

HIGHER ED: SOUP TO NUTS

An Exclusive Booklet on
Academic Career
Development



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Over the past few years, Chronicle reporters and editors have heard one message loud and clear: The academic job market is changing in remarkable and unprecedented ways. For graduate students and other young scholars, keeping up with those changes just gets more and more difficult.

That's why we decided to create Vitae, an online community built expressly for students, faculty, and administrators. Vitae has a larger-than-ever database of academic jobs, a free dossier service that lets scholars manage their professional documents, and a network that helps those scholars connect with colleagues, mentors, and collaborators. Today, I'd like to introduce another feature of Vitae: our daily news and advice.

To start, we've assembled a team of several dozen experts called Vitae Voices. These are thoughtful insiders—graduate students, professors, career coaches, HR gurus, alt-academic pioneers—who speak on career-development strategies: How to land a job. How to negotiate. How to be a better teacher or a more-efficient writer.

It's vitally important for young scholars to understand academic labor, too. That's why our two reporters, Stacey Patton and Sydni Dunn, work to answer questions we hear from real academics: How does a digital humanist assemble a tenure portfolio? Why are so many Ph.D. candidates jumping ship after years of study?

In this booklet, you'll find a small sample of the advice and commentary on Vitae. We think there's stuff here that might be of help to graduate students—and to you, the experts who provide them with counsel.

We'd like to invite you and your students to check us out online at chroniclevitae.com. Create a free account to explore our free dossier service, search out colleagues, follow authors, and receive our weekly email digest of news and advice. Let us know what you think: What could we do more of? What could we do better? We're eager to have you join the conversation. Thanks much.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brock Read'.

Brock Read
Editor, Vitae



Career
Development

Graduate
School

Mentoring
and Advising

Scholarly Work

Social Issues

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Negotiation 101

SYDNI DUNN
Staff Reporter, Vitae

Bravo! You've just managed to score an academic job offer. Now comes the awkward question: Should you negotiate for a better salary or lifestyle? Or, with the job market as bleak as it is, is it better to just smile and sign on the dotted line?

In recent weeks, negotiation has been the talk of the online academic community. The surge in commentary can be traced to a popular blog, the Philosophy Smoker, where a job candidate identified only as "W" detailed how her recent tenure-track job offer from Nazareth College of Rochester was rescinded when she tried to negotiate the contract terms.

"W", negotiating by email, asked for an increase in her starting salary; a semester of maternity leave; a pre-tenure sabbatical; no more than three new class preps per year for the first three years; and a start date in 2015 academic in order to complete her postdoc. The response from the university? Thanks, but no thanks.

We wondered: How often does this happen? And what should young academics know about negotiation? We asked some experts in academic human resources. Here's what they had to say:

David Evans (vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty at Buena Vista U.): Know your absolutes.

First, you need to know the things you want that are absolute—the ones that, if you don't get them, you won't take the job. These need to be the priority in any negotiation. I think that one of W's errors was providing a basically unranked list of rather unrealistic requests rather than asking for the really key things she'd need to take the job.

I personally have had very good luck as a candidate by just being honest about what I wanted. I knew I was going to take my current job and indicated that to the president. I simply laid out my current salary and some other issues and said I would take the job anyhow, but would be most grateful for some additional considerations, which I got. This is not always a plausible strategy, however, because not everyone negotiates in good faith, and you have to use your judgment and be very careful.

Gene Fant (executive vice president for academic administration at Union U.): Be reasonable, be transparent.

Your doctoral-program mentors might try to convince you that you're weak if you aren't aggressive, or if you don't treat the hiring institution as if it were a large research institution. Don't let them. You must be reasonable.

I always recommend that candidates be transparent in their objectives and in their goals. Don't talk your way into a job that you will hate just to have a job. Candidates who won't be happy teaching represent themselves as teachers in order to get jobs all the time. And the reverse happens as well. It is a buyer's market out there right now, but applicants have to realize that every job, and every institution, has a certain reality and that being out of step with that reality helps no one.

Paula Krebs (dean of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at Bridgewater State U.): Find out what's negotiable.

Ask the dean at your campus interview, or on the offer phone call, which areas are negotiable and which aren't. I try to lay that out for candidates so they don't have unrealistic expecta-

tions up front. Some colleges may allow negotiation on salary but not on moving expenses. Some may have course releases that they can offer but not travel money. Some may be able to give money for software or hardware but not for a course release. Ask what's negotiable, so you don't waste your breath.

Allison Vaillancourt (vice president for institutional effectiveness and human resources at the U. of Arizona): Stop writing, start talking.

Begin by expressing gratitude for the opportunity, and frame all requests in terms of how much you want to make the offer work.

Stop writing and start talking. It can be difficult to convey appropriate tone in email, and the medium does not give us an opportunity to gauge if we are off-track in our requests.

Ask more questions. "My research on salaries in teaching-intensive four-year institutions indicates that most assistant professors are earning in the neighborhood of \$65,000. Is that within the scope of possibility here?" or perhaps, "Every institution has different parameters when it comes to negotiating an offer. Can you tell me where there is wiggle room in your offer?"

Jonathan Rees (professor of history at Colorado State U. at Pueblo): At the very least, negotiate your salary.

Not negotiating over salary my first year on the tenure track was the biggest mistake I've ever made in my career. That's because the salary a professor starts at is the floor from which all future salary increases start. Therefore, the (let's say) \$1,000 per year that you miss out on by not negotiating is a \$1,000 per year that you won't get every single year that you stay with that employer. That can add up to a significant amount of money really, really fast.

Negotiation is expected, certainly over money and probably over other things, too. While your load the first year on the job only lasts a year, your salary is permanent. If you don't at the very least negotiate over that, you're hurting yourself more than you might ever imagine.

Noliwe Rooks (associate professor of Africana studies and feminist, gender, and sexuality studies at Cornell U.): Women, don't demur.

It's always hard to negotiate when you might actually be relieved and happy just to get an offer. Women in particular have a difficult time asking for more: We tend to want people to just sort of notice how fabulous we are and pay us what they think we are worth.

I think, though, that the best piece of advice I have received about negotiating is to do as much research as possible as to what is acceptable for that particular institution. Specific requests are not all appropriate for any every school, as we saw in the negotiation "horror story."

The Professor Is In: Choosing the Right Holding Pattern

 **KAREN KELSKY**
Academic Career Coach
at The Professor Is In

The job search isn't looking so great (I'm an ABD candidate in biological anthropology with big grants and first author pubs under a well-known advisor, but no takers so far). I am trying to have a number of other options explored well in advance, including collaborating on postdoc fellowship applications.

However, if nothing comes through by this summer, what is the best thing for me to do for the next year? Should I: 1) attempt to cobble together some adjunct classes? 2) try to get a nonacademic job that pays better (say, as a statistician at the Department of Labor)? Or 3) live off my parents and my small savings and just focus on publishing my dissertation results and other papers? I am feeling rather defeated, but I'm not ready to break up with academia.

All three of these are legitimate options, and I'd need to know more details about each to help you decide among them. For now, let me tell you what issues you should consider when choosing.

Re: 1). Adjuncting is a good short-term option as long as you can manage time and money while doing it. That is, keep enough time apart to be able to remain active in publishing, submitting proposals to conferences, and so on. And earn enough to pay your bills without falling into any (further) debt.

Also note that I said "short-term." Give yourself a clear end-date: One year? Two years? Even three years of adjuncting is an option, but I would strongly advise against continuing longer than that. Adjuncting is inherently exploitative and should be used strategically and instrumentally by job seekers only insofar as it serves their needs and goals. Search

committees do not hold adjuncting against candidates; the issue at hand is how you depict the adjuncting in your job materials. More on that below.

Now, re: 2). The nonacademic job is an excellent option, since it will likely pay decent money and allow you to maintain a modicum of financial solvency and gain the security of health insurance.

The question here is whether you can find the time to continue research and writing. The nonacademic job can be a bit more difficult to come back from in terms of tenure-track competitiveness. Academia is still insular and cultish (although I think this is fraying from the economic meltdown on all sides), and nonacademic work can signal a certain lack of investment in the cult. (Be aware, readers, that this is also very field-dependent. Some fields are open to exchanges between industry or government work and the academy. Bio-anthro is moderately so.)

However, again, it is not the end of your tenure-track hopes as long as you continue to publish, and depict your work appropriately in your job-market materials.

Finally, 3): Living off your parents and savings is an option that Ph.D.'s who have that option increasingly utilize. I would probably suggest that you combine 1) and 3). So you'd live with your parents to save money and adjunct to gain teaching experience, but you'd limit the amount of adjuncting to the minimum so that you can continue to publish.

And again, set a very firm time limit on this entire phase of your life. It seems to me that one year of living with your parents would likely be the outer limit, but that's me.

As I indicate above, none of these things spell death to your tenure-track chances, as long as you frame them correctly in your job letters. Too many candidates inadvertently and unconsciously write job letters that depict them as adjuncts—telling a story of short-term expediency rather than a longer-term plan for a research or scholarly trajectory. This is a mistake. An understandable mistake, to be sure, but still a mistake, because the tenure-track search committee is not hiring an adjunct.

Write letters that frame your teaching experience as serving the needs and expectations of the tenure-track job to which you are applying. Similarly, nonacademic work experience can figure in your job materials, but in an indirect way that foregrounds your academic identity and output. As in all things, it's not just what you say, but how you say it.

