Adages for Ethical Graduate Mentoring in the Twenty-first Century

Charlotte M. Canning, Esther Kim Lee, Sara Warner

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We were among the fortunate ones, and even then we knew it. After graduating with our doctoral degrees, we got tenure-track jobs in top-ranked programs at Research 1 (R1) universities. We each knew brilliant and talented people in our graduate programs for whom this was not true. Our paths were not without challenges, including deeply gendered obstacles, but we are now in positions that come with many privileges. With these privileges, however, come an equal number of responsibilities to research, teach, and serve on and off our campuses. Of these responsibilities, the one that is the most challenging is our role as advisers and mentors to PhD students.

The three of us defended our dissertations in a historical moment when we were taught to be like our advisers, and the goal of almost everyone in our cohorts was to be a professor. Although the job market since the 1970s has been subject to downturns, there was little discussion of the ultimate end-goal of doctoral education. Now, however, there are many questions surrounding the purpose of doctoral education and whether or not the professoriate is indeed the goal for everyone, or whether this can be a goal at all. We did not experience the level of uncertainty our students are now experiencing, but we want to be the best advisers we can to help our students navigate the changing landscape of graduate education.

Earlier in our careers, we all believed that we could change anything, and that what we endured our students would not. Esther wanted to make sure her students of color would not be the only minority participants in a seminar or a conference panel, as she often was in graduate school. A first-generation college student, Sara was the only working-class member of her graduate school cohort and the only out lesbian in most of her classes. Charlotte's program was all white and mostly women. She hoped, like Esther and Sara, for greater diversity and that women would not silently have to endure sexual harassment. To some extent that has proven to be true, and our students have a greater voice and more support than we did. These changes, unfortunately, are not enough that we can look with pride on the current situation in academia, especially when it comes to diversity, inclusion, and ethical actions. We are advising our students to navigate a market that looks nothing like the one we experienced. We struggle daily with the ethics of what we are doing: How do we know we are making the right choices? How do we fulfill our obligations with integrity? What does a respectful partnership with our students look like? In what follows, we share some of our thoughts on what we have identified as the biggest challenges we face as professors and advisers to graduate students. We place particular focus on the job market and the issues of diversity as a way to ground our conversation. By reflecting on our own career trajectories and the current trends in our field, we hope to shed some light on how we approach the critically important responsibility of being doctoral advisors and mentors in the twenty-first century.

Ethics and Advising I: Jobs Contingent, Alternative, and Adjacent

The ethical quandary that those of us who administer PhD programs must grapple with is not simply the question of employment in higher education, but what kinds of jobs our students

can hope to get and where. Of course, getting a PhD as a theatre academic/scholar has always been something like a leap of faith. Even when Charlotte entered the job market in 1991, she received letters saying that searches had been closed due to losses of funding or hiring freezes at the institutions holding the searches. Perhaps one part of understanding our students' future is to stop implying a past golden age, which never really existed. This is not to say, however, that there are not significant differences here in the early twenty-first century compared to the late twentieth.

According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1975, 45 percent of all faculty appointments were tenured or tenure track and 55 percent were contingent positions, defined as "full-time non-tenure track, part-time, and graduate student employees" ("Background Facts"). By 2016, those numbers shifted significantly. Today, only 30 percent of faculty hold tenured/ tenure-track appointments at four-year institutions, although this varies according to the type of institution ("Data Snapshot"). Some institutions are now adding rolling two- to three-year contracts to contingent positions with new titles—for example, the University of Texas recently added assistant/ associate/full professor of practice or instruction—which may alleviate some of the precarity, but these posts are still in no way equivalent to tenure, nor are they the jobs our students are hoping to get.

All three of us know firsthand that even though we have responsibly acquainted our students with labor statistics, many of them still cling to the belief that they will be among the 30 percent who secure tenure-track jobs. Why? The answers to this are numerous. Some are pathological (students might assume they are in the 30 percent because they have always been at the top of their class); some are aspirational (they see themselves becoming their mentors); and others are imitative (most PhD programs are in R1 institutions and so students are most familiar with that setting). But these answers do not obviate the ethical questions. What are the ethics of admitting students to our degree programs knowing that after five to seven years of work and debt they are not likely to find jobs like their mentors had?

