

Speaker 1 ([00:13](#)):

Welcome to the study religion podcast. My name is Erica Bennett and I am a current student in the religion and culture masters program at the university of Alabama. This is the fourth and final episode to a special series on jobs after graduate school. And the humanities take a listen to the first three episodes where Jacob Barrett and I listen to Bradley summer Pamela Gilbert and Jared Powell give their academic history and their view on the state of the academic job market. In this episode, Jacob and I learn about a non-academic career path after a PhD program. Shannon Troper short tells us about her experience, leaving academia and entering the tech field.

Speaker 2 ([00:54](#)):

I find it interesting that both Jared and Bradley experienced a similar lack of information and help that was available to them for jobs outside of academia.

Speaker 3 ([01:06](#)):

I wonder if that's the exception to the rule or if most graduate students feel like they are diving in blind into a world outside of a traditional academic track. Do we know anyone from a PhD program who is now excelling outside of academia?

Speaker 2 ([01:21](#)):

That makes me think of some of the zoom calls we've had with alumni in our master's program here at the university of Alabama. Some are working in politics, others in the medical field.

Speaker 3 ([01:34](#)):

Oh yeah. That makes me think of Shannon tr for Shri. Um,

Speaker 4 ([01:38](#)):

Yeah, I'm Shannon TROs for Shri

Speaker 3 ([01:40](#)):

Of recent graduate from UNC, uh, chapel Hills PhD program. Who's working a tech job, um, here in North Carolina.

Speaker 2 ([01:50](#)):

I think she'll probably have great advice for those in graduate programs who aren't sure what they wanna do after graduation.

Speaker 4 ([02:04](#)):

So I got my PhD from UNC chapel hill in 2018, I believe, um, exploring the intersection of religious history and Chester intellectual history and, um, philosophy of technology. So the question I was pursuing was like, how are technological communities thinking about technology and explaining technology and explaining to each other how technology works and how are those ideas sort of still invested, especially with Protestant assumptions, with religious language, um, all that sort of stuff. Um, and because I was doing that, I had a chapter on open source and so red hat is an open source company that I work at. It's one of the only open source companies. It was on my radar. Um, and when I was in

the dissertation writing phase, I landed a fellowship that allowed me to just write for a year, which was like the dream, right. <laugh> like just gonna do this one thing for a year.

Speaker 4 ([03:12](#)):

Uh, and I felt like it was super isolating. Actually. It was my first time just having one thing on the oven <laugh> and I was riding and I was kind of spinning my wheels and looking at the academic job market, looking at how few jobs there are, um, and how a lot of them require one to three year jumps. And at that point I had made my husband jump pretty significantly twice, right? Like he had a wonderful job at our undergrad, forced him to start all over again. When I moved, uh, to Boulder for my master's and then did it again three years later and, uh, decided that, you know, I would only do that to him if it was for something truly important and meaningful to me, right. Like I didn't that's I wanted to be a good partner. He'd been such a good partner.

Speaker 4 ([04:06](#)):

And, uh, this job at red hat popped up and I was like, you know what? I'll apply. Like, I, I think I fit 70, 80% of the job description, which I've had people tell me all my life, like, that's what you need. And I was like, there's no, you know, there's nothing writing on this. I'm, <laugh>, I'm writing, doesn't matter if I don't get it. It would be extremely interesting field work. I kind of looked at it like potential ethnographic field work. Um, and then I got the job. And so I started working at red hat while writing my dissertation, uh, finished in, finished the dissertation 2018. So about a year in, um, and now I work as a senior communications strategist, which means that I do a lot of writing, editing, interviewing of stakeholders, literature, reviews, analyst, research, and coaching, especially our engineering leadership teams to think about how they want to, uh, frame internal messaging. Like how, what does the product do? Like actually <laugh> and, and what is our goal and what do we wanna say about it

Speaker 2 ([05:11](#)):

When you started your PhD? Uh, was this even on your radar of jobs and if not, what were you first planning to pursue in, uh, after your PhD?

