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Navigating Culture Shock

Ph.D. students at Stanford learn about faculty life at San Jose State U., a campus quite unlike their own

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San Jose, Calif.

San Jose State University's densely built urban campus is the kind of regional public university that educates millions of Americans.

Its enrollment of 31,000 includes many first-generation students, parents, transfer students, and those who juggle coursework with jobs. There is a gritty feel to some parts of the campus's 19 square blocks, especially in places with aging buildings and outdated classrooms. Recent budget cuts have taken a toll, forcing professors to teach larger classes and, at one point, go a few years without raises.

San Jose State is also the kind of university where new Ph.D.'s often find themselves teaching, and the environment and workload can be unfamiliar. For those who trained at elite research universities, the jobs look very different from their professors'. Being a professor here means more teaching and committee work, finding resources on tight budgets, and getting by with less help with grading and in the lab.

Just 20 miles away, Stanford University's doctoral students are training in a different world. The Stanford campus, nicknamed "the Farm," sprawls across 8,180 meticulously landscaped acres. Nearly all of the students live on the campus, and each year transfer students make up only a smattering of the entire student body. The \$18.7-billion endowment dwarfs San Jose's of \$100-million.

A group of Ph.D. students from Stanford is learning how to navigate the cultural divide between the two types of institutions as well as the transition from graduate student to faculty member. As part of a

program jointly run by San Jose State and Stanford, participants have made regular trips to San Jose State to see firsthand how faculty members handle workloads that include teaching, research, and service at a college where research isn't the primary focus. The goal of the program, called Preparing Future Professors, is to give the graduate students an inside look at how a faculty job is experienced on a campus that is far different from their own—particularly as the market for tenure-track jobs remains tight in many fields.

The Stanford students, some of whom also attended top research universities as undergraduates, are assigned faculty mentors at San Jose who talk frankly about how their work environment differs from what Stanford graduate students are used to. The mentors serve as guides to help the students overcome the culture shock that can result from being trained in one type of academic setting and beginning a career in a different one.

"When they graduate, this is the kind of job that they can probably expect," says Adrienne L. Eastwood, an associate professor of English and comparative literature at San Jose, who is a mentor in the program. "It's very important for students not to get gobsmacked when they go on an interview and someone says, 'How would you handle our four-four teaching load?' They should understand what they're getting into."

Many recent Stanford Ph.D.'s have landed tenure-track jobs at regional public institutions, including Coastal Carolina University and Southern Illinois University. They work at other kinds of institutions, too, from small liberal-arts colleges, like William Jewell College, to large public research universities, like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Carolyn MacDonald is one of the Stanford Ph.D. students who participated in this year's program.

Her first impression of San Jose State was its liveliness compared with Stanford's bucolic setting. The urban campus's borders bleed into the city, most notably at the corner that is home to the library. Built in partnership with the city, the library also serves the general

public and is a meeting place for the university's student break-dance club.

"The campus is much smaller than ours, but there's always students around," says Ms. MacDonald, a fifth-year student in the classics at Stanford. "People sitting on benches, talking with each other—there's just a lot of energy."

She was paired with Matthew J. Spangler, an associate professor in the department of communication-studies. His office betrays one difference between San Jose State and Stanford: He shares it with another faculty member, an unlikely arrangement at Stanford.

Another big difference is course load. Most professors at San Jose State teach three or four courses per semester, compared with as few as two for Stanford professors'. Mr. Spangler teaches two courses per semester only because he is the department's graduate-program coordinator.

At San Jose State, professors also sometimes need to scrape together funds. Mr. Spangler told Ms. MacDonald about how he has built a theater program with limited dollars from the university, applying for federal grants to fill the gaps.

Ms. MacDonald, after some weeks in the program, realized that at San Jose and places like it, it would be a challenge for her to carve out teaching and research opportunities in her field. There isn't a classics department at San Jose.

"I wonder about the place of the pure humanities here," she told her Stanford peers at a weekly practicum that is part of the program.