The fact that the overwhelming majority of faculty are in contingent positions means we have an ethical and practical obligation to think beyond binary categories. As performance scholar Gwendolyn Alker notes, the social drama of contingent labor is often reduced to a melodrama that pits a privileged tenured minority fighting to preserve a dying institution against the beleaguered masses of adjuncts toiling in untenable situations. Such binary thinking, according to her, reflects academics' ignorance of our own labor history and produces an "inability to acknowledge economic and social complexities among contingent faculty." The crisis of contingent labor in the academy, fostered by the advent of the corporate university, reflects larger shifts in our neoliberal political order and the rise of an on-demand gig economy in many sectors of the labor market. More than a quarter of all US workers participate in the gig economy, though some claim the number is as high as one-third or one-half ("How Many Gig Workers Are There?"). This larger context has everything to do with how we think and work and with what we are able to do, ethically, to help create sustainable futures for our students.

Faculty, even the most privileged of us, cannot transform the neoliberal gig economy into one that values long-term commitment to and development of employees. Instead of diffusing our attention and energy on the impossibly difficult task of fighting the larger economic transformation, we choose a different focus to maximize our impact as advisers. That impact happens, in part, by shifting our energy away from the inequities of employment, to how we may make our advising ethical in and of itself. In *Theatre & Ethics*, Nicholas Ridout argues that "increasingly the relationship of theatre and ethics comes to be a question of form rather than content. It is how you make it, and what relationships you establish in the making of it that matters . . . not what message or ideology you are trying to communicate" (49). There is much here to debate, but we want to focus on the ethical questions of how we advise and the relationships that emerge from our intentions and actions. After all, as Latin American studies scholar John Riofrio argues, "the benefits for faculty *doing* the mentoring are as significant as the benefits to the graduate students *being* mentored" (204; emphasis

in original). We can generally assume that advisers care about their students' futures, however much that "caring" may seem weak or lacking to students (and may be in some cases). What the advisers do—despite their best intention—may not be however the best thing for their students.

The "alt-ac" movement has presented a number of challenges. Alt-ac is shorthand for alternative careers outside the academy; it is sometimes also called ac-adjacent, implying that students are not moving too far afield from the academy in their careers. Alternative academic careers have been formally explored in the humanities since at least the 1970s. Downturns in the academic job market were then a historically recent occurrence, as the professoriate had been in a growth mode since the end of World War II. During the recession in the 1970s, however, the number of PhDs being defended began to exceed the number of available positions, so much so that those who entered the job market during that period are often referred to as the "lost generation." This new situation spawned a version of the "quit-lit" articles so prevalent now. In 1974, one recently minted PhD (who eventually did land a job as an assistant professor) observed that "the most conspicuous alternatives to college teaching for many doctoral students and nontenured faculty members are unemployment and despair" (Harwood 316). Others wrote in 1978, "we hope that appropriate action will be taken on several fronts so that prolonged job searches such as ours will become a quirk of the 1970s, rather than additional standards that new initiates will have to pay" (Lyson and Squires 238). In the 1990s, graduate students were still hoping for a better market, and they were not the least bit encouraged by the emerging discourse around alt-ac.

The market was supposed to reverse course in 1989, with a predicted undersupply of PhDs and an increase in retirements, but this turnabout never materialized, one of the many failed promises of Ronald Reagan's supply-side economics (which George H. W. Bush famously derided as "voodoo economics"). Instead of getting better, job prospects became increasingly worse. In 1998, three graduate students fumed that institutions and advocacy organizations were still doing a terrible job of accurately envisioning futures for our students:

> history leads us to respond with skepticism and some anger to the M.L.A.'s blithe recommendations that we pursue alternative careers. Many of us had alternative careers that we gave up for the underpaid, overworked decade of our lives in which we struggled to gain credentials for a profession that has allowed a two-tiered employment structure to develop, offering a living wage, basic benefits, and a modicum of job security to only an elite group of academics. (Kelley et al. B4)

Today, no one is "blithe" about "alternative careers." To the contrary, we actively source them. In addition to the 2013 study "Humanities Unbound: Careers and Scholarship beyond the Tenure Track" and a plethora of articles in *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*, graduate students can research the possibility of careers outside the academy on a panoply of sources.[1]

Cornell is one of many universities that now offers dedicated alt-ac advising through career services. This type of centralized approach to career advising has become necessary, because faculty have neither the time nor the experience to support students adequately in their search for parallel paths. While such efforts are welcomed, they do not relieve advisers of our ethical obligations; if anything, these dedicated resources complicate and compound our responsibility. All too often, an investment in alt-ac resources is held up as evidence of an institution's commitment to graduate students, even though these measures will fail to adequately address, let alone ameliorate, the employment crisis for the majority of doctoral candidates. We fail our students when these resources become a substitute for action.

