

Putting the PhD to Work— for the Public Good

This book invites readers to consider ways that humanities graduate training can open unexpected doors that lead to meaningful careers with significant public impact, while also suggesting that an expanded understanding of scholarly success can foster more equitable and inclusive systems in and around the academy. It offers concrete steps to support individual career pathways as well as structural reform. Despite decades of research and funding in career initiatives, many doctoral students feel alone and at sea when it comes to envisioning and working toward their professional futures. And yet an increasingly interconnected world means that the humanities are more necessary than ever. It is because of this disconnect—between students’ frustrations on one hand, and the importance of the humanities in all sectors on the other—that I began this project. Intended especially for doctoral students and their faculty mentors and advisors, *Putting the Humanities PhD to Work* includes case studies and concrete actions to broaden the range of career paths for those who pursue doctoral education. And yet it is more than a how-to guide. The underlying pulse of the book continually returns to two main questions:

- What can be done—by students, faculty, and program administrators—to normalize and strengthen a wider range of career pathways?
- How might a broader understanding of postgraduate success improve the health and inclusivity of the humanities?

These questions help to situate a discussion of career paths in a broader context of graduate education reform and support for higher education as a public good. Graduate education is sometimes perceived as elite and esoteric, but scholarly research has a significant impact on things that affect the daily lives of millions—from the policies that structure our society to the stories and art that bring meaning and joy. This book offers ways to reframe humanities doctoral training with an eye toward public impact, and a focus on making graduate education matter in new and powerful ways.

I contend that reform can and should take place at multiple levels simultaneously, with students, faculty, and administrators all creating opportunities for change through decisions large and small. The book is intended for current, prospective, and recent graduate students; for scholars who are interested in changing careers at any life stage; and for faculty members, graduate deans, administrators, and advisors who shape graduate programs as well as individual students' pathways. Each of these audiences may have a different goal in reading this book—embarking on a different career path, learning new strategies for advising students, understanding the current landscape of graduate education before deciding whether to pursue a PhD. By providing a solid background of the stakes and possible interventions, as well as practical, hands-on advice, I hope every reader emerges with a clear sense of possibility for their particular context as well as a glimpse into the hopes, values, concerns, and constraints facing other readers.

This book includes a consideration of academic labor structures and career opportunities, and provides graduate students with a context and analytical framework for discerning opportunities for different potential career paths, while taking an activist perspective that moves not only toward individual success but also toward systemic change. For those in positions to make decisions in humanities departments or programs, the book offers insight into the circumstances and pressures that students are facing and examples of programmatic reform that address career matters in structural ways. It grounds its argument in recent data without losing sight of the human realities that suffuse issues of academic labor practices, job markets, and career paths. Throughout, I highlight the important truth that different kinds of careers might offer engaging, fulfilling, and even unexpected pathways for students who seek them out. People pursuing PhDs are deeply curious, exploratory, and passionate about their work; that curiosity is essential to research. Imagine what could happen if doctoral students were invited to apply a similar approach of inquiry, creativity, and exploration to their potential professional lives beyond the university's gates.

Humanities for Today's World

Individuals and institutions can play a pivotal role in supporting a renewal of humanities education as a key element of thoughtful citizenship in today's society. My research suggests that new developments in doctoral programs—like encouraging creative dissertation formats, adopting new models for comprehensive exams, integrating digital skills and methods into humanities scholarship, and embracing scholarship with meaningful public impact—can open doors to broader matters of where students work and how scholarship might reach the public in unexpected ways. Solid mentorship is also key, as it gives students the space to explore their possible futures, equip them for broader pathways, and enliven their research. From small interventions to major programmatic change, there are ways for students, faculty, and administrators to begin working toward these goals right now.

Recognizing the expansive social value of the knowledge, skills, and approaches that recent graduates have gained during the course of their studies means understanding the wide range of institutions and contexts where they can make a significant impact. Faculty and administrators have an opportunity to adjust graduate program structures to better equip students to take on a wide range of roles where they can apply their deep humanities training. Even without knowing exactly what pathway a graduate might take, since career opportunities are constantly evolving, the curiosity and love of learning that spark a desire to pursue a graduate degree is something to celebrate. Society needs more, not fewer, people trained to understand and contextualize the cultural, historical, linguistic, and other valences of contemporary geopolitics. More people who can read, critique, and synthesize complex and competing arguments. More people who know the national and global histories of systemic racism and institutionalized bias and who are equipped to speak out against ongoing inequalities. We need them in the classroom—but not only there. The impact of humanities training would be far greater if universities trained students not only to teach but also enabled them to pursue careers that carried them beyond the university, creating a robust network of humanities PhDs working across a wide range of institutions and professional contexts.

