

M. Belinda Tucker

Graduate Division Associate Dean

PREGNANCY IS NOT something one would automatically associate with the postdoctoral experience, yet, M. Belinda Tucker, a social psychologist and longtime observer of postdoctoral scholars, notes that some women who have postponed childbearing take this relatively unpressured period to begin their families. “Once you get that first faculty job, you’re on committees, you have students, you’re teaching classes, and you have to publish,” Professor Tucker says. Confronting the issues associated with juggling family and work might well fit into an agenda of postdoctoral supports.

As one of the Graduate Division’s new Associate Deans, Professor Tucker will be the point person on issues related to postdoctoral fellows. She will also be liaison to the Life Science Division, the Social Science Division, the International Institute, and the Schools

of Public Affairs, Nursing, Public Health, and Dentistry, giving her the opportunity “to learn a lot more about how the graduate experience might vary among settings and what their distinctive needs are,” she says.

A final piece of her new portfolio is liaison to the Institute of American Cultures, an umbrella organization that supports the ethnic studies centers and builds research connections among them. When she arrived at UCLA in 1978, one of her first assignments was to coordinate the Afro-American Studies component of the Institute’s postdoctoral program, which placed fellows in each of the ethnic studies centers.

Since then, Professor Tucker has had a great deal of experience selecting and working with postdoctoral fellows on her extensive agenda of research projects. As the Director of the Family Research Consortium IV, for example, she helps manage a program

that “places scholars around the country to develop their capacity to conduct research on family processes and mental health.”

At UCLA, she recently served on the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee, which was charged with developing new policy in that area. “Structural issues related to survival” were high on the agenda. For example, some national fellowship sources may provide a fixed amount of compensation, regardless of where the recipient lives. “People who live in very expensive places like Los Angeles are going to experience constraints on their lifestyle,” Professor Tucker says. Recognizing this, the National Institutes of Health now allow universities to provide supplemental payments from other grants. Another important concern is the relationship between mentors and postdoctoral scholars. UCLA has developed “some guidance for mentors and postdocs on what they can expect to happen over the next year, or two or three, in this relationship,” Professor Tucker says.

Much of Professor Tucker’s understanding of the postdoctoral experience, however, comes from her one-on-one connection with fellows as well as graduate students in the course of an extensive research agenda. At the present time, she is continuing the analytical phase of a 21-city longitudinal study of family formation patterns, completing a study of how developmentally disabled people adapt to midlife, and participating in a comparative look at how black urban youth—African Americans, Belizean Creoles, and Belizean Garifuna—make the transition to adulthood. A project investigating how families adjust to the imprisonment of a member is just getting under way.

The Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences has honored Professor Tucker with its Outstanding Research Mentor Award in 1998 and the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award in 2004. She has been part of dissertation committees in a wide range of departments: from psychology, sociology, and anthropology to English, geography, and urban planning.