A university program developed in response to a problem is assumed to resolve the problem, as feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed has observed: "[w]hen the problem is not resolved, the resolution becomes the problem" (2017, 110). In other words, the very establishment of alt-ac centers allows academic institutions to appropriate institutional failure as evidence of institutional success.

Ahmed calls this "non-performativity," an act in which naming a thing (in this case alt-ac) does not bring something into effect (careers for doctoral candidates), or more pointedly, when something is named in order not to bring something into effect (a radical revision of graduate education) (106). The action that Ahmed critiques—non-performativity—is what Ridout sees as an older and now less effective way to understand ethical choices and actions. Teleological solutions—we will do this thing, it will solve the problem, and we are done—have limited ethical value compared to approaches that acknowledge constraints and a limited ability to transform a given situation. As Ridout argues, "[t]his focus on process and form goes hand in hand with an openness to the future and the unpredictable rather than a closure around a specific ethical position" (49). A willingness to collaborate with students on embracing "the future and the unpredictable" is much more likely to serve our advisees than simply saying, go to the career center and check out these websites. An ethical approach to the job crisis cannot be limited to finding a solution to the problem, but it can provide motivation to keep experimenting with strategies. Instead of grooming our students for the kinds of jobs that we ourselves have, should we brave together the precarious job market by exploring all its options openly and with full disclosure? If so, what pedagogical changes would this entail, both individually and institutionally?

The three of us struggled with our own thinking on this issue, seeing the merits and drawbacks of working on the institutional level or the individual advisor level. Our experiences tell us that the two go hand in hand, and that we have each had experience working within the ethical framework that Ridout proposes and challenging the institution in large-scale ways as Ahmed urges. But it does not need to be a duality. Patricia Ybarra observes that faculty often see the move into academic administration or university leadership as becoming "one of them" and as moving "from the side of dissent to the side of management" (333). She suggests instead what might be a hybrid of Ridout's and Ahmed's positions: "[f]aculty-led democratic rule," Ybarra urges, can "be a model in a society with increasingly vanishing possibilities for collaborative governance" (335). The three of us have found, in fact, that both are necessary for us to stay focused on the challenge of supporting our students to find meaningful positions after they defend their dissertations.

Ethics and Advising II: Diversity, Inclusion, and Value

No longer an ivory tower for white men of the learned class, the academy, since the second half of the twentieth century, has aimed to reflect society in an egalitarian way. The move toward egalitarianism and away from what was essentially an old white boys' club has raised interlinked questions of diversity, inclusion, and value. Who defines diversity, and how transparent is the process of inclusion? How is the value of knowledge measured and according to which standards? What should we do, as advisers, when our set of values for what is worth learning is different from those of our students? Increased attention to diversity in the academy has coincided with the decline of tenure. The significant inroads that women and underrepresented groups[2] have made over the past fifty years are threatened by the erosion of tenure and the stratification of the academic labor market. It is not only that the tenured rank has been abraded by neoliberalism and a climate of anti-intellectualism, but the inclusion of women and underrepresented groups has made it easier to make those attacks. Moreover, women and underrepresented minorities are overrepresented in non-tenure track positions (Flaherty 2016).

Most of us with commitments to equity and inclusion end up working for organizations that do not have these commitments. We often acquire commitments to change something because of what is *not* being done. There are two kinds of diversity work, according to Ahmed: the kind we do when we attempt to transform an institution that employs us, and the kind we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of that organization. The two are not mutually exclusive. Diversity workers have jobs precisely because equity and inclusion are not policy or daily practices. This kind of labor

is frustrating because it takes the form of repeated encounters with institutionalized inertia, with forces that do not and will not move. "Universities often describe their missions by drawing on the languages of diversity as well as equality. But using the language does not translate into creating diverse or equal environments," according to Ahmed. There's "a gap between a symbolic commitment and a lived reality. . . . Indeed, equality and diversity can be used as masks to create the appearance of being transformed" (2017, 90). In the audit culture that undergirds the neoliberal university, diversity takes the form of "image management" and is limited to "changing perceptions" of whiteness and male-dominance rather than changing these attributes of organizations. Here lies the rub, according to her: equality and diversity can be used "as performance indicators to present the best view of an organization" (105). The labor of diversity workers ends up supporting the very thing we critique, and if we protest this appropriation of our labor, we are cast as "institutional killjoys" (99).