Speaker 4 ([05:24](#)):

Yes. Uh, not at all. Uh, uh, not at all on my radar. Um, honestly, tech was on my radar because I knew that I wanted to think about how weird, um, and delightfully weird, I think philosophy around tech can get and how that always really resonated me with me in terms of secularism and religious discourse. But working in tech was like, not at all on my, uh, radar. I was, um, pretty narrow, I guess when I thought I was like, okay, I'm gonna do the right things. I got into my ideal program. UNC chapel hill was what I wanted. I, um, published early and relatively often I did the international and the national, um, conference circuit. I taught, I got fellowships. Like I was on track. I did the GSC rep stuff, things that, that you guys are doing, right. Like doing all little things to, to make sure that the tenure packet, um, the tenure job packet is gonna be there.

Speaker 4 ([06:29](#)):

Yeah. Um, and I didn't know how to think about alternatives. I think what led, what led me to the alternative was honestly that like personal circumstance of looking at the job market, knowing that it was not gonna just be likely one or two years of jumping, that it could be up to 10 years of jumping, looking at friends who were, you know, older and extremely talented <laugh> and watching them do these jumps. Um, so I think I just got curious. Yeah. And a little whimsical. I applied to the red hat job

without thinking too much about it. And also like not upset if I wasn't gonna get it. And I was still a year out from applying to academic jobs. So, you know, it was a good time to apply because it was like, I'll buy a lottery ticket. <laugh> yeah.

Speaker 2 ([07:23](#)):

It's two bucks.

Speaker 4 ([07:24](#)):

Yeah. I think that being curious and being a little whimsical is something that's that we could do a better job of helping graduate students.

Speaker 2 ([07:33](#)):

Where, or how did you stumble across this job at red

Speaker 4 ([07:37](#)):

Hat? Yeah, so I, um, was not on the academic job market. Um, I had the list of materials that I knew that I needed to start putting together to go on the job market the next year. And I hadn't, I truly had not been looking at other outside jobs. It was just a creeping factor, a creeping feeling of, am I gonna do this again? Like, am I going to cuz at that point we had been at chapel hill five or six years, my husband was doing really well in what he wanted to do. <laugh> right. And didn't wanna like leave that again. Um, and honestly what happened was luck. It was a combination of me being familiar with what open source was and what red hat was and red hat being in Raleigh. And knowing that I, when I was going through the graduate program that I wanted some networks that were not other graduate students, that I got to a point in my third year where all my social networks were graduate students, which is delightful. I love, I love, love, love my peers, but it's very easy to talk about work all the time. <laugh> so I went to a meetup about watching horror movies and we would just go to this like random house in Raleigh <laugh> and watch horror movies with 20 other people. Um, and one of them worked at red hat and she posted the job on her Facebook and I said, okay, you know what? It sounds like a writing job. Tell me about it.

Speaker 2 ([09:08](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That also sounds like a potential horror movie <laugh>

Speaker 4 ([09:12](#)):

It does, but see, I love horror movies. So it's like whimsy <laugh> yes. <laugh>. Yeah. In general, I think, uh, going to watch horror movies at an unknown person's house that you found on the internet is a risky endeavor <laugh> it was, it was truly wonderful.

Speaker 2 ([09:30](#)):

So partly look a lot of luck. And I feel like that, I think that's similar within the academic, uh, job market and outside the academic job market. There's always this like portion of luck are you gonna get there at the right time? Are you gonna get the job you want? Or are you gonna just hear about it through someone you might know? Might not know.

Speaker 4 ([09:48](#)):

I think it's really important to highlight that actually, because I think a lot of what prevents people from looking for other jobs is a implicit belief in meritocracy within the academic system. Right? So if you do all of the things and you do them well and you get the really prestigious grants and you just work all the time, you will get that job. Um, because the people that get the job, get it because of their ability and yes, like that's not, not true. <laugh> right. Um, people in graduate programs are talented self starting people who wear so many hats, they're project managers, they run programs, they run their own research. They're writers, they're collaborators. Like these are skilled people. And if they finish a PhD, they're skilled people who have fairly early in their life E established them as an expert, like as an actual expert in something.