In fact, the nodes for such a network do exist, since humanities PhDs have long excelled in a wide range of careers. Doctoral degree recipients have very low rates of unemployment, and those working beyond the classroom, whether in nonprofits or businesses, tend to have very high rates of job satisfaction—higher than those in tenure-track faculty positions.¹ Research by the Modern Language Association suggests that the trend of strong employment for people

with advanced degrees holds true for the humanities, with only 0.1 percent unemployment in their sample.² However, this network of PhDs working beyond the classroom remains somewhat invisible in university contexts. It is not uncommon for department websites to unceremoniously drop the names of their graduates who step into jobs outside the familiar ranks of assistant, associate, full—especially since only faculty job placements count toward program rankings. Alumni networks and development offices are the first to know when grads have made a move, but departments often rapidly lose touch. Rather than forming a vibrant network of the multivalent possibilities open to humanities PhDs, those who seek careers outside the classroom quietly disappear, leaving each new generation of students to wonder what they could possibly do with their degrees—and prompting countless would-be students to decide not even to apply. Since graduate students excel at reading between the lines, the silences speak loudly. When certain outcomes are celebrated and others are rendered invisible, there is a tacit but clear signal that paths outside the well-trodden ones are undesirable. The result is a perpetuation of conventional forms of success, which limits creativity and diversity of all kinds, and also limits any extramural connections that students might have fostered. Given the already-widespread perception that the humanities are less valuable than STEM fields in terms of applicability and practicality, advisors, departments, and universities are taking an enormous risk by sending such messages.

Imagine an example. Picture a student just beginning her graduate work in, say, English; I'll call her Eva. She dives into the coursework, learning the methodological and theoretical approaches that her discipline values. She plunges into close reading and archival research. She learns about the historical context, the contemporary stakes, and the counternarratives that affect her research. She selects an advisor and a committee to guide and critique her work. As she learns more and more about the ways that literature has given voice to important cultural moments, she is inspired by the possibility that connecting communities with art and literature in new and deeper ways may serve to bring about new insight, cross-cultural understanding, self-reflection, and a deeper grasp of historical context. Perhaps she looks ahead to her future career and pictures herself working with the public in an advocacy capacity, navigating between local work with a community-based organization and broader outreach through op-eds and public speaking. As she gains experience and credibility, she finds that she is able to bring her deep humanities training to bear on public perception and educational policy work.

But now imagine that as Eva shares her enthusiasm, she begins noticing implicit messages of disapproval from her professors and even fellow students.

She perceives flashes of confusion or displeasure about her proposed path. Her advisor is unable to suggest any models or mentors for her to turn to for guidance. She has a difficult time finding resources to help her make connections and explore opportunities. Faced with these negative signals, she decides to pursue the expected path and go on the academic job market.

Though Eva's research is excellent, tenure-line faculty positions make up an ever-smaller share of college instructional positions, while doctoral graduation rates continue to increase. Undergraduate enrollments are strong despite a decrease in the number of humanities majors, and colleges need someone to teach all those students, so this newly minted PhD is able to pick up a few courses as an adjunct. Suddenly finding herself earning less money than she did as a graduate student, she cobbles together odd jobs to keep herself afloat. With no time built into her job description for research or professional development that would make her a more competitive candidate for tenure-track positions, it becomes increasingly difficult for her to break out of the cycle.

Now imagine that Eva is forward-looking and perceives all of these possible outcomes before she begins her graduate career. Perhaps she is the first in her family to attend college. Perhaps she is a woman of color, and notices very quickly that there are few people who look like her among the ranks of senior faculty across the United States, giving her the impression that the profession will be unwelcoming or that she will face bias throughout her trajectory. Given all those factors, does she decide to take five or ten years out of the workforce, relocate, and possibly go into debt in order to pursue a graduate degree? She may decide that the odds are not in her favor and opt out before she even begins.