Ask your mentors or editors to review your documents to make sure they are communicating a “tenure-track identity.” If you tell a desperate and emotional story about the “gap,” the gap will loom large in your record. If you tell a factual story about your academic output, the gap will appear minimal and/or irrelevant.

Once a Faculty Member...

**PAULA KREBS**Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences at
Bridgewater State University

I shook a lot of hands at a recent ceremony honoring our new students—freshmen and transfers—who made the Dean’s List in their first semester. As one guy clasped my hand on stage, he paused. “Nice to see you again,” he said. I tried to remember where I knew him from.

The problem is, I see so few students in my job. Despite all the students on our “lists,” deans like me end up spending most of our days in meetings with other administrators and with faculty members. The problems we solve (or try to) are curricular, or they’re about hiring, or maybe they’re about promotion or tenure. I’m one of those deans who never sees the students who are “sent to the dean.” Student issues all go through the associate dean.

I can’t teach as part of my job because teaching is reserved for members of the faculty union. Realistically, I couldn’t teach anyway—my calendar is too erratic, too subject to other people’s schedules.

And I don’t miss teaching, most of the time. I moved into administration because I wanted to be able to make change for more than just the students I saw in my classes, and I’m trying to bring to scale some ideas that I think will make a difference.

Still, as everyone before me who has moved into administration after teaching has discovered, it’s odd to work for students without working with them. It doesn’t feel like it’s good for me to spend all my time with people over 35.

What is the advantage of having seasoned faculty members become academic administrators? Does our experience in the classroom mean we have special insights on the structures and functions of higher education? I like to think that having been a teacher (a pretty

good one, actually) means I can help other folks become better teachers. Not that it’s my role to tell them how to teach, of course. Or how to do their research. But I can help them figure out what they need to do—and what they need—in order to do their jobs well. And I can sometimes get them the resources for that.

My boss’s mantra, when he’s faced with a tough situation, a conflict, a decision: What’s in the best interests of the students? I hope that having been a faculty member for a long time gives me a better sense of how to answer that question when I’m faced with tough choices. And sometimes I even think I’m in a better position to answer it now that I’m not a faculty member.

When I was a faculty member, I thought in faculty terms, thought as a department chair, thought about protecting faculty interests. And faculty interests are usually student interests, of course. After all, the working conditions of the faculty are the learning conditions of the students.

I find, in my current position, though, that I sometimes clash with faculty when their priorities bump up against what I (now an administrator, admittedly) see as the best interests of the students. These are not soul-shaking conflicts; they’re often relatively small issues. Perhaps I think a department should incorporate more digital work into its curriculum to prepare students for the world they’ll face after they graduate. But maybe, oddly enough, the department is not interested in having a dean tell it how to teach. Having been a feisty faculty member, I remember how it felt to have administrators poke their noses into faculty business, and I know that such interventions would not end well for me.

I do know my place. It's to help faculty do their best work. But that still leaves me with a slight hole in my career where the students used to be. Students, unlike faculty, give you instant gratification. You can see them learn, watch their progress over the course of a semester or through a major. They grow so much in four years, and you feel as if you've had something to do with that. I miss the pride that comes with teaching—and the gratitude, too, if truth be told. Administrators don't see a lot of rapid progress, and we don't get a lot of gratitude. (We get other things, like bigger paychecks.)

So after my first year as a dean, in an effort to make some fleeting, pitiful contact with students, I organized a Labor Day event—after move-in, but before classes—for any of the new first-year students who cared to take a chance on Breakfast with the Dean.

It was a good breakfast. Eggs, pancakes, sausage, bacon. But as could have been predicted, few students were interested in getting up on Labor Day morning.

A handful signed up. A few of them showed. I managed to corral a few passersby into sitting down with us as well. I gave them a brief, chatty welcome and did some icebreakers so everyone could get to know each other.

We ate. We drank coffee. The ones I'd pulled in off the street slunk off at the first opportunity. But a few stuck around. They seemed to like each other. They were still chatting when I left.

Then, at the reception after the Dean's List ceremony, the student who'd shaken my hand reminded me why I knew him. He was one of the Breakfast with the Dean crew. A small group of the students who attended became friends, and three of them made the Dean's List at the end of the semester. They still hang out together.

That's progress. That's something I can point to. He even thanked me.

I'm already planning a lunch.

The Cost-Conscious Case for Taking Your Grad Studies Abroad

**LAURA SMITH**Master's Candidate in Journalism
at New York University

When I was deep in the throes of my graduate-school search, debating the merits of several competing journalism programs, I met a woman who urged me to apply to a similar, less-expensive option. There was just one catch: The program was in Beijing.

I nodded, smiled, and promptly forgot her advice.

But last month, as I wrote about financial advice for graduate students, I thought of that woman again. Had I made a mistake by not considering schools abroad?

When I worked for Pearson, the multinational publishing conglomerate, I came across “An Avalanche Is Coming,” a 2013 report arguing that higher ed is failing to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The paper sounded some alarms that you’ve undoubtedly heard before—that in the U.S., student debt is rising; that the cost of a degree is rising just as its value in the marketplace is diminishing. But it adopted hopeful rhetoric about students: “In the 21st century, the student consumer is king,” it said, because students can “shop globally for the best higher education offerings.”

Being a king (or queen) sounded infinitely more appealing than what I actually was in grad school: broke.

So as my husband considers applying to graduate school, I’ve spent some time researching the pros and cons of graduate study abroad. If we’re going to invest in another graduate degree, we want more bang for fewer bucks!

Here’s what I’ve found: Yes, there are many well-regarded programs overseas. And yes, many of them are much cheaper than com-

parable programs in the United States. The Global Higher Education rankings reported in 2010 that the average annual price tag of U.S. universities was \$13,856, while the average cost was \$7,692 in Australia, \$5,288 in the United Kingdom, \$5,274 in Canada, \$3,118 in New Zealand, and \$585 in France.

While some schools have higher prices for students coming from other countries, universities outside the U.S. are still markedly, sometimes dramatically, cheaper than their American counterparts. This is true even when you factor in travel expenditures and the cost of living—and especially when you consider that many universities in the European Union and other countries offer one-year graduate programs.

Just ask Amelia Hagan. When she began looking for tourism-administration programs so she could pursue work as an event planner, George Washington University’s master’s program routinely popped up in her Google searches, but Hagan was daunted by the roughly \$90,000 price tag on the two-year degree. That, along with the high cost of living in D.C., made the program unappealing. At the urging of a friend, she expanded her search to include schools abroad. She is now in a one-year master’s program at the University of Brighton, in Britain, where she estimates her degree will cost her \$20,000.

For Kate Newman, the decision to study abroad was a no-brainer. She briefly considered pursuing a master’s in international affairs at Georgetown University, until she calculated that the program would have left her with five-figure debt. Instead she applied to Australian National University, attended on a full scholarship, and never looked back.

Of course, it's not always that simple—not even close. Is overseas study a good deal for you? Here are a few steps to take to reach an answer:

Look past tuition.

Saad Rizvi, one of the authors of the “Avalanche” paper and a senior vice president at Pearson, says American students need to consider much more than just sticker price. While international schools tend to be cheaper, schools in the U.S. have larger endowments and often more opportunities for fellowships, especially for Ph.D. students. “U.S. universities are some of the best-funded out there,” Rizvi says.

Additionally, most federal and state governments, along with private charities, don't offer scholarships and grants for international study (though many students can still receive Stafford loans).

Explore emerging markets.

For those still interested in looking for fellowship money abroad, Rizvi suggests investigating emerging markets like Singapore, China, and Malaysia. “They have booming economies,” he says, “and they want to build their education systems to last.” The National University of Singapore, for example, has many research opportunities; in fact, Rizvi notes, it'll even foot the bill for students who promise to work for the Singaporean government or a company registered in Singapore for three years after they graduate.

Be smart (but open-minded) about quality.

Paying less for a degree sounds great, but are these schools offering a comparable education? For some students, the answer will certainly be “yes.” Amelia Hagan tells me that she finds the course offerings and curricula in Britain surpass those in the States: “The course I'm doing here,” she says, “is much more specific than the GWU one would have been.”

There's a tendency among American students to think that only the schools we've heard of are good, but The Times Higher Education's World University Rankings top-50 list is filled with universities outside the United States. On the other hand, while the National University of Singapore is No. 26 in those rankings, an employer in the U.S. might still be skeptical of a degree from a university they've never heard of.

There are ways to combat this. One suggestion, from a 2010 U.S. News article by Amanda Ruggeri: “Frame the university for the hiring manager.” In other words, be prepared to explain why your decision to study abroad was more than just a cost-saving measure; it should advance your own intellectual and professional goals, too. And if you have to explain that the institution's a good one, explain away. It's a fine idea to “state the school's ranking or acceptance rate high on the résumé,” Ruggeri writes.

Know your field.

Do the skills acquired abroad translate into jobs back in the States? In a lot of cases, sure. Rizvi points out that there are benefits to an international degree: “Many companies are now having to work across multinational themes and collaborating across time zones. It is becoming increasingly important to have a global perspective,” he says.

In a number of fields, he adds, global experience is “a necessary step to progress to senior positions”—so studying abroad can be an asset that “gives people an edge.”

That said, this logic doesn't apply across the board. Studying abroad made sense for Kate Newman, because her degree is in international relations. But there are still plenty of degrees that require expertise better obtained on this side of the pond. For instance, if you plan to practice law exclusively in the U.S., it's certainly better to stay stateside.

