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The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide To Turning Your PhD Into A Job



Synopsis

Each year tens of thousands of students will, after years of hard work and enormous amounts of money, earn their PhDs. And each year only a small percentage of them will land jobs that justify and reward their investments. For every comfortably tenured professor or well-paid former academic, there are countless underpaid and overworked adjuncts and many more who simply give up in frustration. Karen Kelsky has made it her mission to help job seekers join the select few who get the most out of their PhDs. As a former tenured professor and department head who oversaw numerous academic job searches, she knows from experience exactly what gets an academic applicant a job. Now, for the first time ever, Karen has poured all her best advice into a single handy guide that addresses the most important issues facing any PhD, including writing a foolproof grant application, cultivating references and crafting the perfect CV, acing the job talk and campus interview, and making the leap to nonacademic work when the time is right.

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Customer Reviews

If you are a graduate student, considering graduate school, a faculty member, academic support, academic administration, or human; you need to read this book. The American academy is broken. I say this as one of the lucky few with a tenure track job. A system of graduate education was created in a time with circumstances that no longer exist. As Karen Kelsky explains in the opening chapters, the path to secure employment via a doctoral degree is a rocky one with a very uncertain outcome. For those that choose to pursue it, this book (and Kelsky's blog and social media profiles) provides

a frank, honest, and accurate description of what it takes to get something out of the doctoral experience. Highlights:- The scope of this book could have been problematic. Yet somehow Kelsky pulled it off: covering what it takes to get a tenure track job, the job market process, and throws in some additional material on grants and leaving the academy.- The job market process chapters are incredibly detail oriented and this is a very good thing. The academic job interview is unlike anything anyone has experienced before. I'm certain this book will make interviews less scary.- Some of the chapters are elaborations on Kelsky's blog posts (some of which may not be available online anymore), but this is the minority of the content in the book. Moreover, the overarching themes and lessons of the book make the material useful, even to those that had read the blog post previously.- Kelsky is telling the ugly truth about the reality of the job market process. Yet, unlike many academic pundits, she also gives proven strategies for dealing with reality. We would all like things to be better, but until then, we have to work within the system. Kelsky gives you ways to do that.- Occasionally Kelsky's experience as an anthropologist does not resonate with my experience in a different field. Almost always Kelsky acknowledges when there are disciplinary or paradigmatic differences and suggests that the reader knows her field. This book may frighten some people. But it is absolutely essential that anyone that is a part of this process understands how this works. I read the book as a veteran of Kelsky's blog and consulting. I suspect that reading the entire book would be challenging and/or overwhelming for a young graduate student. I would suggest that an early graduate student read Part I, II, III, and IV carefully and skim the rest for familiarity. A graduate student that successfully passes exams should re-read Parts I-IV and then read V-VII carefully. Parts VIII-X are more topic-specific, but are excellent resources for any scholar. I believe that faculty should read this entire book with a goal of being better advisors and better academic community members. We all need to take responsibility for the system that currently exists and Kelsky's book (and other work) may be a good starting point for trying to resolve some of the problems - either as individuals or systematically. I sincerely hope that Kelsky can carve out time from her consulting work to write a similar book about life on the tenure track and getting tenure. Her blog posts on this topic are fantastic and I suspect that it would be a good "second project" ;) for her. We all desperately need this sort of frankness and guidance.

While it masquerades as an academic advisory, this book is really a paean to a universal truth: other people are more interested in their needs than yours. If you want to be hired, you need to show them quickly and succinctly how you add value, and you need to do it in their terms. Kelsky conveys this results-oriented mindset with practical advice in a manner that's both frank and

edifying. Her book is a mental reset and, to my mind, a useful read even outside of academia.

I'm an avid reader of Kelsky's blog and purchased this book fairly certain of what it would contain. My high expectations were certainly met. While the book did not contain much information that was "startlingly new," its breadth and depth earn the book its place on my bookshelf. I'm certainly happy to have all of this information in one place so that I can share chapters with colleagues, friends, and students. Kelsky has written a book designed to empower PhD students who are facing a bleak academic job market. She doesn't guarantee that her readers will earn a "coveted" tenure-track position by reading the book - nor is that her goal. Her mission is to help PhDs get a job, be it academia, alt-ac, or non-ac; and she does this by detailing what job candidates need to know about academia. The readers of her blog or columns in The Chronicle will not be surprised by this goal, nor should they be. Kelsky is an avowed advocate for PhD students and recent graduates who are struggling on the market because they need more guidance. The book is written for all academic fields, but Kelsky also calls attention to some of the dire conditions in the humanities, and how that may affect PhD candidates and job seekers. The bulk of the book focuses on preparing for jobs in academia, but it also provides information on leaving academia and finding other ways to utilize the PhD. The book is broken down into ten parts covering everything those looking at the tenure-track need to know, including types of academic institutions (R1/SLACs/R2/etc.), job market documents, offer negotiations, grant writing, and how/when/why to leave academia altogether. For those who are familiar with her blog, here are the biggest bonuses of her book:

- * More real-life examples from emails, letters, and in person conversations Kelsky has had over the years.
- * Chapter 4 details how the academic search process works from the university/department side - a land few grads may know as intimately as Kelsky explains.
- * Figuring out a 5-year plan and determining what issues of the minutiae of graduate school life will distract you from the goal of making your CV the strongest it can be for the job market.
- * Creating your "campaign platform" for the job market
- * More specific information on crafting your elevator speech
- * Key questions to prepare for in an academic interview (and how to tackle Skype and on-campus interviews)
- * Answers the question of what to do when you don't feel like you belong in academia, for myriad reasons including elitism, racism, gender, sexuality, imposter syndrome, and more

Most importantly for me, having all of this information in one compact book means I have a go-to present for my favorite students who giddily tell me that they want to become a professor. I don't want to discourage them like my undergraduate advisers tried to do to me, but I do want them to be well-informed about what the graduate-school-to-tenure-track life is like. I love having genuinely curious and bright students be

interested in becoming a professional in my field (history), but I don't think it necessary that they see "professor" as the only meaningful way to study history or be a historian. I'm glad Kelsky has deepened my understanding of the nuances involved in mentoring students and being a student myself, as well as giving practical and thoughtful advice. On another note, the book also provides me with a good stocking-stuffer for my non-academic parents who still wonder why I'm in school after so many years, and why my work schedule doesn't follow the 9-5 they're used to. I may even send a copy to my adviser.

This book is a helpful resource, but not as helpful as I would have liked. I read many related parts of the blog, where Kelsky spends a significant amount of time telling prospective job applicants what NOT to do with their application documents, giving clear examples, that, sadly, do look like a lot of my own first drafts. What I was hoping for in the book was that there would be additional, equally specific information about what TO DO. Here the advice in this book is much more generic and less helpful. Sentences like "remember to always stay on message," while probably good advice, are not that useful. I can KNOW this and still not know HOW to do this. It is helpful to see others' mistakes so as not to repeat them, but some positive examples would be immensely helpful, or better yet, providing a bad example followed by how to edit/modify, and the resulting positive example. This is, after all, the process most of us go through when we write. The first draft isn't very good, we make modifications, and eventually produce something we're happy (or at least satisfied) about. I appreciate Kelsky tackling this topic, but was disappointed with the lack of concrete advice for writing good job documents.

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