Academic Precarity in American Anthropology

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This post is part of the series Academic Precarity in American Anthropology: A Forum (/fieldsights/1321-academic-precarity-in-american-anthropology-a-forum)

This essay addresses the precariousness of the job market for U.S.-based PhDs in sociocultural anthropology. While a tenure-track job remains the career goal of most PhDs, a role to which 90 percent of graduate students say they aspire (D. Ginsberg 2016), the scarcity and competitiveness of these positions is daunting. In fact, less than ninety were vacant in 2016 and, at the time of writing, fifty-five in 2017. While exact figures are unavailable, we speculate that a proportion as small as 16 to 21 percent of PhDs in sociocultural anthropology will attain such a position in any department within five years of graduating. Despite these long odds, a tenure-track professorship remains the aspirational norm within the discipline. This is true for both graduate students and their faculty mentors, who often reassure worried students that they will beat the odds. Indeed, attaining a tenure-track position is still expected, if not exactly assumed, particularly in highly ranked departments at elite institutions. In terms of curriculum, scope of work, and mentoring, graduate education in anthropology aims to produce scholars, fieldworkers, and, to a much lesser extent, teachers, whose excellence will be measured by grants, published articles, book contracts with prestigious presses, and, ultimately, the tenure-track job. This discrepancy between an aspirational norm and a more volatile reality, begs the question: if the outcome for as many as 80 percent of graduate students will be something other than a tenure-track job, why are PhD programs almost exclusively training them for a professional life that few will realize?

More questions, predictably, ensue: Is it right, even ethical, for departments to keep accepting graduate students into training for a profession that so few will ultimately be able to practice? How do faculty and new graduates alike make sense of such pervasive "failure" on the job market? How do students manage the uncertainty of professional futures during what can be a lengthy and grueling period of graduate training? And, as the viability of our current model of professional reproduction becomes increasingly untenable, what, if anything, is emerging to take its place?

The two of us, from quite different positions, have been struggling with these issues for some time. One of us, David, is an advanced graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. In the final stages of dissertation writing and having unsuccessfully taken a first pass at the academic job market, he accepted a full-time position as an experience researcher at Adobe Design. Enjoying the collaborative nature of the work and the economic security it has provided, he has been ambivalent about continuing to seek a tenure-track position. The other author, Anne, incidentally David's mother, is a longtime professor in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. She has dealt with her own students facing the travails of the job market for years. And she is part of a department where the issue has been recognized as an increasingly critical one, discussed by faculty in recent years with a new sense of urgency. In both our cases, our institutions are private research universities and our departments are exclusively sociocultural, rather than being made up of three or four subfields. Our experiences are thus skewed toward a particular kind of anthropology and a particular kind of pedagogy, training that values theoretical sophistication and exacting fieldwork over other kinds of professionalization.

In what follows, we seek to understand why a standard of professional success is being maintained—indeed, normalized—despite the fact that is presently unattainable by all but a few. In doing so, we consider the professional training and subsequent employment of anthropologists in terms of both vocation and job. This is an inherently tense coupling, as Max Weber noted almost a century ago in his analysis of the capitalist spirit infusing the university system, one at odds with the vocational calling experienced by academics. In this piece, we engage this tension 1) in the context of anthropology graduate programs in the contemporary American university system; 2) as understood and experienced by fifty interlocutors, including faculty, recent PhDs, and staff at the American Anthropological Association (AAA), and 3) by offering a series of programmatic and creative proposals for moving beyond what we see as a failed status quo.

In doing so, we will use the rubric of precarity to examine the current labor market in academic anthropology. Deriving from the post-Operaismo school of Marxism (see Lazzarato 2007), precarity indexes labor that is uncertain, unstable, and insecure. But as much as it is a figurative descriptor of contingent employment, the term also refers to normative expectations that have become unsettled or made contradictory by pervasive economic insecurity. For instance, under Fordism, workers in Japan, the United States, and parts of western Europe counted on job security to afford them the middle-class, respectable lifestyles that were a normative value of their communities. But when these jobs increasingly became unattainable, laborers were not simply struggling under the burdens of contingency; they also experienced themselves as deviants failing to secure socially legitimate work (Berardi 2009). It is this sense of deviance that we wish to highlight in our usage of precarity. Most workers in the world today and across history have never been, or thought that they could be, securely employed. Our engagement with the concept of precarity is thus more specific and limited: here, it marks not only the concrete dimensions of how anthropology PhDs are (or are not) employed, but also the standard by which a professional anthropologist gets judged by their peers—that is, the ability to attain a tenure-track professorship. By calling the academic market precarious, we wish to emphasize how intrinsically and insidiously these two factors can be linked: the rigid clinging to an aspirational norm that, realizable by only a select few, contributes to the precaritization (as with, but not limited to, the adjunctification) of anthropology PhDs, more and more of whom are being produced by our departments.

Throughout this essay, our supposition is that academic anthropology's limited labor market indexes broader and deeper problems in higher education. Such precarity is neither unique to our discipline, nor altogether new. Nonetheless, these problems have a particular quality in anthropology, given the long history of applied anthropology and the field's well-articulated, and increasingly well-recognized, value outside the academy. That is, in contrast to many humanities disciplines structured around core competencies that are less immediately transferable to alternative professional contexts, in anthropology there are already clear, fairly well-established professional opportunities for highly trained ethnographers. However, despite the relative availability of such work (recognizing that it, too, is by no means abundant or easily attainable in today's economy), few faculty members or PhD students have much awareness of what it takes to find such work, outside of applied anthropology programs that are typically offered at the master's level and outside the R1 bubble. Such ignorance stems, we will argue, from the stigma that still attends applied and nonacademic work within [illegible] jobs that sully the purity of a vocation. This stigma is profoundly counter-productive. It fails to recognize that the promise of a nonutilitarian professional existence—one operating outside of contemporary capitalism and its spiritual depredations—is ultimately a

partial truth at best, as Weber recognized so long ago. Making something as scarce as a tenure-track job in anthropology so normatively aspirational can actually promote a different kind of instrumentality. Among graduate students in particular, fears about the job market are increasingly dominant and have real consequences not only on professional futures, but also on the kinds of projects young scholars pursue—and thus the shape of the discipline as a whole.

In analyzing the current state of affairs and moving toward a series of programmatic suggestions, we hope to help stimulate a collective debate about these issues that is at once critical and creative. We recognize that we are joining a conversation that is already underway, and we are grateful for the efforts of figures like Elizabeth Briody and Ken Anderson for helping to sustain it. By no means do we see what is offered here as particularly original or new; however, by bringing this conversation to the website of *Cultural Anthropology*, one of the discipline's most respected (and, arguably, most "academic") forums of publication, we hope to elevate its visibility.