One more thing to consider: As foreign universities become increasingly specialized, they're working harder "to establish credibility within certain fields," says Rizvi. For example, Queen Mary University, in London, has made a concerted effort to become a premier program for the study of British history. So if you're looking for a very specialized program, there may be a school abroad that's esteemed for its role in that niche.

Search for alliances.

Rizvi also points out that the employment climate is changing. People simply aren't staying in their jobs for as long as they used to. So increasingly, he says, employers care less about the "brand" of your degree than the actual skills you can demonstrate right off the bat.

So when you're looking abroad for a graduate program, it's important to consider how closely that program is allied with employers. "Some universities really take pride in creating practical connections with employers," Rizvi says, "so you graduate with great knowledge but also with a portfolio" of work experience when you come back to the States.

Think about where you'll be comfortable.

I'm saving this one for last because it should almost go without saying: When you're deciding whether to study abroad, you'll want to consider much more than cost and quality. By all means, you should research daily life in the countries where you're thinking about studying. You should make sure to find out what programs the institutions you're considering have in place to support international students.

And you should get a read on how many foreign students there are at those universities: A robust international student body could make acclimating easier.

In the end, there's no one-size-fits-all answer on whether to attend grad school abroad. In my case, it's tough to say if I made the right choice by sticking stateside. There's a temptation to reinforce the decisions we've already made, but I'm happy with my program.

One thing I can say for sure, though, is that if and when my husband applies to graduate school, we'll be broadening the boundaries of our search. If you're at all open to living overseas, restricting your search to the States no longer makes a great deal of sense.

The Six Stages of Graduate Education



WILLIAM PANNAPACKER

Professor of English, Faculty Director of the Digital Liberal Arts Initiative of the Great Lakes Colleges Association, and Director of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Scholars Program in the Arts and Humanities at Hope College

I spent six years in my Ph.D. program. Looking back, I think the experience had six relatively distinct stages:

Application Year: “This graduate program will be great. I’ll get to study the things I enjoyed as an undergraduate, and they’re going to pay me enough to get by in an exciting new city. And when it’s all done, I’ll become a professor and get to write books and teach classes at a research university or maybe a liberal-arts college. I won’t be rich, but I’ll be comfortable, and I’ll be doing useful work without having to sell out.”

Years 1-2: “This is really hard. Everybody speaks in ‘theory’ all the time, and they all seem to know so much more than I do. And I’m taking on all kinds of extra work as a research assistant so I can pay my rent. How can I possibly read 2,000 pages a week, keep up with my research projects, and learn a second foreign language? I’m going to fail my qualifying exams. I feel like an imposter. Maybe I should leave.”

Year 3: “OK, maybe I can do this. I did pass my exams, and I won an essay prize and published a few things. Teaching sections for two different courses is hard, but I’m learning a lot, and I have plenty of time ahead of me. I’m enjoying reading books, gathering research materials, and thinking about my project, and I can make real progress on writing the dissertation in the summer.”

Year 4: “If I’m going to make any progress on my dissertation—which I’m starting not to like—I can’t keep teaching so many sections, research assisting in the summer, and adjuncting on the side. Nobody but my adviser cares about the dissertation. I’m getting worried about all those recent graduates who haven’t found jobs, except as adjuncts and postdocs. But everyone says the market has to improve.”

Year 5: “I’m 30, and it seems like everyone I grew with up has a steady job and a real life. I’ve sunk so much time and money into this career path, but the academic market isn’t improving. I hate my dissertation, but I have to finish it. Let me take on some other, shorter writing projects. I should borrow some money, but what if I can’t find a job? I’d better start going to those alternative career panels. (I just hope no one sees me.) I’m starting to feel depressed. I wonder if there are any adjunct jobs I can find to pay down my credit cards this year?”

Year 6: “The job market was supposed to change, but it seems like hardly anyone is finding an academic position: just adjunct work. I’ve got a dissertation completion fellowship, but it only covers about half of my living expenses. I’ve had to borrow a fearful amount of money. I rarely leave my room; I’m depressed all the time, and dealing with stress-related ailments. (I’m spending too much time scanning the Internet looking for positions of any kind for which I might be qualified, even though I still want to be a professor.) A decision has been made: This dissertation is never going to be perfect enough: Here, just take it, and please let me go.”

And after year as a part-time lecturer, and an expensive and stressful season of interviews, I found an academic position at a liberal-arts college in the Midwest. Despite my obvious shortcomings, I was one of the lucky ones—there's no way I deserved a job more than many who did not find one. And it's much, much harder today than it was then.

The happiest moments of graduate school for me were getting accepted with funding into a good program and the first year after my qualifying exams: when the future seemed full of potential. Apart from those times, graduate school was a struggle to keep up, followed by a slow descent into depression and resignation. Just because I had a positive final outcome—after several difficult years—doesn't mean that reforms aren't needed. It's not enough to say, "I made it."

I think it's important to provide the financial support needed to allow graduate students to finish quickly without significant debt; programs should limit enrollments, if necessary, to make that possible. The dissertation should not be such an isolating experience; it's time for doctoral programs to accept more collaborative forms of scholarly production. Instead of shaming students away from nonacademic career paths, programs should encourage them to explore alternatives to traditional academic careers. Most of all, the entire profession should organize itself to reverse the trend towards casualization of academic employment.

The implied contract of graduate school is that one accepts several years of low wages in return for a good chance of finding a position in higher education. That's exactly what I thought I was getting into, and most prospective graduate students still think that. More than anything else, on top of the isolation of the dissertation writing process, it was the fear of unemployment—and the perception that one had to be "perfect" to have a chance at getting a position—that produced the unhappy final stages of my graduate education.

It's risky to assume that one's experiences are representative of an entire institution, but whether or not that is the case, I think there is a consensus that graduate education—and the academic labor system—are in need of substantial reforms. And I would argue that prospective students and their advisors should seek out programs that are implementing them.

The Amazing Adventures of the Comic-Book Dissertator

SYDNI DUNN

Staff Reporter, Vitae

If a picture is worth a thousand words, Nick Sousanis likes to joke, his dissertation has exceeded the standard length and then some.

Sousanis, a sixth-year doctoral candidate in interdisciplinary studies at Columbia University's Teachers College, gets to deliver that line a lot. He is, after all, doing something pretty gutsy with his academic opus: completing the whole thing in comic-book form.

A quick glance at his dissertation—“Unflattening: A Visual-Verbal Inquiry Into Learning in Many Dimensions”—makes clear that it's a stark deviation from the traditional, oft-expected monograph. Flip to one page, and you'll find a series of intricately drawn eyeballs interspersed with a quote from Mikhail Bakhtin about “our own monolithic and closed world.” Turn to another, and you'll see a rendering of a human face, slightly submerged in water, alongside several notes about the concept of immersion.

“Text is powerful and useful,” Sousanis says, “and it shouldn't be thrown away because someone did something with comics. But why are we privileging one form over the others?”

It's a question more and more academics are asking. As digital projects become more prevalent and as more scholars brainstorm ways to make graduate work user-friendly and widely accessible, it's clear that doctoral study is evolving. At the center of that change is the dissertation.

Sousanis' work is just one example of this evolution, says Sidonie Smith, director of the Institute for the Humanities at University of Michigan, who is a former president of the Modern Language Association. Smith has also seen dissertations presented as series of articles, as public blogs, and as interactive digital projects, to name a few.

“‘One size fits all’ is no longer a tenable model,” Smith says. “We had a system for long time where there were two modes of communication: the book and the article. Now, all these changes are coming about. We ask, ‘What is the best form for what I'm trying to get at here? For the intervention I want to make? For the shape of the project?’ That serves the people better.”

But does it serve the scholars themselves? That remains to be seen. To some academics, alternative dissertations can seem innovative; to others, they can seem unserious. A comic-book dissertation might sound fun, but preparing to defend the thing? That can make extra work for the author and the advisors, as Sousanis can attest.

A Project of Comic Proportions

Sousanis' relationship with comics has been a long one. He doodled as a child; developed his first superhero comic, “Lockerman,” in junior high; and continued serializing that character's adventures through the end of high school. In college, he dabbled in a few side projects. But he didn't get serious about the artform until after college, when he found himself running an arts-and-culture webzine in Detroit.

During his time there he participated in several art shows using comic work. For one exhibition—on games as art—Sousanis wrote an essay, in comic form, about the history and philosophy of gaming.

“If there was an ‘aha moment,’ it was having made this piece,” he says. “It really demonstrated that I could reach a wide audience and still convey deep concepts.”

When he arrived at Columbia, he shared the piece on games and suggested to his advisors that he could do the same type of work with a focus on education. Thus his unorthodox dissertation came alive.

The work is now in its final stages, and the medium is a huge part of the message. Sousanis argues that, by interweaving visual and textual elements, comics open up avenues for creating and learning that aren't possible through writing alone. The dissertation comprises a series of chapters, each representing a different dimension of learning.

When discussing perception beyond the visual sense, for example, Sousanis depicts his dog, Sledge, navigating deep woods in the darkness. The dog uses many modes of perception to experience the world—incredible hearing, night vision, a strong sense of smell, and an acute concept of time. In doing so, Sousanis writes, the dog accesses dimensions of experience that humans can't fathom. In other words: Perception and thinking come in many forms.

