As has been abundantly documented in the popular and academic press, the humanities are facing challenging times marked by national debate regarding the importance of the humanities in higher education, program and budget cuts, and an ever-decreasing number of tenure-track jobs. In addition, the humanities face quite literally a quantification of their value as the Academy adopts a more corporate mindset. This volume provides advice to professionals in the humanities on how to forge a useful, compelling, and productive career. The book’s 13 chapters address professional approaches to developing and maintaining an active research agenda, fomenting the ideals of the teacher-scholar model, managing the service demands within and outside the college or university, and navigating institutional politics. The collection offers practical and theoretical approaches to higher education, personal anecdotes, intelligent advice, and interviews with colleagues in the humanities. Specific themes addressed include the transition from graduate student to humanities professional, diverging from prescribed paths, the humanities professor as creative writer, moving from secondary to post-secondary education, humanities in an international, market-based context, and participation in governance structures.
Forging a Rewarding Career in the Humanities
Forging a Rewarding Career in the Humanities
Advice for Academics

Edited by

Karla P. Zepeda
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne, IN, USA

and

Ellen Mayock
Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA, USA
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STEPHEN KIDD

FOREWORD

Forging a Rewarding Career in the Humanities

ADVOCATING FOR A MORE VIBRANT HUMANITIES LANDSCAPE

People often think of humanities career choices as largely individualistic personal decisions, and of course they are. But in the aggregate, they are also a means by which a professional community can have a positive impact on society. In this sense, there is more at stake than individual success in ensuring that students succeed in their quest to forge satisfying humanities careers. And, while the task of “forging a rewarding career in the humanities” is an individual one that can be aided considerably by the advice in this volume, the task of creating a vibrant humanities landscape with plentiful opportunities for future job seekers is a collective enterprise in which all who work in the humanities can and should participate.

Over the past five years, the humanities have suffered from a poor public image. This has been due in part to a steady stream of media stories about the perceived lack of employment options for humanities majors, assertions that the humanities are less important to prosperity and well-being than other pursuits, and efforts to guide students and resources away from humanities departments at universities. Unfortunately, these media stories threaten to undermine public understanding of and enthusiasm for the humanities.

A critical way for all of us to help create a more positive environment for the humanities is to shift our focus from making claims about what the humanities need, such as more funding and more jobs, to advocating for what the humanities have to offer. By making substantive arguments for the value of our disciplines and demonstrating that value to a range of stakeholders—including the general public, elected officials, students, and college and university administrators—we can not only increase the flow of resources to humanities organizations and increase employment opportunities for humanists, but also expand the productive engagement of the humanities in broader social issues.

MAKING SUBSTANTIVE ARGUMENTS FOR THE VALUE OF THE HUMANITIES

While the generation of new knowledge is a worthy end in and of itself, in order to garner more public support we need to make broader claims for the value of our disciplines. The National Humanities Alliance’s Four Arguments for the Value of
the Humanities connect the work of the humanities to widely-shared goals: opportunity for all; innovation and economic growth; productive global engagement; and strong communities.

Opportunity for All. The first of the arguments is that humanities disciplines teach essential skills and habits, including reading, writing, critical thinking, and effective communication, that are crucial for ensuring that each individual has the opportunity to learn and become a productive member of society. Innovation and Economic Growth. As employers predict that future economic growth will come from cultural knowledge and analytical ability paired with technical knowledge and scientific research, the second argument is that the humanities foster innovation and growth.

Productive Global Engagement. Third, the humanities contribute to productive global engagement because they cultivate and maintain deep knowledge of the languages, cultures, and histories of rapidly changing areas of the world that national security, diplomatic, and business communities regularly draw upon to understand the contexts in which they work. Strong Communities. Fourth, our ability to build strong communities is enhanced because humanities research, teaching, and public programs promote the cultivation and dissemination of knowledge about civic institutions, citizen participation, and the foundations of community.

While there is a good deal of qualitative evidence to support these arguments, we need to devote resources to further substantiate them. This requires being more expansive in our approaches to evaluating our work. In some cases, for example, it may be critical to partner with social and natural scientists to study the broader effects of engaging with the humanities. In order to generate more public support for our disciplines, we not only need to make the best possible arguments for the humanities as a public good and commit to new evaluation and research about our work, we also need to broadly disseminate this information.

DEMONSTRATING THE VALUE OF THE HUMANITIES

One of the best ways to generate public support for the humanities is to demonstrate this value in particular places. We can accomplish this by cultivating collaborations between museums, libraries, archives, state humanities councils, and colleges and universities that focus on enhancing and demonstrating their local impact. A recent study of humanities organizations, conducted by the Humanities at the Crossroads initiative, confirms in Indiana what many of us assumed from experience around the country: humanities organizations on the local and state levels are not currently collaborating often or extensively on programming or advocacy. The Congressionally-requested American Academy of Arts and Sciences Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, in its 2013 report “The Heart of the Matter,” identified this lack of collaboration as a key impediment to developing a more robust and impactful humanities sector.

This lack of collaboration among humanities organizations limits the public impact of independent projects as well as the amount of resources that can be
secured to expand programs. To solve this problem, the Commission argues that humanities organizations need to “embrace a new commitment to collaboration and a new sense of mutual obligation.”(19) The National Humanities Alliance Foundation, in collaboration with the Federation of State Humanities Councils, has recently launched an initiative called Humanities Working Groups for Community Impact that is designed to facilitate this work. Under the initiative, which is funded by the Whiting Foundation, we will bring together local humanities organizations in several areas around the United States to launch projects that engage their communities, and we will document and share examples of high impact work that can serve as models for others. Many humanities organizations and individual scholars are already undertaking this work independently. If you are not yet engaged in these demonstration efforts, I encourage you to seek relevant partners and develop an initiative focused on your local community.

If you are considering a career in the humanities or are continuing to navigate an already rich trajectory, heed the excellent advice in this book as you identify and pursue your career path. It is important for you to develop a career that is personally rewarding in intellectual and other ways. In addition, please work collaboratively with your colleagues to help foster a more vibrant and impactful environment for the humanities. By emphasizing the value of the humanities in concrete terms and showing this value in particular communities, you can shape public understanding. And enhanced public understanding will lead to the creation of more opportunities for those who seek a rewarding career in the humanities.

REFERENCES


*Stephen Kidd*

*National Humanities Alliance*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The co-editors sincerely thank the 12 contributors to this volume for their excellent and diverse essays on the state of the humanities and on strategies for making the humanities a viable professional home. We also greatly appreciate the input of legal counsel Mark GiaQuinta for his willingness to contribute his time in talking with Karla Zepeda about the humanities and the legal issues that are arising in this sector in the new millennium. In addition, we are very grateful to the individuals—named and anonymous—who responded to our “top tips” survey to provide comments and advice for humanities professionals. We are also grateful to Adilia D. Ortega for contributing the cover photograph to our volume. The co-editors extend profound thanks as well to Stephen Kidd, Director of the National Humanities Alliance, for his interest in our project and willingness to write the volume’s foreword.

Peter de Liefde of Sense Publishers has been an excellent editor for this volume, and we thank him for his smart suggestions and prompt responses. Ellen Mayock also wishes to thank Washington and Lee’s Lenfest Research Program for its support of her work on this volume. Karla Zepeda would like to express her appreciation to IPFW’s College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of International Language and Culture Studies, and Purdue University’s Conference for Pre-Tenure Women for serving as an inspiration for the importance of instilling the values of collaboration and mentorship.

Furthermore, the co-editors would like to acknowledge the support of a real community of scholars—our own teachers and mentors of many years, our colleagues near and far, our students whose capacity to embrace the humanities keeps us fully engaged in our work, and our writing friends whose creative initiative and works continue to inspire.

Karla Zepeda wishes to express profound gratitude to her husband, Matthew Wenger, for his support and commitment to her profession. Ellen Mayock would also like to acknowledge her partner, Patrick Bradley, and her children, Charlie Mayock-Bradley and Susanne Mayock-Bradley, for the many beautiful ways in which they keep the “human” in the “humanities.”
INTRODUCTION

THE HUMANITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Over the last decade, and certainly since the banking failure and resultant global crisis in 2008, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in its pages has consistently posed questions about the durability of the humanities on a changed academic landscape. Such headlines as “The Economic Logic of the Humanities” (Soll, 2-24-14), “A Rallying Cry for the Humanities” (Baker, 3-13-14), “Harvard Mounts Campaign to Bolster Undergraduate Humanities” (Berrett, 6-7-13), and “The Humanities, Declining? Not According to the Numbers” (Bérubé, 7-1-13) simultaneously warn of a need to fortify humanities programs and to defend the existence of such programs. We expect this type of discussion about the Academy from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, but it is a debate that now also frequents the pages of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other major urban dailies in the United States and beyond. *The New York Times* has published such articles as “The Repurposed Ph.D.” (Tuhus-Dubrow, 11-1-13) and “As Interest Fades in the Humanities, Colleges Worry” (Lewin, 10-30-13). Like it or not, this “crisis of the humanities” is real at least insofar as the perception of the crisis makes it so.

As has been abundantly documented in the popular and academic press, the humanities are facing challenging times marked by national debate regarding the importance of the humanities in higher education, program and budget cuts, and an ever-decreasing number of tenure-track jobs. Given these evolving themes, this collection seeks to provide advice to professionals in the humanities on how to forge a useful, compelling, and productive career. The volume’s 13 chapters address and/or recommend professional approaches to developing and maintaining an active research agenda, fomenting the ideals of the teacher-scholar model, managing the service demands within and outside the home college or university, and navigating institutional politics. This work also addresses the “alternative academic” and “post-academic” choices that some humanities professionals need and/or want to explore. The collection contains a variety of essays that span practical and theoretical approaches to higher education, personal anecdotes, intelligent advice, and interviews with colleagues in the humanities.

