

Not a Plan B: Diverse Career Opportunities for Classicists
A Panel sponsored by the Graduate Student Issues Committee

Although most Classics PhD programs center around preparing students for careers as tenured professors, the SCS Placement Reports over the years have shown a growing number of contingent positions and a dwindling pool of tenure-track jobs. For many years, classicists have been intentionally seeking careers outside academia entirely, and we can only imagine what changes are coming for the academic job market in a post-pandemic world. Yet in too many departments, accepting a job outside college teaching has been treated as “failure” or as a “Plan B,” to be considered only if the unquestioned first choice of a tenure-track position fails to materialize. Over the last ten years the conversation has begun to shift as the “alt-ac” craze swept through humanities graduate programs across the country, but few departments have been able to create lasting structural or cultural change to make preparation for the non-academic job market part of their graduate students’ professional development; and in many quarters, the stigma remains for those leaving the field of higher education.

At the end of the day, what matters is that graduate students are placed in jobs that are fulfilling for them as individuals and set them on a path of success in their chosen career. It makes the most sense for both the ambitions of graduate students as well as the modern job market to eliminate the dichotomy of academia vs. alt-ac (or rather, of tenure-track jobs vs. everything else) and open our minds to consider the wide and diverse job market that is available to persons with post-graduate Classics degrees. We propose this panel to help undergraduate and graduate student attendees understand the very wide range of careers that are available to them with an advanced degree in Classics and how to prepare for those different opportunities in, and perhaps in spite of, the setting of graduate education.

The panel will consist of four classicists with postgraduate degrees who have found successful and fulfilling careers outside the professoriate. Our first panelist, who holds a PhD in Classics, will discuss their role as an Instructional Designer at a major university's Center for Teaching. Our second panelist holds a Masters degree in Latin & Greek Languages and Literature; they taught middle school Latin for several years before transitioning to a career in software engineering 6 years ago. Our third panelist holds a Masters degree in Classics and teaches high school Latin, a career goal which they made known to their faculty throughout their graduate school career. Our fourth panelist holds a PhD in Classics and works for Google. Each panelist will give a brief overview of their path from graduate school in Classics to their current employment and offer their advice, resources, and best practices for students who wish to pursue similar paths. We will leave ample time for discussion and questions amongst the panelists and attendees.

For an increasing number of Classics graduate students, pursuing jobs outside of tenure track faculty positions is not a Plan B, and it is time for us to stop framing it as such. By preparing graduate students for the diverse career opportunities that await them both inside and outside the academy, we can give students a greater sense of purpose during their studies and a leg up in the job market after graduation. Many current faculty members feel ill-equipped to advise their graduate students on how to train and prepare for a non-academic job, but by training graduate students to understand the breadth of their skills and career possibilities, those who do become college faculty will be prepared to effectively advise their own future students on non-academic job opportunities.