As advisers, we have observed underrepresented students experience pressures of graduate school more intensely than their peers, especially when it comes to issues of graduate student labor and time-to-degree. Anecdotes of underrepresented students being asked to "volunteer" their time for teaching and service are abundant in our field, and their labor is often taken for granted. And, many end up presenting their work prematurely to the detriment of their long-term success. As Ahmed notes, they are the ones who are burdened to put the university's symbolic commitment to diversity into action and make it a lived reality. At the same time, they are also expected to write their dissertations on nontraditional topics that require more research time, and many of them have to work with advisers who do not specialize in their new and exciting topics. And they have to do all that while they are asked to shorten their time-to-degree. Faced with the increasing expectation to share their time and intellectual labor, underrepresented students must also decide how they can finish their degrees efficiently.

In public universities, at least, as time-to-degree becomes a standard of big data (especially because it is so easy to quantify), the pressure to complete PhDs quickly is immense, and some universities have set in place funding restrictions to ensure that this happens. In addition to the intellectual implications of these policies, there are significant labor ones. We have all spent much more time during the past five or so years on petitioning, emailing, and arguing for students in meetings than we did ten or fifteen years ago. Taking on the position of head of a PhD program did not used to be as much of a bureaucratic job as it is now. It has always been about curriculum, student appointments and evaluations, and related matters. Now we have added semester-by-semester assessments (usually mandated by a combination of federal, state, and university authorities) and seemingly endless petitions where we beg for time and funding extensions for students. Faculty are usually chastised for this even when the petitions are granted. Some administrators position themselves as the rigorous enforcers of discipline and guardians of the budget and therefore cast faculty as lax with students and profligate with the limited university resources. This description seems to reinforce the old faculty versus administrator duality. We do not mean it to, especially because we have all held significant administrative positions and expect to in the future. What it actually describes is how often the neoliberal academy forces us into roles not of our own making or desire. Because so much of what we do in graduate programs has been siloed off from one another—funding separate from intellectual/creative work from teaching—we, all of us students, staff faculty, and administrators, are challenged to make arguments in one category that cannot be made without the other categories. Despite this, however, arguing that a student is writing a brilliant dissertation that will bring methodological innovation to the field is less effective than arguing that they have some sort of personal crisis.

Despite the challenges, we have excelled and found much joy in convincing our chairs and deans of the value of the dissertations written by our advisees. What has frustrated us is the lack of dedicated funding and resources to allow students to do their work, and how the pressures of time-to-degree have affected their research. Graduate students avoid what they see as old-fashioned (for example, deep archival work, historiography), inefficient (for example, ethnographic fieldwork,

language studies), or politically inexpedient (for example, anything other than contemporary case studies or the theoretical "flavor of the month"). We fear we are educating a generation of students who are so afraid they are not going to get jobs that they are unwilling to invest anything into the system. We want to acknowledge and respect this fear (because it is real), but also to counter this bifurcated vision of the academy.

The pressures of time-to-degree and the language of what is "useful," "practical," or "efficient" have deep and consequential impact on students of diverse backgrounds. They are often admitted into doctoral programs in theatre and performance studies because they are interested in studying nontraditional topics, ranging from race and ethnicities to nonbinary sexuality. However much doctoral programs encourage such cutting-edge research, it is unclear how many of those programs have coursework that supports such research and whether the students will have jobs that require their skill set. Some discover that after they are finished with their dissertation, their topic is too narrow for many jobs that require a more comprehensive and/or traditional knowledge of theatre history. Even after they land academic jobs, they are often in departments that do not understand their work or find it valuable. How should we advise underrepresented students when they ask about what is useful to them? Is what is considered *useful* the same as what is *valuable*? These questions are more urgent than ever. The data on diversity in graduate education is discouraging (when it is available), and the political attacks against diversity and affirmative action are gaining momentum nationally.[3] It is not enough to admit a student of color, for instance, and hope that that individual will diversify the field. Symbolically, the student may diversify her doctoral program and the institution, but the "lived reality," as Ahmed puts it, would not have been transformed.