Many of our contributors have earned the Ph.D. in either the humanities or the social sciences, and the contributors’ areas of employment range from temporary and permanent employees in the Academy to international education personnel to lawyers. As a result, the volume as a collection offers a broad slate of experiences and advice for individuals who want to approach the career path in an informed, deliberate, and flexible way. Sample topics include the transition from graduate school to humanities professions, diverging from prescribed paths, the humanities
professor as creative writer, moving from secondary to post-secondary education, humanities in an international, market-based context, and participation in governance structures. In addition, the editors have done a small survey of humanities professionals and offered a summary of their experiences and “top tips” for individuals embarking on new careers or interested in changing the direction of their careers. The project’s originality lies in its multiple perspectives on the current state of the humanities, its variety of approaches (higher education analyses, creative essays, and interviews), and its practical recommendations for establishing a rewarding career in an area currently quite underappreciated in many arenas.

According to the AAUP Research Office and the US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, whereas in 1975 part-time faculty occupied 30% of all faculty appointments in the United States, in 2011 that percentage rose dramatically to over 51%. This statistic, no longer at all surprising, reveals many other trends and tendencies that have changed the way in which the world values, quite literally, work in the humanities. It demonstrates, among other phenomena, the increasingly corporate mindset of public and private colleges and universities (significant increase in administrative positions; more emphasis on career development and placement; less certainty about the scholarly direction of the professoriate), the skyrocketing costs of college and resultant debate in the public sphere about the literal and figurative value(s) of a college education, evolving roles of professors and contingent faculty, conversation about vocational and/or pre-professional aspirations of undergraduate and graduate students in an economy less flush with available jobs, dis-ease or unease and ignorance about the skillsets gained through study in the humanities, and more acute questions of academic freedom. This debate about the humanities is so heated that even election data guru Nate Silver has “crunched the Humanities” (Bauerlein, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 15, 2013). Both Mark Bauerlein and Michael Bérubé (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 1, 2013) find in Silver’s data that “the number of students choosing English and other humanities fields is stable or only slightly falling” (Bauerlein, July 15, 2013). These authors recognize a crisis in the humanities, but they insist, quite correctly, that the crisis is not based upon undergraduate enrollments.

In his timely book *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Andrew Delbanco offers his own summary of the elements of change in higher education. These include globalization, economic instability, the ongoing information technology revolution, inadequacy of K-12 education, the breakdown of tenure, and the “collapse of consensus about what students should know” (4-5). Delbanco also makes the key point that sciences have a distinct advantage in the realm of higher education resources for their “ability to demonstrate progress” (94). This concern is echoed by major humanities scholars cited in Tamar Lewin’s article in *The New York Times* (October 30, 2013), among them Columbia’s Delbanco, Harvard’s Louis Menand, Princeton’s Anthony Grafton, Stanford’s Franco Moretti, Americian Council of Learned Societies’ Pauline Yu, and Harvard’s Jill Lepore. Dan Berrett informs us that “more
undergraduates majored in the humanities in 2011 than did so a decade ago, but federal support for research in those disciplines accounted for less than one-half of 1 percent of the money given to colleges for science and engineering” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, September 4, 2013). Even at many small liberal arts colleges, administrators and admissions experts are raising the profile of the STEM fields, at times at the expense of the humanities as the core of the liberal arts ideal. From the American Council of Learned Societies panel on “The Public Face of the Humanities,” Jennifer Ruark reported that the one item the panelists agreed upon was “that humanities scholars need to communicate that their research, no less than research in the hard sciences, produces new knowledge” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, May 12, 2014). This is a good moment to remember that the humanities is the area in which a genre called the novel keeps us wondering about—and creating, and questioning—the place of human beings in real and fictional worlds.

Several are the high-profile scholars involved in this discussion about the evolving place of the humanities who have cited W.E.B. DuBois. For example, Michael S. Roth, author of Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters, uses a key DuBois quote to understand the state of the university at the start of the last century: “The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be a centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization” (qtd. in The Chronicle of Higher Education, May 19, 2014). David Hollinger points to market-driven values as the main motivators of the loss of prestige of humanities fields: “It is part of the gradual loss of nerve on the part of American higher-education leadership that the value that increasingly defines what goes on inside the university are those things that are valued outside the university” (qtd. in R. Wilson, The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 15, 2013).

These lists of concerns and obstacles are long, and the items on them are comprised of complicated layers. Add them together, though, and the simple truth is that we are in a moment of real change in the higher education system, a change that requires that we be open to new ideas, trends, and career tracks and that we exercise a certain nimbleness surrounding change. The American Academy of Arts & Sciences’ 2013 report on the state of the humanities and social sciences, titled The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a vibrant, competitive, and secure nation, maps three main goals for advancing the humanities and social sciences: (1) Educate Americans in the knowledge, skills, and understanding they will need to thrive in a twenty-first century democracy; (2) Foster a society that is innovative, competitive, and strong; (3) Equip the nation for leadership in an interconnected world (Report Brief PDF). A grounding in the humanities also allows us to examine critically the somewhat corporate and definitely nationalist rhetoric of the AAA&S (‘thrive’; ‘democracy’; ‘competitive’; ‘nation’; ‘leadership’). This volume supports the humanities and those who are looking to forge rewarding careers in these areas in part due to David Hollinger’s rationale that “the humanities deserve support not because they always get things
right—often they do not—but because they are the great risk takers in the tradition of the Enlightenment” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, October 14, 2013).

HUMANS AND THE HUMANITIES

Professor Mónica González García, whose chapter in this volume includes the phrase “Humans in the Humanities,” advocates for remembering the human element in the humanities, a theme that recurs both in this introduction and throughout the volume.

In her layered “Response to the Letter of Sor Filotea de la Cruz,” brilliant Baroque writer and scholar Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz writes of the humanities as the means to help us to understand our world and to make connections among the disciplines: “For my part, I can be certain that what I do not understand of an author from one area, I usually can understand of another author from a different area, even if its field of inquiry seems quite distant” (833; translation ours). In this outstanding exposition of the interconnectedness of the academic disciplines, Sister Juana also states, “I wish to persuade everyone by means of my own experience that [this interconnectedness among the disciplines] is not only not an obstacle, but rather succeeds in having the disciplines bring light and open paths for each other, through variations and hidden links—and this universal chain’s wisdom comes from the Great Author [God]—and thus it seems that they correspond to one another and are united with admirable forethought and labor” (833). Sister Juana sees God as the center of a wheel whose radial lines are the academic disciplines that all link back to the center (833). While this 17th-century nun from “New Spain” (now Mexico) in this letter of self-defense necessarily evoked God as the giver of all academic light, talent, and ambition, she also set forth, long before the Enlightenment, an astonishingly prescient stance and a useful way to think about the objectives and methods of higher learning.

As the world becomes more commercialized and globalized, we humans in it need now more than ever the capacity to read and view different kinds of text, to consider them critically, and to offer studied opinions about them. We need all of the versatility that the humanities and their interconnections among disciplines offer and the entire skillset of reading critically, writing clearly, presenting engagingly, connecting to a broad array of disciplines, and speaking capably in more than one language. Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz makes clear to us that human beings need both the utility and the beauty of the humanities, that one without the other makes us less whole and less engaging as human beings.

Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, leading thinker and writer and ardent defender of the humanities of the 17th century, is never quoted in current-day research on the state of the humanities, and she should be. Her life example and literary works demonstrate consistently that people steeped in the humanities are able to study all disciplines in a more open and adventurous way and that “humanities tracks” can lead very effectively both to the humanities and to other areas of inquiry (thus showing Sister Juana to be an early advocate for the “alt-ac” and “post-ac” tracks, without ever losing sight of the “ac”; see Josh Boldt’s piece on “alt-ac” resources
at the Chronicle Vitae site). Sor Juana teaches us one additional very important lesson, which is that we also need to understand these issues through the lens of gender, an element severely under-studied in current research on the humanities. These issues of gender manifest in three principal ways: (1) the attack on the growth of interdisciplinary programs in the humanities (and especially on women’s and gender studies and African-American studies); (2) the privileging of STEM over the humanities; and, (3) very specifically and least commented upon in the popular and academic press, the relatively high population of women in the humanities, which seems to have led to a “feminization” of these disciplinary areas and a gradual devaluing (both literally and figuratively) of their contribution to the Academy and to society in general. In addition, except for the inclusion of some significant women’s voices (e.g. Rosemary Feal, Jill Lepore, Pauline Yu), the humanities debates have been dominated by men (e.g. Mark Bauerlein, Michael Bérubé, David Brooks, Andrew Delbanco, Mark Edmundson, David Hollinger, Franco Moretti, Michael Roth). This volume’s contributors add their scholarly, professional, and personal voices to the mix to give a more nuanced view of these macro-level discussions about the humanities.

If we believe in the importance of humans in the humanities, then we must take into account the ways in which women have been largely invisible in our public discussions about the direction of the humanities. We must remember that women are the majority of undergraduate students, that there are more women than men in humanities fields in graduate school, that women represent half of the United States workforce, that women’s positions in the Academy are disproportionately those of assistant professor and contingent faculty, and that the humanities fields most populated by women are often part of the departments most quickly excised when universities slash programs. Even as the STEM fields examine the challenges of recruiting and maintaining more women, we are busy devaluing the advances made by women in the humanities fields. To value the humanities, our nation must learn to value women and the scholarly work we do.