Speaker 4 ([10:50](#)):

So these are talented people. Um, but that belief in meritocracy overlooks this very real thing of networks and luck and yeah, you know, like another way to say luck is, is being in conversation with lots and lots and lots of people. And I used to think networking was kind of a, a gross term. Right. And I think it can be for some people, like I'm gonna network with you to use you, but actually networking can be as simple as just being radically interested in other people and sincerely interested in other people and uplifting them. And if they can do that, if you can do that for them, like they're also gonna open doors for you. So that like curiosity and being interested in other people, I think does shake things up. And I think for me, um, it got a lot better when I took the goal out of it. Right? Like, so if the goal is, if, if I'm telling myself the goal is going to this thing to build my network and to like get people interested in me, my social, an anxiety is off the roof and like, it's not gonna work. It's, it's just not gonna work. I'm not that charming <laugh>. Cause

Speaker 2 ([12:04](#)):

When you have this like pressure that you,

Speaker 4 ([12:06](#)):

You have this pressure, I think people pick up on it too, you know? And I think if you're skilled at it, um, and I think the business schools probably do a better job of like, what are the guard rails and how do you do this and how, you know, like I think that there is a structure that can help people. But for me, I think at UNC chapel hill, I was part of a cohort. Um, that was a little, um, earlier in the program than me. So they were all leaving as I was coming in and they were so generous and so collaborative and had made a very explicit pact with one another to lift each other up and put each other in conversation with folks that they knew that each other didn't know. And I think that that made such a big difference on my life that I could just kind of switch to being like, all right, well, you know, what are you interested? <laugh> yeah. And tell me about your work and like what makes you excited? And I think, you know, life is messy and work is hard, no matter what field you're in and if you meet somebody who's actually interested. Yeah. You can get a lot, a lot

Speaker 2 ([13:18](#)):

Bouncing off of this. Um, while you were getting your PhD, what, or even before then, was there anything that you wish was different about the academic system in the sense of what skills you wish you might have gained through your multiple years in academia?

Speaker 4 ([13:39](#)):

<laugh> so through your lifetime, <laugh> in libraries. Um, that's a really great question. I will say from a skill set, I think the PhD gave me almost everything. Yeah. Um, and what, what they didn't give me is the ability to translate and to say that to other people, right? Yeah. So like the skillset you get when you're in a PhD program and honestly in a master's program, to some extent is the close reading, like close reading, the ability to ask good sharp questions, um, understanding that any issue has several different layers of interpretation. Those layers are gonna be uneven because of history and power and location, and the ability to start to like pick part that complexity and not be overwhelmed by it is an unbelievable skill. Project management is a thing that people get paid really well for <laugh> and every single grad student I've ever met is a project manager.

Speaker 4 ([14:45](#)):

Um, who's unafraid of ambiguity who can take an impossible task, like writing a thesis or doing a dissertation or creating a podcast series and break it up into like milestones and deliverables and show success and show progress. Um, you know, and everybody's self starting and knows how to collaborate. Like these are skills that are, that are hard to gain in other contexts. And I think extremely translatable to the jobs I've had and all the jobs I've seen post <laugh>. Um, but the things that they don't do is they don't tell you to focus on those things. Right? Like it's very much like I am an expert in this research. Yeah. Like, well, I have a friend who pointed out to me, she's a very successful UX researcher. Um, Drang Asad, uh, she's at Microsoft, very high powered UX researcher position. And she was like, you know, you do have, I was like, well, I don't have UX research skills. She's like, you absolutely do have us research skills. Like why is your dissertation just listed here as a dissertation? She's like, you are a principal researcher for a, you know, multi-year long project that you got grant money for. You funded, you like did all these things. And so there's like those kind of pieces about translation and being a little bit more honest about what we're actually doing.