There are many examples of what happens when we allow such discrepancies between symbolic diversity and real diversity to become normalized in academia and not change the system at its core. In terms of gender equity, for example, there is no longer a significant entry-level gender gap for most doctoral programs in the humanities. Women hold 49.2 percent of all faculty positions, up from 38.6 percent in 1993.[4] The pipeline, however, is a very leaky one. Female faculty constitute just 38.6 percent of tenured faculty, and fewer than two in ten women are full professors ("More Faculty Diversity, Not on Tenure Track"). Female doctoral candidates take longer to complete their degree (which often involves additional loan debt), and the longer one takes to finish the PhD, the less likely one is to secure a tenure-track job (Finkelstein et al.). A recent study aimed at assessing the impact of gender on an academic career trajectory ten years after the PhD found that women earn lower salaries than men in comparable positions, and they are more likely to leave the profession than their male counterparts due to poor job prospects, dual career issues, and family obligations, among other factors (Flaherty 2017). Interestingly, women who hold administrative positions (the biggest collegiate growth area) are more likely to remain in the academy. University administration involves a collaborative environment, involves less pressure to publish or perish, and operates on a set schedule, leaving evenings free for rehearsals and family obligations. For women, who perform the lion's share of caring labor in our society, a non-professoriate position can offer a more conducive work environment in which to produce creative work and/or raise a family (ibid.).

The data on students of color are also full of symbolic successes, but failures in lived reality. For one, doctoral completion rates are lower for African American and Latinx students, in large part because funding varies disturbingly by minority status. According to the report "Graduate Students in 2020," black and Hispanic students are significantly less likely than white students to ever hold a research assistantship, to have a faculty mentor, or to publish before graduation (Council of Graduate Schools 2). Asian Americans are frequently disadvantaged when it comes to diversity efforts because they are seen as overrepresented in some fields (primarily STEM) when, in actuality, they are decidedly underrepresented in the humanities. Doctoral candidates of color, being shamefully scarce in the academy, have a higher than average chance of securing employment, although not necessarily on the tenure track (Finkelstein et al.). Students and faculty of color face a number of challenges, from disproportionate requests for service (as representatives of diversity) to micro-aggressions and

blatant displays of racism.[5] Many members of underrepresented minorities face discrimination in any workplace situation, but the situation is amplified in the academy, where they constitute such a small percentage of the profession. In a political climate that is unabashedly hostile toward racial minorities, immigrants, and nonbinary people, it is simply unclear what works best in terms of recruiting and retaining a diverse body of doctoral students without a radical transformation. In the absence of such clarity, however, we hope that our students will build on the work we have done mentoring them to bring about a more inclusive academy.

Ethics and Advising III: Adages for a Supportive and Open Mentor Model

The four aspects of doctoral education identified by the "Graduate Students in 2020" report as critical to success are: degree completion; funding arrangements; research productivity; and faculty mentoring (Council of Graduate Schools 4). The three of us have shifted course from an "apprentice model" of mentorship to a "supportive and open mentor model" that we believe encourages intellectual risk-taking, promotes creativity, and fosters innovation (ibid.). Being an ethical mentor does not mean adopting a set of ideals or norms of conduct; rather, it entails asking questions about how to advise students in the unjust and unequal world of academia. At the start of this essay we posed three questions about this mode of advising: How do we know we are making the right choices? How do we fulfill our obligations with integrity? What does a respectful partnership with our students look like? We would like to end not with the answers to those questions, as we believe there are no definitive answers, but with this list of four guiding principles, which we call "Adages for Ethical Graduate Mentoring in the Twenty-first Century," and that we invoke daily to help us answer the three questions.