Physician and professor of general internal medicine at Harvard Medical School and nationally recognized poet Rafael Campo speaks eloquently (with professor and poet Lesley Wheeler) to the importance of the humanities in every area of our lives:

I am here to say as a physician that I can’t imagine the work of healing without the arts, the humanities, the context that helps me make sense of what I see every day, to place the decisions I help patients to reach about treatment options in an ethical context, to recognize that health and disease are not simply a function of physiology but are also impacted and defined by social and cultural forces. It’s unthinkable to me, but humanities budgets are being cut. Fewer students major in the humanities now. Writing programs are seeing declines in enrollment—it’s a concern in every aspect of the arts. But we need the humanities. As a primary care physician, I use what I learned in my English classes at Amherst much more than I use the knowledge acquired in my biochemistry classes at Harvard Medical School. We need to make a
clearer argument for the relevance of study in the humanities and why it will always be critically important to us, no matter what profession we enter or type of work we do. (Shenandoah Literary Magazine 63:2)

Here in the 21st century, we humanities professionals must continue to recognize, encourage, and publicize the ways in which the humanities disciplines lead us to understand our world and to question what we think we know.

Ellen Mayock

THE PROFESSIONAL AND THE PERSONAL

After submitting my case for promotion and tenure in the fall of 2012, I found myself in unexpected stillness and silence that permitted a momentary flashback of my years as a junior faculty member. The professional reminiscence allowed me to see my indebtedness to my mentors within and beyond my home institution. Their advice and support had been invaluable as I transitioned from graduate school into my first tenure-track position and during the probationary years. I had learned so much about academia in my five years on the tenure-track; I just wished I had learned it all a lot earlier.

My academic job only remotely resembled my graduate school experience despite the consistent space of higher education. It was at Purdue University’s First Conference for Pre-Tenure Women that I learned about the diverse professional experience of women across university campuses and the importance of mentoring in building a successful career. Many women university faculty, especially minority women academics, lack the guidance and support of mentors. I was struck by the code of silence and pristine professionalism that prevented the exchange and free access of information regarding academia as a workplace. While we teach, research, serve, and write reports, we also confront a variety of situations that can influence our level of professional success and impact our careers. Higher education is not impervious to the issues that afflict society such as institutional racism, a topic addressed in “Presumed Incompetent: Breaking the Silence of Racism in Academia” (Ho, 3/4/2013) and Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012), or hierarchy and prestige-base caste system, as addressed in “Superpowers: The American Academic Elite” (Oprisko, 12/3/12) and “Pushing Up Ivies: Institutional Prestige and the Academic Caste System” (Oprisko, Dobbs, & DiGrazia, 2013). Yet another important factor shaping professional success is the tension created by internal politics of a department, college, and university, a subject addressed by David D. Perlmutter in “Pick Your Battles … but How?” (2010a) and “Spotting Your Enemies” (2010b). The silenced factors impacting academia can become a threat to professional success in general, but especially to women and faculty of color.

Thus, I envisioned a collection of hybrid essays in which humanities professionals would share their personal experiences of academia and provide advice as mentors. The essays could assume a personal tone in order to establish a
INTRODUCTION

The present-day discussions on the crisis in the humanities focus on the dominant factor of the economics of the humanities as conveyed by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences’ report “The State of the Humanities: Funding 2014,” and such articles as, “Status of the Humanities: ‘We Haven’t Quite Recovered from the Recession” (Howard, 2014), “An Era of Neglect: How Public Colleges Were Crowded out, Beaten up, and Failed to Fight Back” (Fischer & Stripling, 2014), and “From Public Good to Private Good: How Higher Education Got a Tipping Point” (Hebel, 2014). As higher education finds itself burdened by the reduction in federal and state funding, rising tuition costs, declines in revenue, and dwindling lines for full-time faculty, what do these challenges signify in the day-to-day toil of university life? How do academics respond and forge a rewarding career despite significant work burdens? What other realities form a part of the lives of humanities professionals? And, what leads academics to leave academia and find success elsewhere?

Despite the current impassioned discussions on the crisis of the humanities, there is a lacuna of focused, personal, and honest advice on the realities of academia and the challenges of building a rewarding career. There is plenty of information in the form of blogs, such as Karen Kelsky’s The Professor is in, Tanya Golash-Boza’s Get a Life, Ph.D.: Succeed in Academia and Have a Life Too, and the multi-writer blog The Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC). In addition, The Chronicle of Higher Education offers opinion pieces in its Advice Columns on a plethora of topics, such as Fundraising, Academic Assets, the Graduate Adviser, the Adjunct track, and Beyond the Ivory Tower, among others. In addition, The Chronicle of Higher Education designed Vitae, an interactive space for faculty and administrators, which includes a News and Advice section and serves as an online career service. A Google search on “academic career advice” provides 30,100,000 results. Thus, the information regarding the reality and challenges of academia is certainly available, but one has to be exact about the search terms and know the issues that can influence an academic career right at the beginning, such knowledge needs to be made accessible before experience teaches harshly. Forging a Rewarding Career in the Humanities: Advice for Academics contributes to the discussion presented in The Leaning Ivory Tower: Latino Professors in American Universities (Padilla & Chávez, 1995), Black Women in the Academy: Promises and Perils (Benjamin, 1997), Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus (Boice, 2000), and Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012), as far as presenting the landscape of challenges in academia, but it goes beyond the ivory tower to offer advice to humanities professionals developing a career at different stages and spaces. Forging a rewarding career requires ingenuity, perseverance, and much guidance. We hope to make information accessible and advice attainable through hybrid narratives aimed to mentor.

Karla P. Zepeda
The essays in this volume respond to the current state of the humanities in part by examining the wide-ranging career paths of humanities professionals. Although many graduate students and prospective graduate students believe they are embarking upon a direct journey from degree to employment in the Academy, we now know that the process is much more complicated. Market forces, program and budget cuts, decreased employment, and/or personal circumstances all indicate that forging a rewarding career demands ingenuity and resourcefulness. The following 13 essays humanize humanities professionals by revealing their scholarship, personal stories, unique responses to changing circumstances, and most importantly, qualified advice gained through experience.

We have been motivated to produce this volume in order to address shortcomings in the knowledge available to graduate students and humanities professionals and to share advice from a variety of individuals whose paths range from the standard to the unpredictable. To this end, we have divided the collection in two parts. The first part focuses on the ways in which humanists can build rich, many-faceted careers in a variety of sectors, and the second names specific obstacles in the career path and suggests methods to avoid or overcome them.

Lesley Wheeler’s essay opens Part I: Building a Well-Rounded Career. In “A New Walk,” Wheeler examines the ways in which we view academic “success” as something that requires ascent of a narrowing stairway. By pursuing a series of ambitious projects, one climbs through the professorial ranks, eventually achieving the Alpine peak of scholarly prestige, or possibly of higher-paid administrative work. What the increasingly rare attainment of tenure should authorize, however, is choice—or, at least, it should bring into visibility options we always possessed. Our academic fields and our classrooms benefit from intellectual and artistic risk-taking; our whole lives are more meaningful when we feel free to ask, “where should I go next?” and “is there a more interesting way to get there?”

Michelle Durán-Ruiz embraces open horizons in her essay, which examines the sense of anxiety and entrapment in graduate school. At the time, only one person seemed to make sense: Durán-Ruiz’s graduate advisor and his one piece of advice: “You need a PhD, in order to do what you want.” Ten years at Harvard, holding on to that one phrase, helped Durán-Ruiz to complete the program. This essay addresses the accidental journey of a Ph.D. in Romance Languages, who ended up with a thrilling academic job, overseas, doing just what she had dreamed of: teaching, advising and designing academic projects without the pressure of publishing.

Chapter 3 in Part I is a co-authored essay by Sheri Spaine Long and Jean LeLoup. In the essay the authors offer wisdom about careers in the humanities with a special focus on languages, literatures, and linguistics. Non-traditional approaches that embrace a discipline in transition are essential traits of future professionals. The authors are university scholar-teachers who have taken non-traditional paths in their respective careers. A catalog of suggestions contains concrete advice for those in the early stages of their careers and/or those
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considering a career in the humanities. The list is based on decades of experience and knowledge of the field in which the authors have worked and reflects the authors’ mindfulness of emerging trends in the humanities.

Paul Hanstedt’s narrative titled “The Generalist” explores what it means to find one’s way in the academy. Contrary to the popular construction of “scholar” as one who seeks expertise in increasingly narrow fields of focus, the author of this narrative found himself, even at the very beginning of his career, drawn to multiple strands of inquiry and investigation in a variety of fields. While this occasionally caused strife in the author’s life, in the end the author believes his status as a “generalist”—one who seeks to make connections between and among seemingly disparate bodies of knowledge—actually allowed his career to flourish.

Chapter 5 is Mónica González García’s analysis of the decay of the humanities in Neoliberal Chile and its application to the current state of the humanities in the United States. On September 11, 1973, while the Chilean air force bombed the presidential palace, special military forces broke into the Universidad de Chile’s Oriente Campus, where pedagogies, social sciences, and humanities were taught. A few days later the military junta made official this “silencing” by designating military chancellors in order to “purge the anti-academic elements festering within our higher education” (General Gustavo Leigh). As Chile was the first country to adopt neoliberalism (with the violence of a dictatorship), González García believes that Chileans can offer useful lessons about the devaluation of humans and the humanities in the market era. She contrasts Andrés Bello’s idea of the social role of the humanities with data on their effacing by Pinochet and testimonies about their problematic return in democracy.

