



# CONNECTED ACADEMICS

Preparing Doctoral Students of Language and Literature for a Variety of Careers

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## THE SHIFT: NETWORKING AS AN INTROVERTED ACADEMIC



By **Kesi Augustine**(<https://commons.mla.org/members/kesi379/>)

I hate networking. This is partially a result of my temperament. I am an introvert. You know the kind. Sensitive to others. Drained by groups. Desperate to join happy hour. Desperate to cancel on happy hour. Again. I do not network as well as I nest.

In today's job market, however, eighty percent of successful applicants find their jobs through networking. This fall's Connected Academics proseminars taught us that survival and growth in this market demand

introverted and extroverted performances. After four years of graduate study, I have yet to master this balance. During my last conference, instead of shaking hands and exchanging business cards I did deep-breathing exercises during bathroom breaks.

My cohort has been honest about its networking anxieties. During a site visit to the New York Public Library, we discussed the successes and challenges we've encountered as (former) graduate students trying to network our way into jobs. On the worst days, we have struggled with insecurity, defensiveness, isolation, fear, the endless quest for perfection, and the crippling knowledge that, as **Manoah F.** (<https://commons.mla.org/members/mfinston/>) explained, on the job market "people don't really know what to do with humanists."

Even beyond my cohort, as a collective, academics have invested in a fear-based, dichotomous discourse about the possibility of finding tenure-track careers. This discourse keeps us reaching outside ourselves. We do more, sleep less, eat terribly, and compete fiercely. It seems as if the meek cannot survive.

My beliefs have reflected my fears in these regards. *I cannot network well because I am shy and introverted*, I would think. *If I do not network, I will not get a job. Just look at all these articles about PhDs. We're doomed.*

The self-help author Wayne Dyer teaches that my thinking and acting on notions of limited supply, my belief that I am untalented and unworthy, and my thoughts that nothing about the job search can change all reflect a life that is spiritually "out of balance." Although much of Dyer's work opposes academic values, Dyer has taught me that my complaints about introversion only reinforce my challenging relationship to networking. The shrinking number of jobs for humanities PhDs, coupled with the competitive job market at large, means that it's time for me to make a major shift.

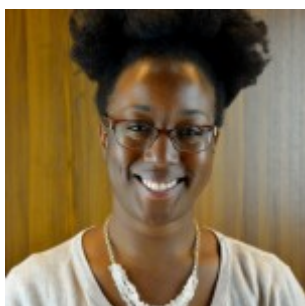
Lately, with my cohort's help, I have developed new beliefs. *I can network*, I think. *I value my work and my talents. I enjoy many privileges. I will get a job. I do the best that I can, even when that "best" is not "perfect."*

I have also compiled some networking strategies for the introverted academic:

- *When in doubt, write it out.* I approach thank-you e-mails as the opportunity to express my honest gratitude. I judge myself less when I write than when I speak aloud.
- *Know that you can do it.* Our panelists at the library all mentioned that their jobs require a balance of duties. They enjoy both researching and engaging with diverse audiences. According to this panel, when you work in a setting that benefits from your introverted skills, you will become more confident about practicing the extroverted ones.
- *Remember, people are human.* Our proseminar has also discussed the value of conducting informational interviews. These interviews, we found, can help us find new connections and learn practical details about a particular career. **Chelsea A.** (<https://commons.mla.org/members/chadewunmi/>) admitted that she enjoys informational interviews because of their intimacy and because she can direct the conversation to compelling topics. Chelsea has taught me that it's harder to fumble informational interviews than cold calls.

But intimate meetings also demand that we abandon the stiff verbal handshakes of phrases like “Best” and “Hope all is well.” I love it. Now, I tell people when I am nervous, or if I am taking a few moments to process what they have just said. I offer my authentic self.

**Molly M.** (<https://commons.mla.org/members/mollymann/>) also gave us great advice in **one of her blog posts** (<https://connect.commons.mla.org/instead-of-networking-the-art-of-asking/>). She wrote, “There’s satisfaction in both meeting someone else’s need and in having your own needs met.” I encourage academic introverts to seek the balance in our interpersonal relationships that Molly defines as we shift from seeing networking as a curse to embracing it as a challenge.



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**literary techniques and a representation of the expansion of  
consciousness that will push all readers toward our diverse future.**