Method and Background

Our inquiry, while far-reaching in scope, is modest in execution. Rather than collecting statistical data about placement rates, an important project that others have been pursuing (e.g., D. Ginsberg 2016), we strive to understand the experiences, concepts, and tensions that have been emerging around precarity in academic anthropology for those who are most affected—a conversation that, we felt, too few were having, at least in public. Seeking to give this inquiry an ethnographic sensibility, we decided to talk to people. Drawing on our own experiences in anthropology departments and, to some degree, our own social and professional networks, our method consisted primarily of short interviews lasting between thirty minutes and several hours. In total, we separately conducted interviews with roughly fifty participants between us. All of the participants had been trained or were undergoing training as anthropologists. They included tenure-stream faculty, recent PhDs, current graduate students, and several staff members of the AAA. Faculty participants teach in departments of anthropology as well as cognate disciplines, in public and private universities and in PhD-granting as well as applied master's programs. Of recent PhDs, about half are employed as postdocs, in contract positions, or tenure-track positions; the rest are either on the job market, alternatively employed, or un/underemployed. Our sample is admittedly small and skewed toward those trained or teaching in departments conventionally regarded as elite, though we also took pains to include participants from other institutions. Our participants were exceedingly generous with their time and the honesty with which they spoke to us, for which we are appreciative. A few participants indicated that they were willing to be identified by name, but in the end we decided not to identify any of our participants of their institutions in order to depersonalize our findings and to protect participants' anonymity.

Before proceeding, given our different positions in the field and relations to it (let alone to one another), some background about the origins of our collaboration is in order. The project began in the summer of 2017 when David (Anne's son) began working at Adobe: a move that Anne initially found perplexing. Though she was well aware of the uncertainty of the academic market from her graduate students and had experienced her own professional anxieties (and a difficult tenure process) over the years, it had been over twenty-five years since she landed a tenure-track position and she was both secure and content in the scholarly environment of her home institution, Duke. Why would her son so hastily pursue industrial work and forego applying for postdocs or visiting professorships—the route she always advised her own students to take? For David, the move into applied work was largely serendipitous. Through a contact from a college friend, he first lined up an internship at Adobe one summer when nearing the end of the funding from his graduate program; the generous pay gave him the additional year of funding he needed to make headway on his dissertation. Once in the position, however, David was surprised at how much he enjoyed the work. Working collaboratively with interactive designers, engineers, and product managers, David found that the (relative) job security his colleagues enjoyed gave a different affective quality to the working environment, especially in contrast to the increasingly tense mood of graduate students in his own department in recent years.

While David was aware from the beginning of graduate school that the job market would be difficult, midway through his training he found the specter of "the market" dominating his head space and that of fellow students in and beyond his own program. Faced with an uncertain future and the prospect of itinerant adjuncting for minimal wages, he found it increasingly difficult to connect with the intellectual curiosity that had first drawn him to academia. Thus, when nearing completion of his dissertation and having failed to land any of the tenure-track positions for which he had applied, David accepted a full-time position at Adobe's Design Research and Strategy group, where he started working in May 2017. Relieved of the economic and professional anxieties that had preoccupied him in recent years, the time he is currently able to devote to writing his dissertation feels more focused and engaged than it has been in years. Meanwhile, the work environment at Adobe includes a flexible schedule, generous benefits and pay, a collegial atmosphere and, often at least, a quasi-academic spirit. David works with a small team of anthropologists and psychologists (most of them PhDs) and is encouraged to publish and attend professional meetings. While the work draws on his ethnographic skills, it is, admittedly, different from what an academic position would entail. The research is never exactly his own and it must always, on some level, answer the question: "Can this help our bottom-line?"

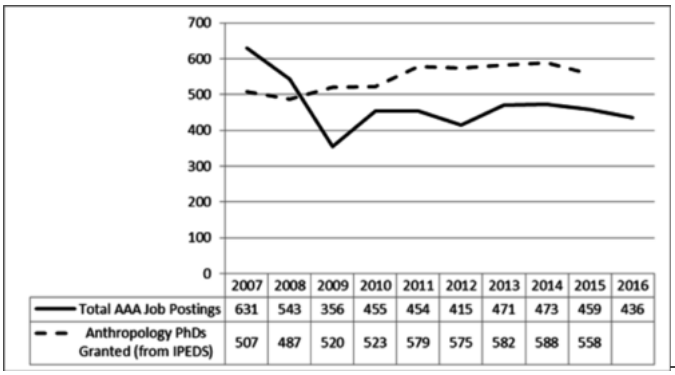
Hardly a perfect scenario, in other words, but a satisfying one. For Anne, seeing this scenario up close has been instructive. As a senior scholar whose research has for many years been materialist, examining relations of production, reproduction, and, more recently, labor precarity in postindustrial Japan, Anne came to better understand the labor dynamics involved in her own profession through observing David's experiences. This process has led her to an awareness of the need to become more cognizant of not only the routes to employment outside the academy, but also the negative consequences that holding on to an increasingly elusive professional ideal can have on those being trained.

Our stakes in writing this collaborative essay, then, are both different and similar. Finding himself approached for advice by current students and recent PhD who are interested in exploring a career in the tech industry and in applied research more broadly, David is motivated to give voice to these concerns and to offer helpful suggestions beyond his immediate bubble of acquaintances and friends. Anne, a professor in a department undergoing a robust self-critique of its graduate program, is more invested in rethinking the academic profession and its methods of training from the critical lens of precarity. But sharing a passion for and commitment to anthropology, we collaborate here in hopes of contributing to a multiperspectival dialogue about possible futures for the field and its practitioners.

The Job Crunch and the Temporal Double Bind

In the experience of many of the faculty members with whom we spoke, securing a tenure-track job in anthropology has always been an uncertain aim. As students, many were warned that only one in three or four of their cohort would ultimately be fortunate enough to attain such an appointment. Others commented on the luck involved in their own path to professional security. One tenured faculty member attributed his success to pure chance: because he had researched, geographically and thematically, precisely what a particular posting sought, he got the position that he has held for fifteen years. Another tenured faculty member submitted two hundred applications for tenure-track positions, receiving only two interviews: one for the position he has now held for twenty-five years. A third went from teaching at a small liberal-arts college to a position at a R1 university: a trajectory he still considers fortuitous. As these examples suggest, landing a tenure-track job—leaving aside the question of what kind of tenure-track job—has never been a sure thing. There has always been a horizon of professional and economic risk against which training, fieldwork, and dissertation writing have unfolded.

Yet, even if the job crunch is hardly new, the market today is more constrained than ever, as figures from the AAA reveal. The overall trend is toward a dramatic decrease in job postings: 459 in 2015, down from 631 in 2007 (note that these figures are not broken down by subfield and include visiting and otherwise contingent positions as well as tenure-track ones). At the same time, the number of PhDs produced has actually gone up: 558 in 2015, compared to 507 in 2007.



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total AAA Job Postings	631	543	356	455	454	415	471	473	459	436
Anthropology PhDs Granted (from IPEDS)	507	487	520	523	579	575	582	588	558	

(https://typhoon-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/image_attachment/image_attachment/3450/Platzer_and_Allison_Graph.png)

This situation—that more anthropology PhDs are entering the labor market as the market itself contracts—is a brute fact that most of those with whom we spoke were unfamiliar. While certainly aware of the fact that jobs in anthropology, tenure-track or otherwise, are difficult to come by, few of our interlocutors had access to any concrete data about the placement of their department's graduates over the past decade. Many said they wished that they had this information or intended to gather it some point in the future, but its absence gave a sense of vagueness to the reflections of most tenured and tenure-track faculty. That is, many acknowledged the difficulties of the job market without being able to speak with much specificity about it. By contrast, those teaching in departments with applied master's programs had placement statistics at their fingertips and could demonstrate a very high placement rate, an outcome they understood to be a central element of their professional responsibilities.

