

# Post Academic Syllabus

*Beth M. Duckles*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

There is likely a very good reason you've decided to search the internet for advice on leaving academia, been sent a link to this or have stumbled on this syllabus. Regardless of your stage of being in the academy, the way you've gotten here or your feelings about wanting to leave, you are welcome here. We probably don't have all the answers for you, but we have a few thoughts. And we certainly know what it's like to be where you are.

Why are you here? Well there are a lot of reasons you might have decided to take a look.

- Maybe you're at the tail end of a job search and you're not going to get a job you want.
- Maybe you're a grad student who knows she needs options.
- Maybe you're a tenured professor who doesn't want to stay in academia for any number of reasons.
- Maybe you're not sure but just want to know what your options are.

Whatever stage you're at, you're welcome here.

You'll also likely have a lot of emotions about this too. We'll talk about that in Ch 2. Just know that we get it.

### 1.1 A Syllabus? Really?

Well, why not? We use syllabi to teach content to students, why wouldn't we put together a framework for learning more about the job of leaving the academy?

There are a few reasons why I chose this as a format.

- 1) Because you know what a syllabus is about if you're an academic. You have taken classes and have read other people's syllabi. You might have written your own. This is a comfortable format.
- 2) When making your own classes you probably look at other people's syllabi and "borrow" from them (with attribution of course). This is not only acceptable, it's normal in most fields. Same with this document. Take what you want, leave the rest. Some of this will be useful, some will not.
- 3) Leaving academia and learning the skills to make this leap is no different than any other skill you've learned in a class. It's just work. A syllabus reminds you that this is doable. Plus I get to give you homework and who doesn't like homework?
- 4) A syllabus changes from semester to semester. This document will do the same, staying online and shifting as I get more resources, suggestions for units and ideas for how best to format this thing. I strongly encourage you to contribute to this document as we go.

## 1.2 Prerequisites for the course

This syllabus will make the most sense for people who have spent time in a graduate program that is primarily designed to prepare you for a career in academia. This course also presumes that you are open to a life that is somehow different from becoming a tenured professor at a university.

A few things that are not required: You don't have to have left academia, you don't have to make a decision about if you'll leave. You don't even have to know what that would look like if you did.

## 1.3 A few Terms

- Post Academic/Post Ac
- Academic Adjacent/Ac Adjacent
- Adjuncts
- Postdoc/Postdoctoral Fellowship
- VAP/Visiting Assistant Professor Position
- TT/Tenure Track Position

## 1.4 Contributing

I take responsibility for this document and the opinions are mine unless they are in quotations and therefore contributed by someone else. That said, I strongly encourage you (yes you!) to contribute resources, materials, feedback about books/articles/resources, ideas for assignments, or any other thoughts you have. I welcome emails, responses to this survey and pull requests on GitHub. I reserve the right to edit for clarity, space and to spelling/grammar. I also may not be able to fit everything into the document, but I will do my best.

Please be patient if you do submit something. I am one person, and this is a labor of love. I also don't have all the answers for your field or your experiences. So if something seems wrong to you, please let me know. We all need each other here. There's a lot we can accomplish if we join together our (massively overeducated) brains.

If I do include something that you have contributed, you have the option of having your name listed in the contributors section with my gratitude. Making your name public is not required for contributing.

## 1.5 About

This syllabus is designed by me Beth Duckles (Hi!), but it would not exist without the incredible group of women who have joined the Athenas Slack Channel for Post Ac women, the people who responded to a survey I put out for resources on Post Ac life and the many contributors who have offered their thoughts and resources.

# Chapter 2

## Quit Lit

Quit lit is rarely defined but most academics have seen or heard of its prominence in recent years. These documents are a particular type of discussion of the challenges in higher education. They often take a first person perspective and reflect both on the individual's story and how this connects to the larger questions within the academy and higher education. By starting with an incomplete typology of perspectives on why people leave the academy, we get a sense of the variety of stories that are told and can reflect on how these themes may emerge in our own stories.

The point is to begin to own one's story and to take seriously how our own individual positions and experiences are connected to the larger world. Being willing to examine our own story in light of the larger structure, industry and mechanisms that we have been a part of can ease the individual burden and begin the healing process.

