish, but it is desirable to keep active in organizations like the Massachusetts Junior Classical League where students can enter state contests. At BB&N we ask all Latin students to take examinations like the National Latin Exam, but no administrator is looking over the results with a critical eye. The school does print the Advanced Placement and SAT II averages for prospective families and colleges to examine. Language teachers do keep their eyes on how well their students do relative to the standardized test results of students in the other languages (French and Spanish). We are in friendly competition for students. Currently 86 of 450 Upper School students take Latin while Spanish is the most popular language at the school.

At BB&N we have two Latin levels, one for Honors/AP students and one for students not aspiring to the Advanced Placement tests. The possibility of teaching to the AP level allows the PhD's knowledge to be used effectively with motivated students. This year the Latin V AP Catullus/Horace course has 11 seniors, the regular Latin IV course has 3 seniors and 5 juniors. The Latin IV Vergil AP course has 13 juniors. I am teaching this year the Latin V AP and the two Latin 2 sections each of which has 10 students.

I have found teaching at the high school level to be more time-consuming than teaching at the college level if you do not count the research part of publish or perish at the college level. I am busy all day long while in college I had either 6 or 9 hours of class per week. I enjoy advising the eight students in my

Adviser Group. For six years I ran the Senior Spring Program which is the alternative education program designed by seniors seeking internships or other educational opportunities during April and May of their senior year. There is a greater array of such experiences when you teach at the high school level including helping with college counseling, serving as Grade Dean, and several other jobs which can provide a transition into administration for those so inclined.

Teaching high school students at a fast pace has its challenges, and finding ways to keep student interest and to vary activities requires more imagination than lecturing to college students. There is much, much more grading in high school work, but spreading the risk out over many evaluation experiences is fairest for the students who have many potential daily burdens.

I do not think I will ever be bored by my high school classes. My students are very interesting even if sometimes immature. The immature ones are often the most entertaining, and I tell my students that they should do their best not to bore me, or I may become boring. I need to keep their interest, and they need to keep my interest. The PhD holder will find fewer intellectual challenges at the high school level than at the college level but many more social/interpersonal challenges. Again you must like young people. They are testing your limits, the school's limits, their parents' limits.

—**Robert Edbrooke, Buckingham, Browne & Nichols School, Robert_Edbrooke@bbns.org**

Count me among those holders of the doctorate who, after some time at the university level, are teaching at the secondary level. The most critical factor my decision was the difficulty in finding a position in a location where my wife and I could

both live and work. Although the opportunity for my present position seemed very attractive, I was reluctant to give up college work, because I really love research. I've managed to continue my own work, but it's very difficult without institutional support, time, and a library. Still, I plod on, adding my drop or two to the sea of our knowledge.

When I was considering applying for my present position, two revered, formidable scholars told me—independently—that the school is where one really learns *how* to teach. They were ever so right. When I go instantly from reading Latin lyric with a class of seniors every bit as bright as any college students I've ever had to a rowdy gang of 8th graders with all sorts of learning conditions, I really have to stretch my skills. By teaching in the school I've also learned *why* to teach. The power and influence of the Classics on younger minds can and does have an enormous effect. Should I teach college students again, I know that my school experience will make me a much better teacher there than I was before. This, after all, was Quintilian's experience.

What [is being recommended] for the present crisis, that PhDs consider secondary teaching, I would like to see instituted as a very strong and permanent recommendation for our profession: American Classics doctorands should be prepared and encouraged to teach at both the college and school level, and a PhD should be strongly recommended for anyone considering teaching secondary-level Classics. Great scholars of the past century taught in the schools; some of their works are still standards, and they produced so many excellent students, too. It is still expected and quite ordinary in Europe that teachers of the Classics at the pre-collegiate level have the doctorate; we should strive for that same qualification. This would have the added benefit of linking the two levels more closely together.

—**Peter Cohee, Boston Latin School, Licohee@aol.com**