We might parenthetically ask at this point: To what degree is placing graduate students in gainful employment the responsibility of graduate institutions, generally, and faculty mentors more specifically? Why is it that professors in applied master's programs consider facilitating such placement to be a principal obligation, while faculty in more conventionally elite programs often see such professional development as orthogonal to their primary intellectual duties? We'll return to these questions later in the essay.

For now, when asked how graduate students in their own departments were doing on the job market and whether our speculative figure of 16 to 21 percent resonated, just over half of respondents said that this proportion felt intuitively correct, if not a little high. The other half reported slightly better figures, typically citing the fact that their department was highly ranked. Yet even in such elite programs, faculty recognized that their graduate students perceived the situation to be precarious, perhaps even a crisis. In fact, many faculty described both an awareness of the pressures graduate students face and a sense of paralysis around how they could or should respond. Several faculty members noted that they simply hadn't been trained to be job counselors, at least for work outside of the academy. "I am going to be honest. We don't know what the fuck we are doing," a recently tenured professor at a prestigious institution said. "Many of our best students aren't getting jobs and we don't know how to help them."

Even faculty members who are more skeptical about a perceived crisis in today's labor market recognized that graduate students today are deeply anxious. And graduate students themselves were articulate about this anxiety, describing urgency and instability as affects that now defined the experience of graduate school, fueling, as one put it, a hypercompetitive spirit that is often difficult to distinguish from outright rage and hostility. Among his fellow students, one participant perceived an anomie that pervaded nearly every encounter, even the washing of coffee mugs in the student lounge. Other students spoke of heightened competitiveness in a more Darwinian register, a persistent recognition that not everyone will survive. As both faculty and students noted, this dynamic can drive a careerist ethos that readily overtakes curiosity and inquiry, more broadly.

One faculty member lamented that many ambitious graduate students fashion themselves early in their training as fully fledged scholarly brands. They do so with customized websites, regularly updated Twitter feeds, and so on, making themselves into entrepreneurs defined by a specific niche instead of initiates into a field of intellectual and relational engagement. Such motivations index a set of disciplinary transformations that some faculty particpants found irksome. One tenured faculty member bemoaned this tendency, which she described as "reactionary," in both students and junior colleagues. Simply doing whatever it takes to get a job should not be why one goes to graduate school in anthropology, she said. Otherwise, why not just become a banker?

Karen Kelsky, a former tenured professor of anthropology at the University of Oregon, is perhaps the most visible of a cottage industry of consultants who help students think strategically about the entire hiring process, even as they describe academia and anthropology, in particular, as little more than a delusional cult. That some first- and second-year graduate students who are living on meager stipends and still developing basic fluency with the discipline would consider paying for the services of such consultants, which cost upward of $200 an hour, speaks volumes, one of our participants said. Such an anxiety to credentialize can betray a hyperprofessionalism that is discomfiting and yet increasingly pervasive. Going into their first semester of a graduate program, many current students and recent PhDs recall feeling motivated to present at national conferences, turn seminar papers into potential publications, and define their own brand relative to current and speculated future trends in the discipline. Such an emphasis on tangible products in the form of CV lines over the process of learning in all of its ambiguity frustrated both faculty and students, even those who felt obligated to follow suit. Many students recognized the importance of preparing a CV that would scan as competitive as much as six or seven years in the future, but recognized that such concerns could impinge on a deeper process of engagement. One respondent, a recent PhD, reflected:

> Simply put, precarity promotes insularity. The logic of the niche works as branding or whatever, and plays out in attitudes of expertise and superiority. The strategy is an old one in academia. Find a tiny corner for yourself and dominate it. Hope that a need for your corner arises or, better yet, speculate about what corner is going to be hot next year and jump to that. Also, shit in everyone else's space if you can. This logic can be useful for getting a job and tenure, but it has a tendency to produce fiefdoms that do not communicate with each other. Again, this logic/strategy makes the most sense if a more organic approach to the field is a crapshoot and professional risk. At least, if you have your own little space, you get some sense of control and identity and maybe you'll even have a career. All and all, it's a nice warm little pathology that we like to call home.

Beyond escalating careerism, a number of faculty members also pointed to structural conditions that put increased pressure on students and departments. Funding, both from universities and granting agencies, has been reduced even as administrators are imposing stricter time limitations on degree completion. According to one respondent, who teaches at a public institution, his administration has imposed a strict six-year limit on all social science PhDs. Moves in the same direction are happening at private institutions as well. Many faculty see such an expedited timeline as counter to a scholarly process of formation. As anthropology has historically depended on the acquisition of field languages and the cultivation of informant relationships that have their own obstinate temporality, expediting fieldwork can lead to thin studies that are ultimately concerned with advancing a novel and marketable viewpoint. “I keep trying to get my students to slow down,” one faculty member recounted.

Yet some faculty members favored a reduction in the time spent on the doctoral degree. One participant, based in Europe where around four years for a PhD is more the norm, suggested that the American system might want to emulate the European one. Another faculty member proposed making training more “efficient” by encouraging students to think, make, and articulate their work in ways that would be legible beyond anthropology journals. Noting that students can get overly mired in theoretical debates and “jargony” language, this participant stressed clarity and legibility as transferable skills: traits that she found too often lacking in the scholarship of academic anthropologists and graduate students in particular. She also suggested that encouraging students to more expeditiously “get on” with the various hoops of doctoral training —writing papers, sending out grant proposals, getting into and back from the field, finishing the dissertation—would help foster the kinds of intellectual and professional skills that would be advantageous on the job market, academic and otherwise.

In sum, we believe that a temporal cleavage exists in how faculty think about professional training. To some, the problem is that graduate students are taking too much time, getting mired in the details of the discipline, and thus failing to develop skills that could generalize. For others, graduate students are taking too little time, being overly concerned with their careers. For graduate students, though, both those with careerist impulses and those without them, there is simply not enough time—one way or another. They feel forced to make decisions that they can only hope will prove to be a workable compromise. If they linger, the hot project they began working on as early as their first year of graduate school might become stale. Yet if they take too little time to conduct fieldwork, they’re open to the charge that their fieldwork was perfunctory or insufficiently rigorous. In short, they face a temporal double bind.

Professional Aspirations and Ethical Norms

The fact that many brilliant and dedicated students are not getting tenure-track jobs is a reality few faculty members denied. One was shocked when over three hundred applicants applied for a position at her public university. They were all “phenomenally good . . . everyone should have gotten it,” she reflected, but the search committee ultimately selected a candidate presumably more exceptional than the rest—precisely why or how, she struggled to articulate. Some of his most original and engaged students have been the ones who haven’t gotten a job, observed another professor, who identified his department as one of the top-ranked in the country. This professor hastened to add that “those getting the jobs are very good too, of course.” Like many of our participants, he made no mention of measures being taken—whether in terms of curricululum or additional training—to make students either more competitive on the academic job market or better prepared for different kinds of careers.