Speaker 2 ([16:16](#)):

Yeah. It's, it's not that you don't gain the skills in your, um, academic journey it's that you lose the skills of how to explain them to people outside of your academic journey. And so anyone in academia, if I say I did a dissertation, they, they think of all those things. Oh wow. She, she did this project for multiple years. Oh my gosh. She also got a grant. She, you, they hear those words as soon as they hear it. One word dissertation. Yeah. But outside of our little bubble, no one quite knows exactly what that entails. Yeah. Cause they've not done one. They want to know how does that benefit me? And so that makes sense that the skill you need is how do I translate this to people outside,

Speaker 4 ([17:03](#)):

Which you also have because of teaching. Right? So like, it's this, it's just, you have to, it's just, this is a big part of my work at red hat is experts talking to experts. Is this wonderful, delightful space, because they can say so many things with one word mm-hmm <affirmative>, but they're gonna lose anybody else. That's not in the room and academics are the same way. So it's just that slowing it down. What does that mean? <laugh>

Speaker 2 ([17:31](#)):

Do you often have postgrads come, um, and ask you questions or, uh, especially about the job market outside of academia. Um, and then how do you advise them?

Speaker 4 ([17:44](#)):

I do. Yeah. And actually, I think everyone who I've talked to who has made the jump from academia to an outside academia job, has people sliding into their emails, <laugh> into their direct messages all the time. I, it is kind of an underground network because I think that that's, it's an unspoken reality that yeah, people aren't all gonna get the tenure track job. Um, and it's also kind of a harsh moment because if you finish the PhD, you are what, 10 years in right. 10 years into grad school. Um, that is serious time and resources. Often time for people it's delayed financial planning, it's delayed family planning. It's moving to places where they may or may not feel comfortable. Um, it's a lot to invest in with a very small goal post because right now the goal post that's celebrated is not, Hey, you got a PhD, you are like a recognized expert.

Speaker 4 ([18:56](#)):

I, I heard somewhere that's like 3% of the world's population has PhDs. Right? Like, no, but we're not gonna celebrate that. You only count if you get a tenure track job. Yeah. If you're, and so thinking about alternatives can feel like a dream dying. I think it can feel like, well, why did I do this? Yeah. Um, yeah. So I think that, yeah, I think that that's why people do kind of, I think it is a big conversation. I think it's happening outside of the university system and in quiet ways that I think are getting louder and louder. Even over the past year, you see this as more of a conversation. Yeah. But I don't think it can happen inside until like that issue of taboo is kind of

Speaker 2 ([19:42](#)):

Addressed. Yeah. Yeah. Who's going to pop the bubble. Who's gonna pop the dream bubble that everyone who gets a PhD is going to be a professor one day. No one wants to pop that bubble. Cause I think as soon as you pop it, now you're worried. Are any, is anyone even going to want a PhD? I don't, I, I can't do anything else with this PhD. Right. Stereotypes. And then, so who inside the PhD system wants to pop that bubble cuz then you don't have any more PhDs, but

Speaker 4 ([20:08](#)):

See this is, oh, so I'm so glad you phrased it this way, because this is like the thing that, that, uh, kills me the most <laugh> kills me the most because you have the smartest people I've ever met are inside the academic, uh, the academic system, like beautifully gorgeous thinkers who can like in the moment give poetic responses about like alternatives to capitalism, but they cannot escape the pressure of trying to articulate a case that is often a business case to like board of governors and state legislators about why higher education matters. And they're under a lot of pressure to do this, right? Like higher education is under pressure. It's being defunded. Um, the public at large is kind of swinging into an interesting anti-intellectual space, right? It's a very threatened thing. And so of course, part of what academics are gonna do is say, well, we are special.

Speaker 4 ([21:18](#)):

Like you need us, but then they're using the same sort of it like collapses into the same sort of language that graduate students use, right? Like we are special cuz the research is special and this is unique and you can't do this outside. And as long as like that continues to be the only way to defend higher education. I think the flip side of that is that graduate students and themselves are inside of a system that is telling them that they are special because of one specific thing. And that even if they have the skills to leave it, if they leave it well, did you actually have the skills to leave it? Did you fail at the system? Are you a sellout because of the like,

Speaker 2 ([22:12](#)):

Yeah. You didn't have the stamina to stay at seven adjunct professorships for a hundred years with your two kids and jump to seven states. Yeah. How dare you leave, leave your PhD goal. Leave your professor goal. Yeah.