The time she spent with students in Mr. Spangler's performance-studies class, however, reminded her of how much she likes teaching. "After the first class, I remember thinking, 'Wow, that's a pretty noisy classroom,'" Ms. MacDonald says. "But they're engaged, they're actively discussing poetry. It was a great reminder that I'm most energized when I'm in the classroom."

Ms. MacDonald, who plans to go on the academic job market next

year, says she would be "absolutely happy" if she ended up at a place like San Jose State.

Jennifer Summit, a professor of English at Stanford, came up with the idea for the three-month program two years ago, after talking with San Jose's president, Mohammad H. Qayoumi, at a conference. She asked him what Stanford should be doing to prepare its graduate students to teach at a place like San Jose.

He suggested she start a program, which she developed during a year as a fellow of the American Council on Education. Mr. Qayoumi saw it as a way to groom future faculty members for institutions like his, while giving participants a "glimpse into our ecosystem here," he says.

The program started in 2012-13; this academic year, its second, students had to compete for spots. Eight people out of an applicant pool of 24 made the cut.

While the program is small, and is open only to advanced graduate students in Stanford's School of Humanities and Sciences, it stands out for providing elite research university students with extended, close-up exposure to the professoriate, and for the kinds of experiences they can have with faculty members on the San Jose State campus. Similar programs, initially sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, exist at numerous colleges. But those programs, and their offshoots, include few institutions like Stanford and sometimes offer students limited exposure to what being a professor is like.

Stanford holds a dinner for new participants, their mentors, and program supporters to set the stage for the program, says Ms. Summit, who will leave Stanford soon to become dean of undergraduate studies at San Francisco State University. The students then shadow their mentors during the semester as they prepare for classes, teach, hold office hours, and attend Faculty Senate and committee meetings. Another dinner took place last week to mark the end of the current session.

To build on what they learn at San Jose State, the students attend a weekly practicum at Stanford run by Richard M. Reis, a part-time consulting professor of engineering there. During the sessions, they talk about their time spent with the mentors. Mr. Reis and guest speakers also cover such topics as how to put together an application package, survive an on-campus visit, and design a new course.

"The students are deeply impressed by what can actually be done in an environment like San Jose State—and that's good for them to see," Mr. Reis says.

One day in late February, Esra Burak, a Ph.D. student in sociology at Stanford, settled into a seat among roughly three dozen or so students in her mentor's "Sociology Capstone" course. It is in classrooms like this one where the differences between the student populations here and at Stanford are most stark.

Three students stood before the class for a presentation, but one of them had to leave after completing his part. He is in the military and had to go to a training exercise with his unit.

Later in the session, the San Jose State students talked about interviews they were assigned to conduct with their parents. One student said her father had told her that when she was born, he gave up college so he could earn money to support her. Another student's mother used the Job Corps, a federal vocational-training program, to advance her career in the utilities industry. Another talked about her father, a high-school dropout who went on to earn a GED in his early 30s before becoming a mechanic.

"Being a faculty member here is hard work, but not in the obvious way," says her mentor, Preston O. Rudy, an assistant professor of sociology. "There are problems students have that move into your classroom and into your office. We have students who are deployed to Afghanistan or students flying to Mexico to go to a grandmother's funeral. So many of them have more than one job; some have children.

"At our institution they're not just students. They have a whole other life."

The chance to see the differences at an institution that serves a student body like San Jose State's was one reason Ms. Burak applied for the mentorship program. "Preston does a good job of meeting the students where they are," says Ms. Burak, who earned her undergraduate degree at Cornell University. "I'm just taking everything in. I think everything I've seen or heard will help me."

She will start work this fall as an assistant professor at Lingnan University, a public liberal-arts institution in Hong Kong, where her husband works in business.

Shawn Burns, a seventh-year Ph.D. student in philosophy who expects to finish in June, has been struck by the conversations he overhears when he eats in San Jose's student union. Students, he says, often talk about money woes and the work they do to pay bills.

"I never hear that talk among students at Stanford," he says.

"They're generally not working one or two or three jobs to pay tuition."

