

STORIES OF BECOMING

*Demystifying the Professoriate for Graduate
Students in Composition and Rhetoric*

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Logan

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Published by Utah State University Press
An imprint of University Press of Colorado
245 Century Circle, Suite 202
Louisville, Colorado 80027

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The University Press of Colorado is a proud member of
the Association of University Presses.

The University Press of Colorado is a cooperative publishing enterprise supported, in part, by Adams State University, Colorado State University, Fort Lewis College, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Regis University, University of Alaska, University of Colorado, University of Denver, University of Northern Colorado, University of Wyoming, Utah State University, and Western Colorado University.

∞ This paper meets the requirements of the ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992
(Permanence of Paper)

ISBN: 978-1-64642-163-3 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-64642-164-0 (ebook)
<https://doi.org/10.7330/9781646421640>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lutkewitte, Claire, author. | Kitchens, Juliette C., 1976– author. | Scanlon, Molly J., author.

Title: Stories of becoming : demystifying the professoriate for graduate students in composition and rhetoric / Claire Lutkewitte, Juliette C. Kitchens, Molly J. Scanlon.

Description: Logan : Utah State University Press, [2021] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021035813 (print) | LCCN 2021035814 (ebook) | ISBN 9781646421633 (paperback) | ISBN 9781646421640 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: English teachers—Training of—Research—United States. | Graduate students—Training of—Research—United States. | Doctoral students—Training of—Research—United States. | English language—Rhetoric—Study and teaching (Higher)—United States. | English teachers—United States—Anecdotes. | Graduate students—United States—Anecdotes. | Doctoral students—United States—Anecdotes.

Classification: LCC PE1405.U6 L88 2021 (print) | LCC PE1405.U6 (ebook) | DDC 808/.042071173—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021035813>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021035814>

The University Press of Colorado gratefully acknowledges the support of Nova Southeastern University toward the publication of this volume.

Cover illustration © Macrovector/Shutterstock.

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INTRODUCTION

HERE'S A STORY ABOUT . . . WHY WE NEED MORE ROBUST PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSORIATE

At the beginning of the 2017–2018 academic year, our faculty research team met as we often did in one of our offices on campus to discuss our research agenda for the weeks to come. For the past several years, we had been conducting a national grant-funded study on new faculty in the field of composition and rhetoric and wanted to continue with our plans for analyzing and sharing our findings. By that point, we had gathered data from new faculty across the country by surveying, interviewing, and collecting professional documents from them.

However, this particular meeting began with frustration. We had just received word from our dean that there would be cuts to our college's budget and our funding for professional development would be lowered for the upcoming year. Faculty in our college, including us, used professional-development funds to, among other things, travel to conferences to present research, collaborate on projects with peers, and speak with editors and publishers. That day, we had planned to advance our research—we had a lot to get done after all. But this news took precedence, and Juliette began with her correspondence with our dean over the cuts. She talked about the email she sent the dean that explained how the cuts to funding would make it difficult to cover the costs to attend and present at two conferences in the upcoming year, both of which involved copresenting with students. One presentation was on a service-related project with a colleague and several students; one was this grant-funded project. The dean's response was to make grant-funded projects a priority.

We were disheartened by this news of budget cuts, as it would make our own faculty responsibilities for research harder. We

went on to talk about a disconnect between our faculty and our administration, how administration didn't understand there were not as many grants to cover the costs of conference travel available to those of us in the humanities as perhaps there were in other fields, how it was time-consuming to apply for grants in the first place, and given our course loads, not always possible. We were lucky to receive a CCCC grant to get our project funded, but even that grant wouldn't provide funding for conference travel. In total, we applied for five grants and got three for our research project, only one of which offered partial funding for conference travel.

The news of budget cuts came at a time during our research project when we were learning more about the responsibilities of the new faculty in our study, especially those in our interviews, and how those responsibilities were tied to research. We were left wondering, If new faculty members were required to participate in research, how were they supported? What resources were available to them? And it was not just about money, we realized. Certainly, financial support helped. It also helped to be given the time to do research, write, and present it. While it had been years since we researchers were in doctoral programs, we could recall that in our programs, we neither discussed ways to address something as crucial as budget cuts with college- or university-level administration nor learned that securing external funding for conference travel is a crucial but difficult endeavor. Yet these were skills we needed to advocate effectively for ourselves, as faculty members, at the moment.