### 2.1 Readings

- Garber, Megan. "The Rise of Quit Lit" - Atlantic
- Schuman, Rebecca "Thesis Hatment" - Slate
- Bartram, Erin - "The Sublimated Grief of the Left Behind"
- Neff, Ali Colleen - "On Academic Precarity"
- Lee, Oliver - "I have one of the best jobs in Academia. Here's why I'm walking away" - Vox
- Conditionally Accepted, "Dear Department, I Quit."
- Harbin, Alison - "Why I Left Academia Part I & II"
- Erin Bartram - "The Sublimated Grief of the Left Behind"
- Dunn, Sydney - "Why So Many Academics Quit and Tell"
- For more, see the list of pieces in a Google Doc: "Quit Lit: The Vitae List"

### 2.2 Homework:

1. After reading the above quit lit, find more stories that fit with your experiences. Consider the following themes and note which ones fit best with your story.
  - academic precarity and economic instability
  - the contingent labor market and low-paid adjunct positions
  - not enough tenure track jobs and the competition for tenure track positions
  - academia is not for me
  - academia is for me but I didn't get a job

- academia is for me but I hate teaching
- unfair teaching burdens
- student apathy
- student entitlement
- unprepared students
- student as customer
- the rise of online education
- increased student tuition
- student loan bloat
- the broken hiring process
- the broken tenure process
- the broken academic publishing process
- decreased university funding
- increased higher education administration
- low faculty salaries
- declining funding for research
- the declining liberal arts
- anti-intellectualism
- classism
- geographic isolation
- loneliness
- grief
- the “two body” problem
- having a child
- having a child with special needs
- having small children
- incompatible careers
- family illness
- divorce
- everyday institutional racism
- microaggressions
- mental illness
- workaholism
- everyday sexism
- sexual harrassment
- sexual assault
- assault
- verbal abuse
- gaslighting
- unequal emotional labor workload
- illegal behavior
- institutional politics and infighting
- sabotage
- the trap of post doctoral positions
- the trap of visiting assistant positions
- the trap of adjuncting
- dropping out of a Ph.D program
- the desire to do work that matters
- the desire to do manual work
- the desire to have a life.

2. Write your own quit lit piece. If you have not already left, imagine you have or will soon leave. If you have left, make your writing cathartic.



Optional Extra credit: Let someone (or a lot of someones) read your quit lit piece.



## Chapter 3

# You Are Not Alone

This unit reminds you that regardless of your experience, there are others who have had similar experiences and who have left the academy. There is even some evidence that you will (gasp) be happier if you leave.

There are a myriad of people out there who are doing work that will help you even if you have no money, there are books you can check out from the library, concrete steps you can take and people who will talk to you.

We will start with general resources and then follow up with specific resources for certain groups.

### 3.1 Readings

- What I wish I had Known - Beth M. Duckles
- The Professor is In
- Imagine Ph.D.
- Beyond the Professoriate
- Perel, Greta - “What Happens When Academics Quit? Good Things it Turns Out.”

### 3.2 Resources for Women

Women often face very specific challenges with leaving the academy. There are a number of resources that may help you work with and heal from these challenges as well as assisting you in getting your story back into your own hands.

- Tara Mohr, *Playing Big* > “Gave me lots of solid information about women and ambition, and eventually connected me to smart women also trying to figure shit out.”

### 3.3 Resources for People of Color

### 3.4 Doing your Human Homework

Leaving the academy is a huge life shift and as the child of two psychologists, I’m keen to encourage people to work through the things that have brought them emotional pain. Basically, I want you to do your human homework.

Human Homework is the act of facing and working with your fear, shame and emotions so that you can heal. It's not something you ever finish doing but it is something that you need when you're going through difficult times.

Doing your human homework regardless of who you are will make you a more effective and whole human being. I strongly believe that you are not broken and the world has need of your intelligence and skills.

I do not have opinions about what specific method would work best for you to do this work. I just encourage you to do it.

Below is a list of resources that might help. Some might intrigue you, while others may turn you off. Just find the resources or method that do speak to you and work with those.

- Transitions Book - William Bridges
- Nonviolent Communication
- Sedona Method
- Parker Palmer and the Center for Courage and Renewal A former academic and writer, Parker writes about his experiences and share insights from the Quaker tradition and his time with the retreat center Pendle Hill. His books reflect on how to "let your life speak" and to look for wholeness in your life. He works with the Center for Courage and Renewal to create retreats and other seminars.
- [Brene Brown] Brene Brown is a professor of social work at UT Austin who did a TEDx talk that went viral about vulnerability. She has written several books based on her research. Among them are Rising Strong
- Pema Chodron
- Landmark Forum
- Last Mask Shamanic Center
- More to Life
- The Road Less Traveled - Peck
- Leadership Embodiment - Wendy Palmer
- The Big Leap (???)
- Martha Beck Martha is a former academic who has written memoirs, self help books and has created a tribe of people who are focused on finding direction. Among her books: Steering By Starlight, Finding Your Way in a Wild New World.
- Man's Search for Meaning - Viktor Frankl A book written by a psychologist, chronicling his experiences in Auchwitz and finding meaning in life.
- "Uncertainty: Turning Fear and Doubt into Fuel For Brilliance - Jonathan Fields
- "The Power of Meditation: A 28 Day Program - Sharon Salzberg
- The Dance of Anger - Harriet Lenrner

# Chapter 4

## Networking

This class will demystify and simplify the task of networking by encouraging you to note your strengths (yes introverts have networking strengths) and to give you a chance to play around with and consider how best to network into new ideas.