If even elite departments and star faculty are having trouble placing their students, one might expect increased recognition that the problem is structural, i.e., there are simply very few jobs to be had. But we were struck by how much the tenure-track job continued to shape conversations about the profession and its reproduction in our interviews with faculty. Even when despairing of the professional travails facing their students, they gave more attention to strategies for making students more competitive for tenure-track positions than imagining alternatives. This is a fact that graduate students themselves pointed out, although one tenured faculty member also acknowledged this myopia on the part of herself and her colleagues. Characterizing it as “tunnel vision,” she reflected: “We’re all people who love school and can’t imagine intellectual life outside the academy.” This faculty member, like many, had students who had nonetheless pursued nonacademic careers. About half of the faculty members with whom we spoke discussed specific students who were working (quite happily, some added) in fields such as industrial design, government, journalism, development, advocacy, or administrative positions in higher education. But as to how these students had found such work, many faculty admitted to being “clueless,” acknowledging that these students had ultimately found such work on their own with little support from the department or institution.

For many faculty members, a tenure-track position is an expression of affinity and personal preference: people doing what they care about and are skilled at. For such participants, a tenure-track job is a professional aspiration *and* something like a vocation. Indeed, according to some, aspiring to a tenure-track position is less a matter of personal choice than an obligation or duty, whether to anthropology as a discipline or to the people we study; often this distinction was blurred. A number of graduate students suggested that attaining a tenure-track position was both expected and demanded by their advisors, whatever the personal costs. Such a demand had a moral or ethical quality.

In an extreme example of such a position, one graduate student claimed that faculty members in her department considered exploration of alternate career paths a form of personal betrayal, even moral turpitude. Others said that in exchanges between faculty and graduate students, the topic of needing (or wanting) to find work outside academia was never brought up, even while administrators have been putting pressure on departments to include elements of professionalization in their curricula. When deciding to seek work in industry after five consecutive attempts on the job market (and four years as an adjunct), another recent PhD recalled receiving hostile emails from several committee members, berating her for a perceived lack of commitment to the discipline. In the past, she had tried to speak with faculty about the psychological toll that peripatetic adjuncting was taking on her and her family, but her advisors had been unwilling to engage. Instead, they reassured her that her scholarship was excellent and that it was simply a matter of persistence. Now two years into a career in the tech sector, she reports that faculty advisors whom she once considered personal friends no longer respond to emails.

Many graduate students said that while professionalization outside the academy was not strictly taboo, it was a topic that rarely came up in conversation with faculty. Discussing career prospects or the reality of the job market were seen as vulgar topics, not meriting the serious attention devoted to more philosophical, theoretical, or ethnographic debates generally animating departmental discourse. Yet some faculty members took a different view, suggesting that it was students who did not want to explore the possibility of nonacademic jobs or to devote departmental colloquia or resources to this end.

Critiquing departments across the discipline for their complicity in the overproduction of unemployed PhDs, one faculty member called the entire system “predatory,” decrying “our selfishness in being unwilling to teach graduate students to do something other than what we do.” Another called anthropology a massive “Ponzi scheme.” For this long-tenured faculty member, admitting graduate students and encouraging false dreams of a professional life that is out of reach for all but a few is immoral: “We flatter ourselves that this is a noble calling, that students can give eight or nine years to this before continuing their lives otherwise.” His proposal was to abandon graduate education in anthropology altogether. Several other faculty members, but by no means the majority, said that they had heard similar proposals and agreed, reluctantly, that

this was their position as well. A few respondents went further, arguing that faculty nakedly exploit graduate student labor in teaching, teaching assistance, research assistance, and beyond. According to one recently tenured professor, faculty have a vested interest in maintaining graduate education and the dream of a tenure-track job, because it allows them to teach the kind of small graduate seminars they prefer to undergraduate survey courses.

The ready availability of TAs also relieves faculty of some of the tedium of grading papers and the time otherwise involved in working with undergraduates, several pointed out. The telos of a tenure-track job can also encourage graduate students to do marginal, thankless work for minimal pay, in order to get so-called experience that might tip the scales in their favor on the job market. Whether that work takes the form of overseeing conferences that faculty are organizing, editing manuscripts, or conducting background research, such experience can be an alibi for outright exploitation. Beyond that, the need for a sterling reference letter in such a fiercely competitive market can serve to coerce the provision of graduate student time and labor. While blatantly exploitative scenarios were relatively rare, at least in our interviews, we did hear subtle variations on this theme more often than we would have liked. Whether explicit or implicit, the suggestion that faculty can and do exploit graduate student labor, not to mention the labor of adjuncts, came up again and again. To return to the temporal double bind we discussed in the previous section, several faculty members intimated that their colleagues purposely slow down the dissertation process for precisely this reason, all the while telling students that it is in the interest of producing quality research and ultimately of securing their bright future as a renowned scholar.

The Phenomenology of the Job Market

For the graduate students and recent PhDs with whom we spoke, the experience of engaging the job market was extremely taxing and often profoundly dispiriting. Many described the process of endlessly applying for jobs: being constantly on call and prepared for an interview (whether at the AAAs, by Skype, or a campus visit), submitting further applications for postdocs and one-year positions on top of tenure-track ones, and, meanwhile—if not yet done with the dissertation—trying to stay sane and sufficiently prepared to finish to the satisfaction of one's committee members. The process is exhausting, physically, psychically, and everything in between. We heard several stories of marriages and long-term relationships bowing under the weight of such pressure. Young parents, in particular, struggled with the uncertainty of the process.

One recent PhD recalled an emotional roller-coaster. He felt upbeat in the fall when applying for positions, devastated in the winter when getting rejections or no news at all, and then a shiver of excitement at the one or two responses that came belatedly in the spring. Another lamented that minute, neurotic dissection of and speculation about the job market had become all anyone ever talked about among her graduate cohort, even at the parties where they ostensibly got together to have fun. A third bemoaned the sense of utter insecurity and helplessness that the entire process had engendered. Not knowing what particular departments were looking for when calling for a campus visit, of which she had had many, made preparation nearly impossible. She recalled a feeling of intense despair, along with profound self-doubt, when she failed to get a position for which she had been a finalist.

Almost all of our graduate student participants said that getting a tenure-track job was their goal when embarking upon the PhD, and that this was treated as a natural, normative aspiration by their programs. Yet most admitted that such an aspiration was also very much their own, something that had not been foisted on them by faculty but was driven by their own passion for the field. In this vein, one respondent, a recent PhD, described her love of fieldwork and research more broadly. She would happily take any academic position available, wherever it might be. This would include research appointments in Europe or the Middle East, opportunities she was in the process of seeking out. But meanwhile, the preparation of endless applications amid an accelerating sense of futility was wearing her down.

For another participant, it is the combination of teaching and research that sustains him. Even the life of a contingent, underpaid adjunct was more fulfilling than the better-paying corporate position he had held before starting graduate school. He would never return to a similar role, whatever the personal costs. In fact, this recent PhD, Samuel Shearer, who asked to be named, said that he would be willing to be an adjunct his entire life if it came to it. He would prefer to organize for workers' rights within the institution than work outside of it. Another recent PhD loves being an anthropologist, but also feels unqualified to do anything else. Yet his initial motivations have become increasingly remote through successive rounds on the market. A third shared that she has trouble recalling why she had put herself through such a trying process, and wondered whether it would be remotely worth it in retrospect.