Speaker 4 ([22:27](#)):

Yeah. Well, and too, like I think I, I haven't read this in a while. And so like this is, you know, one of those blurry, I don't know that I have a citation for this, but I'm pretty sure that after the first year of adjuncting it becomes even harder to get the tenure track job. Right. Like tenure track usually goes to somebody who is still in a PhD program or just graduated. So it hurts those folks too where they can't imagine alternatives. And then all of a sudden, you know, like, well this is the only meaningful thing because I have invested everything to do this. Yeah. And so it is this moment of, I think real grief and real grappling with, was this a job? What do I do for a job?

Speaker 2 ([23:14](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 4 ([23:15](#)):

I mean, one of the things that I tell people who do ask me, like, are you glad you went? I am so glad I went, I am so glad I got the PhD. I am a fundamentally different person because of UNC chapel hill. I am a different thinker. I have a different perspective than many of my coworkers and friends. Um, the way that I engage with the world is different. Having that time to like languish. And I mean, it's a lot of work. So like language is maybe not the right language, but like having that time where a significant part of your job is to in read and engage in conversations that have been going on across time and across geography is such a gift. Yeah. Um, the problem is, is it should be funded. Like people should not take out loans for this work. Um, and that it is a job, but it's a beautiful thing. And until, until we, until we talk about why it's a beautiful thing distinct from the tenure track, I, we are in a losing position to defend higher education from the things that are attacking it.

Speaker 2 ([24:31](#)):

The goal doesn't need to be a tenure track professorship. The goal could be knowledge, right? Like until we, or the goal could be a tech job or the goal could be X, Y, and Z. Right. But I think that's really interesting to put it that way, that the goal doesn't have to be this tenure track position.

Speaker 4 ([24:51](#)):

Well, it's also an interesting thing to talk about goals, right? Like, so I, I, a friend at red hat pointed this out to me, um, chief of staff, uh, for the, for the, for CTO was like academics have a almost treadmill understanding of job growth, like in job progression and professional development. Like you do this and this and this and this and this. And he is like, these other jobs don't work that way and you don't commit to a job for a lifetime. Yeah. And so when he takes a different job, his goals are even phrased differently than anything that I was doing. Right. Yeah. And so like thinking about like, what was the goal of the PhD for me? Um, and is that even the right language, like would, would the business case for higher education be a voting public that can, you know, discriminate against falsified information or ask questions or champion inclusivity and diverse voices in ways that like are held to a slightly higher

standard, you know, and we have space to ask that and make that argument if graduate students are paid a living wage.

Speaker 2 ([26:10](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 4 ([26:12](#)):

So as long as there's still students taking out loans, like then that becomes a much more difficult thing to do. Yeah. And as long as we treat it as this futile system, we're like, if you just do these things, you'll get the job. Like it's just a terrible,

Speaker 2 ([26:29](#)):

Yeah. It, it's not proven effective so far. How would you advise someone maybe in me and Jacob's position, maybe still in their PhD who realize they want to go outside the academic field? What things should they be thinking about? What should they be looking for? How should they, how should they be communicating their skills that we know they have?

Speaker 4 ([26:53](#)):

So the first thing that I would advise is, um, and this is a little controversial, but like do not take out loans for a graduate program. Like at least not a graduate program in the humanities. Uh, you know, I had a student take out \$400,000 for dental school, but is making like 600,000 in New York. So like, okay. You know, but like <laugh>, but I just, I think that the, um, in the best case scenario you're gonna have grad school paid for. And that's the only scenario you should go to grad school with. And even then, like, it's a pause on your retirement and your savings. And I think that that pause is then really felt when you are on the job market and it adds a layer of pressure and grief. So like, I would just say, you know, that that was something that was told to me.