"We make sense of the world beyond text," he says. "The visual system is really powerful. I don't think of this work as illustration. Rather than illustrating things, the images and the composition are the thinking."

An Advising 'Rabbit Hole'

"So how did I get away with it?" he asks, laughing. "I didn't think that it was that big of a deal. You can be just as smart with a comic."

Still, he had to make a convincing case for a nontraditional format. "My approach was 'Why not?' Then I realized part of the dissertation also had to be 'Why?' I had to show why comics do what they do."

His advisors, all new to comics, bought in. "I'm of a generation where 'comic' means Superman," says Robbie McClintock, one of those advisors and an emeritus professor of the historical and philosophical foundations of education. "But his work as an artist is reflective of visual thinking. The images that he's constructing, his artwork, fits very well with the intentions of his dissertation."

It's one thing to sign off on the concept; it's another thing to shepherd it to a successful defense. The advisors, just like the author, were in uncharted territory. Ruth Vinz, Sousanis' primary advisor and the chair of the arts and humanities department, admits that she wasn't initially sure how much help she'd be able to provide.

In the early stages, advisor and student met regularly, and Sousanis guided Vinz through his frames. They discussed where the sketches might lead, which concepts he was trying to demonstrate, and which parts of the process he had yet to understand. "These were conversations around little lines and squiggles, sometimes," Vinz says.

Other times, Sousanis brought in pages, and he and Vinz just talked about them. Over time, Vinz says, she became a better reader of his work.

"It's a bit like reading a poet that you haven't managed to get to know beyond the obvious words," Vinz says. "One day, you suddenly fall like Alice through the rabbit hole, and this completely different way of seeing and understanding the medium in front of you opens up."

Between the steep learning curve and the detailed discussions of how image and text interact, the project has been time-consuming for both advisors. Though comics are generally thought to be quick reads, McClintock says that Sousanis' work actually takes more time and analysis than most traditional dissertations.

Sousanis continues to send his committee progress reports, and they provide feedback on both the visual and textual aspects of the comic. There have been few major revisions so far. McClintock says he expects that Sousanis will be well-prepared to defend.

Sousanis is hoping the defense will come in late April. He's just shy of 100 pages, with a final target of 120.

After all these years, he says, he's confident about his work. But he admits that he's had to overcome his own hesitations about whether the comic form would count and whether he should include a larger text component. But, he says: "I felt I shouldn't hedge."

"If I was going to argue that this is relevant," he says, "I had to jump in all the way."

Meeting Halfway

Other students who are taking on alternative dissertations are a bit more cautious. Dani Spinosa, a fifth-year doctoral student in the department of English at York University, is writing her dissertation on a publicly available blog. But for her defense, she'll be turning her blog posts into a monograph.

"That wasn't totally my decision," Spinosa says. She had the blessing of her immediate advisors to defend her work in blog form. But others were less enthused. "Chairs and the head of the graduate department said a blog is not a dissertation. The print version is half-way between what the department wanted and what I was willing to give."

But creating the print version means double the work. In addition to publishing to her research to the blog, she is editing and reworking the posts to recast them as cohesive book chapters. She is also incorporating comments from the blog into the print version, turning them into footnotes.

"What I've edited so far still retains some of the fragmentation of the individual posts, which I like," she says. "I don't want the process to be a distant past when I defend the print version."

So why publish the dissertation online when you know it won't be evaluated that way? Spinosa says she's doing so because the blog format fits her dissertation topic. Her work, which focuses on the texts of 11 poets, seeks to reconcile political philosophies of post-anarchism and adapt them into a literary theory of reading and actively engaging with the texts.

"My work complicates this issue of authorship, the supposed authority of the author of a text," she explains. "The whole point of the dissertation is to signal that authority of the writer and break that down. The idea of authority of ridiculous. It's all a communal process, all copying someone else."

Every Tuesday she publishes a piece of her dissertation and offers it up for anyone to read and critique. "What everyone is seeing is a first draft," she says. "I'm exposing that not only to my committee, but to everyone. There's a pressure to write usable, publishable content every week."

Andy Weaver, Spinosa's primary advisor and an associate professor in the department of English at York, is her most faithful reader. He checks out each of the weekly posts and offers comments.

This is the first dissertation of this type he has supervised, he says, and he was both "intrigued and hesitant" when the idea was proposed. Though he believes the quality of a dissertation is more important than the form, he says, he worries that some of the scholars who could one day give Spinosa a job might not be as open to the medium.

"As far as I know, my colleagues have been supportive of Dani's blog dissertation," he says. "The only concern I've heard from colleagues is that nontraditional blogs can sometimes be overlooked by hiring committees. On the other hand, some hiring committees are intrigued by nontraditional dissertations, since it shows an ability to think creatively and independently."

'A Double-Edged Sword'

The job market is a concern for both Sousanis and Spinosa. While they hope they will stand out for their creativity, they also worry that their outside-the-box approaches could hinder their chances of getting hired.

"This might make me seem cutting-edge," Spinosa says, "but it could also hurt me in some ways. People might not think this is adequate. It's a double-edged sword."

Sousanis agrees. There's a lot of interest in alternative dissertation models, he says, but "I'm not sure if there are homes for us yet."

Smith, a former liaison for the MLA's Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature, said these are "legitimate concerns." "We're in this moment of change," she says, "but we're at the early part of this."

There are still many hiring committees that may consider a deviation from the standard model "an erosion of tradition," she says. "My prediction is in another couple decades, there will be a lot of different forms, a lot more collaboration."

Until then, students who take on alternative dissertations, as well as those who go the traditional route, need to articulate the quality of the research, not the form.

For Sousanis, though, form and quality go hand in hand. "I can say this about my work: my comics are smarter than I am and smarter than I would be in just text," he says.

And even if the format doesn't score extra points with his dissertation committee, it might help him start a few conversations. "I hand this out to people on the street," he says of the comic book. Between that and the blog, he says, "people around the world are reading a doctoral dissertation, and that's really exciting."

When It Comes to Mentoring, the More the Merrier



KERRY ANN ROCKQUEMORE
President at National Center for
Faculty Development & Diversity

As head of a faculty-development center, I visit a different college campus nearly every week. By far the most common complaint I hear from tenure-track faculty members is about a lack of mentoring: “Mentorship just doesn’t exist at this university,” for example, or “We’ve all been matched with a mentor but I only see mine once a year.”

And there’s truth in that venting: While everyone seems to agree that mentoring is crucial to new faculty success, many campuses have no formal mentorship program. Others have mentor-matching programs that are only marginally effective.

There are a few reasons why many colleges take such a flawed approach to mentoring. First, it’s invisible, time-intensive, and unrewarded labor. In a context of shrinking resources and greater expectations, it can quickly fall to the bottom of a busy professor’s priority list. Second, informal mentoring is often treated like a gift or a favor that’s bestowed upon junior faculty members only when we like them, when they behave in appropriately deferential ways, when their needs support our agenda. The inevitable result is that some new faculty members get mentored well and others don’t get mentored at all.

But there’s another culprit: When there’s no consistent definition of mentoring, everyone’s in trouble. I often ask people what “mentoring” means to them, and I get a shockingly wide range of responses. For some faculty, it’s an all-encompassing, quasi-parental relationship. For others, it’s an obligatory 20-minute coffee once a year to answer questions.

Now, if you’re getting all the support you want and need to be successful, great. Keep doing what you’re doing. But if you’re not getting the information, resources, access, connections,

sponsorship, and encouragement you need, it’s time to ditch the vague notion of “mentoring” and get in the habit of asking yourself: What do I need, and where’s the best place to get it? Here’s how to do that:

Stop looking for a guru.

Sure, it’d be nice to have your own personal (Dr.) Yoda instructing you in the ways of the academic force. But the idea that one person can meet all your mentoring needs and guide you throughout your career is a fantasy.

So stop searching for that one special someone. Focus instead on building a broad and deep network of people who can assist you.

Identify your needs.

Draft a list and be specific. Do you need productivity tips and professional-development advice? Encouragement and emotional support? Intellectual community? A role model? Someone to keep you on task or hold you accountable for your research? Access to grants or other opportunities? Substantive feedback on your performance?

Chances are that several of these are important to you—and that only some of them are being fulfilled.

Find the gaps ...

Map out your current mentoring network to determine which needs are being met, who’s meeting them, and where the gaps are.

I’ve watched hundreds of new faculty members fill out a Mentor Map. And I’ve seen the same pattern over and over: They realize they’ve relied almost exclusively on one or two people—typically their dissertation or postdoc advisor—to meet all of their needs.

If you want to broaden your network of support, pick one area that would help you move forward. In other words, what do you need right now? Maybe you need people to critique your manuscripts. In that case, it may be time to cultivate a network of readers, engage a professional editor to polish and format your manuscripts prior to submission, or start taking colleagues up on their offers to read (or discuss) your work. Wouldn't it be amazing to have a number of trusted assessors who could read your manuscripts at various stages, respond to specific questions, help you to target appropriate journals, and assist you when you get stuck?

... and go about plugging them.

But how to find the right people? Start by soliciting advice from colleagues who already have what you seek.

If you want to apply for a grant from a particular funding agency, who better to ask than a colleague who has recently received funding from that source? If you're struggling to find enough time for your work and children, why not seek out a colleague who has mastered the art of time management as an academic parent? And if you're struggling with a specific teaching issue, why not ask that award-winning colleague down the hall for some input or head over to your university's center for teaching excellence?