Participants noted that job descriptions can be vague and wide-open, which invites a vast number of applications. The ensuing process can feel opaque, even mystical, leading some to devote hundreds of hours perfecting a letter of less than one thousand words, some with the help of consultants who claim to have uncovered a strict formalism lingering beneath the mystery. The whole process is based on the "star system," one recent PhD surmised, with every department seeking their own star. The process also involved what another recent PhD described as opaque "protocols of behavior"—vaguely defined criteria of "match" with the department that are completely illegible to candidates, particularly those who grew up in a different cultural context.

There is also a temporal dimension to the process, a rapidly ticking clock. At four years out of graduate school, one visiting professor calls herself an "old PhD" in a market that plays to "fresh blood." To stand out at this point, she would need the "brilliant first book"—what another participant, in her second year of a second postdoc, says is the holy grail of attaining a tenure-track job. Rather than converting her dissertation into a book quickly, she had been advised to craft a theoretically inventive, ethnographically mesmerizing masterpiece of a first book. Her career would ultimately depend upon it, she was told by peers. Her advisors gave her the opposite advice.

But the market is volatile and ultimately impossible to psych out, many noted, despite the claims of the formalists. Yet recent PhDs and current graduate students report being reassured that, as long as they stick with it and are sufficiently good, they will eventually get the job they deserve. Of course, this puts the pressure on the student herself. Many wind up personalizing the outcome of a search for a tenure-track job that never bears fruit, an outlook that was widely shared by those who had taken or were considering nonacademic jobs. Others managed to resist self-blame. "This is not just about me personally. There are structural conditions getting ignored by our professors no matter how personally encouraging and supportive they are," said one recent PhD who admitted to feeling resentful of her otherwise enormously supportive committee. Another, now happily employed in a position outside of academia, said he didn't feel angry at his advisors, but simply wanted to yell at them "wake the hell up!" A third admitted that the expectation of a tenure-track position was one that he, as much as any of his professors, had willingly abetted. "I felt I was in the protected elite," he said.

Echoing this sentiment, one recent PhD came from an R1 department where students were, in his view, "spoon-fed the idea that we'd be safe." He bemoaned the culture of silence that pervaded his department regarding job placement beyond the gold standard of the tenure-track position. Another recent PhD, also from an elite program and the only one in his cohort to have found a job outside of academia, reported that he had not discussed his pathway—or been invited to do so—with faculty at all. In fact, when he tried to broach the subject, faculty members would seem uncomfortable. The message, he felt, was that he was doing something vaguely indecent by working in

industry, despite the fact that so few graduates of his program had in recent years found anything but contingent positions. Still another participant recalled his advisor suggesting to him that the "failures" of previous cohorts were a reflection of their pedestrian and unoriginal scholarship. "You have to think about why they, in particular, didn't get jobs. I mean, just look at their projects," the advisor said conspiratorially.

Overall, we discovered a real disparity between how faculty and recent PhDs or graduate students thought about the issue of job placement. Whereas most recent PhDs said that too little, if any, attention was paid to this during their studies, faculty said that they clearly outline to incoming students the difficulty they will face in securing a tenure-track position: a fact that many insisted they had to grapple with themselves when embarking on their own graduate studies. We came to believe that while such conversations may be happening in departments, there remains what one student participant called a "cognitive dissonance" and another called a "lack of imagination" in examining the relationship between training and job placement. Both students and faculty play a part in this when they set their sights on tenure-track positions alone.

Precarity and Anthropology's Duplex

So how do we make sense of this situation?

As suggested at the outset, precarity is the analytic we have adopted for addressing the uncertainty of the academic job market for anthropologists trained to regard the tenure-track position, attainable by as small a proportion as one-fifth of PhDs, as vocational expectation and norm. We reference precarity not only in the sense recently expressed by Anna Tsing (2015, 2)—as "life without the promise of stability," which she calls the "condition of our times"—but also in the Marxist sense sketched in the introduction: the frustration of an aspirational expectation that has been socially normalized, even though materially made impossible. But why the contemporary perception that what is hardly new—that is, an uncertain labor market for anthropology PhDs—has reached the proportions of a crisis? Is there something distinctive about the path to professionalism in the discipline today? If so, then what is producing it and what are its effects?

To answer these questions, we need a better understanding of the structural and material conditions of our place within the academy and society at large. In taking this tack, we agree with Hugh Gusterson (2017), who has recently argued that anthropologists have been remiss in failing to analyze our own positionality within (and complicity with) the political economy and power dynamics of the university today. Gusterson's call for remedial "homework"—critical ethnographies of the university and the political economy of our profession—is already underway in interdisciplinary fields like critical university studies and in other work on academic precarity (e.g., Bousquet 2008; B. Ginsberg 2011; Ivancheva 2015, Newfield 2016; Levin and Greenwood 2016; Navarro 2017), in the web project *Academography* (http://academography.org), the efforts of Tim Ingold and others to organize a transnational academic union called PrecAnthro (https://www.facebook.com/precanthro/), and the many blog posts (http://www.alicolleenneff.com/blog/2017/11/8/on-academic-precarity) detailing personal accounts of adjunct precaritization.

Drawing on this work, here we merely sketch what such a critical ethnography of the corporatization of the university system might need to consider in analyzing the reproduction practices of American anthropology. As academic knowledge production gets reshaped by the transfer of corporate market strategies and workplace practices, a number of disturbing trends emerge. Such changes include: a widening gap between private and public institutions in funding and resources; an increase in tuition, student debt, and reliance on high-paying foreign students (37 percent of U.S. universities attract them with targeted recruiters); a marketization of education which packages the college experience as a high-end consumer good; diminished budgets to support both teaching and scholarship (down by one-third since the 1970s); a vast rise in the number of administrators and decrease of regular faculty positions; and an upsurge in bureaucratization and modes of measuring and auditing productive output that rely on quantitative metrics to evaluate faculty performance and their value to the institution (Graeber 2015).

One result: adjuncts. Today, the number of tenure-track appointments has been vastly overshadowed by irregular or part-time positions. Presently, 75 percent of all faculty in the United States are adjuncts, a proportion that quadrupled between 1975 and 2011. Nationwide, the median pay for one course as an adjunct is $2,700: a salary so low that 31 percent of part-time faculty live near or below the poverty line and 25 percent receive public assistance. Reliance on such contract labor is not simply a matter of financial need. The largest increases in the proportion of adjunct faculty have occurred during periods of economic growth. By underpaying and overrelying on such faculty, universities can divert funds from teaching to other big-ticket items: a new athletic stadium with better concession stands.

Moreover, administrators are given a readymade labor pool in PhDs willing to stay proximate to the academy in hopes of eventually landing the tenure-track job. Kevin Birmingham, the recent winner of the Truman Capote Award and the only non-tenure-track faculty member ever to have been awarded it, has suggested that (https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Great-Shame-of-Our/239148) "the prospect of intellectual freedom, job security, and a life devoted to literature, combined with the urge to recoup a doctoral degree's investment of time, gives young scholars a strong incentive to continue pursuing tenure-track jobs while selling their plasma on Tuesdays and Thursdays." As in anthropology, the number of tenure-track jobs in Birmingham's field of English has rapidly declined (by 43 percent between 2008 and 2014). This over a period when doctoral programs have awarded 10 percent more PhDs—a situation prompted, ironically, by the precarity of the job market outside the academy, such that some students seek out graduate study as a few years of intellectual reprieve.