Speaker 4 ([27:49](#)):

And I truly believe that everybody's super smart and has a lot of options. If you're looking at grad school, you have options, like take care of your financial life first only go somewhere where you are valued in that way. Yeah. And then the second thing I would say is, you know, uh, be curious and be open and look at, look at your training as a job, be thoughtful about what skills you're doing and like slowing that down for yourself. Right. Um, so keeping track of, you know, I did a podcast and like here are all the, uh, project management skills I gained from that. And maybe looking at project management jobs and seeing how they're describing skills and like walking yourself through how that translates. Yeah. And if you find a piece of it that you really like, um, like teaching or research, looking at those jobs and then saying, okay, well, what else are they asking for?

Speaker 4 ([28:51](#)):

You know, if it is project management, I have a friend from UNC, who's now a project manager. He loved that part of the process. He went and got the PMP certification and that combined with his experience allowed him to enter a, a mid-level job, you know? So I think being open, being curious, um, being like knowing the value of what you're doing and the good that it's giving to you for the time that you're in the PhD program, the five to seven years or the, or in the master program, the two to three years, like treasuring that for what it is, but not getting caught in the imagination of your committee. Right? Yeah.

Because these are people who have succeeded within the system. They're wonderful people. Yeah. They're super brilliant people, but maybe also, they're not the ones who are best equipped to help you think about <laugh> what else you can do. Um, so like just meeting, you know, talking to alumnis, being curious, being open, joining a horror meetup group, or like literally anything else, like just

Speaker 2 ([30:01](#)):

Expand your circle.

Speaker 4 ([30:02](#)):

Yeah. And think about it as like you are in control of your career. Like you, you not necessarily, even if you want the tenure track job, you don't have to be on that treadmill. Like you don't. I think it's very easy to get into a PhD program and yet really overwhelmed by everything you need. And like, you're handed a packet as like by year three, you're gonna do languages and by three and a half, you're gonna do exams. And by year four, you're gonna do this. And five you're gonna, like, it's all laid out. And I think you have to be like, okay, this is it. But also like, how do I want to set my own professional development goals? Yeah. Even if you're just being curious.

Speaker 2 ([30:39](#)):

Yeah. No, that makes sense. Also, I just thought of this now languages has to be a great, a great marketable skill. It is. If you think about it that way. Um, I always, I always forget that a lot of programs, uh, have you do languages,

Speaker 4 ([30:54](#)):

There's so many good skills. I mean, like localization is a cool job. <laugh> like I have a friend who's constantly looking at the Pokemon, um, company because they know Japanese and they're like, well, as soon as they hire somebody here, I was like, yeah, you'd be great at it. And uh, I know somebody else who is a freelancer, she's finishing her PhD and she's a freelancer and she's translating board games from Japanese. Like it's just so many skills,

Speaker 2 ([31:23](#)):

So many options. Yeah. Um, okay. So with that being said, we've really touched on, um, us, like, what can I do as, as a student? What can I do looking outside, um, what procedures skills or courses, anything do you think that institutions, especially, uh, departments in the humanities could, uh, implement to better prepare their students leaving their programs?

Speaker 4 ([31:51](#)):

Yeah. That's a great question. Um, the first thing I'm gonna say is that like pay grads full stop. It's a job. I think if we treat it like a job, you know, it's a job and there's that horrible issue where like graduate students are often classified as student and staff and that affects yeah. Insurance affects leave. Like it, it does all these things. Like I think that if we can pay students so that they can live <laugh> while doing a program and not leave with debt and loans, that solves a lot of issues. Yeah. It allows people to make a choice to go do this for other professional development issues. Right. Like, yeah. I chose to go do it, to learn how to be a thinker and gain rapidly gain professionalization skills that are hugely benefiting me in the corporate world. Um, and that's just the reality.