The time for our research meeting was limited, so we had to set aside thoughts of the budget cuts to move on with our meeting's agenda, though those worries remained in the back of our minds.

**HERE'S OUR ADVICE ABOUT . . . WHY
DOCTORAL PROGRAMS MATTER TO THE
PREPARATION OF NEW FACULTY**

The above story is one that many faculty in the field of composition and rhetoric are familiar with, as they too have been asked

to do more with less. But doing so is not something we have necessarily been trained to do through formal education. Some doctoral programs support graduate students through generous funding for professional development, but hardly are doctoral students trained to negotiate with a dean about such funding or about budgetary concerns, a lack of resources, how to find other sources of funding, and so forth. Likewise, there are a number of other situations graduate students may not be ready to handle once they become new faculty. When our study's participants described to us such situations, we knew, as researchers and as graduate program faculty, that we needed to share this knowledge with others, especially graduate students pursuing careers in our field. Composition and rhetoric doctoral programs highly value developing reflective practitioners who are active, ongoing learners, innovators, and collaborators. As a field, we aim to prepare practitioners for the dynamic demands presented in not just our classrooms and our scholarship but also in the complexities of the everyday. And that is why we wrote this book.

In 2011, Rosanne Carlo and Theresa Jarnagin Enos wrote that “at the heart of the direction and future of our field is the planning and design of our graduate programs: the classes we require students to take, the possibilities and forms we offer graduate student writing, the opportunities we create for interdisciplinary work, the professional development and outreach programs we provide for them” (210). We couldn't agree more. However, as we have found in our study, most doctoral programs still focus heavily on research and teacher training and less on the other everyday realities new professors in our field participate in. In part, this emphasis reflects the long history of and value our field places on the work we do in composition and rhetoric as practitioners—the classroom, the scholarship, the service, the leadership. While the emphasis on pedagogy in composition and rhetoric is uniquely commendable, if not exceptional, in comparison to other fields, this doesn't negate the opportunity for doctoral programs to improve, especially since doctoral programs serve as the last place new faculty receive extensive formalized professionalization.

But we also know doctoral programs can be slow to change. Therefore, we address this book most explicitly to graduate students. While we hope you aren't our only readers, we think we have the most to offer you in terms of strategies that will help you prepare for the professoriate, strategies that might not currently be afforded by your doctoral program. This text addresses six strategies:

- **Strategy 1:** Know (Y)Our Stories
- **Strategy 2:** Understand the Job Market
- **Strategy 3:** Define Your Tetrad: TRSA
- **Strategy 4:** Prepare for More Than TRSA
- **Strategy 5:** Recognize Your Time Is Valuable and Manage It Well
- **Strategy 6:** Collaborate

Through these strategies, we encourage you to collaborate with your program faculty and administrators to identify areas for improving your program for yourself, as well as future students, that go beyond training for only teaching and researching. In our research, we were reminded time and again of Virginia Crisco et al.'s work many years ago on graduate education. In their work, they argue that when we talk about graduate education, we must be careful not to see it as "the reduction of education to job training" (360). Rather, they argue that it should go beyond "training in job skills" (360) and that it should "focus as much on how students can change the profession as on how it can change them" (361) via giving students "practice in, not preparation for, the profession" (363). In other words, here is an opportunity to make a difference in the profession, while you are a graduate student, that can lead to being successful now and in your career as a professor later on. We hope you see this book as a method for viewing graduate education not as a "fixed end of professionalization" (361) but as a way of becoming a member of a profession that is, at the same time, evolving, too. Keep in mind, now and throughout the book, that when we speak of "preparation," we mean to evoke Crisco et al.'s definition extending beyond just job

training to include the everyday experiences of graduate students and new faculty.

HERE'S WHAT OUR RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT . . .

CHOOSING THE PROFESSORIATE AS A CAREER PATH

Our grant-funded study spanned four years. During that time, we collected data (1) via a nationwide survey in which nearly two hundred new assistant professors in the field of composition and rhetoric participated, (2) through follow-up interviews with a sample of ten of those survey participants, and (3) by collecting professional documents (CVs, cover letters, etc.) from those interview participants. Following the collection of data, we went to work coding and analyzing using qualitative-data-analysis software that allowed us to identify themes that offered us insight into what has been working in graduate programs to prepare faculty for the professoriate and what has not. Particularly, we looked closely at what new faculty wished they had learned in their doctoral programs prior to becoming new faculty members. As new faculty learning to navigate the ins and outs of their positions, the participants were able to speak about what would have been most helpful to them prior to taking on such positions. This information was most telling because it pointed to how their doctoral programs did and did not prepare them for life as a professor.

The goal of this book, then, is to share our study's findings in order to help you better prepare for life as a professor in a multitude of ways. For the most part, our study's new-faculty participants were satisfied with their career choices, which is encouraging, as it reflects a number of things our field should be proud of. For example, when asked whether their choices would be different if they were to begin their career again, nearly 60% of participants said they would *definitely yes* or *probably yes* "choose the same doctoral program," and 67.3% said they would *definitely yes* or *probably yes* "choose the same professional path." Based on these responses, we say we are doing a good job making sure students like you in our field are happy with their choices in life regarding their careers.

Table 0.1. Survey Results: Program and Professional Choices

	<i>Choose the same doctoral program</i>	<i>Choose the same professional path</i>
Definitely yes	50	52
Probably yes	67	80
Not sure	31	32
Probably no	23	12
Definitely no	10	5
Did not answer	15	15

However, there is always room for improvement. As we discuss in this book, our field and our programs have opportunities to make real changes that can benefit everyone, not just our graduate students, though our focus in this book is certainly on you. When we better prepare new faculty, we help all faculty, and that benefits our field, our institutions, and—most important—the students we teach. Now as a professor (Claire) and two associate professors ourselves, we have benefited in a lot of ways from this research, especially in becoming more aware of the needs of our junior colleagues. Folks like us don’t go into academic work because good is good enough.

In the pages to come, we discuss our findings on new faculty in composition and rhetoric, providing a picture of what successes they have had and what challenges they have faced. Our hope is that you will be able to recognize ways you can help yourself prepare for similar situations. We also hope you will be instrumental in improving doctoral programs nationwide as well as in bringing awareness to how our field educates graduate students to begin with. As was clear from our study, graduate programs are strong in some ways but have not adequately prepared students in other ways, such as for situations similar to the one described at the beginning of this introduction, the one involving budget cuts. As a soon-to-be-full-time faculty member, you should recognize that your days as a student are not finished once you graduate with your doctoral degree. Perhaps this

is one of the misconceptions new faculty have. They may believe they have left formal learning behind, but on-the-job lessons can and should happen. However, unlike the more easily identifiable professionalization experienced in graduate school, new faculty are faced with the challenges of both recognizing the opportunities and creating them where they are not yet apparent. This learning should not just be the responsibility of new faculty and their hiring institutions; it should also be that of our field. Our wish for this book is that it will attest to the need for multiple avenues of support for graduate students as they transition out of their doctoral programs and into their careers as members of the field of composition and rhetoric. You will certainly play a vital role in this process, as you are currently experiencing graduate study firsthand and can share your experiences with your institution and the field now.

Finally, and more to the point, what you will find here is not only the story of our research on new faculty but how such research has helped us identify six specific strategies we believe are crucial to effectively preparing you for the professoriate. We realize there are quite a few strategies graduate students who are soon-to-be new faculty can utilize in order to be successful (more than could possibly fit in just one book). However, based on our research, it is these specific six strategies, above all, that we believe will serve you in the most productive ways as you move on to careers as professors in composition and rhetoric.

The six strategies we developed for this book came from the themes and subthemes we discovered in our data, particularly those that involved coding. Indeed, coding was an important part of our research process. We believe Rebecca Moore Howard explains the coding process best:

Coding pushes the researcher away from confirmation bias, beyond grasping at bright shiny objects in an impressionistic reading of text. Coding compels the researcher to be systematic in handling data; it facilitates unexpected insights and impedes the researcher's impulse to notice only the passages that support his or her preliminary hypotheses. Once the coding is finished, the interpretation begins, with the researcher working with very systematically categorized and analyzed text. (79)

We were systematic in our categorizing and analyzing of the texts that contained our data and we did this through NVivo, a software program designed specifically to analyze data. What came from this coding, then, were the perspectives about our data that helped us thematically organize this text in a way that best tells our and our participants' stories, stories that illuminate ways to better prepare graduate students like you. We recognize and value the story you are bringing to this text as well and hope we can combine efforts to make our field even stronger.