Wouldn't that be far more effective than repeatedly turning to a mentor you've been matched with who has never written a grant, has no children, and employs a teaching style that's radically different than your own?

Don't be afraid to ask.

Asking for help isn't something most new faculty look forward to or feel comfortable doing. I often hear young scholars repeat what I call "limiting beliefs"—powerful stories that keep them from requesting the resources, referrals, and support they really need.

Many of these are universal: "Who am I to contact [insert big name scholar]?" for example. Or "I feel like an imposter, and if I ask for help, people will find out I don't know what I'm doing."

Schedule your requests.

Limiting beliefs lead to procrastination: If you feel awkward seeking help in the first place, it's tempting to put it off. That's why I recommend scheduling your requests in your calendar each week at a specific day and time. That's right: Scheduling one 30-minute block each week to ask for what you need will pay enormous dividends in expanding your support network and getting your needs met.

And remember, when you do meet with a prospective mentor-to-be, know what you're going to say and be specific. Don't ask "Will you be my mentor?" unless you want them to say no. Do ask focused and informed questions about what you hope to learn.

Shifting from a guru-based mentoring model to a network-based mentoring model requires an initial leap of faith. But if you stop searching for that one all-knowing mentor and start focusing instead on your concrete, specific needs, you'll discover that a large network does more than one mentor ever could.

'Rainbow Children': What Grad Students Should Know About Interracial Mentoring



GINNY YANS

Board of Governors Distinguished
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A colleague recently referred to my graduate students as “Ginny’s rainbow children.” I smiled in recognition, although I had never given it much thought. I’m no Angelina Jolie systematically collecting children from different parts of the globe. But my students do come in many varieties: African-American, Asian-American, Asian, Latino, a Filipino-Hungarian, various white ethnics, and a student of mixed Hawaiian, Jewish, and African-American heritage.

Before my colleague used those words to describe what could be less colorfully described as interracial mentoring, I saw nothing remarkable afoot. I am a senior history professor specializing in immigration studies at an eastern research university. Immigration scholars study the movements of peoples of different racial groups throughout the world. We also study racial and ethnic identity. Students, I had assumed, chose me as a mentor because of my expertise in those topics.

But I began to think differently after further discussions with my graduate students. How, after all, did a white professor from a European immigrant background come to “mother” these rainbow children? Some of the conversations took me to places I had never before explored, with delicate lead-in questions like: “Well, would you have preferred to work with a professor of your own color? Of your own ethnicity? Do you think you would have done better with him or her?”

I remained puzzled by their answers. What seemed particularly paradoxical was the mix of students within my group. I soon realized that it is not simply a matter of their individual choices of a mentor, but the existence of these students as a collective—as a group reflecting what will at some point be the norm among doctoral students—that bears greater scrutiny. Despite their different racial and ethnic identities, I now believe that as a group these

students share an agenda and specific needs. That is what drew them to the same mentor. As we face a vastly transformed American nation and student population, there is something encouraging and positive in that.

When I mentioned to some graduate students and recent Ph.D.’s that I would be writing for *Vitae* on interracial mentoring, they responded with surprising and genuine enthusiasm. Clearly, their own experience in graduate school, which they uniformly described as positive, was important to them. “That’s great! That’s important!” I heard, invariably followed with: “No one talks about race and the mentoring relationship.” They welcomed the opportunity to discuss an admittedly sensitive topic openly.

So let the conversation continue. As you may have guessed, I see two sides to this story: the students’ and the professor’s. I begin here with the point of view of the students—both my own, and others I’ve talked with who have experienced interracial and interethnic mentoring.

Some of those mentoring relationships are, initially at least, more a matter of circumstance than one of choice. Nonwhite students often must choose a mentor of another race or ethnicity simply because there are none of their own group on the faculty. It’s likely that interracial mentoring plays out differently in California, say, than in the South, or on an Eastern campus such as mine. It also plays out differently in the humanities than in the sciences. (One could argue, for example, that the natural and physical sciences are nearly “colorblind.” But in English literature, history, or anthropology, race and ethnicity are the subject matter, and exploring one’s own identity is itself often part of the research process.)

Today’s students bring a specific set of concerns to the mentoring relationship. It can no longer be assumed that a student’s color or

racial identity will determine the subject matter he or she chooses to study. We find Asian Americans who call themselves “Americanists,” not Asian-Americanists, and we find African Americans who eschew black studies, choosing instead to examine Shakespeare, Renaissance painters, or Cold War diplomacy. Simultaneously, white students are studying people of color and, in some cases, successfully landing jobs in African-American, Latino, and Asian studies programs.

Today’s graduate students differ from those of earlier generations, who expected to be teaching within what is soon to be an old American demographic. Choosing a mentor with a matched racial or ethnic identity has less appeal than it had for those entering academe in the 1960s and 1970s. With these provisos in mind, here is a summary of advice—a “How to Do It” list—offered by students for others planning to cross interracial or interethnic divides in choosing a mentor. (I summarize or quote from the students’ own words.)

Look beyond race.

Don’t choose an advisor because of his or her skin color or ethnic identity. The professor’s field of specialization is more important.

Think pragmatically ...

Ask yourself these questions: Will this mentor really help me to get the dissertation done? Will he or she spend the necessary time with me and help me deal with my special needs and weaknesses, like writing and organization of dissertation chapters? Will this mentor help me find financial support and write letters of recommendation in a timely manner? Will this mentor help to guide me through my job search? As one student said: “You must find out the answers to these questions. Ask around.”

... and emotionally.

The rainbow children ranked the emotional tenor of their relationship with their mentor as a matter of primary importance. One student who had initially chosen a mentor of the same race, only to be met with neglect, commented bitterly: “Forget skin color. Avoid mentors known for treating their students like shit. Don’t expect a change. They will dish the same out to you.”

Don’t get caught “color matching.”

It used to be that if you were Latino, black, Asian, Jewish, or Italian, you would be interested in Latino, black, Asian, or ethnic studies and you would therefore have a Latino, black, Asian, or ethnic mentor specializing in that field. If you’re working in one of these fields, the students said, it doesn’t hurt to have a mentor who can “network” for you among his or her acquaintances and buddies.

But student demands have changed, and so has the job market. In today’s tight market, even students choosing race and ethnicity as their focus of study want to describe themselves as qualified to teach outside those specialized fields. They want to present themselves as capable of teaching introductory level courses in English literature or history, too. That kind of versatility is increasingly valued in an era of tight budgets across higher education. Be prepared to counter the assumption that, because you are a person of color, you will not be interested in teaching “colorblind” subject matters.

Consider the upside of broadening your horizons.

What are some of the benefits of interracial mentoring? Students who risked working with a mentor outside of their own racial and ethnic groups said they were able to maintain their own cultural identities even as they became more able to see the “bigger picture” around “how others think.” You are you. An adviser with a different racial or ethnic background is “the other.” A good adviser, the students reported, allowed them the space to explore themselves and “the other” within a secure and trusting environment. Many were surprised to find that someone of another ethnic and racial group could offer them that security.

See who else you would-be mentors are mentoring.

Finally, as one student warned: “If a potential mentor has only white, straight males among his or her students, there is something wrong. Run the other way, fast. Making that choice was the best decision I made in my life.”

How Grad Students Can Get Past 'The Nasty Stuff People Do'

STACEY PATTON
Senior Enterprise Reporter, Vitae

Here at Vitae, we go to a lot of academic conferences—and attend a lot of lectures, workshops, and other sessions—so you don't have to. Our Conferencegoer series takes a periodic look at some of the helpful, unexpected, or otherwise interesting talks we sit in on.

The conference: The Compact for Faculty Diversity's annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring

The location: Arlington, Va.

The scene: The conference, in its 20th year, is the largest gathering of minority Ph.D. scholars in the country. This year's sessions touched on teaching millennials, designing syllabi, handling personality drama in departments and labs, and getting published.

The session: "Solo Success: How to Thrive in Graduate School When You're The Only _____ In Your Department"

The speaker: Kerry Ann Rockquemore, executive director of the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity.

The takeaway: The road to completing a doctoral degree can be like a slow-moving reality show—one that takes years to unfold, bogs down in personal dramas, and turns into an unnecessarily miserable experience. As dreary as that sounds, it's even worse for minority scholars.

That's because they're not just worrying about finishing their degrees and getting jobs. They're also navigating around plenty of other obstacles—including overt and covert forms of racism, disproportionate service obligations, and daily "microaggressions."

"Microaggressions," Rockquemore said to chuckles from the audience, "are the nasty little shit people do."

She was talking, of course, about racially-coded acts: In the classroom, a student asking, "Do you have a Ph.D.?" or "Have you taught this class before?" In a faculty meeting, a colleague constantly interrupting or dismissing your ideas. In a research setting, a proposal of yours being met with crickets when a similar suggestion from a scholar of a different race is celebrated.

Rockquemore says these microaggressions contributed to an exhausting grad-school experience: "I stopped exercising. I gained weight. My hair was coming out in clumps. My husband said he didn't know me anymore. And my family stopped inviting me to events because I didn't have time for birthdays and reunions."

Rockquemore said her struggles were not unique; she hears the same stories over and over again. "These microaggressions push people's insecurities, and what happens is you start over-functioning on teaching to prove that you are qualified," she said. "This eventually affects your teaching and writing. You get pissed off and that's energy you need to get your work done."