Speaker 4 ([32:53](#)):

Like you do have to, when you, when you switch a career, you have to be ready to maybe go into a little bit more of a junior position. But in every single case I've seen PhDs. Even if they start out more junior rapidly, get to a senior mid-level position and catch up to their peers who have been doing the job the whole time, because you have skills that are hard to teach and are hard one. Yeah. Um, but it has to start with departments and universities paying grads and not offering positions if they can't fill them. Yeah. If they can't pay for them. Um, other things that I think departments can and should do is, um, alumni networks. Right. So, you know, faculty are pressed with time too. Like they are not they're, they are suffering under the same system. And rather than them having to shoulder all the weight of preparing students to leave a system, that they are still deeply invested in sharing that.

Speaker 4 ([33:54](#)):

Right. Yeah. And if you have a robust alumni network, what you're also doing is showing your grad students that like, here's all sorts of versions of success. Yeah. Like, and you're still part of this intellectual community. Even if you go do something else and we still wanna talk with you and work with you. Um, and that can also just open up the imagination of everything you can do. Right. <laugh> like, how did you get into tech? Well, let me tell you, um, so I think those are two things I did see Brande university has started this really great thing where they are offering fellowships. So they, um, got a pocket of money and they are having their PhDs right. For fellowships that they then fund and give them basically an unpaid internship into other places that the student wants to work. So it's kind of like a way to like, get that student in somewhere and that institution doesn't have to pay the university's paying.

Speaker 4 ([34:57](#)):

Yeah. And then they get like, is things like the university press or like the local center for democracy. Like that kind of stuff is really cool. And I think also helps address some of this. Yeah. Um, I think identifying complimentary skills, like we've all been in the CV workshops, <laugh>, you know, resumes are important, um, encouraging students to be looking at, uh, job descriptions and thinking about like, okay, well, you know, you wanna go into content. So you know, that SEO is gonna be important. Is there a way we can double that up with your research plan? You know, like, um, counting different things as successful public portfolios I think are really important. Yeah. Um, so maybe it doesn't make sense for everybody to do a dissertation <laugh>, you know? Yeah. So like what can you produce if you are a talented humanities researcher and you want to go into videography?

Speaker 4 ([35:58](#)):

Yeah. Can you produce a documentary in the archives? Yeah. You know, like who think about who it's for and how it can be used to produce something that you can hand over in an interview. Yeah. Um, and so that too, I think there's such a system for letters of recommendation in place. Like faculty are very used to writing letters of recommendation, but they're all four other academic jobs. I think faculty need to learn how to write letters and little blurbs that can help students in different contexts. So, you know, like maybe it's opening part of the lever or maybe it's adding something to their LinkedIn or giving them something on a freelance website. Yeah. There's a wealth of ideas. You just, they just need to start trying some stuff.

Speaker 2 ([36:46](#)):

Yeah. So start somewhere please. Yeah. One,

Speaker 4 ([36:50](#)):

Well, start with paying, start with paying and then like follow up with literally any of these things,

Speaker 2 ([36:57](#)):

Any of the other ones. Yeah. Yeah. I, yeah. I think, um, especially talking to you today, it's been really nice and refreshing, um, cuz it's, we're not trying to beat down the academic system by any means. Um, and I, that's not the goal of this podcast. We, we all know we're in the same bus, we're all struggling the same fight. And we have been struggling the same fight since we talked to, um, a professor at, at the university of Florida, um, who, when she was going, she's been there for 15 years she's she was struggling with the same problems in the nineties. And so acknowledging that this isn't a today problem, acknowledging that there are active things, programs can be doing and not just programs colleges as well. Yeah. Uh, we talked to a lot of people who had problems with, um, their college career centers. Not them not even being able to help, um, a, a grad, a graduate student level person try to find a job outside of their track. Right. Um, and so I think, yeah, I don't know, talking to you has been really refreshing because it's not this like, oh, we're no one has hope. It's like, we all think education is important, but now let's see how more important it can be than just being a professor. Being a professor is great. That is not the argument today, but acknowledging that we have to do others things.