Again, such conditions are not unique to anthropology, nor is the relative silence about their consequences. What distinguishes the situation in anthropology, though, is that our object of inquiry is precisely human relations. As Marilyn Strathern (2005, 90) famously observed, anthropology is and always has been a relational science, one that produces knowledge of relations precisely through relations themselves—what she calls anthropology's "duplex." So while the entire university system is, in one form or another, embroiled in the dynamics we have been sketching, in anthropology there is a particular quality to the current state of affairs. As Tami Navarro (2017, 506) puts it: "While anthropologists have paid increasing attention to neoliberalism in our research, we have been less willing to apply this lens to our own academic positioning and the ways these roles are shaped by privatization and market models." This includes recognizing how differential power relations—a key concern of anthropologists—play out in the ranks of contingent faculty in the United States: over half of whom are women (https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/12/03/black-professors-essay-raises-questions-why-she-was-investigated-after-offending), and 10.4 percent women of color (http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Minorities-in-Higher-Education-2010.aspx). Class figures in here, too, privileging those with the means to slow down their graduate studies or to pay for master's degrees to help assure admittance into high-ranked programs.

In short, either we are actively suppressing the kind of attention that the practice of anthropology depends on, or else our reflexivity faces its limits at home. Why, after all, have so few been interested in anthropology's duplex within the profession of anthropology itself? Jan Lueck-English, the president of the Society for the Anthropology of Work and a professor at San Jose State University, offered the following observation in her interview with David:

> Sometimes faculty are not the most self-aware creatures in the universe. And I say that as a faculty member. It's a blind spot and it's particularly a blind spot when you have privilege. We can look at someone else's privilege and see where their blind spots are, but we have a hell of a time looking at our own privilege and seeing our own blind spots. And we know why that's the case. People are rewarded for participating in their own elite status.

Anthropology as Vocation and Job

Given the dynamics of the job market, how are young anthropologists preparing and presenting themselves to get the positions they seek? As we heard from graduate students, they are compelled to develop a strong profile and a unique personal brand for themselves: one with multiple parts, including diverse strengths, that can be marketed to a host of different potential employers—different programs, departments, postdocs, nonprofits. Unless one gets a tenure-track job and, with it, the prospect of settling into one institutional home, job-seekers need to present themselves as bundles of skills, assets, qualities, and strengths that can add value across multiple domains. If they fail on one front, they must quickly repurpose these skills for an entirely different market. In the face of these multiple job markets, one cannot simply specialize; one must always be cross-specializing, and strategically so.

The need to fashion oneself as a composite of attributes is a portrait of labor entirely in keeping with the times. The recent work of Ilana Gershon (2017) has carefully analyzed transformations in the concept of work in the United States. In the recent past, a worker might see themselves as something like a property, of which they were the rightful owner: labor was thus only temporarily rented to an employer. Today, by contrast, workers see themselves more like businesses whose services, rendered in terms of a list of assets and strengths, are sold to other businesses, that is, employers. In this light, one recent PhD with whom we spoke was teaching at four different institutions, each demanding different skill sets, with nothing due to last beyond the year. While not identifying himself as a business explicitly, as many of Gershon's interlocutors did, he nonetheless reflected her observation that a worker today must relate to their labor as if it were a business: a particularly contemporary form of alienation. The adjunct and the aspiring professor alike must devote great time and energy to reading and anticipating market trends, staying connected to a network acquaintances who might offer work or provide the right reference, all the while cultivating a set of modular services to fit various job opportunities.

So why stay tethered to academia and to the pursuit of a tenure-track position, if labor has become little more than a set of transactional, if still pedagogical and occasionally scholarly services? For the recent PhD stretched across four institutions, as with many of our participants, the answer was self-evident: there could be no other path for a true anthropologist. But, we wondered, was there not something frankly irrational, even masochistic in this attachment to such an insecure position over other possibilities for the practice of anthropology? What we learned was that, despite its corporatization in recent years, academia still retains the aura of something else: a world of ideas and of the mind, which is not reducible to profits or mere instrumentality.

Certainly, few anthropologists enter the profession expecting fat salaries or plush lifestyles. Rather, we are driven by passion, an engagement with the world, perhaps even a calling. We recall Weber's (2001) well-worn concept to reference devotion to a single-minded pursuit in a highly disciplined and individualistic fashion, as an end unto itself. In Weber's argument, beginning with the Reformation and Calvinist reworkings of the notion of predestination, the individual could no longer rely on ritual and clergy to assure salvation, but was now made responsible for their own fate through material acts of religiosity, which were enacted and reflected through productivity and accumulation. The calling became an *as-if* mode of action—conduct adopted *as if* it could prove that one was saved, a fate that could never be actually known. As predestination was reserved for a select few (who themselves would only recognize their privilege after life ended), one's calling could only resolve itself in death.

Insofar as a calling entailed working relentlessly (and often alone), not knowing if one was among the saved and driven to make money but enjoined not to spend it, the pursuit of a calling could lead to both loneliness and alienation. Yet from such an ostensibly irrational premise, Weber argues that a modern rationality was born, one expressed in the disciplined pursuit of economic gain characterizing capitalism. And, because industrious work was done for spiritual rather than practical reasons, the sober productivity of worker-believers—who worked hard but didn't interrogate the conditions of their workplace—ultimately spurred on capitalism in a recursive loop.

We see a resonance here with the situation of academic anthropology and the value placed on the tenure-track position as the ultimate sign of the professional elect. To pursue this position at whatever cost, even years spent adjuncting and living precariously, thus comes into focus as a moral pursuit: an as-if proposition all its own. Similarly, deviation from this path comes to represent a lack of sufficient passion, commitment, and intellectual wherewithal instead of an acknowledgment of the material reality of a tight labor market in a uber-capitalist university system. The burden of shouldering this worldview falls too one-sidely on the individual, occluding the responsibility of those in such coveted positions from adequately assessing the material conditions of the profession's (re)production. As Weber himself noted in his lecture "Science as a Vocation," the university, too, is driven by the spirit of capitalism. Run increasingly on a market model, the university consecrates revenues and a reputation based on the productivity of its faculty as both popular teachers and top-notch scholars. But as to the terms on which recent PhD get positions in the first place and manage to maintain them over the long term, these tend to be set far more by university administrators than academics. Weber (2007, 134) found the conditions of academic life to be a "mad hazard" and he emphasized the remove of the academic worker from their institutional means of production. How could one not be crippled by despair, Weber asked? Yet, over and over, his colleagues told him (as ours do today): "Of course, I live only for my calling."

Moving Forward

The increasing scarcity of tenure-track positions for anthropology PhDs poses a dilemma, if not a crisis, for not only those still struggling to attain them, but for the field as a whole. Understanding how this dynamic has been experienced and conceptualized by a small sample of those in the field was the initial aim of this project. Bringing our own perspectives to the table, we sought to test our own perceptions in relation to a broader set of interlocutors. Conducting our inquiry primarily through interview rather than participant-observation, we nonetheless sought to produce a form of ethnography: a description of life as lived and experienced by some people in a particular place and time. Yet we believe that anthropology must also be something more: a critical inquiry into what makes life the way it is that helps push analysis in the direction of imagining life as something else. Accordingly, we have also attempted to consider precarity and the conditions producing it in more anthropological, and thus, transformational terms. Because anthropology trains its future practitioners in the context of a university system that is itself embedded in a particular form of capitalist socio-economy, in this essay we have tried to investigate the ecology in which the tenure-track job search is inscribed.