History Mentors

Our work rests on our mentors and theirs before them. Charlotte studied with Sue-Ellen Case, who studied with Ruby Cohn. Case shared stories about Cohn at San Francisco State University, and Charlotte was inspired by Cohn's refusal to cross the picket lines of student protest, as well as her resignation in 1968.[6] This anecdote is only one example of how, during the 1960s and '70s, movements of resistance "based their principles of participation and evaluation on the ideas that knowledge can be reorganized and institutions could be changed for the good of minoritized communities" (Ferguson 63). The knowledge that our work has a precedent informs, sustains, and inspires us. With each student we support and encourage, we are challenging larger social and political conditions that would argue that we do not belong or that change is not possible. History offers rich and inspiring models, stories, and ideas that we can use to sustain ourselves and our students.

Resources Are Finite

The postwar academy was predicated on a growth model. When the three of us were undergraduates and then graduate students, we imbibed the notion that the mission was to expand. That is no longer the case. Mantras like "do more with less" and "work smarter not harder" are signs of the new austerity model that celebrates the defunding of higher education as a positive move. The fact that we often do not have time to develop that new course, advise that production, or apply for another grant is not a sign of a personal failing; instead, it is a sign that there are not enough faculty and/or staff to support the work that needs to be done. The Performance as Public Practice (PPP) program, which Charlotte heads, is always revising current requirements to incorporate into the existing curriculum the skills and knowledges that students need in order to navigate contemporary academia. The program cannot add new classes or additional employment opportunities, but it can

ensure that by the time a student enters candidacy they understand the job market, have a teaching portfolio, and can talk about their research in ways that resonate with multiple and diverse audiences. While this is similar to the mentoring idea of the next point, it exists on its own as a reminder that while the personal is political, the political is not necessarily personal. We survive austerity, but we do not thrive within it.

Curriculum Is Mentoring

A good mentor demystifies graduate school for students without disillusioning them. This can be a difficult balancing act in the best of times and a herculean task in our era of pervasive austerity. During the 2008 recession, Cornell targeted a handful of units for budget reductions, including the Department of Theater, Film, and Dance. Central administration charged the tenured and tenure-track faculty with creating a new vision for our program (renamed Performing and Media Arts) and implementing cuts (more than twenty full-time, non-tenure track artists, administrators, and adjunct instructors lost their jobs). The surviving faculty safeguarded the graduate program and made a conscious decision to involve students in our rebuilding process. When Sara became Director of Graduate Studies in 2016, she transformed the proseminar from an Intro to Theory and Methods course into a primer on the business of education with the goal of creating what she calls "soft money gladiators"—scholars and scholar-artists who can fund themselves. As the first person in her nuclear family to complete high school and the only one to attend college, Sara always worried about money and hustled to fund her education. Hustling is a marketable skill in the neoliberal academy, which privileges privatization, entrepreneurship, and competition for resources. Sharing this knowledge, which is instrumental, commercial, and practical, plays into the commodification of the academy, while simultaneously arming students with the tools necessary to battle with these forces. This year, Cornell graduate students secured over $100,000 in soft money (three particularly dogged individuals earned over $25,000 each) to fund dissertation research and creative work. The highest earners were first gens and nontraditional students.

Mentoring Is Research

At its best, mentoring is a "vehicle for passing along strategies for success and transformation" (Riofrio 208). This implies that success and transformation are one-sided, that the student is the only one changed. There is more to it than altruism, Riofrio argues, because when the students are active partners in the mentoring relationship, "they can bring new ideas to their mentors and also question their mentors' established practices" (218). Those kinds of questions can be uncomfortable for both faculty and students. But by encouraging them, we are creating a more equitable and sustainable relationship. These discomforts are to be embraced, because "to receive the greatest benefits from mentoring relationships . . . they must be willing to make themselves vulnerable to their students. Intransigence, insecurity and arrogance on the part of the faculty can all combine to frustrate these potential benefits" (219). These resistant feelings are often ones that precede an intellectual or emotional breakthrough. The "open" part of the mentor model is being receptive to what the students are teaching us and how they are modeling for us a future in which they wish to live.

When Esther started teaching at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2000, she quickly realized that she had to approach mentorship less as apprenticeship and more as collaboration. While her specialization was in Asian American theatre, the vast majority of her mentoring time was spent on advising students who wanted to study a wide array of topics, ranging from Shakespeare to American baseball history. She asked students to teach her and teach her well about their topics, and she made sure their dissertation committees included an expert on that topic from either on or off campus. By emphasizing collaboration and knowledge sharing, she was able to head a small doctoral program that encouraged students to pursue their ambition.