So how can minority scholars fight through departmental politics on their way to a doctorate? Rockquemore shared some lessons she wishes she'd been taught earlier:

Know what you want. Scholars often lose energy on introspection, asking themselves "Do I really want to pursue a Ph.D. or an academic job?" That ambivalence can stifle productivity.

Understand the game... The things that tend to matter most to academics—tenure, promotions, scholarly reputation—aren't necessarily the ones that resonate with university administrators, who may care more about service, committee participation, and teaching. Remember that you're operating in a political environment and must manage professional relationships in their departments.

...and realize that it's not all about the work. Writing, for example, might be rewarding, but you've also got to do things that will earn you credit from potential mentors and references.

Don't be afraid to bother people. Even when they really need help, scholars often assume that colleagues are too busy to be asked. Don't decide for other people if they can help you—and don't believe that you can figure everything out on your own. It's the slowest way to get things done.

When it comes to writing, don't binge and bust. This is a pattern that usually begins in college, when students grow accustomed to looking at the syllabus, seeing that a paper is due by the end of the semester, and then putting it off until the night before. It's a pattern that some scholars carry over into graduate school and onto the tenure track. The problem is that dissertations, journal articles, and grant proposals can't be knocked out the night before the deadline and still be competitive.

Don't make the perfect the enemy of the good. Perfectionists publish less because they hold onto their ideas for too long and eventually get scooped. And when they ask colleagues for input on their work, they can feel attacked and pulled down. It's essential to get that input, to work collaboratively, and to make sure your research doesn't become your identity.

Build a many-headed mentor. Rethink the traditional mentoring model. Don't go to one person for everything. Approach people who've been successful in getting what you want—a job, a grant, a book contract—and create a network that you can stand in the middle of.

Differentiate the ideal from what's real. Racism is one of the great structural problems of academe, Rockquemore said, and it won't be fixed by the time you defend your dissertation or get tenure. But if you become too fixated on structural problems, you're probably wasting some energy on stewing—especially if you're a graduate student who isn't in a position to make changes.

When colleagues or students test your qualifications and disrespect you, you have to find ways to keep from overcompensating in an effort to prove them wrong. In other words, don't let the pressure of being the “only one” in your department consume you.

If you can manage to run the grad-school gantlet, Rockquemore said, better times may await. “Being a professor is a wonderful life,” she told the audience. “But you have to go through some stuff before it gets good.”

Nothing New Under the Sun: Of Mentors, Mentees, and Common Experiences



GWENDOLYN DUNGY

Executive Director Emeritus at
National Association of Student
Personnel Administrators

I think what I'm about to write holds true for everyone. It's just that I've lived so long that it probably happens to me more frequently.

No matter what someone says to me, it seems, I can think of a similar experience that I can relay. When my conversation partners pause to take a breath, I have to work really hard not to jump in and tell them: The very same thing happened to me! I do still share those stories sometimes: I hope they establish that we're similar, that we have something upon which to build a relationship—or at least that we have a common reference point.

When I'm out and about with young professionals, they frequently pull me aside for a private conversation or ask to talk with me by phone at a later date. Usually they want to chat about their career direction.

Sometimes, they just want me to look over a résumé and offer my thoughts. Other times, they seek an introduction or nomination for a professional position. And then there are scholars who want to bring me up to date on their careers so I can serve as a reference. Whatever the request, I'm always open to hearing and helping in any way that I can.

Some of the most intriguing conversations, though, come with people who recently applied for positions but weren't selected: They often tell me about their interviews and ask me for a critique. During these conversations, I turn myself into a fly on the wall. I imagine the space and the interactions from the perspective of the interviewers and the interviewee. I imagine what kind of conversation the search-committee members had prior to the candidate's interview, and I make assumptions about what the conversation would be afterward.

What's uncanny about my mental reenactment is that the candidate and I come to the same conclusions about what he or she did well

during the interview, and about what needed strengthening. Sometimes one's reflections upon an experience need a mirror outside of oneself.

In a recent conversation with a tremendously talented midlevel administrator, I was struck by how our experiences were so similar. I was able to share my experiences and what I learned upon reflection. I also found that the person in describing her experiences used the exact same words that I used when I wrote in my journal following our common experience!

While time marches on and the circumstances in regard to climbing the career ladder may differ, I continue to be amazed by how the experiences elicit many of the same responses and reactions that colleagues generations before also expressed. It's these kinds of encounters that convince me that mentors can be useful.

Seldom am I stumped for words when I'm in conversation with those who want a sounding board. But I try not to lose sight of my first rule of communication: Listen attentively and encourage the speaker to continue. When I do respond, because this person has trusted me with their deepest dreams, aspirations, and fears, I have moved them to my inner circle of people I love and want to protect and help succeed.

At times I have shied away from being a mentor in the formal sense because I didn't think I had enough to offer. But I realize now that it's not what the mentor thinks she has to offer, but what the person who wants a mentor thinks. And if the mentor has reflected on her experiences and gleaned lessons from them, the relationship can be mutually beneficial.

After listening and sharing with some of my colleagues who are thinking about the career paths they want to take, I feel energized, hopeful, and useful. There are not many experiences that can leave me with such a feeling of euphoria.

The No-Fail Secret to Writing a Dissertation



THERESA MACPHAIL

Assistant Professor/Faculty Fellow
at New York University

As a former journalist, assistant professor, and seasoned dissertation-writing-workshop coach at New York University, I can promise you there is only one fail-safe method, one secret, one guaranteed trick that you need in order to finish your dissertation: Write.

That's it. Seriously. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but there are no magical shortcuts to the production of prose, academic or otherwise. If you want to complete your dissertation in a reasonable amount of time—and trust me, you do—you must learn to prioritize the act of writing itself and write every day. Writing must become a non-negotiable part of your daily routine.

Here's the basic, scalable program that I recommend: Sit your butt down in a chair, preferably in a quiet and distraction-free room. Disable your internet and turn your phone on silent. Come into your writing space having already done the research you need for that day's writing task. You will not be researching or looking anything up during your writing time (research and editing are discrete tasks, believe it or not, and should be done in separate blocks).

Don't do "poms"—timed sessions of 25 minutes with five-minute breaks in between—for writing. They work well for other discrete tasks, like research or formatting or getting your bibliography together, but not here. Instead, try to write for a longer, uninterrupted time. In NYU's workshops, we write for 50 minutes straight, with 10-minute breaks, for 4 hours daily. That might not be feasible if you work or have young children, but plan on writing five days a week, no matter what, for a minimum of two hours each day. It's doable, I promise.

Here's the rationale for writing every day: Writing is thinking. It takes time and it's supposed to be challenging. The biggest mistake I've seen most graduate students make is to mythologize what I call "the moment of genius." Because writing is thinking, brilliant thoughts do not just appear on the page after long hours of arduous musing on a subject. In my experience, the best ideas almost always come about through the act of writing itself—usually just at that moment when you've run out of steam and are staring down a seemingly intractable problem, desperately wanting to quit. These are the breakthrough moments. When you're writing a dissertation, one of the most difficult intellectual tasks a person can do, commitment to the writing process is far more important than genius. If the smartest person in the world cannot learn to write, then she won't be a successful academic. Period.

In the past year, I've coached over 60 Ph.D. candidates from diverse departments—from computer science to French literature, from anthropology to political science. And despite the differences in discipline and style of writing, the process and my advice remain the same. Everyone struggles with similar technical and emotional issues: procrastination, distraction, anxiety, structuring an argument, finding their voice, integrating theory and evidence. It's very hard work, this writing-your-dissertation thing. The trick is to not make it even harder by avoiding the work itself.

The greatest obstacle to any dissertation writer, by far, is the all-too-common tendency (conscious or not) to try to avoid the negative feelings associated with the difficult stages of the writing process. If you make writing a part of your work-week routine, there will be good and bad days. On the good days, the prose will flow out of you at a rate that you didn't think was possible. Or you'll finally figure out how you want to argue your main point. Or you'll realize that what you thought was one chapter is actually two or three different ones. On the bad days, nothing that you write will seem good enough. You'll hit the backspace and delete keys so much that they'll start sticking. You'll move the same paragraph five times before you delete it out of frustration. The trick is to go with the ebb and flow of writing, to ride out the bad days.

I often advise the students in my workshops to "get comfortable being uncomfortable." Very often in the writing process, you will feel shitty. You will write shitty first drafts. You will wrangle with disparate sources, gargantuan amounts of data, and difficult theoretical concepts. You will often feel lost and frustrated and tired—uncomfortable. The successful writer knows that feeling lost, frustrated, and tired is just a part of the process of coming up with something great. Writing is thinking, and good ideas take time. There are bound to be a few false starts and dead ends along the way. If you feel shitty about the writing and force yourself to write anyway, you will not only finish your dissertation, you will allow yourself the opportunity to work through complicated arguments and say something interesting or even something pretty great.

All professional writers know that good books and interesting articles are the product of several drafts. So is your dissertation. In fact, the dissertation is better thought of as the lousy first draft of an eventual book. No one but you expects your dissertation to be perfect. What advisors want to see is honest effort and interesting thinking on the page. Trust me, most of us remember all too well what our dissertations were like (mostly terrible: just ask your advisor if you can read a copy of hers!), and we can empathize with your struggles. But we also know that the only path to a completed dissertation and a blossoming career is through writing—putting ideas down on a page, and wrestling them into shape.