While Eva considers these possible outcomes, the department she is (or was) considering conducts a calculus of its own. Faculty and administrators observe that their graduates are having a difficult time gaining long-term academic positions, and in response the department grows increasingly conservative in its admissions process. Rather than take risks on students with unconventional backgrounds or those who hope to do the kind of public-focused work that Eva hoped to do, they redouble their efforts to recruit conventionally high-achieving prospective students with top-notch GRE scores and pristine academic pedigrees. In what they think is an unrelated issue, they are surprised to note as the years pass that they are having a harder and harder time meeting university goals for diversity and representation among their students, and even among their new faculty hires.

This scenario is all too common in higher education, and shows how many issues intertwine to create an environment that is problematic from both an educational and a social justice standpoint. It is a no-win situation. The individual

student is badly served by the systemic biases, exploitative labor structures, and negative signals she receives from her peers and advisors. The department is negatively affected by the well-meaning but problematic move toward increased conservatism that they hope will improve placement rates for their graduates, but that actually serve to further reduce diversity and limit opportunity. Undergraduate students are badly served by the poor labor practices of most institutions that leave adjunct faculty teaching the most vulnerable undergraduate populations with extremely limited resources and support.

There's another major segment of the population that is badly served by this scenario: the public. Because Eva received signals that nudged her toward a career in the classroom that she wasn't initially aiming for and away from a fulfilling public-oriented career that appealed to her, the public is deprived of a deeply trained specialist who could help advocate for complex causes that require deft historical inquiry and cultural understanding.

The focus of this book is only partially about the success of individuals; it is also intrinsically tied to broader cultural norms and labor issues within the academy.³ Though humanities scholars thrive in a wide range of positions (and have long done so), most doctoral students in the humanities consider a faculty position to be their primary career goal, and few graduate programs systematically equip their students for varied postgraduate opportunities. And yet meaningful and sustainable academic employment is an increasingly distant prospect for many doctoral recipients, with a dwindling proportion of tenure-track jobs available to an ever-growing pool of graduates. In 2016, 37.5 percent of all graduating humanities PhDs reported having an academic job lined up—and many of these positions were likely adjunct positions or short-term visiting appointments (I'll have more to say about that in chapter 1). Most do find work in the years following graduation—the overall unemployment rate for humanities PhDs is very low—but it can take people a few years to find their footing. Given these numbers, so-called “alternative” career options are anything but secondary.⁴ A more expansive view of career possibilities might enable recent graduates to find meaningful work more quickly by encouraging a different kind of search from the outset.

Even though the percentage of graduates that obtain tenure-track faculty positions has diminished as reliance on contingent labor increases, faculty careers are still the primary goal for a large majority of humanities doctoral students. Findings from “Humanities Unbound,” a study I conducted with the Scholarly Communications Institute in 2012, revealed that three out of four PhDs working *outside* the classroom entered graduate school expecting to pursue a career in the professoriate.⁵ As the American Association of University

Professors notes in their annual report on the state of the profession, academic employment is increasingly shifting to part-time and contingent positions, with 76 percent of all teaching positions being filled by instructors in contingent roles as of 2011.⁶ This trend means that proportionally fewer tenure-track lines are available to new graduates, compounding the problem. Notably, a 2013 survey of chief academic officers revealed that provosts expected that reliance on adjunct labor to continue or increase; some respondents expressed having little faith in a continued tenure system.⁷ Given this backdrop, continuing to view tenure-track employment as the sole expected professional outcome for humanities doctoral recipients is untenable.

The fact that tenure-track employment opportunities are becoming scarcer relative to the number of graduates does not necessarily mean that too many people earn PhDs, or that graduate programs should reduce their admissions. The truth is that the high percentage of contingent faculty members has not come about due to an overabundance of doctoral recipients. Rather, the decision to have adjuncts teach the large majority of college courses is an almost entirely separate matter of budgetary pressure and institutional priorities that favor short-term and inexpensive solutions over long-term and complex commitments to departments, programs, and students. While some contingent positions offer reasonable wages and benefits, the vast majority do not. The matter goes beyond simple supply and demand; the number of tenure-track positions available does not fluctuate based on the number of qualified candidates, or even based on the number of students enrolling in a particular disciplinary area. Changing the supply of newly minted PhDs by offering more or fewer slots in graduate programs will likely have little to no effect on the job market for tenure-track faculty careers.