Katherine K. O’Sullivan’s “Marketing the Unmarketable: From Medievalist to International Business School Thesis Coordinator” examines the possible responses to the shrinking academic job market in the humanities, the low number of jobs in Ph.D. candidates’ areas of specialization, the potential crisis of faith in candidates’ abilities, and the scant information on career alternatives. O’Sullivan suggests that there are opportunities for employment outside of the humanities beyond the United States due to an under-representation of academics in the two-tier university structure, particularly in the Netherlands. This essay offers personal narrative and practical advice for Ph.D. students in the humanities about developing a skill set outside of one’s specialized field of study that is marketable for employment across university disciplines.

The final chapter in Part I includes “top tips” from humanities professionals who responded to a brief survey. The chapter shares the verbatim responses from the survey and then summarizes the top tips from the respondents.

Part II: Overcoming Obstacles names the problems in the humanities and offers a series of individual solutions. Michael McClure establishes that the academic world that many of us imagined while we received our initiation at top-flight graduate programs is a dwindling likelihood for most of us. Based on 25 years of teaching at a variety of institutions, this essay offers a “sanity project”: how to find professional satisfaction teaching in the humanities at a time when dwindling resources, shrinking student interest and motivation, inconsistent administrative
support, rising class sizes, heavier course loads, fewer support structures for under-prepared students, shrinking travel budgets, disappearing sabbaticals, lower admission standards, and sometimes quarrelsome colleagues are more the norm than the exception.

In Chapter 9, Mary Ann Dellinger’s “Transitioning from Secondary to Higher Ed” represents a type of pro forma prose list of plusses and minuses for the frustrated K-12 teacher contemplating investing (precious) time and (even more precious) money in a graduate degree in the humanities with the hopes of transitioning to higher education. The lure of “academic freedom,” scholarly engagement, and what the general public perceives as a cushy job (3 to 4 classes a semester—how hard can that be?) are especially misleading to the classroom teacher who makes logical assumptions based on shared pedagogical lexicons.

Beatriz Trigo makes clear in Chapter 10 that governance has become an increasingly indispensable element for a professional in Academia. As a result, it ought to be viewed as an integral part of a scholar’s life and a source of career enrichment. This essay considers how committed participation in governance can enhance and benefit an academic’s career, making service to one’s institution, department, and wider community a meaningful experience. Therefore, this essay advocates a personal, proactive approach to making the most of our engagement with service, focusing especially on the areas of campus visibility, institutional knowledge, collegiality, and governance as a resource for invaluable advice.

Elizabeth Kuebler-Wolf returns to Wheeler’s concept of the career staircase in her essay titled “Halfway Up or Halfway Down.” Kuebler-Wolf recounts her career trajectory, highlighting the unanticipated stumbling blocks and the lessons she has learned along the way. Christa Bucklin’s essay, “Finding Fulfillment through Self, Purpose, and Community,” reinforces that the path towards a rewarding career in the humanities requires patience, perseverance and diligence. Nevertheless, Bucklin insists that there are other elements that lead to fulfillment—in particular, knowledge of self, a sense of purpose, and a network of supportive relationships in the academic community. Bucklin tells us that, as descendants of the humanists, we as professor-scholars can use our teaching and research as a form of artful expression of who we are in order to live with purpose in a community of individuals committed to the humanities disciplines. The final chapter of the volume offers a comprehensive view from legal counsel, Mark E. GiaQuinta, who reflects upon his own professional development and his service to clients and the Fort Wayne School Board. GiaQuinta comments on the challenges faced by the United States education system and offers solutions.

The essays in Forging a Rewarding Career in the Humanities: Advice for Academics provide a rich analysis of the current state of the humanities and a diverse set of solutions and advice for individuals who are seeking a more detailed roadmap for humanities careers. We fervently hope that our experiences will serve our colleagues at all ages and stages of their careers as they move along their professional paths.
INTRODUCTION

REFERENCES


PART I
BUILDING A WELL-ROUNDED CAREER
LESLEY WHEELER

1. A NEW WALK

In late April of 2013, the dogwood around Sweet Briar College had already shed their white petals in favor of even green, and the redbud blossoms were long blown away. The trails around campus, though, should have been colorful with students. Instead, along the stream-edge, there were only horseshoe prints—perhaps a few days old? An installation of broken crockery sat on a tree stump deep in the woods, suggesting a tea party gone feral. Once, giggles alerted me to two young women standing in a meadow, their nakedness glowing, just past my dirt track. I apologized and hurried past. One of them yelled after me, “This is for a photography class! We’re not just hedonists!” Otherwise, I was alone with frogs and water birds and old grave-markers, wondering why getting lost made me so happy.

I had been lucky enough to win a two-week residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in Amherst, Virginia. My project: to sift through several years of poem-drafts and find a narrative arc, a channel through the material, that could plausibly organize a collection. I brought along scholarly sources, too, because I’m also writing a new critical book, but I shelved that box on the studio windowsill. I too often sideline poetry because it’s more difficult to earn grants and major publications in that arena, at least for a poet-scholar whose best credentials fall to the right of the hyphen. This fellowship is for art, I told myself strictly. Later, when summer heat took hold, I would shut myself up in prose.

I approached my task with panic: was all this funded, privileged solitude really necessary? Did the advantages of uninterrupted labor justify leaving my family for two whole weeks? Unable to sleep, I rose early each day, sped to my studio, and worked on poetry until late afternoon. Then I drove two miles to Sweet Briar’s back campus and set out on some path I had never walked before. Trailhead cubbies marked “maps” were always empty so I didn’t know if I would end up tromping through wetlands or up into wooded hills. Against all reason and experience, I would convince myself, forty-five minutes in, that the track was starting to loop back, that the next fork was auspicious, because I really didn’t want to turn back and retread the same old ground.

That was my first artist’s residency. I’m not sure when I’ll seek others. During that time apart, I missed winding down in the evenings with my children. Conversations with my spouse, also a writer, are more helpful than distracting—I ended up seeking his advice by phone and email, even zipping home over the mountain one night to hash out a version of my manuscript over our kitchen table. But at the VCCA, I realized some important things about myself and my way of working. I already knew that routines are important: even if the rules you impose...
on yourself are totally artificial (I absolutely have to make the most of the next two weeks), nothing gets done without them. I learned, though, that I’m happiest when my routines are flanked by unknown territory and just a bit of risk. What I loved best about my time away and miss most, months later, was wandering. In my hometown, the routes are familiar: through Stonewall Jackson Cemetery with my son; by Woods Creek with my husband; along fancy Jackson Avenue when the trails are muddy. I make small new discoveries daily—a tree toppled by high winds, deer crossing just ahead in the twilight, a side-street detour we haven’t tried in ages—but I can’t get quite lost enough.

A sense of having choices is crucial to satisfaction. Lucky as most professors feel to land a tenure-track job, many of us begin to feel oppressed by its narrow parameters before long: teach this way, publish that kind of article, adhere to a cheerful-and-constructive script during all meetings. I handle my frustration with some of those norms by trying to choose the job afresh at each crisis point. What do I really have to do? What are my unacknowledged options? Is there somewhere else I’d rather be? Some days I can choose my work enthusiastically, sometimes not, but given the constraint of having to earn a living, my commitment to a relatively poor and obscure art form, and my real enjoyment of literary conversation in classrooms, the professoriate has always presented a pretty attractive system of trails. I’ve been able to keep choosing it daily for a couple of decades.

The ability to select one path over another is important for everyone. The ability to choose uncertainty is important for me. I often envy the expertise of people who cut a single deep groove, but I need to undertake unfamiliar genres and experience the landscape of my field from various perspectives. This is where my title phrase, drawn from the end of A. R. Ammons’ poem “Corsons Inlet,” comes in. Poets try “to fasten into order enlarging grasps of disorder,” as Ammons writes, but he remains thrilled that “that there is no finality of vision, / that I have perceived nothing completely, / that tomorrow a new walk is a new walk” (1972, 151).

In a piece about choosing among forks, a likelier quote might be from “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. Or I could swap in a different Frost poem about traversing woods and fields—“The Wood-Pile,” “Acquainted with the Night,” and “Directive” are touchstones—or cite another favorite poet for whom ambling is a recurrent subject (Frank O’Hara, Sylvia Plath, Paula Meehan). There are many. Walking and writing share inherent affinities: both require a forward push at a pace slow enough for careful looking and listening, and both involve a balance of routine and surprise. What pulls me towards Ammons on this occasion, though, is his emphasis on the disorderliness of the adventure. He paces not over New England granite but along a narrow strait in southern New Jersey. No land is completely still and permanent, but dunes change rapidly. Since the boundary between land and ocean shifts minute by minute, who could presume to know it?

Whether one prefers familiarity, strangeness, or some alternation of those prospects, a rewarding professional life isn’t a goal to be achieved—grail found, check—but resides in having a range of auspicious-looking paths to try and the resources necessary to explore them. Adopting choice as an ethic and aesthetic has
made my job harder, though. While it’s terrible to lack or even just fail to see branching trails, so is having too many alternatives. A too-wide range of options paralyzes a person, especially when you first realize how deep the woods can be.