And, finally, I'd advise anyone writing a dissertation to shift her thinking. You are no longer simply a graduate student; you are a Ph.D. candidate. As such, writing is part of your job. In fact, it's the most important thing you can do for yourself and for your future. Get into the habit of daily writing now and you will have a prolific career. But you have to start today. Right now. So stop reading this and get to work.

The Nuts and Bolts of Crowdfunding



DAN ROYLES

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Richard Stockton College of
New Jersey

Shortly after finishing my last piece, on what I wish I had known before I decided to crowd-fund my oral-history project a year ago, I realized that I never offered anything like a “how to” guide based on my experience. So what follows is a collection of more practical insights from my Kickstarter campaign. Here are a few lessons that can help guide your first foray into crowdfunding:

Research your platform options. Since my oral-history project focuses on African-American history, I had decided that if I were to do a crowdfunding campaign, it should run in February to coincide with Black History Month. However, I only decided to commit to crowdfunding very late in January. So I didn’t get to research the different platforms as carefully as I would have liked.

At the time, I went with Kickstarter because the site seemed to have the best-developed network of donors. In a sense, that paid off: I did receive a rather sizable donation from someone who appeared to contribute regularly to different projects, and who found me through Kickstarter’s main page. However, I only realized afterward that Kickstarter required me to hit my target in order to see any money. Indiegogo, on the other hand, would have allowed me keep a portion, albeit smaller, of the pledges had I not hit my target.


It didn’t matter in the end—I exceeded my goal—but I might have decided differently at the outset if I had researched more thoroughly. Since my campaign ended, other platforms, such as GoFundMe, seem to have become more popular, but Kickstarter and Indiegogo appear to still be the two big heavyweights when it comes to crowdfunding creative projects.

Understand precisely how much of the donation total you’ll receive. I was aware that Kickstarter would take a cut of the pledges. But I didn’t realize that Amazon Payments, through which Kickstarter routes the money, would take a cut as well. This meant that I received several hundred dollars less than I’d anticipated.

Careful research at the front end should solve this problem. But in general, be aware that at least one other service in addition to the crowdfunding platform may take a portion of your proceeds.

Let your project guide the rewards you offer. The reward levels I offered included a mention on the project’s Wordpress page, rubber wristbands printed with the words “FIGHT AIDS,” a personal acknowledgment in the finding aid for the oral histories, and a copy of the book that I plan to produce. You might also offer a shoutout on your project’s Twitter account, if you have one. Or a producer credit if the final product for your project will be a film. or a program acknowledgment if your project will result in an exhibition. Rewards like these are also nice because they are impressive and exclusive, but they don’t require a trip to the post office on your part.

Plan for your campaign to take time. This may sound like an obvious point. But I was honestly surprised by the amount of time I ended up spending each day checking Kickstarter page analytics, sending out announcements over Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks, and writing updates for the project page. At the very least, plan to spend an hour a day on your campaign while it’s running.



Promote your project on all of your social networks, including those that you don't use very often. Ideally you'll already have built an audience around your project that you can tap into for your crowdfunding campaign. But you'll want to tap into your network of family and friends as well, because they're invested in your success!

For example, I got some nice donations from a handful of posts that I put on Google+. And while the joke about all Google+ users being Google employees is pretty on point, Google employees have a lot more disposable income than do academics, and they're unlikely to see your flurry of crowdfunding Facebook posts.

So there you have it—some tried-and-true practical tips for crowdfunding success.

On Depression, and the Toll Academia Exacts



JACQUI SHINE

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University of California, Berkeley

I had planned to tackle another, less personal topic for my first Vitae outing, maybe get my rant on about the digital humanities. But it's winter again. It gets dark so early now. I struggle with it for weeks. Eventually, usually sometime in February, the bottom falls out. First I struggle to write, then to read. Somewhere beyond the possibility of boredom or interest, I stop getting out of bed.

I can rally for specific and discrete obligations, though that gradually requires more and more elaborate self-bribery. *I'll teach if I can bring the dog with me. I'll go to class if I can get French fries afterwards.* (The McDonald's phase of a depressive episode is particularly humiliating.) The depressed graduate-student story, right? Well, maybe.

Over the last few years—and certainly since I started my Ph.D. (mumble-mumble) years ago—mental health among graduate students has become a more public subject. There is much more discussion about the ways that graduate education can erode resilience and confidence and impair mental health. I appreciate that. I've also found that the discourse, particularly around depression, assumes that we need to address solutions to otherwise healthy people who have just been worn down by stress. Usually this involves destigmatizing the use of counseling and psychiatry services, and encouraging students to try tools like yoga, meditation, and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Here's the thing, though: Graduate school doesn't make me depressed. Depression makes me depressed.

I have suffered from clinical depression since childhood. Its effects on my life have been deceptively insidious: It has been difficult, but not impossible, to conceal my fairly constant low-grade dysthymia. As a student I've had a somewhat easier time minimizing the degree to which a major depressive episode disrupts my daily life than I might have had in a different kind of work environment. It's easy to hide the fact that you're having trouble leaving the house when you don't have to be somewhere at 9 a.m. every day.

There are a number of ways, however, in which graduate school is particularly challenging for me—and there aren't necessarily easy remedies. It's not a question of not knowing where or how to get help. My adviser knows I'm depressed and is very kind about it; I trudge to therapy (sometimes therapy and group therapy) weekly; I don't cancel my regular appointments with my psychiatrist. I am pretty candid about my depression and my efforts to manage it.

The problems are bigger. One is that academia mythologizes intellectual work in ways that make it difficult for folks like me to adapt. In the humanities and social sciences, we are steeped in the belief that one has to truly love the work in order to succeed. It's a conversation I have with my adviser a lot: whether or not I love the work enough to see it through, to be sustained by it.

But depression makes that a question I can't answer. I don't know if I love it. Depressed, I don't love anything unless it comforts me in some way. (So I guess I love my cat, endless TNT marathons of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, soft hoodies, and coffee.) Certainly, I sometimes have moments of pleasure and satisfaction after teaching a good class or writ-

ing an elegant sentence or finding an exciting source. But I can't say I love my work—or much else—in a sustained, daily way. And if that's a requirement for success in academia, the solution is stark: Figure out how to love it. If you don't love it, get out. There's no way to do the job without that love, the logic goes, so there isn't much use in trying to make it easier in other ways.

A second problem is that academic institutions don't respond effectively to chronic and invisible disabilities. Folks in my department discouraged me from registering with the university's disability-services program. They said outright that they couldn't imagine what kinds of accommodations would actually be useful for me; they implied that registering could potentially stigmatize me.

Thinking that focusing on my health might give me the chance to figure out whether I loved my work or not, I broached the subject of a medical withdrawal with my psychiatrist. She said that there was no such thing for graduate students. She didn't know any graduate students who had taken one, anyway. Much later, I learned that she was incorrect: At my campus, medical withdrawals are possible and, unlike so-called personal withdrawals, they are one of the only ways to pause the normative time clock. But if the professionals who authorize medical withdrawals didn't know that I could take one, I had no idea with whom I was supposed to talk about it. At every stage, when I tried to pursue the channels available to me for supporting my chronic illness, I was actively discouraged from doing so.

So I didn't take medical leave. I didn't pursue disability accommodations. And my progress has been very, very slow. Yet I want to be clear that I don't think this is a problem specific to me or to my institution, one that the University of California at Berkeley alone needs to solve. Nor is it one that is solely the provenance of academia. There is an enormous stigma against considering depression as a chronic illness, and I don't know that those who advised against pursuing accommodations were wrong.

Yet what's the alternative? What kind of career would I have if I spent all my energy trying to conceal my illness? Until we start asking what it might mean to better support students who come to graduate school with histories of mental illness, instead of responding as though depression is a side effect of intensive academic study, I'm not sure we will come any closer to addressing the very real needs and very real suffering of folks with short-term and chronic conditions.

So, no, I'm not depressed because of graduate school, not in the way one might imagine. In another way, though, I suppose I am: I live and work in a context in which I am encouraged to conceal my illness, lest it somehow devalue or denigrate my intellectual efforts or the currency of my reputation. As though my work and my life are somehow separate from one another. This is a toll that academia exacts from so many of us—from those of us with chronic illnesses, certainly, but also, more broadly, from anyone who is different.

Over time, I have had to abandon the fantasy that I could make my queer, working-class, chronically ill body and mind into something more acceptable, more invisible. I hope to use this space to explore what that letting go might mean as I contemplate the possibilities of an academic career—and also to start a conversation about what we need in order to make better lives as scholars and as people.

On Privilege and the Ph.D.



KATE BAHN

Ph.D. Candidate in Economics
at New School

I'm certainly not the first Ph.D. candidate who, with the end of graduate school in sight, has wondered: If I had to do it all over again, would I still pursue a doctoral degree?

The answer? Yes. But what's been on my mind lately is why that's my unequivocal response. After all, I haven't had a full-time job in over five years, and I've racked up some student debt (albeit less than many of my peers) in the process. That's something I wouldn't have been disposed to do in the first place if it weren't for my family background.

You might say advanced degrees run in my family. My mother has a Ph.D. in biology and is happily employed as a toxicologist in the private sector. Her father was a doctor; his brothers were another doctor and a lawyer. In fact, that side of my family is thick with Ph.D.'s, M.D.'s and J.D.'s. And while my dad was the first member of his family to go to college, he went on to earn an M.B.A. and worked in finance for years before ultimately turning in a more artistic direction. As a result, my parents take terminal degrees for granted—they're just a step on the way to having a career you enjoy.