The truth is, that getting a new job, starting a new career, or even being a public academic requires networking. I am not suggesting that you change who you are, or do anything that turns you into a smarmy salesperson. You gotta be you.

### 4.1 Resources

- “Bajuniemi, Abby - “Networking Strategies for Beginners”
- LinkedIn
- Meetup.com
- Twitter
- Facebook Groups

### 4.2 Homework

- 1) Create social media profiles for Linked In, Twitter and Meetup. If you dislike or are nervous about being on one or more of these platforms consider creating very specific boundaries around how you choose to use them. For instance, you might decide that you will not friend people on Linked in that were in your classes. Or you might only tweet things that you think people who are in your field would be interested in. Or you might decide
- 2a) Connect with five new people on LinkedIn that you already know. Write them a short personal note saying something along the lines of: “It’s great to see you on here, hope you are doing well. - YourName” or “I was thinking about you the other day and it’s good to look you up on here and see you’re doing well.” - YourName or “I saw this article/anecdote/event/meme and thought of you. Hope you’re doing well.” - YourName
- 2b) Follow someone you think is interesting on Twitter. Read their tweets.
- 2c) Look for some Meetups you might consider going to. Put one on the calendar.
- 2d) Join a new Facebook Group and respond to or “like” someone’s post.



# Chapter 5

## Getting a Job

There are a thousand and one books out there on how to find a job and a ton of people who can help. That said, it can be somewhat overwhelming to approach those books when you're a post academic because you have some very specific challenges.

You might wonder: - How do I turn my CV into a resume? - How do I talk about my research/papers/work to non academics? - What skills exactly do I have? - How do I market my skills? (and btw marketing is a dirty word) - Who would hire me? - What if I want to do something completely different that I'm entirely unprepared for?

First, recognize that you have skills. Even if you have the most esoteric dissertation in the world, you have skills and often can teach them or use them in service to all kinds of projects. Consider what you did love about academia. Was it reading? Writing? Teaching? Was it the content you were working on? Was it the methods you were using? Did you like the meetings or prefer to hide out in the lab/library/archives? Consider your answers to these questions as you look for your job and try to find places where those skills are valued.

Second, the path of finding your post ac job can be trial and error. It often does not follow a clear path and there isn't anyone else who can know what the next step is for you to take. It can be bewildering, frustrating and incredibly scary for academics who have had the path laid out for them (take these classes, then do these exams, then write this paper etc). This kind of figure-it-out-as-you-go mentality is actually normal for non academics. If you need to be reminded of this, go talk to a friend who never went to grad school and ask them how they got their current job. You might be surprised.

Third, you gotta pay your bills. Don't discard jobs that are completely different than your academic work, if they fit for you and make you happy. There is no shame in doing work that is non academic to make ends meet. Do side gigs if you need to, start up an etsy shop, work with high school kids on their SAT prep, teach art classes, do freelance writing or editing. Consider arranging flowers, being a cheesemonger, becoming a sommelier, a bike mechanic, doing community organizing, running online seminars, Let me reiterate, there is no shame in any of these jobs. Or rather, you can feel ashamed if you really want to but you might consider that most people are not judging you.

### 5.1 Resources

#### 5.1.1 Books Focused on Academics

- So What Are You Going To Do With That? - Susan Basalla
- The Professor is In - Karen Kelsky

### 5.1.2 Websites

- Jobs on Toast
- Versatile Ph.D.

### 5.1.3 Books on Offbeat Jobs

- Born for This: How to Find the Work You Were Meant to Do - Chris Guillibea
- How to Be Everything: A Guide for Those Who (Still) Don't Know What They Want to Be When they Grow Up
- Leap: Leaving a Job with No Plan B to Find the Career and Life You Really Want - Tess Vigeland
- Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing your Career - Herminia Ibarra
- The Art of Nonconformity - Chris Guillibea
- Weird in a World That's Not: A Career Guide for Misfits, F\*ckups, and Failures by Jennifer Romolini

### 5.1.4 Articles

- Benefits of a Non Linear Career Path
- Post Acs are Happier than Academics

### 5.1.5 Entrepreneurship

- Disrupt Yourself: Putting the Power of Disruptive Innvoation to Work - Whitney Johnson
- \$100 Startup - Chris Guillibea
- Side Hustle: From Idea to Income in 27 Days - Chris Guillibea Book and Side Hustle School

### 5.1.6 Marketing

- Book Yourself Solid - By Michael Port

## 5.2 Homework

1. Write down ten jobs you would like to do. Don't think about it, just write them down. Doesn't matter if they're silly or strange. Feel free to put circus performer, professional basketweaver or person who does nature walks for a living. Do this every day for a week.
2. Look up the concept of Ikigai or your "Reason for Being". Print out a copy of the diagram (a google search here will help) and fill in your skills/projects so that you can see where your skills fit. Ask questions of the things that you fill in. For instance, if one task fits into the category of What you love and what the world needs, how might you find a way to also get good at the task and/or to get paid for it?
3. Ask someone you trust to tell you what they think you're good at. Listen without interrupting. Write down what they say.