Ultimately, we cannot resolve the ethical dilemmas concerning graduate education; instead, we have found that the most ethical action we as mentors can take is to abandon the idea that ethical questions can be answered definitively. We embrace ethics as a challenge to be addressed on a daily basis. "The university is vexed and vexing," Ferguson concludes, "but the fact of the matter is that it is there" (98). The academy "is there" indeed, but we can serve ethically our doctoral students despite its many vexations by reminding ourselves that we have history from which to draw, an infrastructure with which we can engage, finite resources that can fuel change even in economic downturns, curricula through which we can innovate, and research that encourages us all—faculty and students—to see possibilities everywhere for transformation on multiple levels: personal, institutional, and political.

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Sara Warner is the Director of Graduate Studies and an associate professor in the Department of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University, where she is a Stephen H. Weiss Junior Fellow and a Community-Engaged Faculty Fellow. She publishes on dramatic literature and performance studies; feminist and queer art; LGBTQ studies; the prison-industrial complex; and academic labor. Her first book, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (2012), received the Outstanding Book Award from ATHE, an honorable mention for the Barnard Hewitt Award from ASTR, and was named a Lambda Literary Award finalist. Her cultural criticism can be found in a variety of outlets, including *Time*, *Huffington Post*, and HowlRound. In addition to two monographs, she is working on a multiyear community-based play, *Climates of Change*, which explores the human impact of global warming on the Finger Lakes.

Notes

1. Such sources include websites (for example, Versatile PhD, Beyond the Professoriate, ImaginePhD); blogs (From PhD to Life, PhD's at Work, Sell Out Your Soul); podcasts (The Recovering Academic and PhD Career Stories); and books (*Outside the Ivory Tower, So What Are You Going to Do with That?*, and *101 Alternative Careers for Teachers*). See Katina Rogers, "Humanities Unbound: Careers and Scholarship beyond the Tenure Track."

2. By "underrepresented group," we are referring to any demographic whose presence in the academy is lower than their presence in the general population. Thus we use the term to refer to racial and ethnic minorities, to those with nontraditional and nonbinary identities, and to differently abled bodies and those with special needs.

3. Challenges to affirmative action programs have had a "a significant chilling effect" on recruitment and retention of scholars of color, "resulting in a dilution of resources and a weakening of institutional will," according to a Woodrow Wilson Foundation report titled "Diversity & the Ph.D." (3). This study details a substantial decline in federal and state support for minority students since 2003, when the Supreme Court ruled on two controversial cases of affirmative action at the University of Michigan. In 2006, Michigan voters passed a referendum banning affirmative action at public colleges and universities. Similar lawsuits involving the University of Texas at Austin and Harvard University, coupled with the Trump administration's 2016 decision to restore Bush-era "race-neutral methods" of college admissions, have dealt a serious blow to diversity efforts. In the current climate, even support for data collection has lessened, making it difficult to find reliable current statistics on the racial demographics of graduate students.

4. A few humanities fields are dominated by women, including languages and literatures other than English, where they constitute almost two-thirds of the faculty. Women-dominated disciplines tend to be adjunct-heavy fields, with higher teaching demands and lower pay. Many humanities disciplines remain bastions of male rule; less than one-third of philosophy, classics, and religion faculty are female. See "Trends in the Demographics of Humanities Faculty: Key Findings from the 2012–13 Humanities Departmental Survey."

5. A Vanderbilt University study found that black academics are required to be not only excellent scholars and researchers, but adept entertainers as well. African American academics are expected to tell jokes and keep their presentations loaded with levity, especially when presenting scholarship to their mostly white peers. Interviewees describe being "directed" on their academic performance, with instructions to play down their passion and to smile more. Black female colleagues report facing the additional injustice of being scrutinized for their clothing and hairstyle choices (McGeea and Kazembe).

6. Resigning in protest to institutional practices continues. In May 2016, Sara Ahmed left Goldsmiths University of London, because, as she explained, "I have resigned in protest against the failure to address the problem of sexual harassment. I have resigned because the costs of doing this work have been too high." Her action sparked a debate in the mainstream press about how universities handle sexual harassment. See Ahmed, "Resignation"; and Sally Weale and David Batty, "Sexual Harassment of Students by University Staff Hidden by Non-disclosure Agreements."

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