A number of institutions are working against these patterns, and throughout this book I share examples of those whose approaches are particularly compelling. From incremental changes like modifying the curriculum for a single course, to more sweeping reform that takes aim at things like dissertation models or time-to-degree across an institution, many programs are beginning (or continuing) to examine what is essential and where change might begin. For the programs that are working hard to improve the structures and systems that make it difficult for individual students to break the traditional mold, it can be helpful to learn about similar efforts, both to bolster the foundation for supporting such changes and to learn in advance from challenges that other programs have encountered. This cross-pollination is especially important given that the question of career diversity and professionalization can be most effectively addressed when considered alongside other pressing issues in gradu-

ate education. One program's focus on developing systematic professional development and individual support for graduate students can be strengthened and amplified by supporting like-minded programs that advocate for fair labor practices for contingent faculty members; by lobbying against the trend toward labor casualization and just-in-time hiring; or by working toward robust pedagogical support for both graduate students and faculty. All these efforts are necessary to building scholarly structures that support the best research and teaching while also strengthening individual outcomes.

Full support for doctoral students' career pathways entails not only offering opportunities for skill development but also encouraging a broader definition of what constitutes postgraduate success. While a number of initiatives, such as the Woodrow Wilson Foundation's Responsive PhD project (2000–2005),⁸ have worked to shift university paradigms and encourage better career preparation for graduate students, their resulting methods and recommendations have still not been widely adopted. More recently, the report of the Modern Language Association's Task Force on Doctoral Education offered a suite of strong recommendations on reforming the humanities PhD,⁹ and funding agencies including the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation have stepped in to support such efforts. The MLA's report is still too recent to assess uptake and outcomes, but it signals the importance of doctoral education reform to the discipline as a whole, and provides a useful starting point for discussions that can lead to real action.

Why Pursue a PhD?

Before digging too deeply into how to prepare successfully for and transition into a meaningful career, it's worth stepping back to take a look at the purpose of rigorous academic study. Why do universities offer humanities PhDs in the first place? And why do people pursue them?

The pursuit of knowledge, the desire to better understand the world, the hope to contribute to learning and to create new meaning—all of these can be profound reasons that people pursue advanced studies in the humanities. In humanities disciplines, the doctoral degree is an opportunity for deep specialization as well as expansive thinking in the various forms of cultural expression and human experience that bring meaning to our lives. At its best, the standard structure of coursework, exams, and dissertation provides students with a model of decreasing structure that enables them to move progressively from a learner to an expert—and not only an expert, but one who can compellingly share that expertise with others. Comprehensive exams are the moment when

doctoral students prove that they have a firm grasp on the thinkers who came before, while the long, unstructured deep dive of the dissertation gives them a chance to show that they can effectively craft, complete, and defend new interventions in their areas of study. This ongoing project of learning, inquiry, and articulation pushes the boundaries of long-established fields. Humanities fields need top-notch research by new experts in order to question the inclusion or exclusion of certain writers or artists from a broadly accepted canon; to consider marginalized perspectives and develop a more complex understanding of histories; to create compelling visions for where we, as humans, have been and where we are going.

An unstated purpose of graduate students' rigorous and creative work is to feed the knowledge they create back into the academy through both teaching and research.¹⁰ But why should scholarship be confined to such a narrow space? Humanities study taps into some of the deepest motivations and fears of individuals and societies—how we understand identity and belonging; what we consider to be beautiful; how dynamics of power, authority, and rebellion change over time. These questions resonate with people far beyond the confines of the classroom, and rely on knowledge and cultural artifacts created both within and outside of the artificial constructs of disciplines or periodization. Without changing the rigor of study in the slightest, it is easy to imagine a very different breadth and depth of engagement with communities of practice and with various publics, both in the way students learn and in how and where they apply their expertise.

Pursuing a graduate degree in the humanities means undertaking a life of research that involves deep inquiry into areas of uncertainty—except, often, where professional outcomes are concerned. Whereas a student's research may take her through time, space, and varied paradigms, the end product almost invariably takes the form of an article or monograph, and the expectation for advancement is the steady progression from apprentice, to junior faculty member, to tenure. But why should the structures meant to train emerging scholars and foster academic freedom and inquiry limit the reach of brilliant people and their ideas in this way? While it is crucial that some scholars go on to continue their research and teaching in this traditional manner, expanding the range of scholarly products and career paths would mean huge gains for society, bringing new ideas to the public through a wide range of institutions. With deeper and more sustained public connection, the relevance of higher education would be more immediately apparent, prompting greater public support. Ideally, that support could then translate into stronger city and state investments, slowing the defunding process that is dismantling public higher education. Further,

recognizing a broader range of what scholarly work can look like makes it possible for scholars with varied backgrounds and skill sets to break new ground. It opens up new avenues so that institutions aren't gatekeeping in the same ways, letting the same people advance all the time.