After working for a few years post-college, when I felt like I could go no higher on the career ladder without an advanced degree, I entered a master's program. At the time, I thought an M.A. would be enough to get me where I wanted to go—into the upper echelons of a labor union or economic-policy think tank. But two semesters into a master's program in economics, I realized I had so much more to learn! I couldn't possibly tackle it all in a master's program. I entered a Ph.D. program, aware of the intellectual difficulty, but not fully registering what it meant to pursue a doctorate and how privileged I was to be able to do so.

Recently, though, I've become acutely aware of my own privilege and the choices I've taken for granted. I have no undergraduate student debt, so I was (until I began graduate school) one of the lucky *70 percent of people with a college degree and no student debt, according to a recent study by the Urban Institute. I'm also white. Did you know that a mere 16 percent of whites have student debt, compared to 34 percent of African-Americans and 28 percent of Hispanics? So says the same study.

Without undergraduate loans weighing me down, I was free to take on some debt for my graduate studies. Of course, some graduate degrees cost an arm and a leg—six-figure law-school tuition is common—and that's not counting the added expense of supporting yourself while in school. And the opportunity cost of getting a Ph.D.—that is, what you lose by choosing that option over another—is very high when the alternative is having a full-time job for those five-plus years.

But opportunity costs aren't the same for everyone. They're higher for those with more debt, and student debt isn't accrued equally by all those who pursue Ph.D.'s or other terminal degrees.

While many programs have made efforts to diversify their student populations, black and Latino students in Ph.D. programs—many of them from working-class backgrounds—are significantly more likely to take out student loans to support their studies. A recent study of Ph.D.'s in STEM fields found that while only 10 percent of white and Asian students have more than \$30,000 in loans, 25 percent of African-American students and 14 percent of Latino students do. Given the potential loan burden involved, it's easy to see why many working-class people opt out of graduate school.

My balance sheet aside, my family background also played a huge role in my ability to pursue a graduate degree. Having financially secure parents with advanced degrees meant that my decision to seek a Ph.D. was very different than that of someone whose parents didn't go to college.

There was never any question that I would go to college. My parents did, my brother did, my peers did—it was, I believed, what everyone did. And actually, a greater proportion of people do attend college now than did several decades ago. The proportion of first-generation college students has been declining since 1971, according to a Higher Education Research Institute report, largely because more people now have parents who went to college, too.

Unfortunately, this decline is not spread evenly across all groups; the rates of first-generation African-American college students are shrinking more rapidly than the rates of African-American parents who've attended college are rising, the report notes. And that's troubling, since college is supposed to be the great equalizer.

Rhetorical scholar Brett Lunceford asserts that the challenges first-generation college students face when deciding to go to college are compounded in graduate school. University administrators and academics often take for granted the knowledge and privilege that students from academic or upper- and middle-class families bring to grad school in a way that disadvantages first-generation and working-class students (and that's discounting the isolation first-gens may feel after they get there).

Without guidance from those in the know about how to choose a university or a department, what to include in an application, or how to prepare for grad school, students from nonacademic or working-class backgrounds can have an especially hard time landing in the right program and starting on the right foot. By contrast, my educated, well-read, and well-informed parents were among the best critics of my application materials and cover letters, and their advice improved my chances of getting into school (and into jobs).

Higher education is touted as a way to increase social mobility and earning potential—something that more people would strive for if they had the means and the luxury of choice. But sadly, graduate study is increasingly out of reach for those not born into privilege.

I've opened my eyes to how lucky I am to have been born into good circumstances, or higher “up the hill,” to borrow a phrase from Charles M. Blow. I think that similar acknowledgements from other academics could help turn our programs into more welcoming places.

If we think social mobility is a common good, academia should be amplifying that goal, not working against it. That means that students and faculty should represent society as a whole—not just a cross-section of scholars lucky enough to come from certain stock.

The Mothers I Meet in the Academy



STACIA L. BROWN

Adjunct Instructor at Community College of Baltimore County

My first bout of baby fever accosted me in an empty classroom. It was winter, the coldest, darkest stretch of teaching college in the Midwest. I'd just dismissed a group of English Composition students for whom I bore no particular affection but for whose success I felt—however temporarily—responsible. After one-and-a-half years as an adjunct, I knew that when a term ended, my protectiveness over those students wouldn't really ebb; it would instead be transferred to a new set of kids next semester. The cycle was predictable, but it had begun to alter me.

Once I've taught someone, she is always "one of mine." My eye is drawn to her face amid thousands of others on campus. If her name is still clanging around anywhere in the ever-crowding space of my adjunct-brain, I summon it at the sight of her. If not her name, I recall something else related to her work ethic or writing: Always showed up 15 minutes late. Lost a childhood friend to cancer. Is in favor of federal food-stamp cuts. Expected an unearned grade change.

It didn't immediately connect for me that this carrying around of students' names, memories, and values was a practice of nurturing—or that I enjoyed nurturing so much that I'd started wanting to do more of it, in intervals of longer than four months.

The thought winded me that winter day after my class left. Apparently, I wanted to be a mother. I wanted someplace else to focus my encouragement and worries. I wanted the opportunity to be a longer-term influence on someone, to truly test my mettle not just as a short-term teacher of composition but as a lifelong teacher of compassion and character.

It was all very naive, but the longing swept over me in earnest. I began to panic. My mother, whom I called while standing at the lectern with cottony sobs in my throat, tried to calm me from 500 miles away. She said the fever would pass and this terrifying feeling—even in its sudden intensity—was normal at age 28. This was the first time either of us had heard me express any desire to be a parent. But here it was, as real as the actual pregnancy I'd announce almost two years later.

Just as I was experiencing my own maternal epiphany, I had started pulling double duty at that university and at a local community college. It was at the latter where I began to meet and teach my first student-mothers.

Over one-quarter of all community-college students in the U.S. are parents. Of that group, about 1 million are single parents, and the majority of those single-parent students are women. Single mothers pursuing college degrees are an ever-growing demographic, and their needs differ enough from those of the childless students that many colleges, such as the University of Missouri and Michigan State University, have implemented housing, employment, and child-care support programs to help them achieve success.

But these supplemental programs tend to focus on external barriers to academic accomplishment. In the classroom, instructors find themselves asking a different question: Should I make adaptations to attendance or assignment-submission policies to accommodate those parents? The decision is never cut and dried.

There are many ways my students approach letting me know they are parents. Some come up after the first day of class and announce it directly, listing the possible ways it may impact their attendance. Some write about it in the first essay I assign: the personal narrative. Others hurry in apologetically, with their tiny, quiet progeny in tow. And others still, usually the mothers of high-school or college-age children, say nothing at all in an academic context. I'd never know they were parents if I didn't overhear the phrase "my son" or "my daughter" in their conversations before or after class.

To the extent that they center their parenting identity as a feature of their educational experience, I feel duty-bound to bear it in mind. But figuring out how to accommodate the mothers we teach can be a sensitive business. Just as they have different methods of informing us, they also have varying expectations.

If you've ever had a frequently late or absent student whose reason is always related to her child, you know what it's like to teach someone whose motherhood impacts her life in ways that will make it difficult to succeed in your course. She may expect a leniency you can't allow. Or you may implement special arrangements that account for her unexpected loss of childcare or her chronically ill child's hospital visits. These may seem unfair to students who aren't parents.

I will admit that becoming a mother myself has made me more empathetic to student-mothers' experiences. I am very willing to work around a single mother's schedule or allow her to bring her child into my classroom on a day when his own school is closed. I will allow an expectant mother a few more excused absences during a term, as I know firsthand how physically taxing some pregnancies can be. To be fair to my childless students, I am also willing to navigate around their occasional absences to pick up an extra shift at work. Any arrangement we make is based on the understanding that the work cannot suffer. It remains students' responsibility to find the lecture notes and assignments they've missed and to commit to any agreed-upon office visits or amended deadlines.

Mothering has made me far more aware of the ways in which students' outside lives can't be kept out of the classroom or contained to the page. Professors and students alike bring our whole selves into these settings. So we cannot ask our students to shut off their non-academic responsibilities as easily as we ask that they shut off their cellphones.

When the average 18-year-old student misses more classes or assignment deadlines than allowed, we penalize them, via grade reduction, to teach responsibility. In many cases, for student-mothers, responsibility has been demanded earlier and more often, and the stakes for irresponsible decision-making are much higher. It stands to reason, then, that dinging their grades when they miss classes won't do much for their sense of responsibility. What it might do is emphasize the importance of managing heightened pressure.

There are gentler ways to teach that. But they require a patience and magnanimity that some professors—especially adjuncts—cannot afford. Accepting some students' work on rolling deadlines and penciling in extra office hours becomes too taxing. Ultimately, professors must do what's best for themselves. This is a career in which self-preservation is of the utmost importance. And at institutions that make family resources available to students, it can be a relief to direct those students elsewhere.

My own experience as a single mother is teaching me that, even when I'd love to, I can't afford to reduce or delegate much of the work at hand. I am used to going out of my way, of doing more work than what may seem reasonable, if it means my child will be afforded the opportunities she needs. I see that same resolve in many of the mothers I face in my classrooms. It resonates in ways I'd be loath to ignore.

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