

## PREPARING FOR LIFE OUTSIDE THE ACADEMY: A PRIMER AND RESOURCE GUIDE

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The following document provides suggestions for how to gain professional experience and prepare for a possible career outside the academy. However, the advice will serve you well for life inside the academy, too. Your job search need not be an either-or situation; many people conduct tandem searches, and the preparation you do for one search will also be useful for the other. Ultimately, being proactive and feeling empowered go hand in hand. The information below will help you get started early and make a plan.

When and how can graduate students in the humanities gain professional experience?

### In your teaching

**Create connections with local cultural sites and institutions.** By organizing classroom visits to cultural sites such as museums and libraries or by inviting guests from such institutions to speak or lead workshops in your class, you can develop invaluable connections with people with PhDs working in research and cultural organizations. Follow up after the visit with a thank-you note and a request for an informational interview. By connecting your students with institutions on and off campus, you are also furthering their engagement with broader communities.

**Use technology in the classroom.** By bringing educational technology into the classroom and assigning multimodal projects, you can gain literacy in and master new technological tools that are useful in and beyond academia. You might use educational tools like *Wikispaces*, *Mediathread*, *Courseworks*, or *EdBlogs*, through which you can familiarize yourself with management software, work with HTML or CSS, conduct videoconferences, or engage in collaborative multimedia analysis with your students. You can also familiarize yourself with design-and-presentation software like *Illustrator*, *PowerPoint*, *Keynote*, and *Prezi* by using them to develop and present class materials.

**Act with intention as a mentor to undergraduates and fellow graduate students.** By working with students in office hours or student conferences, you can help students think about their coursework in the context of their larger educational and professional goals. Helping new graduate student teaching assistants improve their pedagogy and sharing your experience, even informally, provide additional ways to further develop your mentorship and professional-development chops. Many institutions and departments offer formal (sometimes even paid!) opportunities in this area through positions such as lead graduate teaching fellow.

## In your research

**Develop new technical skills.** You don't need to be a self-identified digital humanist to have technical skills, and your graduate-school years are a great time to develop them. Many institutions offer resources to help boost your digital and media skills, from video editing and coding to geographic information systems and *Wordpress*. For skill development you can do in your pajamas, try out a Code Academy or *Lynda.com* tutorial on a coding language.

**Manage your dissertation project thoughtfully.** Many employers are interested in project-management experience, and as a dissertation researcher and writer, you will have years of it. Think conscientiously about your research and writing process so you can articulate it to a potential employer. Did you create a timeline for your project? Did you secure funding for the work? Did you report regularly and deliver updates to your adviser about your progress?

**Apply for grants.** Many organizations in the nonprofit or education sector ask for grant-writing experience. Apply for internal and external grants to fund summer research, archival research abroad, or dissertation-completion years. Track the amount of grant funding you receive and be prepared to give the number on a future résumé.

**Present your research.** By attending and presenting your research at conferences in your field, you are gaining presentation skills needed in many jobs, especially, the ability to communicate your research to an audience of specialists and nonspecialists. Seek out opportunities that will force you to translate your research to a general audience. You can also use these conferences as an opportunity to network with people at other universities who may be not only doing scholarship that interests you but also working in hybrid academic-administrative or alt-ac positions that you find appealing. Set up informational interviews with these people to learn about what they do.

**Create connections with faculty members beyond your department.** Connecting with faculty members from other departments is a great way to expand your network not only for academic jobs but also for a broader range of careers. Some of these faculty members may have experience or connections in careers beyond the tenure track. Talking with these faculty members is also an opportunity to practice communicating your research to scholars outside your department.

## As a graduate student leader

**Plan events.** Through the process of proposing, organizing, financing, and managing events such as conferences, roundtables, and workshops, you can gain experience writing project proposals, managing a budget, organizing a team, securing funding or reimbursements, designing publicity materials, and arranging logistics. Be able to talk concretely about your event-planning process and what the event achieved. Did you manage a team of ten graduate students and delegate responsibilities? Did you secure graduate school funding for your event? How many people attended? How many departments and universities were participants from? Can you now point to your *Illustrator* or *Photoshop* know-how?

**Lead meetings.** Chances are you will probably have to lead meetings in a future job. So you might as well practice now. By doing so, you can gain experience setting an agenda, keeping records of proceedings, and presenting information to an audience.