What Kinds of Careers?

The reasons that a graduate student or PhD holder might consider a career beyond the classroom vary widely. In many cases, the most significant step involves a shift in thinking about career opportunities as either “faculty” or “not-faculty” to instead seeing a faculty career as one option among many. Seen that way, it is far easier to assess the advantages and drawbacks of a faculty career in a neutral way, rather than through the lens of a deficit model that considers anything outside a narrowly defined norm to be less valuable.

Despite the wide range of career pathways graduates pursue, including those where they continue to teach and conduct research, professional development is not a routine component of many graduate programs. To the extent that career preparation is discussed, it is often with the expectation that successful completion of graduate work will automatically put one on a path toward a particular kind of success. Higher education continues to be one of the most promising indicators of future earnings, so it is with good reason that many expect graduate study to lead to stable, fulfilling careers. While a faculty position involving some combination of teaching and research remains the most common path for people with doctoral degrees in humanities fields,¹¹ it is far from the only possibility.

Moving outward from an academic department, career possibilities might include staff or hybrid work in universities—careers in administration, libraries, humanities centers, or student services, for instance. But the higher education universe doesn't end at the boundaries of the university's campus. Many other institutions also support the structure of higher education and can be excellent places of employment. These include scholarly societies, professional associations, publishers, state and federal governmental agencies, and policy organizations. Radiating further from the university are institutions that promote public learning and knowledge sharing: museums, archives, public libraries, cultural heritage organizations, the media, performing arts, cultural and educational nonprofits, and many more. And for companies directly related to education or cultural heritage—anything from educational technology companies to tourism-related industries—humanities expertise is incredibly valuable. Even companies without a clear connection to the humanities in their mission

can have engaging and relevant opportunities in areas like research and development; tech companies, for instance, face a multitude of ethical and intercultural questions and have increasingly turned to humanities scholars to help them think differently about how their products will function in the world. Independent consulting and freelancing is an attractive option for some, and others apply the skills gained in graduate school to careers far afield from the subject matter of their discipline. Not all of these jobs *require* PhDs, of course, and there is some concern about encouraging people with doctorates into careers that have typically been pathways for people with master's degrees. While this kind of "credential creep" is a valid concern, for the most part the benefits of encouraging highly trained humanities practitioners to pursue broader career goals far outweigh the potential drawbacks. For the purposes of this book, I focus specifically on doctoral programs and people with PhDs, since a discussion of similar topics for master's programs would merit another book's worth of analysis.

The Current Landscape: Career Expectations

When I conducted the "Humanities Unbound" study, a few clear patterns stood out.¹² First, there was very little diversity of career goals at the outset of graduate work. Respondents reported that when they began their studies, they did so with the overwhelming goal of eventually becoming faculty members. Most felt highly confident about this future pathway.¹³ These numbers are particularly striking because the survey targeted people with careers outside the professoriate.¹⁴ Instead of working as faculty members as they had anticipated doing, these survey participants were employed at a number of different types of workplaces, with a large majority working within universities, libraries, and other cultural heritage organizations. The data shows that, historically, many graduate students have begun their studies without a clear understanding of their future employment prospects. While the degree of transparency about the likelihood of obtaining a tenure-track position may have improved in recent years, overall the responses signal that we are failing to bring informed students into the graduate education system.

Deepening the problem, students reported receiving little or no preparation for careers outside the professoriate during the course of their studies, even though the need for information about a variety of careers is acute. Only 18 percent reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied with the preparation they received for careers outside the classroom. The responses were rooted in perception, so there may have been resources available that students were not taking

advantage of—but whatever the reason, they did not feel that they were being adequately prepared. That perception reveals significant room for improvement throughout the higher education system. Further, if programs devote time and funding to resources for career preparation, it is essential to offer and promote them from the very beginning of graduate students' careers. Failing to do so may limit the effectiveness of such interventions, since it reinstates the sense that a career beyond the classroom is a “plan B” that is less prestigious than a faculty position would be. Students are very good at sensing implicit signals from their peers and advisors, which is one reason that it is crucial to embed the discussions in the earliest stages of graduate school as students are getting their footing in a program.