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My vocations include teaching poetry, writing poetry, and writing about poetry. “Vocations” sounds spiritual, and I do find that level of satisfaction in those activities sometimes, but more pragmatically, I mean that I enjoy them more than all other kinds of work. I feel happy and competent while pursuing them and satisfied afterwards that I’ve spent my energies fruitfully. However, I experienced the least freedom in those practices, and derived the least pleasure from them, during my years in graduate school and on the tenure-track.

My undergraduate education at a large state university was spotty in quality yet empowering. Overworked professors somehow praised my essays and welcomed my comments in class; researching and composing a senior honors thesis on Anne Sexton and Adrienne Rich was a joy; I helped edit one literary magazine, co-founded another, and talked poetry late into the night with a crowd of bookish friends, one of whom I’d eventually marry. The elite graduate program I entered immediately afterwards, in contrast, involved smaller classes, brilliant and better-funded faculty members, incredibly talented and motivated fellow students, and a fabulous library. Studying there, though, shook the ground beneath me and undid my confidence. Some of that was salutary, even overdue. I had never worked so hard or felt so intellectually challenged. In other ways, though, I became badly lost.

I was only twenty-one years old for that first three-hour seminar on feminist theory, and far outclassed. The other graduate students in my cohort, mostly educated at prestigious private institutions, were better read. My professors seemed to start with assumptions about literature and writing I’d never been taught. Everything was guesswork. I trailed along, trying to deduce the history of twists and turns in paths others had already walked and forgotten.

In coursework, for example, I kept snagging on briars everyone else seemed to foresee and sidestep. Why do we study African-American literature? I asked in one seminar, less than articulate in my desperation to understand what made a field a field. The professor, whose teaching unsettled me then but has meant a great deal to me since, froze then admitted his visceral reaction to the question. I received his response with confusion, went home, looked up “visceral,” and only at that belated moment realized I’d given offense. Another day, a student well on her way to becoming a superb teacher-scholar mused about the meaning of the hyphen in the term “African-American.” But what does the hyphen mean? I begged. No one answered. My questions were so stupid and embarrassing they couldn’t bear to tell me what was so stupid and embarrassing about them; I’d have to figure out on my own why I should be mortified. The marks I earned on those final research papers were, I suspected, acts of flummoxed charity on an abbreviated Ivy League scale, lower than the grades of students who truly belonged in the program.
I doubt I produced great essays for those courses, but my footing felt surer on the page than around the seminar table. For many graduate students in English, writing is torture. It never became so painful for me, although it accrued more dread than before. During the half-decade I spent earning a Ph.D., I didn’t understand what I was supposed to be doing, so I searched for middle ways between what pleased me and what satisfied professors and advisers. “Study the structures of books and essays you admire,” my better dissertation director instructed, the sober young one who would soon be denied tenure. Literature surveys, clever chapter titles, close-readings sandwiched by argument: I anatomized and imitated furiously. Standards became tougher in the tenure-track years that followed, when I had to persuade not just kindly advisers but strapped publishers that my scholarship was worth investment—I despaired over the muddle of pages I’d worked on for so long. In 1999-2000, when I submitted my tenure portfolio at a southern liberal arts college, I received anonymous reader reports on the manuscript of my expanded dissertation. Those generous pages finally marked a trajectory I could readily follow. Oh, I’m supposed to be advancing a conversation, indicating what’s already been said and explaining how I build upon it, and leaving notes so the next person can follow my tracks. That explanation made me see the value in scholarly writing, its fundamentally social, teacherly quality and the pragmatism of its clumsy apparatus. Revising the book into a publishable state became suddenly almost easy.

Did no one else ever say, over years of mentoring, that it’s a conversation? Really? Probably many people did, but fear had baked me so hard I couldn’t absorb the information.

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Teaching was never so onerous or so mysterious. My first teaching experience again involved a moment of undergraduate inspiration. Required to present a text related to my honors thesis to a seminar of students embarked on similar quests, I handed out copies of “Rapunzel” from Anne Sexton’s *Transformations*, read it aloud, asked a question, and was electrified to see my classmates lean in with excitement to discuss the possibilities. That twenty-minute lesson remains one of the brightest fragments of my senior year. From that moment, I knew what I wanted to do with the decades ahead. This confidence sustained me through the first two years of graduate coursework when, unlike students at other institutions who depend on teaching fellowships, candidates at Princeton were restricted from teaching. Afterwards, faith that I can do this buoyed me through our limited pedagogical training: two workshops, each a few hours long, supposedly preparing us sufficiently to teach at one of the nation’s most prestigious universities.

By the time I began my teaching assistantships for large surveys in Modern Poetry and American Literature, though, I was traveling with a knowledgeable ally. My boyfriend had worked in regional theater administration for a couple of years and then applied to a nearby master’s program in English education. He read my coursepacks jammed with Gayatri Spivak and Donna Haraway while I studied his
copies of bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress* and Janet Emig’s *The Web of Meaning*. He always had a gift for analyzing the tangles in a piece of writing and delivering the remedy tactfully—of several editors on our undergraduate literary magazine, he was the one I approached for private quality testing before submitting my work for general judgment—but his pedagogical resourcefulness increased exponentially while he completed his practicum under a master teacher in a top New Jersey public high school. I observed his classroom and he observed mine. In the early years we dissected almost every session in the evenings, sharing notes, strategies, and assignments over Yuenglings and experiments in cheap home-cooking.

I’m not saying I was a *good* teacher then, although I had some social aptitudes that suited me to humanities teaching. A talent for asking provocative questions combined with genuine interest in other people’s opinions takes you pretty far in an English seminar. The chief classwork is collaboratively building and dismantling arguments with close attention to textual evidence, and I was always able to get people talking about poems. I possessed, that is, the same set of qualities I look for in job candidates now: enthusiasm, curiosity, attentive listening, a knack for rephrasing comments or queries so the conversation moves in productive directions. Still, I barely knew my supposed area of expertise. When, to my shock, I was hired at Washington and Lee University in 1994, I had to manage seven classes a year without a famous lecturer at my back, among a conservative, mostly-male student body not used to young female teachers or discussion-style classrooms. I was so excited about all that feminist subversion I would perpetrate, but learned the hard way not to dismantle my own classroom authority utterly, at least before my new students granted me some. I gradually figured out that most students want and need what I want and need, what everyone does: choice, but not an entirely pathless wilderness; risk, but with a cellphone at the ready; good scenery; and a sense of progress, of rewarded effort at the end, even if the walk doesn’t turn out just as they had hoped. When the material at hand is literature, transgression will always be an important method and theme; those challenges find us no matter what I plan, often at an unexpected juncture.

Those first years as a teacher presented some rough patches. As in my scholarly writing, I know I had knowledgeable guides who wanted to help me learn with more speed and less pain, but mostly they didn’t give me the lore I needed when I needed it or, more likely, I just couldn’t hear them. I hated the constant classroom observations by senior department members. Some of them were solidly in my corner; a couple of them undermined me at unpredictable intervals. Many interactions fed my graduate school paranoia that I was a sad disappointment who was barely able to conduct a civilized conversation.

When no disapproving gray-haired gentleman dozed in the corner, though, I loved asking students questions about poems, plays, essays, and novels. The discussion meandered unpredictably, with sudden birds swooping out of the brush. I was supposed to herd the students towards satisfying insights by the time the bell rang and I managed that only sporadically. Even so, they were mostly game, and often even happy, to be wandering around with me.
Tenure and the usual promotion from assistant to associate professor are supposed to constitute a sort of finish line, yet I don’t know anyone who’s been entirely content with the prospect from the other side. The validation is wonderful for a few minutes. Job security is serious business, both for the person who attains it and for the colleagues and students now committed to working with that person for decades to come. Too many great teachers never receive it, though contingent faculty may work for years beside a more privileged cohort, accruing similar credentials with inferior support. Still, for better and worse, the tenure transition reframes choices, adding new possibilities and subtracting others. For instance, English Ph.D.s are much less mobile after tenure because most openings occur at the assistant professor rank. At more advanced levels, changing employment is basically the purview of administrators and superstars.

Teaching becomes easier around this juncture, partly because one’s skills and subject-mastery are stronger and partly because students grant authority readily to an older, better-credentialed person. There are simply fewer of the problems that wear down a junior person’s goodwill: hostile challenges to grades, you-need-help course evaluations, and unproductive classroom provocations. Besides, most teaching obstacles come in just a few shapes and sizes. There are several ways to handle the defiant remark that we’re over-interpreting this text, the poet couldn’t possibly have planned all that—around, under, through—and after a while you’ve tried them all. I don’t sweat those little choices now, even when I select one that works out badly, because the scales are weighted differently. I’ve taught lots of good sessions; occasional mishaps don’t shatter my confidence that I’ll teach well again.

In other ways, though, the professorial system of trails becomes more challenging to navigate after tenure. Promotion to associate professor brings overwhelming service obligations: for me, co-founding and helping to lead a Women’s Studies Program, chairing searches and an advising task force, and generally assuming more responsibility for running the joint. Most of my discontent in my thirties rooted in ambivalence about administrative responsibilities. The subsequent transition to full professor intensified these commitments: my department, now full of wonderful new personnel I had helped hire, needed my leadership for a stint. Although I kept teaching and writing at reduced levels, department head duties controlled most of the workweek. My inbox brimmed with urgent emails from the dean, the registrar, colleagues, and students. I became desperate, again, for choice.