Unlike some of his Stanford peers in the program, the realities faced by those San Jose students are not foreign to Mr. Burns. He attended community college for six years while working, in part, to put his wife through law school, then went on to the University of California at San Diego, where he earned a bachelor's degree. "I was a commuter myself," he says, "so I remember what that was like."

While sitting in on a class in Latin American philosophy at San Jose, Mr. Burns noticed that students were all taking notes with pen and paper. At Stanford, students take notes on their laptops, he says. He is thinking about what he would need to do if he were to teach students like this.

"I would make sure resources are available in hard copy," he says.

"And you're not going to make students pay \$200 for textbooks at San Jose State. You're going to find another way."

entors in the program say they try to pass along the kind of wisdom

That they wish they had received. Lawrence Quill, an associate professor of political science, shared his syllabus with his mentee, Robert Barlow, and talked about his teaching load: four courses per semester. (This semester he added a fifth class, in independent study.) Mr. Quill has about 30 students per course, which prompted Mr. Barlow to ask about his teaching assistants.

"I told him they don't exist, and you have to do the grading yourself," says Mr. Quill, who earned his Ph.D. at the University of Essex, a public research university in Britain. "He was taken aback by that. You have to get past the shock of having to do quite a lot with no additional support."

Professors in the hard sciences at San Jose State can't count on large amounts of start-up money to get their laboratories under way. Robert Rawle, a chemistry Ph.D. student at Stanford, learned from his mentor what it had been like to proceed without that kind of cash. Lionel E. Cheruzel, an assistant professor of inorganic and bioinorganic chemistry, came to San Jose State in 2009 after completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the California Institute of Technology.

"I remember I was going to wash some test tubes and someone at Caltech said, 'What are you doing?' " Mr. Cheruzel recalls. " 'Just get some new ones.' "

When it came to his own lab, Mr. Cheruzel didn't hesitate to take advantage of an unexpected opportunity to acquire more materials—free. Roche, a pharmaceutical company, shut down a nearby research facility, and he picked up some lab equipment and supplies the company was giving away to scientists and educators several years ago.

"You have to work with what you have," he says.

Mr. Cheruzel has wondered whether sharing some of his experiences with Mr. Rawle was "the right thing to do. You don't want to discourage people, but I do want to say, 'this is what it takes.'"

Mr. Rawle, a graduate of Pomona College, wants to work at an institution that emphasizes teaching undergraduates and doing research with them. He appreciates Mr. Cheruzel's candor. "You can either bemoan your situation or be like Lionel and just make it work," he says.

The other Stanford doctoral candidates in the sciences who participated in the joint program—Robert Furrow and Rachel Egger, both in biology—say they now see research in a new light, thanks to faculty members at San Jose State.

Ms. Egger says at one time she never would have considered employment at a master's institution like San Jose State. She couldn't imagine how faculty members at such institutions could maintain their research agenda.

As a graduate of a research university, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, "I was very interested in seeing what it looks like to be a faculty member at a different type of institution," Ms. Egger says.

In the lab of her mentor, Miri VanHoven, an assistant professor of biological sciences, Ms. Egger learned that researchers at San Jose State face challenges different from those at Stanford. A team of undergraduates works part time in the lab—not graduate students like herself, who can put in longer hours. Ms. VanHoven simply chooses projects that allow her to make the best use of the assistance she has. "There's just a different level of planning involved to make it happen," Ms. Egger says.

But she also found herself reassured by Ms. VanHoven. The San Jose State professor has conducted "high-caliber research and published in very good journals," Ms. Egger says. "I've seen now that it can be done."

Skepticism goes both ways between institutional divides. Being from a place like Stanford can be a disadvantage when applying for a job at a place like San Jose State. Applicants from elite institutions can make a search committee wary, Ms. Summit says.

"The fear is that they're not going to have the exposure to the kind

of students that SJSU serves," she acknowledges. "People think they'll be unhappy and they'll leave as soon as they can."

But participants who list the program on their CVs can send a positive signal, says Amy Strage, one of the joint program's co-directors and interim director of the Center for Faculty Development at San Jose State. "It can be reassuring for a search committee to see," she says.