**Negotiate with faculty and administrators.** Negotiating with faculty and administrators might include taking an active role in compiling and presenting queries and recommendations about your program, participating in the graduate student union, being an active member of the graduate student association, and so forth. Think about who you can name as having represented and what concrete goals you can say you achieved through the process.

### **Through internships and jobs**

**Pursue summer jobs and internships.** Consider very early on in your graduate program how you are going to make productive use of your summers for research and career preparation. Applications for most summer positions are due in February or March (though some, such as government and prestigious journalism internships, are due in the fall), so you might want to begin looking in the fall semester and over winter break. Because some summer gigs are part-time, you may be able to spend 15-20 hours a week working at an internship and still make progress on your reading list, prospectus, or dissertation.

**Work during the school year.** Tutoring, translating, and serving as an assistant for an academic often entail only occasional work or a few hours per week. Most institutions also offer part-time on-campus jobs geared toward students. Frequent employers include writing centers, centers for teaching and learning, academic departments, the graduate school, and the graduate student association.

**Apply for on-campus internships.** An increasing number of institutions are offering on-campus internships to graduate students in administrative units around the university. Examples include Columbia University's Fellowship in Academic Administration and the University of Miami's UGrow program. Some internship opportunities are specifically for humanists, such as the Mellon-funded Public Humanities Fellowship at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Do some research to see what is available at your institution.

**Investigate jobs and internships if you are an international student.** International students should keep in mind that they may be restricted from certain types of employment, both during the academic year and during the summer. They often will need special approval even for unpaid internships (which must be advertised as such; an international student cannot accept a paid internship as unpaid to get around this rule). Please check with your institution's office for international students before applying for positions.

## Through volunteer work

Many volunteer opportunities only require a commitment of a few hours per week and are thus easy to fit in not only over the summer but also during the school year. Volunteer experience can be valuable for a résumé; consider using it as an opportunity to put new digital or media skills to work, to demonstrate your organizational and managerial acumen by serving as a volunteer coordinator, or to prove your ability to communicate with a broader audience by writing blog posts or leading tours as a docent.

## By connecting with others

Myriad opportunities exist to leverage and expand your network to explore careers.

- ❖ Follow or connect with people on *Twitter* or *LinkedIn* in industries that interest you and listen to the conversations they are having.
- ❖ Attend conferences and events in industries that interest you.
- ❖ Pursue informational interviews. Think about people you know who work in fields or who have jobs that might interest you. Can you meet them for drinks or coffee and ask about their jobs and career trajectories? Set up a *LinkedIn* profile and connect with friends and acquaintances. Have any of them done PhDs in your field or a related field? What jobs do they have? Send them a message or reach out to them about meeting up.

## Through writing for different audiences

Writing for different audiences could entail writing about your research on a blog or Web site, breaking down your research into manageable bites, or translating what you do for those outside your field. If publishing digitally, seize the opportunity to create multimodal texts or to try out new technical skills. In jobs or internships, take on projects that involve writing in different genres: case studies, briefs, memos, newsletters, and so forth. Such work will help you build a writing portfolio that shows your ability to write for different audiences and in different fields, not only as an individual but also as the voice of an organization.

## How can I balance different types of work?

**Make a work schedule** (and don't forget to leave time for your personal life!). Measure out how many hours per week you spend doing different work-related tasks. Then create a general plan or schedule and stick to it. You *could* spend a whole day preparing your class, but if you want to get other things done, then commit to limiting prep time to the number of hours you have established. Decide when to do certain tasks on the basis of your work preferences: Do you write better in the morning? Then perhaps leave the grading till the afternoon. Do you have small administrative tasks that you can fit in and feel accomplished about when you're mentally drained?

**Create a timeline or an Individual Development Plan (IDP)** to think ahead about when you will explore career options over the course of graduate school. Map out the number of semesters or quarters left to you, marking down when you plan on completing major academic milestones (coursework, qualifying exam, prospectus, defense, etc.). Bear in mind the preparation that will be necessary for such milestones, and plan out your career exploration. Some ideas include

- ❖ conducting a certain number of informational interviews per semester
- ❖ attending a certain number of panels or workshops at your career center
- ❖ creating and fine-tuning a *LinkedIn* profile
- ❖ attending a conference in your field or in a different professional field
- ❖ working a part-time job or completing an internship

To be clear, to create an IDP you don't need to have any idea about what you want to do; in fact, the IDP will help you figure that out. And of course all IDPs are subject to change, because life is subject to change.

**My Next Steps**

Research

Connect

Develop Skills