In research, though, new associate professors face the opposite problem, and a sense of too-open possibilities only expands as one advances up the ranks. Scholarship can seem like a requirement externally imposed during the tenure-track years: they are making me write all through every academic hiatus, query editors, revise furiously, and get the work out on their timetable (“they” usually means the tenure committee, but my frazzled human overlords felt more cloud-hazed and all-powerful at the time). Suddenly, it’s not. There are still great
incentives to publish in the usual high-prestige modes. There’s that promotion to full professor ahead, raises tend to be fatter for publishing faculty, and even at institutions that don’t reward scholarship well, one becomes a likelier candidate for many grants and opportunities. Still, those consequences are much less dramatic than the publish-or-perish tenure crisis. One faces an unfamiliar hillside, only gradually registering the full array of options. So now it’s up to me. How should I allocate effort in summers and sabbaticals? What’s the most strategic work I could do? What’s the most important? Around the curve of one of those questions, bigger ones loom: What are my goals? What kind of a life do I want?

I contemplated those questions during my first sabbatical, the year right after tenure, in 2000-2001. Nursing a baby in a prolactin stupor, shepherding the revised dissertation into book form, I tried to make room, too, for play. I cracked new bindings, returned to poems I’d missed, and looked over notes from graduate school. I considered the subjects that had most excited my students during recent teaching adventures. Which way should I turn?

One of the answers I received from the ether shocked me: I wanted to write a second scholarly study. With external pressure removed, I discovered my own ambition. I knew my next effort could be smarter, bigger, more risky than the first and itched to prove I could do it. I was also surprised by the intensity of my curiosity about poetic voice in particular. I felt driven to confront the history of poetry performance, what it means to discuss sound in the twentieth-century lyric poem, and what poets and critics really mean when they refer to “poetic voice.” All these questions extend in some ways from the preoccupations of my first book: my interests have always centered on the lyric as a genre and the complicated feedback loops between poets and audiences. The project I eventually developed, Voicing American Poetry, represented both a fresh start and a return. When I chose a project freely, with more experience but also without terror of dissertation or tenure committees, I chose better, and wrote a book that meant more to a larger audience.

The other answer revealed during that post-tenure bout of existential writing angst: while I’d been pouring all available publishing and networking energy into scholarly production, and while I recognized this startling new determination to keep producing scholarship although no one was making me do so, I also admitted to deferring another writing impulse. As soon as I started studying poetry seriously in high school—poring over Keats in the classroom, hunting down Ginsberg’s Howl after hours—I also began writing it. I had always read and written stories compulsively, but the rhythms and other sonic patterns in poetry’s resonant lines intrigued and satisfied me more than narrative alone ever did. Writing poetry and writing about poetry were intertwined activities for me as an undergraduate, but pursuing a Ph.D. meant forcing those strands apart. I continued to compose poems to sort out what I was thinking and feeling, and in fact often recharged my scholarly writing by drafting verse in response to poetry and theory. I gave my students creative assignments in critical classes, too, both because shifting between modes helped me and on the general principle that one understands an art better after practicing it. After detouring along those clarifying side trails, though, I’d returned to clearly-blazed scholarly routes to tenure.
Now I opted to give poetry much higher priority. I allowed myself more time to write, revise, and submit poetic work, with limited success at first. The most important leap came in the summer of 2003 at a ten-day writing workshop where I made a few friends, garnered teaching strategies, and most crucially increased my expertise in two crafts: finishing a poem and marketing it. I had tended to shut down drafts too quickly, seeking tidy closure; my workshop leader, Janet McAdams, taught me to circle around to unexpected endings, more complicated and not-quite-resolvable resolutions. “There is no finality of vision,” as Ammons writes (1972, 151). She also delivered canny advice, just when I needed it, about researching publishing venues and delivering work into friendly hands. Again, this was an enormous research project requiring the cultivation of new relationships, massive reading, and the clerical drudgery of stuffing envelopes and tracking submissions, but I chose it.

It didn’t work right away. Magazine acceptances gradually mounted. I marketed a manuscript for five years before a little poetry press published my first collection, *Heathen*, in 2009. As in scholarship, my second project was more strategically conceived than the first: *Heterotopia*, a book about my mother growing up in Liverpool, England in the forties and fifties, was selected soon after for the Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize. *Heathen*, a collection honed over years, is more fun to excerpt at readings, but its looser connections made it harder to pitch; *Heterotopia* is tightly cohesive and more overtly intellectual. I’m equally proud of them but the books and the publishing experiences were different. *Heterotopia*’s prize win seemed to set me on one of those recognizable professional trajectories: here comes the academic poet, accolades mounting, climbing the hill of reputation.

I’ve been overworking this metaphor. Writing isn’t *that* much like walking. Even drafting this essay, watching the word count mount in the lower left corner, isn’t a linear process. I circle back constantly. I’ve rewritten the introduction many times, first to devise a more interesting opening full of sensory details, and then again after noticing I’d contradicted the original thesis within the next two pages. If walking were so recursive I’d drill myself down into a woodland grave before accomplishing a horizontal mile.

The *life is a journey* trope is hackneyed and limited, too. I started in one place with a certain set of feelings and ended up in another place with a different set of feelings. Later I draw a plausible narrative arc through certain memorable facts, knowing there are other ways to plot the graph. I tell a story about my professional life that reassures me, as if I always meant to be where I am now and will continue to frame and achieve meaningful goals in the future, but I’m actually skeptical of that teleology, especially when I lie awake in the night, in the middle of a dark wood, second-guessing decisions. But casting the tale helps me. Even though all narratives are inherently fictional, optimistic stories are more fortifying than shapeless doubts.
I’m in my mid-forties, a full professor with an endowed chair. I possess limited patience for university administration yet the good fortune of liking teaching and writing even more than before. I’m just successful enough to face a bewilderment of options. I am mapless. Here’s the vista.

Poetry Writing

During my term as department head, I composed a long poem about the trials of an administrative assistant at a small southern liberal arts college. As a sexually predatory dean wrecks her friends’ lives, she starts hearing an uncanny voice fomenting rebellion. She’s the reluctant hero, the dean is the Dark Lord, her colleagues are boon quest companions, and the whole speculative campus novella occurs in thirty-line cantos of slant-rhymed terza rima. In short, this was a demented project, but it sprang from dire need, and enough friends liked the draft that I submitted it for publication. *The Receptionist and Other Tales* was named to the James Tiptree Award Honor List and garnered a warm reception at WisCon 2013, the first science fiction convention I’d ever attended.

The same spring, I also led a panel called “Career Suicide” at the major annual meeting for academic writing in the U.S., the convention of Association of Writers and Writing Programs. Instead of heading along the well-trodden track upslope—though I could be delusional about that path’s existence or its viability for me—I had published a third book of poems with a feminist science fiction press. Genre fiction, much less genre poetry, retains a low status among the occult powers in my field. When I describe *The Receptionist* to other poets, some of them light up but others laugh nervously and invent a reason to dash off. If I had known for sure I would be trading some social-professional awkwardness for the experience of being a science fiction author, I still would have made the bargain. The new manuscript, though—*Radioland*, the one I constructed at the VCCA—resembles my first two poetry collections more than the third. My goal is to write the most urgent, engaging, best poems I’m capable of and then find as many interested readers as possible, but I have to be the first arbiter for “urgent” and it turns out my compass is peculiar. I seem to walk in a fog where poetry is concerned. I can’t see far ahead. It doesn’t matter, though. I would write as much poetry even if I never published, maybe more, because instead of revising and honing, I’d just keep charging into new stanzas for the thrill of it.

Prose

I love poetry’s resistance to full comprehension. I know a lot about how poems move, but I’ll never understand every possible joint and pivot, so there’s always something new to study or try. I’ve recently been conducting similar experiments in the critical essay. I started blogging about poetry in the spring of 2011, trying to keep an intellectual diary of Fulbright research in New Zealand, and the quick public response to each effort became addictive. Blog posts reach hundreds of
people instantly, in satisfying contrast to the glacial pace and uncertain impact of scholarly publishing. They also offer a forum in which I can practice a deep conviction: while it’s interesting and useful to argue about poems, we lose a major dimension of the art, and alienate many readers, if we don’t also feel our way through them. Poetry is political, philosophical, historical, social, spiritual, and medical, but it is also personal.

Blogging led to several essays combining critical and subjective prose, and now to a book-length project, *Taking Poetry Personally*. It’s the hardest writing I’ve ever done. Passages of memoir are emotionally exhausting to compose—although I write plenty of autobiographical poetry, prose requires longer inhabitation of difficult memories, and perhaps greater plainness about them. The intellectual challenges, though, are more daunting. The new book levels an argument about reading poetry immersively, entering small but absorbing worlds through each lyric fragment. Because I’m aiming for general as well as specialist readers, I’m processing vast piles of theory and criticism then leaving most of it out, excepting a light spoor of endnotes for determined trackers. The pressure to be interesting in several ways at once with every sentence feels intense. Beginning each new chapter, I become breathless with panic: what’s the best grounding poem, autobiographical material, critical focus?

Stephen King would call the little wilderness behind Sweet Briar College a “toy woods” (1999, 66). How lost can one really become there? *Taking Poetry Personally* feels like hiking in a real forest without a satellite phone. There are bears.

**Teaching**

As an associate and new full professor I felt an incipient sense of ownership of my institution, but experience has taught me otherwise. In particular, I helped build a great department but a mixture of bad administration and accident weakened it, and it demoralizes me to devote energy to an enterprise I have little power to protect and sustain. Now, if I catch the Dark Lords and their minions committing real harm, I’ll fight. I’ve even agreed to a year as interim chair, largely out of loyalty to a small group of colleagues. But I’m doing my best to focus on writing and teaching.