HERE'S WHAT THE SCHOLARSHIP SAYS ABOUT . . . SIMILAR STUDIES

When we began this study years ago, our goal was to capture what life was like in our field for new faculty and, specifically, how graduate students navigate their transition to such positions as they negotiate their identity time and time again. Dozens of studies of various kinds (from case studies to surveys) about graduate programs and new faculty make calls for improvement—calls that, for the most part, continue to go unanswered. As we will discuss later, for instance, Scott L. Miller et al.'s 1997 survey on graduate students in composition and rhetoric called for graduate programs to show graduate students career options other than researching at R1 institutions. Graduate students in Miller et al.'s study also had little confidence in their future realities as professionals in the field. Such a call for more awareness of all career possibilities beyond a career at an R1 institution has been echoed time and again. David Laurence, writing in the *ADE Bulletin* in 2002, wrote that “the curriculum of doctoral education needs to educate future faculty members more directly for departments where teaching, not publication, stands at the center of what faculty members do and for faculty work as it exists in baccalaureate and two-year colleges” (14). Later, in 2014, the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students reported that graduate students had “little support in finding and considering nonacademic jobs” and that finding a job in academia can be “mystifying,” especially when

“many graduate students have little mentorship at their institutions for navigating the market” (1).

More recent scholarship has pointed to other shortcomings in graduate education. For instance, in their analysis of narratives from junior faculty at five different institutions who were tasked with developing an undergraduate writing major, Greg Giberson et al. warned back in 2009 that “the disparity between graduate student preparation and academic workplace realities may only become greater and more complex in the decades to come.” They found that the junior faculty in their study were not entirely ready for the “challenging professional circumstances that undergraduate degree programs represent” and that, while these junior faculty were ultimately successful, there were still questions as to whether or not they could have been even more successful had “they received more direct theoretical and practical graduate instruction in undergraduate degree program development and administration.” They conclude in their study that “future faculty who will develop and teach in undergraduate degrees in writing need a working knowledge of the machinery of academic production; of the specific institutional, political, and historical contexts where they will labor; of the bureaucratic, imaginative, and rhetorical work of program development; and of the possible consequences—positive and negative—of this work.”

Since 2009, scholars have not just studied and made arguments about how graduate study in our field in general can improve. They have also advocated for specific areas of graduate study to improve, from focusing more “on the intellectual, on the nature of writing, on the deeply rhetorical roots of politics and ideology” (Skeffington 69), to providing “a more robust system of education and/or training for graduate students . . . interested in writing program administration” (Elder et al. 14), to rethinking doctoral program language requirements in order to steer away from “monolingualist disciplinary assumptions” (Kilfoil 441), and to arguing that “we need to listen to [graduate students’] insights, to look to their scholarship as identifying future trends” (Carlo and Enos 221). The range of

studies about graduate education in our field reflects the diversity of our field and its continuous evolution.

In our study, more than twenty years after Miller et al.'s, we found that new faculty are still wishing their graduate programs had shown them career options other than researching at R1 institutions, as well as the actual realities of being a professor. What we are suggesting here is the need to do something with these studies and our own that involves more than just reading them. In what ways, we wonder, could these have a bigger impact not just on graduate students, not just on new faculty, but on all faculty and those who do and do not support faculty effectively? Our hope is that our book will encourage real change in the ways we prepare graduate students and that you will lead the way.

HERE'S HOW WE . . . ORGANIZED AND STRUCTURED THIS BOOK

We have devoted each chapter to one of the six strategies, providing you with a central framework to explore our research. The framework outlines each chapter in the following ways: first, each chapter begins with a story related to the strategy ("Here's a Story about . . ."), followed by advice for readers that explains why they might want to use such a strategy ("Here's Our Advice about . . ."). This strategy is the focus of the chapter, and what follows in the remainder of the chapter supports this strategy. We show how our findings from the three phases of our study led us to develop such a strategy ("Here's What Our Research Says about . . ."). We not only share statistics from our survey but also provide examples from our interviews and collected documents.