People reported pursuing nonfaculty jobs for reasons ranging from the practical and immediate—salary, benefits, family considerations—to more future- and goal-oriented reasons, such as the desire to gain new skills, contribute to society, and advance in one's career. While there are a great many reasons for pursuing one career or another, one of the key factors in opting for something other than a faculty career is the desire for geographic flexibility and control. Faculty careers often require a regional or national search and one or more relocations before settling into a long-term position, and sometimes the towns and cities where universities are located offer few opportunities for partners who may also be seeking work. Moreover, some college locations—for instance, small towns whose populations are overwhelmingly white, or states with transphobic laws in place—may not be safe or hospitable environments for all jobseekers. Broadening the career search to other types of positions makes it far easier for a person to control where they live. Another major reason is flexibility and career advancement. Even though academic freedom is one of the strongest draws of a faculty position, for some people a faculty career feels limiting. Pursuing other options allows an individual to develop new skills, seek out unexpected opportunities, and push themselves in ways they may not have done. The desire for greater freedom, or simply a different environment than a university department, appealed to many. One respondent cited the prospect of “an interesting job in a field where wide-ranging intellectual curiosity is an asset” to be a very important reason for pursuing their chosen career. Another mentioned the “tremendous autonomy” their chosen position offered. Much more simply, though, a large number of respondents cited the need to find a stable job as their primary motivation. Some respondents considered themselves “overwhelmed,” “burned out,” or “frustrated.”¹⁵ A note of urgency and, sometimes, desperation came through in a number of these responses.

What all of this information underscores is that a critical consideration of the ways we talk about work—whether as a faculty member or in any number of careers beyond the classroom—is an important step for graduate students to gain more realistic expectations and clearer understandings of their own strengths, needs, and desires. Until we talk about faculty work in the language of labor and employment, it will remain shrouded in mystique that makes it difficult for graduate students to consider it as one option among many.

Many positions that involve translating humanities study into a broader public good are a part of the growing discourse of “alt-academic” careers, a category that is both hard to define and nearly impossible to measure accurately. The changing nature of career paths for humanities scholars is an issue of particular concern to digital humanities practitioners, who have long been working in hybrid roles that combine elements of traditional scholarship, like research and teaching, with other elements, such as software development, librarianship, high-level administrative responsibilities, and more. These roles are not new, but the term reflected an effort on the part of the scholarly community to find a unified and elegant way to refer to such careers. Many of the skills implicit in digital humanities scholarship and work products—including collaboration, project management, and technological fluency—are becoming increasingly important in new models of graduate training, even among programs not specifically allied with the digital humanities. The spheres of alt-academic careers and the digital humanities can be best understood as a Venn diagram, with significant areas of overlap as well as distinctive qualities. Many fruitful conversations and initiatives related to broadening career paths have emerged from the digital humanities community, and there are important reasons why this is the case. At the same time, the two areas are not identical; many digital humanists work as tenured and tenure-track professors, while many who identify as working in alternative academic roles do not engage in the kinds of scholarship or practice associated with the digital humanities.

While the scope of the alt-academic umbrella is a topic of a great deal of conversation and some contention, it is also possible—and perhaps more productive—to take a broad view that is defined not so much by the specific job or career, but rather by a type of approach or lens. The most compelling common denominator among people who have adopted the “alt-academic” moniker is that they tend to see their work through the lens of academic training, and incorporate scholarly methods into the way that work is done. They engage in work with the same intellectual curiosity that fueled the desire to go to graduate school in the first place, and apply the same kinds of skills—such as close

reading, historical inquiry, or written argumentation—to the tasks at hand. This kind of fluid definition encourages us to seek out the unexpected places where people are finding their intellectual curiosity piqued and their research skills tested and sharpened.

This kind of engagement occurs in the classroom, but also in a wide range of other work environments. One commonality across many career paths is that in addition to the intellectual challenges, there are also many other challenges that draw on different kinds of skills. Some jobs require excellent management skills; others require marketing or sales skills; still others require technical skills. These are not often gained as part of the core curriculum in graduate school—but then, neither are the skills required to be an excellent teacher, administrator, grant writer, and faculty colleague. The intellectual and interpretive skills acquired in graduate programs span many careers. The other essential skills vary, and are often learned on the job—and people may find some appealing while disliking others. It is often these ancillary skills that make someone seem “suited” for one particular career or another. A good guiding question for someone wondering what this looks like in practicality is, what are the kinds of problems you like to solve? The challenges of teaching—the constraints of the physical classroom, the institutional structures that govern a course’s size and meeting time, the performative nature of some modes of teaching—may not be the kinds of challenges that a scholar likes to undertake. Instead, someone may feel stimulated by the problem-solving involved in other types of work, such as working to change institutional structures, making connections and partnerships, pitching ideas, writing to different audiences, building a client base, and more. The key is rethinking the way we understand intellectual labor and how we see it embedded in many kinds of work. The rhythms and routines of faculty careers are well worn. It is time to think more creatively about where and how scholarly expertise can be applied.