Yet even as I refuse some commitments, questions about what I can and should be doing in my classrooms just get bigger. How can I support my students’ intellectual engagement with poetry and their developing writing skills while also making room for them to take poetry personally? The world needs critical thinkers and lucid writers but it also needs engaged readers of literature rooted in every profession. My former poetry students are doctors, teachers, ministers, administrators, entrepreneurs, lawyers, accountants, and artists. Liberal arts disciplines are constantly accused of uselessness by politicians and in the media, but I work hard to prepare my students for a wide range of endeavors, and to help them transform, too, into thoughtful, literate people. I command each student’s attention to the subjects I choose for thirty-six classroom hours per term, seventy-
some homework hours, plus extra time for conferencing and evening events. What can I demand of them now that will have the best possible impact later? I want to spend all those hours in ways that truly matter.

Through all of it, I am “caught always in the event of change,” as Ammons writes (1972, 149). I have plans but plans are slippery things, subject to contingency; I tell stories, but those narratives are at least partly retrospective orderings of an experience that was sweaty, brambly, and confused at the moment. It is pretty astounding when, after a period of nervous clambering, you attain a moment of arrival. The only enjoyment you can really count on, though, is the pleasure of the work, the walk.

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Lesley Wheeler  
*English Department*  
*Washington and Lee University*
MICHELLE DURÁN-RUIZ

2. STEP OUT OF THE BOX

I SHOULD HAVE GONE TO LAW SCHOOL

Twenty years later, I still remember word for word what my Spanish literature professor said to me that crisp November afternoon in Boylston Hall: “You have to finish your Ph.D. You have to finish what you started. Without this title, you will not advance as much as you would like,” he said. “More doors will open for you with the title than without.” He even drew a scale—dots, lines, arrows in red ink—on a yellow notepad to show me the skills I would acquire if I completed what I had started in September of 1993. They were skills that would benefit me tremendously in basically any kind of job I got my hands on, he said. He was, of course, referring to being critical and analytical in reading and writing. These skills, as he put it, are the hidden treasures of graduate school, regardless of the field of study.

He was the first graduate advisor I knew who had made a clear distinction between the field of study and the skills one acquires in any six-year graduate program with intense reading and writing at the heart of its curriculum. I had gone to see him because I wanted to quit my graduate studies. Years later, I came to realize the impact his words had on my life as a graduate student. They helped me envision that the years ahead were worthwhile and could have a lasting benefit. My existential crisis didn’t come about because my field of study, Romance Languages and Literatures, did not interest me. What disillusioned me was the imposition of literary theory into the art of reading and the obligation (I’m talking the 90s, here) to use postmodernist theory—or any kind of theory—(as long as it was teoría) and apply it to the text. “You should have known better,” one Argentine graduate student once told me, “What were you thinking when you applied to graduate school? You cannot study literature without theory.”

Her words were echoed by many other classmates and professors throughout my first years of graduate school. It was clear that my feelings were in the minority. “I should have gone to law school. I should have gone to law school. Something practical,” I thought. “You study, you pass the bar, you fight for real issues, and you earn money! What could possibly go wrong with that formula?” I lost track of how many times I would torture myself with those thoughts and, frequently, I had to remind myself of how it all started. Going back to the seed, “Viaje a la semilla” (the story by Carpentier)—that backwards journey takes me to my days at Amherst College and how I first came into contact with the field of Spanish and Latin American Literature.
I was supposed to major in economics, followed by law school in either Puerto Rico or the States. Take the bar, become a lawyer, inherit my father’s library and use his contacts to get myself a job in a top-notch law firm in San Juan: Those were the steps. The goal seemed to be attainable and the right thing to do at the time. Coming from a family of lawyers and judges, I was expected to study something “serious” in light of the investment it meant for my father to send me to a U.S. college.

A failing grade on my ECON 101 midterm aborted that plan in no time. Not only did the 55 bring me to tears, but it sent me straight to the office of the professor. At least he was honest: “Do what you like best,” he said, “you are too young to study what you don’t like.” I couldn’t believe this economics professor would speak to me so clearly about dropping his own course. Looking back, it was obvious that he must have seen the same scenario often in his career as a college professor: a naive freshman frustrated with a failing grade.

I ended up withdrawing from the course and substituting it with “Introduction to Latin American Literature.” A confession in small print: It seemed an easy course, and I needed a break from all the competitiveness that surrounded the economics class. I needed an “easy A” to lift my spirits again.

As soon as I walked into the class, the professor’s thick Cuban accent caught my attention. An image that refuses to fade with time: He was tranquil, sitting at the end of the table, with a copy of the *Popul Vuh* in his hand, talking about indigenous cultures and the socio-cultural context the text belonged to. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, one of the most prestigious literary critics and Caribbean writers of his generation, was giving the class. He was a senior professor, who had come to the Pioneer Valley in the mid 1980’s after fleeing Cuba and spending a year in Europe. I did not know who he was at the time. Actually, I did not quite comprehend the magnitude of his legacy until a couple of years into graduate school. But the lecture was extremely engaging. I could identify with what he was talking about. He was speaking in Spanish, my native tongue, about countries I had an interest in and analyzing the text in a way that was very appealing to the students. His classic scholarship and background as a fiction writer and economist certainly helped in making a “practical” connection between the literary text and the socio-cultural context. It wasn’t long before this economics dropout looking for a substitute class ended up a Spanish major.

Looking back, I realize I have always enjoyed a good book. Nevertheless, my incursions into the literary world during high school were not memorable. I read what the traditional curriculum in English and Spanish demanded of its students. However, in college, and through the expertise of Benítez-Rojo, I was able to study in depth a more particular canon of colonial and contemporary Latin American literature. I was able to enjoy the text for what it was, analyze the socio-cultural context, the characters, and themes without needing to enforce a theoretical apparatus I had no idea how to manage. As my junior year ended, it became clear to me that I wanted to become a college professor in the most basic definition of
the profession: I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to teach undergraduate students the literary texts I enjoyed reading in the language in which they were written. Language methodology was a passion I discovered once in graduate school, but at the time I could not envision how many professional opportunities lay ahead in the field of second-language acquisition.

At the beginning of my senior year in college, Professor Benítez-Rojo gave me the advice I needed to make a career decision about “teaching college students” sooner rather than later: “You need to go to graduate school if you want to teach at the university level.” As simple as that: “You need an MA and a Ph.D. and you need to go to graduate school in the States. Letters of recommendation are the most important element of the application. The network of professors from the Hispanic Studies departments is small. Everyone knows each other and your recommendations will determine where you will be accepted.” Wasn’t he right! At least in many graduate schools of arts and sciences, it is all about connections—about who recommends you and with whom you want to work. He wrote me a thoughtful letter of recommendation that won me acceptance into very good schools and which, combined with a generous merit scholarship, led me to Harvard.

GRADUATE SCHOOL AT HARVARD

The first two years at Harvard remain a blur. I was unhappy, confused, and having serious doubts as to why I was in graduate school. The essence of why I had chosen this career seemed to evaporate in no time. Whatever happened to reading the text, analyzing the characters, and studying the socio-cultural context? It all seemed to be substituted with literary theory. What I wanted to hear in the classroom was that there was a practical connection between literary studies and the world that surrounded us. Instead, I was being instructed to write essays about theory applied to texts, which made no sense to me. It felt as if I were entering a world detached from reality and characterized by abstract concepts. I thought about focusing my studies on education because it at least implied pedagogical research with real kids in school. Basically, I was willing to do anything that could make me feel as if my graduate studies were going to help me in the future, and that I was not trapped in an ivory tower reading impenetrable theoretical articles.

I was also not oblivious to how other students felt. I must say that there were many graduate students who absolutely loved what they were doing: researching, reading critics, applying theory, spending nights and days at Widener Library. I often thought how lucky they were. They were doing something that they truly loved. I could have quit back then, but somehow I didn’t, thanks to an appointment I made with the graduate advisor on a crisp November afternoon. His advice was useful because I was brutally honest with him, which is something graduate students should keep in mind when discussing doubts about the profession. Professors are not going to think less of you because you open up and question your continuity in the program. This is easier said than done, I realize, but
DURÁN-RUIZ

professors were once graduate students themselves and probably went through the same doubts and hesitations.

In any case, thanks to his advice I regained hope in the possibility of doing something more practical within graduate studies. I started seeing some “light” at the end of the tunnel when I entered my third year and was finally able to teach Spanish to undergraduates. The connection with the outside world that I found in the classroom and in the teaching methodology courses kept me going until it was time to think about a thesis proposal.

The area of specialty I had chosen was Latin American Literature because of the passion Benítez-Rojo instilled in me back in my college days and because I was blessed to fall into the expert hands of a brilliant woman. Professor Sommer is a woman of extraordinary talent who taught me how to think creatively and, most importantly, how to think outside of the box. Professor Sommer was famous at the time for helping graduate students find innovative topics of research within the realm of cultural studies. I was certainly not alone in this crusade. There were other graduate students who also wanted to step out and explore other types of texts such as music lyrics, soap operas, and film scripts and analyze them as if they were traditional literary texts. In his *Cultural Studies Reader*, Simon During describes the importance of considering cultural studies to be a field within multidisciplinarity: “The point is not so much to dismantle disciplinary boundaries as to be able to move across them; the aim is to transport methods and attitudes from cultural studies to other disciplines where they are appropriate, but also to be able to forgo them where they are not” (During, 1999, p. 27). The search for The Topic continued for another year until one afternoon I was told that 1987 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former President of Costa Rica Oscar Arias Sánchez was giving a talk at the Kennedy School of Government.