Our view is that the field of anthropology is at a juncture, one demanding both critical self-reflection and structural changes at an institutional level. To that end, and drawing on what we learned from our interlocutors, we now offer a set of practical, programmatic suggestions for how the dilemma of job precarity might (start to) be remedied. Not so much definitive solutions, these are given more as possibilities for moving forward that are intended to spur conversation and collaboration. What we hope to advance is a set of provocations to action, which are at once visionary and pragmatic (Coles 2016).

Proposal One: Creativity and Compromises in Undergraduate Education

Academic precarity reflects broader trends in the university and the socio-economy at large. Paramount here, particularly for the interpretive social sciences and humanities, is the fact that, at a time of institutional defunding, privatization, rising tuitions, soaring student debt, and disproportionate support of STEM fields, higher education has increasingly become an instrument of social reproduction: specifically, the reproduction of economic and social privilege. One effect of these developments is an increased demand to justify higher education in terms of the concrete value it can offer its consumers, students. More and more undergraduate education is evaluated in terms of job outcomes: the value of a college degree is measured by the career and the income it leads to. Such measurements are not exclusively the invention of administrators, we want to emphasize, but reflect the beliefs and desires of students, parents, the media (take, for instance, the infamous *U.S. News and World Report* rankings), and the public more generally. As almost everyone understands, not only do salaries increase for those who hold college degrees and for some professions, but one must also have the right kind of degree from the right school.

In such a marketplace of ideas, the utility of anthropology may elude students, dissuading them from taking classes in our departments or declaring anthropology as a major. As a result, university administrations see anthropology as dead weight and cut back on our funding, thereby preventing departments from being able to hire more faculty and thus provide jobs for recent PhDs. Yet faculty members are not passive victims in this cycle, even if the structural conditions we face are ones that we can all agree are regrettable. Thus, while not suggesting that we pander to the utilitarian values pervading the university today, we do want to encourage efforts to better connect with and captivate today's undergraduates in the classroom. If students are staying away because our course offerings are too esoteric or simply illegible, then we need to get more creative in both what and how we teach. Paradoxically, while elite anthropology departments often look down on applied work, applied anthropology is precisely the kind of course that many undergraduates seek: something we should all pay attention to (as in crafting new kinds of courses like "Ethnography for Designers.") The challenge is to develop what Cathy Davidson (2017) promotes as innovative teaching that is nonetheless faithful to the discipline.

Within the university, it is also important to forge new pathways and partnerships for teaching anthropology. One of our faculty participants calls this "cross-training," an activity that her own (more applied) program has been successful in developing. Another constructive model is the interdisciplinary global studies major that Richard Handler has implemented at University of Virginia, with four separate tracks including "Environments and Sustainability" and "Security and Justice." Anthropological, though not contained within the Department of Anthropology itself, the program is so popular that admission is highly selective (Handler 2013). We also see a need for training our graduate students in skills that can transfer to jobs outside the academy, skills that might also be brought into the undergraduate classroom: digital media, interactive learning, and so on. This would be one way of addressing the scarcity of tenure-track jobs. Rather than reducing or eliminating graduate programs because we cannot fill our undergraduate classes, we could redesign both the training of graduate students and the nature of undergraduate teaching to better support both.

Proposal Two: Investigate the University, Interrogate Ourselves

While trends in the university—toward privatization, instrumentalization, and a stifling of social mobility—adversely affect our discipline, anthropologists also need to do a better job interrogating our own complicity in the current state of things, as well as ways that the profession and practitioners can productively seek change. To this end, we advocate for a serious, collective, cross-disciplinary study of the discipline, one that examines job placement—who is getting what jobs both inside and outside the academy—and applies this data to debate the possibilities for anthropologists both in the context of the university and the world at large. The American Anthropological Association has already launched two initiatives in this direction: a Working Group on Non-Tenure Track Employment in Anthropology (http://www.americananthro.org/AdvanceYourCareer/Landing.aspx?ItemNumber=21819), and a newly created Department of Education, Research, and Professional Development devoted, in part, to extending AAA support to those in precarious employment or seeking alternative jobs.

Rather than using the data thus collected to reinscribe the rift between applied and academic or practical and theoretical anthropology, we advocate for an interrogation of this dichotomy, one in which both practice and theory are critically (re)assessed vis-à-vis one another. This move would call for anthropology programs—and not only those self-identified as applied—to become more savvy about and supportive of a range of professional pursuits for their graduates. Forms of anthropological practice outside the university must be destigmatized. At the same time, this move also means engaging in serious discussion about the place of anthropology within the university: how are those most permanently ensconced in tenured jobs contributing to trends toward marketization and growing socio-economic disparity not only beyond the ivory tower, but also inside its doors?

We must also openly debate the possibility of reducing or eliminating graduate programs altogether, and redirecting a department's energies and resources into undergraduate teaching. Too often such proposals are dismissed with a rueful condemnation of higher education as neoliberal. To meet the demands we face, this simply isn't enough.

Proposal Three: Solidarity with Adjuncts and an End to the Exploitation of Graduate Labor

As an increasing number of anthropology PhDs join the ranks of adjunctified faculty nationwide, we advocate for contigent labor to become an issue addressed by us all. We need to develop ecological solidarity. To that end, we call for robust and continued discussion about the academic labor conditions for fixed-term versus tenured employment at our universities. Unionization and advocacy should be encouraged, and tenured faculty should put pressure on administrators to improve the conditions of adjunct labor. Tenured faculty must also examine their own role in providing adjunct labor for universities through the overproduction of PhDs.

Meanwhile, faculty need to recognize when they are exploiting graduate students. A favor here, some minimum-wage research assistance there: the result is that of highly trained and exceedingly intelligent workers doing high-skill work for not enough pay. We need to collectively end such exploitative practices.

Proposal Four: Critical Reflection on Trends and Turns

In this moment of anxiety, preoccupation, and intense competition over dwindling resources and scarce tenure-track jobs, we also want to raise concerns about the effects these conditions are having in terms of an orientation toward trendiness in our scholarship: a new "turn" every two years. The adoption and fetishization of certain key theorists, texts, or hot topics represents an impasse in ideas that many privately recognize as deadening. In fact, it is a tendency fed in large measure by the narrowness of the tenure-track market. Yet it loops back on itself with the failure to capture undergraduate interest in anthropology and with public visibility and impact that is too meager in light of the discipline's potential contributions. This is not to advocate for the abandonment of rigorously engagement with theory but, rather, to open up the fostering of it in a form less driven by insular disciplinary debates.