Speaker 4 ([38:21](#)):

Yeah. I think it's a, it is, it's both a like material argument and it's kind of like a Wawa. We should all be friends argument, but like, it's true. Like a, like people need to be financially supported and stable to be able to do anything. And so like that has to be addressed first. And then B recognizing that like, you know, graduate students are the most vulnerable, but there's pressure all the way up the system. Yeah. And all the way up the system, the language we are using to defend higher education is failing. So how can we like take the pressure off the people who are the most vulnerable while also start to think about, you know, why are we doing this? <laugh> it's like, it's a beautiful and amazing thing. And, you know, I think it, the world will be extremely worse off if we lose higher education.

Speaker 2 ([39:17](#)):

I loved talking with Shannon because she not only gave advice for students who are adventuring outside of academia, but she gave specific examples of different things. Departments and institutions can implement to aid their students entering those job.

Speaker 3 ([39:35](#)):

Totally. I think her advice on, um, her advice for PhD students finding ways to market, um, and finding new language to talk about the skills that they have, whether it's our, um, project management skills or, um, other kind of skills that non-academic jobs are looking for that PhD students have and are equipped for, they just talk about it differently. Um, I thought that was really interesting. And I also like what she had to say about, um, how departments should be utilizing their alumni, um, that have jobs outside of the, the academy, um, as resources, you know, when the faculty don't know how to answer a question or the faculty don't know something that those alumni, um, who were successful in their graduate programs and got their PhD and are now successful in a field outside of academia, um, that they can serve as a resource to those students as well.

Speaker 2 ([40:36](#)):

So listening to all these interviews was a lot of information. Do you feel better about going into your PhD program or are you more nervous and with that, what do you think was one of your biggest takeaways?

Speaker 3 ([40:54](#)):

No, I definitely feel better. I think it's one of those things where I now know more in depth people's experiences, um, and know a little more about the problem as well as having lots of really useful, um, tips and advice on how to navigate this. Um, as I work my way through the PhD program, and if at some point I decide that I want to pursue a career outside of academia that I have been working, um, with those skills kind of in the back of my head so that I can make that pivot at any moment, um, and be successful, whether I decide to pursue academia or pivot and pursue a non-academic job.

Speaker 2 ([41:39](#)):

Yeah. I found these interviews super helpful in understanding that it's not a specific department problem. It's not a specific field problem. It's truly the humanities as a whole and possibly more than just the humanities. We have talked to English, professors, history, PhDs, religious studies, PhDs. We have truly ran the gambit of departments from across multiple states shows that we're in this together, that it's not an isolated issue at one liberal arts college down the road. It is felt at big state schools, small liberal arts colleges, probably some other ones as well. And so we have to prepare not only our students for leaving our programs, but we also have to prepare our faculty that are already in the systems because without all of us understanding that this is a larger problem than just ourselves, none of us will be able to help each other.

Speaker 3 ([42:50](#)):

Thank you so much, Erica. This has been so helpful and I feel a lot better about starting my PhD program. Um, you know, I always love chatting, but I'm actually running late for orientation, so I have to hop off and head over there. Um, but, uh, you know, talk soon. Talk

Speaker 2 ([43:09](#)):

Soon.

Speaker 3 ([43:12](#)):

Bye.

Speaker 1 ([43:19](#)):

Thank you so much for listening to this series. We are very grateful to have so many people willing to participate and educate not only those going into a graduate program, but also those already in the academy graduates from programs of all shapes and sizes are struggling. We created this series to shine a small light on a problem that requires the attention and action of all of those who are proud to be in academia. Education is valuable. Do not let these issues continue to be pushed under the rug until students no longer want to enroll in higher education. College is a time to learn, explore, and prepare for a life after school. Let's help our students do that at all levels. And for all potential jobs. The study religion podcast is a production of the department of religious studies at the university of Alabama. This episode was made with the help of Shannon tr for Shri, Jacob Barrett and Erica Bennet. Follow the department of religious studies on Twitter and instagram@studyreligionoronfacebookatfacebook.com

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