Career Diversity Is Good for the Academy, Too

It is time to go beyond an oppositional model that defines careers by what they are not. Even though the notion of an “alt-academy” was intended as a reimagining of what is traditionally accepted as scholarly work, in just a few short years it has become reinscribed in the binary of faculty and nonfaculty labor. The same is true of other formulations: postacademic, nonacademic, and so on. With powerful norms governing expectations, it is difficult to break out of this tendency to define against the default. How can we, instead, think both

within and beyond the existing structures and work to redefine them in a way that makes the default far more expansive? I will undertake this challenge in the chapters that follow by addressing not only preparation for careers beyond the classroom but also labor issues and questions of preparation and training for faculty careers. By first understanding the ways in which graduate programs do not always do well what they are expected to do—that is, prepare emerging scholars to become the next generation of faculty members—the opportunities for improvement along multiple axes will become more apparent. Better career preparation isn't something that is needed on the margins of doctoral education; it is needed at the core. The current norms of graduate training often appear to be a failed apprenticeship model—preparing students for just one career path, but not preparing them particularly well, and without acknowledging the long odds of gaining a foothold in the field.

A key factor that is often overlooked in discussions about professionalization is this: all of the elements that make stronger employees are also greatly beneficial for those grads that do go on to become professors. In other words, preparing well for careers beyond the classroom is an excellent way of sharpening your teaching, research, and writing skills as well. Research, teaching, collaboration, project management, problem solving: each of these skills is something that is as valuable in the classroom as it is in a nonprofit, cultural heritage organization, or company. In an analysis of job ads published in the Modern Language Association's Jobs Information List, Beth Seltzer, Roopika Risam, and Matt Applegate found that many faculty job listings expressed the desirability of skills that might be more commonly thought of as belonging to the worlds of administration or management.¹⁶ For example, project management skills can help students to complete their dissertations and conduct research in a more effective and timely manner, and are also a crucial component of developing and teaching a course.

The notion that preparing students for varied careers somehow detracts from their core formation as scholars is simply false. Rather, the kinds of interventions that equip students to succeed in a wide range of job settings can also help them to be effective in their teaching and research if they do become faculty members. Understanding how graduate work can be applicable to different careers helps lay the foundations for students to translate their studies into different contexts, rather than suggesting that what they are learning is only valuable within the university itself. The result may be more meaningful research that can effectively reach a wide range of audiences, and a nuanced approach to understanding the world that can be applied in any professional context.

Overview of the Book

The complex backdrop that underpins graduate study is too often invisible to students as they begin their doctoral work. In *Putting the Humanities PhD to Work*, I aim to demystify this institutional context while also teasing out connections among seemingly distinct elements. I will begin with a broad view of the higher education landscape and the stakes of the career diversity movement, with special focus on why this can be understood as a social justice project. Then, I will build on that foundation to offer concrete suggestions for advisors and students—advice that is grounded in the idea that a broader understanding of scholarly success is structurally as well as individually valuable.

Chapter 1 offers background and context and lays a foundation for the book's argument that a broader understanding of postgraduate success is good for individuals, the academy, and society. In "The Academic Workforce: Expectations and Realities," I examine academic labor structures, including both tenure-track faculty careers and adjunct positions. I also consider the ways that the apprenticeship model of graduate study creates strong incentives and cultural expectations that students will become professors. The chapter addresses what is perhaps the single most damaging practice facing higher education today: the increasing reliance on underpaid, overworked adjunct faculty members with limited rights and resources. I begin here because it is essential to understand the current system in all its limitations before exploring new opportunities and different mind-sets. After examining the current landscape, including the systemic and institutional reasons that tenure-track job opportunities have become so difficult to obtain despite the high demand for the humanities at the undergraduate level, I discuss the expectations that many graduate students have when they enter their programs (spoiler alert: a faculty career), and why the current state of faculty labor should prompt us to look beyond the classroom.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the ways that developing a broader definition of scholarly success is an essential social justice issue, and an important step toward rebuilding trust and investment in higher education as a public good. Chapter 2, "Inclusive Systems, Vibrant Scholarship," examines the ways that current university practices, including the implicit signals and markers of prestige that are commonplace in graduate programs, perpetuate systems of inequality that result in the continued underrepresentation of women of all races and ethnicities and minorities of all genders in the academy. As an example, I examine institutional diversity efforts that push to increase the numbers of people from underrepresented groups yet fail because they do not address broader