Proposal Five: Methods Courses

A number of our participants proposed curricular changes in graduate training to respond to the challenges posed by the shrinking tenure-track job market. This is a complex issue inflected by the diversity of institutional ecologies, histories, and personalities that different programs navigate. We see much to be excited about in the innovative redesign of curricula that various departments have initiated. Some, either in response to or in anticipation of student demand, are already offering ethnographic

methods courses, tracks, and degrees aimed at training students for nonacademic careers. Others are building a more diverse methods sequence into a single curriculum, with the goal of making students more flexibly prepared for different career paths and for more public, engaged, or applied anthropology. Still others are encouraging the kind of "cross-training" described above, in which students pursue mixed or hybrid degrees from two or more programs.

Whatever form it takes, students in our departments need better training—not just in theory and the history of the discipline, but in the concrete techniques involved in participant-observation. Though this mode of research is indeed like a language in that it can only be taught up to a certain point, all too often the romantic and antiquated notion that fieldwork must be a trial by fire is an excuse to skimp on methodological training—despite the fact that ethnography has become heavily sought out elsewhere in the university and in the world beyond it. Students need to learn how to conduct interviews, record observations, and synthesize data into the form of findings. Outside of academia, eloquent turns of phrase and ethnographically vivid descriptions of field encounters simply don't translate. When working for an NGO, public-health initiative, or corporate employer, fieldwork demands actionable findings that can be justified through clear reference to evidence. To be diversely and flexibly skilled, students need to learn to do this kind of research, without recourse to high theory, in order to flourish outside the academy.

Proposal Six: Career Services

While tenured faculty protest that they are not trained as job counselors, they may as well learn to play this role in some measure. Rather than placing responsibility entirely on their students, advisors can do a better job of cultivating referral networks, internship possibilities, and so on. While we are by no means proposing that this should be all that faculty do, we contend that there is no excuse for the attitude of helplessness that we heard time and again.

Proposal Seven: Placement Data

Graduate programs across the discipline need to collect better placement data and to share this data with institutional bodies like the AAA. While we can triangulate and speculate about current placement figures, there is no reason that a more robust and accurate dataset should not be available. This data can help us to understand what is going on and compel us to act.

Proposal Eight: Revisit and Remediate the Applied/Academic Split

This one is simple. Applied anthropology is still looked down on in many regions of the discipline. Practitioners are poorly integrated into conferences like the annual meeting of the AAAs, and students at R1 institutions often have no interactions with them during graduate school. Inviting practicing anthropologists to participate in colloquia and interact with students will not only help to destigmatize the kind of work that, after all, a clear majority of PhDs will wind up doing, but at the same time help to develop networks and contacts that might help students to land first jobs.

Likewise, students need to get some experience doing public or applied work while in graduate school. Far too often, recent (or not so recent) PhDs begin looking for a nonacademic job years after graduating, following a series of postdocs, adjunct positions, and so on. Trying to find one's first job at forty is difficult in any field. And in this case, it is entirely unnecessary. Rather than dissuading students from doing internships and taking contract work during graduate school (which might distract from their true scholarly path), students need to log some of this experience while they are still students.

Conclusion

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of tenure-track job precarity for anthropology PhDs. As we have tried to lay out in this essay, the problem is deeply entwined in not only the training of graduate students but also trends in the university, the job market, and socio-economy more generally. Thus changes to the graduate curriculum, even when forward-looking and terrifically innovative, can only go so far. Furthermore, as Weber so sagaciously discerned a century ago, the spirit of the marketplace fails to completely align with—or to instrumentally erase—the intellectual passion driving so many scholars. A passion may be a calling, but it is also a form of resistance to the iron cage of marketization spreading so insidiously throughout our political, economic, and cultural habitat. This passion needs to be nurtured and kept alive in the work we do practicing and teaching anthropology. As many recent PhDs told us, they have few complaints about the substance of the training they received. The intellectual stimulation, the chance to grapple with theoretical problematics, the analytical working out of ethnographic field material—they loved these things and would not want to see them eliminated or reduced in the future of their departments.

The problem is how to juggle the scholarly training of would-be anthropologists with their placement in the kinds of positions their teachers have. There is a structural double bind here that is thorny and far from easy to resolve. How can we be both pragmatic in training students for sustainable jobs and lives and also visionary in retaining the transformative potential of anthropology as a field? Our work is cut out for us.

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Editor Reviewed

Metadata

Published On

February 12, 2018

Cite As

Platzer, David and Allison, Anne (http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8626-9550). "Academic Precarity in American Anthropology." Dispatches, *Cultural Anthropology* website, February 12, 2018. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1310-academic-precarity-in-american-anthropology

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Comments

Posted By Caroline Yezer

February 13th

I love many of these contributers, but this forum on precarity was written by mostly full professors, some of whom I know, and many of whom have former students that are living that precarity, but seem to be invisible. Why focus on grad students, when so many of us have been adjucting for years and that kind of teaching is our career and wish to be heard?

FWIW, Here's a list of how to help your students living in academic precarity who have been out teaching and probably cannot get hired at Adobe, or just don't know what else to do but teach & continue to research. There are so many ways to help! One of the most important things you can do though, is to show that you believe in your alums and their research, especially when they say they are 'giving up'. Here's ways you can do this:

1. give them access to databases. those without institutional affiliation cannot read articles on JStor for example. If you are faculty petition your institution to allow them to maintain academic affiliation & access. If you think writers block is hard, try writers block and having to beg people to download a PDF for you. I'm floored that no one recongizes this. this should be #1 in the list of issues in this forum.

2. invite them to give talks at your institution or in your classes. I'm amazed at how research universities tend to only invite alums with tt jobs to speak, but ignore those that are perpetually on the market. one thing that precarious academics lack is a community of scholars. You can help by brining them in to speak and get helpful q & a on their research, and doing so shows you believe in them and their work. it helps to be paid for these talks but even if you cannot do so, you'd be surprised at how many precarious faculty would still do a talk. This is one of the things I did when I was on the TT, I invited people I knew needed exposure and whose work I believed in. It takes so little to do this.

3. periodically ask them, "how are you doing, and how can we help you", or send em jobs or fellowship info. most of us anthropologists cannot get to our fieldsites because adjunct work doesn't give access to funds, and most other funding requires you have institutional homes. if you see ways for your precarious student to fund airfare to their fieldsite, say something. IF there is nothing MAKE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES for them. Change the system.

4. pay them for their expertise. For example, I've been involved in 8 hires in small liberal arts college settings. I have far more knowledge about what a hiring committee looks for at such an institution than my colleagues at research institutions do, simply because I've been on that end. Yet my expertise is only used to help coach friends on the market. Your students who are adjuncts or rejected tenure candidates have plenty of advice, but we're so stigmatized and outside of the system, we're overlooked.

5. Take a hard look at your graduate program & your own attitude to your grads that are academics, but don't have tt jobs at research universities. Do you treat these alums the same as your tenured students? Do you treat those at liberal arts the same as those at research institutes? If you replicate a star system that values certain publications & research over teaching, think about how your part in that system feeds back into the market for you new Phds. We know we're in neolib times, we've known it for years, so what have you changed? Do you have functions where you regularly invite alums back, or do you hide from your placement stats and alums that don't have TT jobs, perpetuating the stigma of such labor? Many institutions have cut back on admissions, but haven't given much thought to how to change to support graduates out there in adjunct land. We adjuncts have ideas. We are a rich community of scholars & teachers. Use us, please.
thanks for listening. :)

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