

Getting a Job Outside the Field: Possibilities and Hope

Unfortunately, there is no “5 easy steps to get a job” guide that works for academic or non-academic positions. However, despite the semi-regular doom-and-gloom rhetoric one hears about the state of the field or the availability of academic jobs, it is important for current faculty and students to remember that a graduate degree in Classics does not lock anyone into a single career path. In this paper, I propose to continue breaking the narrative that there is only one worthy job path for a Classicist and outline some ways to constructively work towards the variety of non-traditional career paths during graduate and post-graduate work.

First, it is vital to recognize that if one does not have a tenure-track position, that is not a statement against the merit they provide to society – and, in fact, that “merit” is not a worthwhile goal towards which to strive. As Zhang 2024 outlines, as societies lean further into meritocracy as a stated ideal, individuals strive towards the blatant *representation* of merit: in the same way that conspicuous consumption encourages individuals to display their wealth outwardly, “meritocracy” as a social goal encourages one’s display of merit, which may or may not correspond to what society actually *values* as merit.

Second, many of us did not end our graduate careers with the same personal and career goals we started – humans naturally evolve as we experience our lives. In graduate school, we can explore what a career in the Academy would look like. For many of us, that does not always have the same gleam by the end. Choosing not to pursue “The Tenure Track” does not mean that our time as students was wasted, nor does it mean that our faculty and peers wasted their time with us.

Third, there is no good reason why one should lose access to any part of the Classical World if they do not have full-time academic employment. There are practical barriers to this: access to research materials and time for academic pursuits is limited without university affiliation. However, with further field-wide investment into open access journals, academic conferences being accessible in hybrid formats, and the increase in acceptance of non-traditional publishing methods (blogs, YouTube, podcasts), current research is accessible to many more non-traditional academics than even a decade ago.

Finally, it is important to stress that we all are invested in this field for similar but different reasons. For every Classicist who wants to research full-time and isn't interested in teaching, there is another who only wants to teach and spend time with their own students. Within that binary are further divisions: researching versus writing and editing, preparing lecture notes versus delivering talks in front of students versus mentoring. For each of these attachments, there are opportunities to be nourished outside the academy. With some thought, it is easily possible to identify personal strengths and goals within paradigms beyond the constraints of the few academic job tracks. During this portion of my paper, I will walk participants through a series of questions to help prompt these personal answers.

For the continued survival of our field, and the stability of our graduate programs and our ongoing outreach efforts, I find it vital to remind Classicists that careers outside the academy are beneficial both for personal and societal goals. My career path lets me talk about Classics to non Classicists all the time. I may not conjugate 3rd -io verbs on a regular basis, but I think about how ablative absolutes would be easier to write in Perl. I have skills acquired through years of rigorous training in absorbing complex information to distill quickly and concisely, navigating layers of interconnected dependencies to understand what information is actually important,

explaining and defending a position I've researched to a panel of my peers. These qualities are highly valued outside the academy. This paper, among other resources, will help current Classicists identify the kind of skills that employers value and how to practice them intentionally. Whether one is interested in non-academic teaching or mentoring (corporate learning management), writing and editing documentation (corporate librarian, technical writing), organizing around deadlines (project management), there is a wealth of careers across industries.

Non-academic careers do not mean that one must be ostracized from the academy. This two-way street can be shored up in both directions: the academy can continue its effort to affirm non-traditional career paths, and those of us in them can continue to reach out to participate as we desire. I hope to show that these careers are positive opportunities for outreach and personal benefit, and with little effort the academy as it exists can provide practical encouragement to students and faculty looking for change.

Work Cited

Zhang, T. 2024. "The illusion of meritocracy," *Social Science Information*, 63.1, 114-128.