issues of departmental climate or bias. After a consideration of the academy's conservative nature—which rewards those whose achievements map onto a narrow definition of success—I argue that a broader understanding of scholarly success that includes innovative and applied research may support both broader career pathways and a more truly inclusive university environment.

In chapter 3, “Expanding Definitions of Scholarly Success,” I look specifically at innovative scholarly work and the potential it creates for deeper connections with various communities within and beyond the university. As scholars and technologists create new platforms and structures for sharing research, there are increased opportunities for that work to have a meaningful impact that goes far beyond the reach of a traditional peer-reviewed journal article. However, if scholars are to devote their time and resources to sharing their work through innovative or experimental channels, there must be professional recognition for doing so. From digital dissertations to network building and from policy-relevant research to activist community engagement, greater flexibility in what is understood by the academy to constitute valuable research would help cultivate stronger public understanding of, and support for, systems of higher education.

The ideas and arguments of the first three chapters form a solid foundation on which I build a proposed action plan: concrete strategies that all readers can implement in order to work toward a more inclusive and public-oriented model of graduate education that embraces career diversity. The fourth chapter, “What Faculty and Advisors Can Do,” provides practical, action-oriented suggestions for faculty members and program directors. The ideas in this chapter are intended to help individual advisors as well as humanities departments improve the ways they implicitly and explicitly support their students and alumni. These elements include advising, curricular reform, professional development opportunities, messages about what is valued, and more. The chapter offers suggestions for individual mentorship as well as possibilities for broader programmatic change, with both immediate and long-term opportunities for reform. But the chapter is not only for faculty members or senior administrators; students will find the advice in this chapter grounds them in their own approach while providing a valuable starting point for discussion with their own advisors and peers.

Finally, chapter 5, “Students: How to Put Your PhD to Work,” continues this action plan with a focus on what students need, offering theoretical analyses, case studies, and suggestions on how to move from experimentation to implementation. Faculty members will want to take special note of this chapter as well, since it may influence their own approaches not only to mentorship

and advising but also to teaching, program structure, and more. The chapter offers practical research-based suggestions and examples of individual and institutional success stories designed to help readers strategize their own futures in a realistic and meaningful way. For individuals, this requires grasping the realities that exist, thinking through the options that are possible given those opportunities and constraints, formulating a flexible but concrete plan, and, at the same time, working toward broader institutional change. Few students have comprehensive guidance on all of those fronts at once; this book can help to fill in the gaps in a way that keeps students' complex lives—their commitments, goals, desires, fears, lived realities, and concrete needs—in mind. As a final take-away, the book concludes with ten concrete ways to get started.

Throughout the book I explore how rhetoric and practices related to career preparation are evolving, and how those changes intersect with admissions practices, scholarly reward structures, and academic labor practices. Consideration of the stakes of such discussions—including the effects of increasing reliance on adjunct and contingent faculty labor, the size of graduate programs and the support they provide to their students, and the relationship between career expectations and systemic issues of diversity in higher education—are a constant undercurrent. The challenges are real, and complex; everything from small individual steps to major reform efforts are essential. Whether you are a student shaping your own pathway, a faculty member guiding students, or an administrator building or refining a program, there are things you can do today to support career diversity, increase the impact of humanities research, and bolster public investment in higher education. As University of Michigan professor and past president of the Modern Language Association Sidonie Smith writes in her *Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in Good Enough Times*, “‘the times are good enough’ to transform doctoral education in the humanities.”¹⁷ This framing presents optimism and solace, but also a call to urgency: the time to act is not some hypothetical future day, but now, with the resources and challenges we have today. In short, this is a noncynical approach to the realities of the humanities PhD that offers practical career advice, opportunities for reform, and an affirmation of humanities education as a public good.