## Chapter 6

# Creativity

It may seem strange for me to have a week on creativity but in my own recovery from academia I've found it to be an incredibly potent tool for dealing with what I feel and think as well as a way to feel more content and happy in life.

I believe we are all creative. I don't think there are any among us who are not creative. For many academics, the creative urges have been quashed by the desire to please those who we have looked up to in our school years. We may also believe ourselves not to be creative, or to have taken to hear the kind of language that tells us that a "true" scientist/historian/professor isn't a creative person.

My number one recommendation is Julia Cameron's "The Artist's Way". In that book she describes much of what has caused many of us academics a lot of pain. She does so with compassion and grace and she slowly, steadily and lovingly encourages the nascent artists inside of us out of their shell.

- Julia Cameron "The Artist's Way"
- SARK's book
- Ignore Everybody - MacLeod
- Art and Fear

### 6.1 Homework

- Do one thing that seems fun and creative. A few ideas: Play with legos, cook a meal, doodle on a piece of scrap paper until the page is filled up, write bad poetry about something you can see in the room you're in now, take a train, take a pottery class, bus or car trip and spend the entire trip looking out of the window, hum a song, play an instrument, drum on the tabletop, paint, garden, sew, knit, crochet, find a youtube video that teaches you a dance step, make snow/sand angels, make splashes in the water and watch the shape they make, eat your favorite childhood snack, walk somewhere interesting, skip stones, build a little teepee out of sticks in the woods, make a fire, do karaoke, read a poem or a speech out loud, watch a movie, make paper airplanes, play with arduino, go see a play, do a zumba class, learn a few words in another language, watch a dance performance and anything else your heart desires.



## Chapter 7

# Entrepreneurship for Post Academics

Freelancers Union []<https://www.freelancersunion.org/> - Being Boss Podcast - Your local small business development council (SBDC) - SCORE office <https://www.score.org/> - \$100 Startup Marketing - Seth Godin - Books/Marketing Seminar/Akimbo Podcast - Marketing Mentor Podcast - We Write You - How to Write Like a Person  
- Leonie Dawson's Workbook - Biz <https://shiningacademy.com/2018-life-and-business-goals-workbooks-and-diary-planners-Tools> - <https://app.and.co/>



## Chapter 8

# Industry Specific Resources

### 8.1 Writing/Publishing

- Loft Writing Classes
- WHAT IS THIS?
- Authors Publish
- The International Freelancer

### 8.2 Linguistics

- [Career Linguist([www.careerlinguist.com](http://www.careerlinguist.com))

### 8.3 ## Data Science

### 8.4 Public Policy

- AAAS Fellowship

### 8.5 User Experience/User Design

- 18F
- IDEO
- Stanford D School

### 8.6 Social Scientists

- <https://www.epicpeople.org/>

## 8.7 Other Resources

- [herc.com](http://herc.com)
- The Artful Adjunct
- The Art of Nonconformity

# Chapter 9

## Money

Money is an incredibly difficult subject for post acs.

### 9.0.1 Personal Finance Resources

- Overcoming Underearning - Barbara Stanny
- Financial Diet - Chelsea Fagan
- Your Money The Missing Manual - JD Roth
- Money Drunk/Money Sober - 90 Days To Financial Freedom by Mark Bryan and Julia Cameron

### 9.0.2 Websites

- Personal Finance for PhDs
- Mint
- You Need a Budget (YNAB)
- The Simple Living Forum
- Get Rich Slowly

## 9.1 Being Broke

- Rising: Strategies for the Broke, the At-Risk, and Those Who Love Them by Joon Madriga
- Poorcraft: The Funnybook Fundamentals of Living Well on Less
- Hand to Mouth: Living in Bootstrap America by Linda Tirado

## 9.2 Unique Money Perspectives

- Your Money or Your Life - Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez The perspectives in this book really can change the way you think about money. Through several exercises they get at the question of how much your time and life force is worth. This book can be quite eye opening and is a very unique way to consider how money fits into your life. There is also a vast internet community of folks who have worked through this book and consider their lives based on these ideas.

- Sacred Economics - Charles Eisenstein Eisenstein asks for no less than a reconsideration of what we think of as the use of money. He is interested in questioning how we look at the economic system from gift economies to capitalism. He's interested in questioning the capitalist system through a deeper inquiry into how we might exist in a gift economy.

### 9.3 Money for Entrepreneurs

- Consulting and Negotiation