Then we discuss our field's scholarship, or lack thereof, on the subject at hand ("Here's What Scholarship Says about . . ."). After years of researching and reading studies on both graduate students and new faculty, we have included in this book scholarship you might not be familiar with from your PhD program's courses. We hope that by doing so we provide you with a wider

lens through which to view our field's stories, as well as complicate what you currently do know of them, in order to challenge commonplaces that risk valuing certain voices, ideologies, identities, and histories over others.

After this, with the exception of this chapter, we make suggestions for how you might learn more about such a strategy and how we might improve current programs ("Here's How We . . ."). The two concluding sections in each chapter involve reader participation more directly, providing you with a means for reflection and experiential learning opportunities that have you investigating authentic situations in the field. The first involves answering questions and thinking about specific ways such a strategy might be of value to you ("Here Are Questions to Consider . . ."). And the second invites you to act, to participate, and to experience ("Here Are Moves You Can Make to . . .") in order to better understand the strategy. We see these last sections of each chapter serving three specific functions: (1) demystify the professoriate, (2) compare what current new faculty have to say of their job expectations with the realities you might face when on the job, and (3) make visible the invisible, behind-the-scenes work new faculty do. Our hope is that by the end of each chapter, you will be better able to answer the questions, What will your reality be as new faculty and What is within your power to shape it?

For a visual picture of the framework, as well as an outline of the chapters, we provide a chart (see appendix). In addition to this visual, we have included below a brief description of each of the six strategies to help readers prepare for the pages to come.

Strategy 1: Know (Y)Our Stories

In other words, learn the stories important to you as an individual and to members of the field. In chapter 1, we explore the significance of narrative and how we construct professional identities as faculty—a process that sheds light on the experience of transitioning out of graduate school and into the

professoriate. You may be so intent on looking outward, working to establish yourself as an insider in the field and learning its stories, that you may neglect to look inward, reflecting to develop yourself as an individual first and foremost and understanding your own stories. If—and that’s a big *if*—this study could be generalized in one tidy soundbite, it would be values matter—disciplinary, institutional, academic—but none matter more than your own stories. As important as it is to experiment with pedagogical and critical theories of teaching, research, and academic labor while in graduate school, it is even more important that you experiment with possible selves as you construct an identity in your profession. Learn the stories of higher education and of our field, but continue to write your own stories, including chapters that haven’t happened yet.

Strategy 2: Understand the Job Market

Understanding the field and its processes is especially important for graduate students, but perhaps no process is more important than the job-market process. Chapter 2 uses the rite of passage known as the *job market* to explore aspects of employment in the field that remained confusing to our participants, even after being hired. The goal of this chapter is to make you aware of the challenges you may face before, during, and after you go through this process but also to suggest ways we as a field could make this process better. Your role is to help document this process and identify further ways to make it better.

Strategy 3: Define Your Tetrad: TRSA

In the third chapter, you will see how your future career may revolve around how well you are able to negotiate your own values for teaching, research, service, and administration (TRSA)—what we refer to as the *tetrad*—with those of the institution where you work. Many of our interview participants described having teaching loads, requirements for participating in scholarship, responsibilities for serving their departments

and universities, and even administrative roles similar to each other. However, the ways their institutions defined and evaluated this teaching, research, service, and administration varied from one institution to the next and from one person to the next. That's because much of how we define what we do has to do with what we value as individuals but also how that gets negotiated with what our institutions value. Having the wherewithal to see how this negotiation plays out on a personal and institutional level can help new faculty balance their workload and is key to being successful.

Strategy 4: Prepare for More Than TRSA

The participants in our study were particularly eager to share their thoughts about all the things that do not neatly fit into one category of TRSA. TRSA plays a dominant role in every new faculty member's life, but chapter 4 focuses on not-so-easily recognized but still important everyday activities/responsibilities new faculty participate in. These could include such things as writing a plan for a program initiative, putting together a budget for a writing program, creating marketing materials for an on-campus event, and so forth—things that matter and take up time yet are not necessarily things we clearly mark as TRSA.

Strategy 5: Recognize That Your Time Is Valuable and Manage It Well

Chapter 5 implores you to learn how to protect your time as a new faculty member and see that your priorities match your values. This chapter will help you begin practicing a work/life balance during graduate study. Our participants wished they had learned to say no—to requests for service, committee work, and so forth—and why to say no in order to protect their time. But learning to say no is easier said than done as new faculty learn what life is like when researching on their own, managing committee work, and teaching more classes than when they were in graduate school.

