

Beyond the Tenure Track: Options for Classics Ph.D.s

The job market that current and future Classics Ph.D.s face is one of high demand and low supply: lots of people trying to get a few tenure-track positions. And so the vast majority of grad students will not get a tenure-track in their first year on the market, and most will need multiple years of contingent faculty positions prior to landing a tenure-track job. Some will never be so lucky as to find a permanent position. All will be stressed as hell.

And that's what it is, after all: luck. You need to work hard and be skilled and qualified, but ticking all the boxes on the job-market checklist doesn't entitle or guarantee you to a tenure-track job. And there's great joy to be had in the preliminary or alternative positions available: post-doctoral fellowships, visiting assistant professorships, and non-faculty employment.

Postdocs tend to have lower teaching loads than VAPs and usually no academic service expectations—which means more time for research, professional growth, pedagogy—while still qualifying for full-time health benefits and faculty development privileges. (As a postdoc, I've had the gift of time to push ahead on my research projects, develop a number of brand-new courses, completely reshape my pedagogical practices, dip my feet in the waters of academic service, and advise students voluntarily.) VAPs occasionally are converted to tenure-track positions, and generally provides the opportunity to gain experience with mentoring students and directing student research. Non-faculty employment, which can range from secondary education or higher-ed administration to press editorship or corporate consulting, offers an escape from the stress, seclusion, uncertainty, and self-abnegation of faculty life.

So rather than give idiosyncratic advice on how to maximize your chances of getting a professorship, I'll talk and do a Q&A about what you can do to increase the likelihood of finding

fulfilling, gainful employment. E.g.: first, of course, do what your placement officer/committee recommends, and if you don't have one, agitate until your department appoints one. Second, think about the "sunk cost" economic theory—rational decisions about future actions should be made based on future prospects, not on what you've already spent—and use that to make sure your job hunt is aligned with your real life goals. Third, learn to market yourself and your considerable skills effectively both inside and outside academia.