Allen Frost, a sixth-year Ph.D. student in English at Stanford, is hoping that's the case. He is already thinking about how to best present on paper his commitment to a campus like San Jose State.

"I wanted to be exposed to teaching contexts that we don't have at Stanford," says Mr. Frost, who once taught at a public high school in Pennsylvania. "I'm doing a lot to position myself as someone who cares about teaching. Being committed to the students is what I want to do."

Mr. Frost, whose undergraduate degree is from Swarthmore College, says he knew San Jose State would be different—not as posh and more diverse, for starters. And his mentor, Ms. Eastwood, has provided both a heads-up about the reality and tips for how to keep that reality from hindering his success. For example, she warned, Wi-Fi is spotty on the campus, and committee work schedules tend to be heavy, as hers is. To get her research done, she crams a lot of the work into the summer months.

But Mr. Frost, who has lectured a few times for Ms. Eastwood during the program, says he has come to see that Stanford and San Jose State are alike at the core.

"It's just as intellectually demanding as teaching at a place like Stanford might be," he says. "The students there are just as witty and interested in the material as students are here. They're really invested in their education."

2 Campuses, 2 Cultures

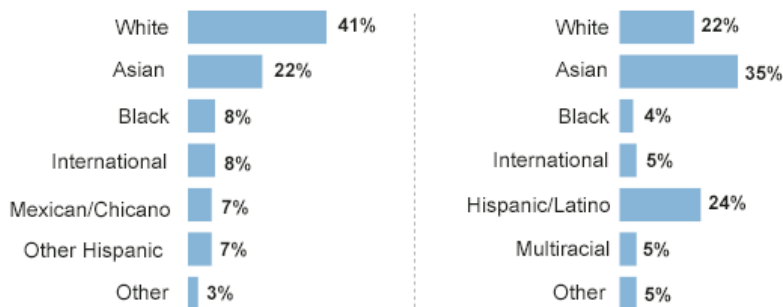
A group of graduate students at Stanford University has had a close-up look at the kind of career that awaits many future professors. As part of a new program, they have been paired with faculty mentors at San Jose State University, who expose the students to what it is like to teach, conduct research, and get by in a work environment far different from the one where they have been trained.

Stanford U. San Jose State U.

OVERVIEW

| | | | |
|---|----------------|---------------|---|
| Operating budget | \$4.8-billion | \$279-million | Operating budget |
| Endowment | \$18.7-billion | \$100-million | Endowment |
| Research budget | \$1.35-billion | \$41-million | Research budget |
| Total undergraduates | 6,980 | 25,862 | Total undergraduates |
| Total graduate students | 8,897 | 5,416 | Total graduate students |
| Proportion receiving Pell Grants | 16% | 40.2% | Proportion of freshmen eligible for Pell Grants |
| Proportion of first-generation students in freshman class | 15% | 28% | Proportion of first-generation students in freshman class |
| Annual undergraduate tuition, room and board | \$55,856 | \$17,876 | Annual undergraduate tuition, room and board |

UNDERGRADUATE, BY RACE



STUDENT-TO-FACULTY RATIO

5 to 1 | 29 to 1

Note: All data are for 2013-14, except for endowment figures, which are as of summer 2013, and figures related to Pell Grants, which are for fall 2012. San Jose State's first-generation college student figure is also for fall 2012.

Sources: San Jose State U. and Stanford U.

Correction (5/5/2014, 11:55 a.m.): The original version of this article misnamed a regional public university that has employed a Stanford graduate. It is Southern Illinois University, not the University of Southern Illinois. The text has been corrected.

Correction (5/5/2014, 1:05 p.m.): The chart originally mislabeled the percentage of San Jose State's freshmen eligible for Pell Grants as the university's percentage of Pell Grant recipients. In addition, the note on the chart included two errors: The endowment numbers are for summer 2013, not June 30, 2013, and the figures for Pell Grants are for fall 2012, not summer 2013. The chart has been updated to reflect these corrections.