Strategy 6: Collaborate

Discourse communities and communities of practice have been consistent threads in our field's intellectual conversation, and the more recent public turn in composition and rhetoric suggests we will continue to critically examine our relationships with others. We are a field that values collegiality and encourages generosity and opportunities for collaboration in many forms. For our study, we were particularly interested in knowing whether new faculty participated in collaboration with colleagues, students, and community members. As we discuss in chapter 6, graduate students who participated in collaboration during their PhD program are more likely to go on to collaborate once they are in the professoriate, especially if they have collaborated in conference presentations, research with faculty, and writing grants.

Moving Forward: Faculty and Graduate Program Support

We've called the last chapter of the book not the final chapter but the moving-forward chapter, as it is a call to action, one that looks ahead to our future. In particular, we lay out three strategies for how our field, institutions, and graduate students especially can help make the transition from graduate school to the professoriate more effective for you and future graduate students in composition and rhetoric. Specifically, we see experiential learning playing a big role in this future.

HERE ARE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER . . .**WHEN READING THIS BOOK**

This book is our team's attempt to address some of the gaps in new-faculty preparation we have found in doctoral programs and move our field to action. You will not only learn about the findings of our study but also be given opportunities to apply what you learn in your own contexts, whether that be in graduate study, through mentoring, or through experiences at our field's conferences. In order to keep this goal of better

preparing you as the primary focus while sharing our research findings, we have included a number of ways that provide prompts for discussion, inquiry, and action. To begin with, we suggest you develop your own list of questions about the professoriate and work with those stakeholders around you to find answers to them. We also want to offer a list of questions we feel all graduate students should consider as they think about their current situation and their future:

- What do you hope to learn as a graduate student that will help prepare you for the professoriate?
- Who or what can help you learn these things?
- What worries do you have?
- What challenges will you face?
- What are you most confident about?
- What are your strengths as a teacher? As a researcher? As a collaborator? As an administrator?
- How can you improve as a teacher? As a researcher? As a collaborator? As an administrator?
- In what ways now can you help your fellow classmates, your program, and your institution make changes to your current situation with the goal of best preparing you for a future in this field?
- What roles do graduate students play in shaping graduate programs? The field?
- What do you specifically have to offer that can create a more just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive discipline and profession?

HERE ARE MOVES YOU CAN MAKE TO . . .

KEEP AN OPEN, POSITIVE MIND

Carlo and Enos argue that “graduate core curricula give a clear indication of the trends in our field and shape our disciplinary identity as curricula reveal the knowledge(s) we value” (210), as well as contend that “social trends, disciplinary trends, and, of course, institutional resources are lines of inquiry to consider when planning a new program or revising a program” (214). As you read this book, we encourage you to think about the

development of your own graduate program—its curriculum, its training, its opportunities—as it is situated in a particular institution amongst particular faculty while at the same time connected to a larger discipline comprised of colleagues who bring a diverse expertise. With the goal of helping improve your own program for yourself and future students, we hope you will consider the various aspects of graduate study that welcome us to experience the many facets of the profession and work with your faculty and administrators (as well as others in our field) to make strides in changing your current situation for the better.

In our findings, for instance, participants had a lot of experience in the areas of teaching and researching prior to taking on faculty positions but not a lot of experience in the areas of service and administration. As you begin this book, we urge you to participate in all the nitty-gritty aspects of faculty employment that go beyond teaching and researching (areas that may be a large focus of your graduate program's curriculum) and encourage your fellow graduate students to do the same. Seek the thoughts of others at your institution and elsewhere and engage in discussions about aspects of faculty employment in higher education that involve all aspects of the job.

As mentioned above, create a list of questions about your current and future plans for the professoriate as you read this book. Then, come up with a plan to learn the answers to them, whether that means finding and meeting with a mentor on a regular basis, job shadowing at other institutions in your area, or networking with new faculty at regional and national conferences. As you do, be sure you are willing to consider all possibilities for your career path and to speak with everyone about their experiences in the field whether they be tenure-track professors or adjunct faculty. Learning from others' stories is one of the most beneficial moves you can make to prepare for the professoriate and resist disciplinary commonplaces.