His name rang a bell, but, to be honest, I knew very little of him. Ten years had passed since the Reagan Era, the Sandinistas and the Central American Peace Process. The 1990’s were coming to an end, but Arias had managed to recycle himself as an international spokesman for antimilitarism using Costa Rica (one of the few countries without a military) as an example. Once in the auditorium, I was surrounded by political science majors and public policy students who were savvy in Latin American politics and eager to hear what this statesman had to say.

To my surprise, a few minutes into his speech, I noticed that he was not excluding from his text the valuable lessons learned from the past. He was an astute writer who interwove the voices of memorable fighters like Simón Bolívar and José Martí and poets like Rubén Dario and Miguel Hernández with his own ideas. It was hard to distinguish where the model ended and the variation began; where literature was an inspiration or more importantly a way of framing a life that had other determinants. It took me just a few minutes to realize that, right in front of me and in the place I least expected, I had found my dissertation topic.

After Arias finished his speech at the Kennedy, I approached him to introduce myself, and after conversing for a while about the literary references in his speech, I asked him point blank if I could write his biography. It took him a while to understand such an unusual request, but I will always be grateful to him for
accepting my audacious proposal and not questioning me further. I kept to myself the fact that it was not going to be a traditional biography, or a chronology of Arias’s life recounting his most important deeds. After all, I was in graduate school and this was supposed to be a dissertation. But if you think creatively and step out of the box, you can find ways to combine literary studies with a practical approach, represented here by the talented figure of this contemporary Central American politician.

Arias’s life and work were not only rich material for narrative; they were also nourished by the narratives he read, as a part of life’s experience to be told. So my proposal took shape in no time and I ended up writing a literary biography focused primarily on the formative role of literature in the life of this political leader. My research took me twice to Costa Rica. I interviewed Arias on numerous occasions both in his native San José and in Cambridge. I had privileged access to his private library, met his family and interviewed his close advisors, and interacted with numerous personalities from Costa Rica and neighboring countries. After years of academic uncertainty at Harvard, after almost abandoning my studies several times, I had found a niche within the field of Romance Languages and Literatures. I had found that longed-for connection between the humanities and doing something “practical” with my studies. Without being overtly conscious of the process itself, I had learned to step out of the box and look for creative ways to make connections between and among disciplines.

TEACHING IN SEVILLE: INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

I soon realized that the cross-disciplinary connections made in graduate school could also be applied to life itself. After the emotional whirlwind of graduate school, I look back and can’t help but smile at how different my career ended up being from what I had imagined. I married a Spaniard, whom I had met in graduate school, and moved to Seville, Spain. What had been familiar up to that point—the MLA job search, the campus interviews, deciding whether to teach at a college or university—faded away, as if the ocean that separated both continents made that distance unsalvageable. Graduate students tend to be planners—life-long planners, in fact. It must be all of that time spent procrastinating between research papers that gives students so much time to plan what their future is going to look like. I, of course, was not an exception to the rule. And what did life teach me? Making plans is necessary and dreaming about the future is inevitable, but one must be flexible and willing to accept unexpected changes.

After arriving in Spain in 2001, two weeks shy of the worst day in contemporary U.S. history, I found myself with no job and with no understanding of how the Spanish university system worked. I felt helpless for weeks, but then anger and frustration took over and awakened the survival instinct in me. I started investigating, knocking on the doors of several professors of Spanish and Latin American Literature at the University of Seville and meeting with graduate students in my field to learn more about their experiences. I found out that Seville had two public universities (no private universities at the time) whose
organizational system of funcionarios (tenured state employees) and oposiciones (state-run entrance exams for public administration positions) made it impossible for any American citizen to apply for an entry-level or tenure-track teaching position. Those positions were really only accessible to internal candidates and to a few outsiders with enchufes (connections). At the time, there was no fair, legal system to access any kind of teaching position at the public universities.

It became obvious, after days of my walking around the city, that there were plenty of American and Erasmus students in Seville, and that the majority of American students were not directly enrolled at the university. And soon, I began discovering the world of study abroad organizations, and in particular, programs in Seville. The job market in this area was blossoming and I found myself with several job opportunities to teach Spanish language and literature. I was what these types of organizations were looking for: educated in the States, with experience in second language acquisition, a native speaker of Spanish with legal papers to work in Spain and a doctoral degree. It goes without saying that there were very few Spaniards or even Americans who fit the profile (and fewer who were living in Seville), so a new world of opportunities opened right in front of me. I could teach language or almost any literature course, as long as it focused on Spanish-language literature. It did not matter whether it was medieval, baroque or contemporary literature of Spain. The demand was there. I never would have imagined that the graduate courses that I took in areas outside of my specialty were going to come in handy. I was going to reuse my notes, papers, and even the same books. I ended up teaching numerous courses in Golden Age/Baroque Spanish literature, though this hadn’t been my specialty in school.

This is precisely the point and the advice I want to share with graduate students: You do not know what areas you will end up teaching. Every graduate course, in every area, is important. The notes you take, the papers you write—save all your study materials (not only the papers from your thesis or major!)—because once you become a professor and you find yourself in front of a class, the material takes on a new meaning.

Despite my excitement to be teaching in Spain, I soon realized that teaching international students also has its challenges. Classes need to be dynamic and interactive, and the professor must enforce discipline, more so than if he or she were teaching in the States, because students get distracted by their new surroundings. Their concentration and sense of responsibility is not the same when abroad as at their home campuses. It is expected of local professors to bring the culture of the city into the classroom; this is a different ballgame you won’t learn in graduate school, and university professors teaching in the States are not typically required to do.

The role of the college professor who teaches abroad is richer and more complex for the simple fact of teaching in the country (which was my case) where the literary works that are the object of study were written. Autobiographical materials—rich in narrative—like the towns, museums, and cafés that inspired these authors, are all within reach. One must be creative in bringing them into the classroom and in taking students out into the streets and showing them how the
teaching of literature has a direct relation to the new world that surrounds them. There is an immediate, almost palpable, connection between local life and literature that made my career as a professor far more interesting than I had ever imagined it would be.

TEACHING IN SEVILLE: STUDY ABROAD

The step between teaching in a study abroad program and becoming an administrator of one was unexpected. I had been offered the position of Resident Director of Spanish Studies Abroad’s Seville program after teaching Spanish literature at another program of the same nature. After four years in the role of Resident Director, I was promoted to Academic Director of the organization—a position I still hold. This is a fascinating opportunity for anyone with a Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures who wishes either to live abroad or work in the field of international education based in an American home campus. As the program’s Academic Director, I have had the challenging task of modeling curricula for language and content courses and deciding which content courses should be offered in each location, taking into consideration the academic interests of American college students. Part of the challenge also includes participating in the decision-making process of where the organization should open another study abroad destination. Ironically enough, being based in Seville (a place far from the Northeast) has allowed me to keep in greater contact with fellow colleagues than if I were living in the States. This is due to the fact that the Academic Director has to be in contact with the many Spanish departments that choose our organization to be their study abroad provider. Inevitably, this leads to the establishment of a working relationship between our Academic Department and the Spanish faculty members at any given college or university.

Apart from designing programs for American college students wishing to strengthen their study of Spanish language and culture, the Academic Director gets to work closely with college students, helping them make the most out of the cross-cultural experience they have embarked on. One of the most rewarding aspects is advising students academically—in particular, helping them decide which courses are a good fit for them or what experiential learning opportunities (internships, volunteering, tutoring children) are worth embracing. Being an administrator in the field of higher education is an empowering position because it makes one feel that the decisions being made affect and shape how American university students perceive and learn about Hispanic culture and civilization.

My advice to graduate students currently pursuing a degree in the humanities is to think outside of the box. Being a college or university professor is not the only career path for a Ph.D. to follow. A terminal degree, as my graduate advisor said, gives you a set of valuable skills that teach you how to think, analyze, and write critically. These skills are one of the keys to being successful in basically any professional job. As a study abroad professional with more than ten years of experience in the field, I can safely say that there is a boom in international education. The whole concept of sending students to study abroad to a variety of
programs and destinations, for the amount of time that works best for them, has caught on, as has the enrollment in master’s programs of international education. For example, the School of International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont offers seven master’s degrees and professional education programs. According to World Learning’s “Facts and Figures,” as of 2013, 622 students from 49 countries were enrolled in these programs, which is a sixteen percent increase from the 538 students enrolled in 2011 (Word Learning, 2013, p. 2). The offices in colleges or universities that manage international educational experiences have different titles, but they all mean the same thing, such as International Education, Global Education, and Study Abroad, to name a few. Someone with a Ph.D. in either the humanities or social sciences is the ideal candidate to direct such an office. The same applies to study abroad organizations, like mine or many others, which are based in the U.S. Their Senior Academic Advisors or Program Managers are all men and women who have obtained Ph.D.’s in the humanities. This is an attractive path worth following for those of you looking for a more dynamic and cross-cultural career than what being a college or university professor may offer.

My personal life choices took me to Spain, and teaching Spanish literature was the platform to a new world, that of international education and study abroad. I do recognize that my career’s final outcome is not the norm. However, the dots of your own life are right there in front of you—scattered across a blank page and waiting to be connected—just not in numerical order like when we were children. It is up to you to give them the shape and form that best suits your interests. It is your choice to step outside of the box and to find and pursue what you are truly passionate about.

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Academic Director
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