Libraries Supporting Graduate Students on Alternative Career Paths: How & Why

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Alternative Academic Careers

- The first use of the term Altac (or Alt-ac):
  - 2009 Twitter conversation between Bethany Nowviskie and Jason Rhody,
  - used " 'alt-ac' as a shorthand for alternative academic"[1]

- In Nowviskie's words:

  a pointed push-back against the predominant phrase, 'nonacademic careers.' 'Non-academic' was the label for anything off the straight and narrow path to tenure — even if that position were, say, in an academic library, a writing center, a university-affiliated research group or cultural heritage organization. I felt it diminished humanities scholars who continued to use their skills in and around the academy, and I was concerned that it discouraged grad students from contemplating new paths. [2]

[1]https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/the-marriage-of-the-digital-humanities-and-alt-ac-positions/

[2]http://nowviskie.org/2010/alt-ac/

Why PhDs Might Pursue an Altac or Non-academic Career

- Fewer tenure-track positions/more contingent faculty positions

- But, contingent faculty positions generally have
  - Low pay
  - No stability
  - No benefits

- Opportunities to utilize skills in other areas of academia, industry and other disciplines

Resources with supporting statistics on last slide

Taboo

Students may be afraid to share that they don't want to work in academia

"If a rotation student comes in saying they want to be a science writer, they're not staying [in my research group]."[1] **– Senior faculty member**

Professors want to clone themselves

"It's my JOB to create more people like me."[1] **– Senior faculty member**

[1]https://chroniclevitae.com/news/598-the-conferencegoer-what-some-faculty-really-think-about-nonacademic-careers

Why Should Libraries Care?

- Phenomenon happening on all campuses, across most disciplines
  - Began in Humanities, initially most acute in Humanities & Social Sciences, now a significant issue in STEM

- Altacs can be found in libraries. Some of the first altac positions were bibliographers
  - Can contribute to the conversations and the work of campus groups
  - Can learn more about where altacs work on campuses and what their information support needs are

- Students and graduates need resources to help them explore career options
  - Library is a 'safe' place to explore resources
  - Some students are afraid to tell their advisor they don't want to work in academia

Altac at UNC

- Formal work began at UNC in 2010.

- In 2013, with UNC Institute for the Arts and Humanities funding, Altac Working Group organized to discuss career opportunities for altacs.

- Invited librarian and altac, Barbara Renner, to be part of the group.
  - Librarians have a promotion and reappointment process similar to tenure.

- Group operated from 2013 to 2016, dissolving when most group leaders left UNC, although some work continued through 2017.

http://altac.web.unc.edu/

UNC Altac Group:

- Met with campus leaders, administrators, and Board of Trustees over two years to receive and share information, including contributions of altacs, and raise visibility of altac issues.

  - *Included Head of Library HR to learn more about professional librarian ranks and appointment and promotion procedures.*

- Identified and surveyed ~140 UNC altacs on workplace experiences, scholarship, teaching, and other professional work.

- Documented scholarly and professional service work by members of the Altac Working Group.

- Built inventory of ~100 campus professional development/support resources to assess availability to altacs and to work for inclusion of altacs.

http://altac.web.unc.edu/

UNC Altac Group, continued

- Helped create [The Richard Bland Fellowship Professional Pathways Program](#) supporting doctoral student exploration of non-faculty career paths
  - $5000 mentored summer internship
  - Begun 2015 and continuing today

- Hosted social/networking/public forum event for all campus altacs plus selected campus leaders, administrators and Board members

- Created a credit scholarly seminar (Altacs in Academe) 2014-2017

- Published about the group's work

http://altac.web.unc.edu/

Library Guide

- Created for just-in-time need
  - Unveiled at 2-day campus-wide altac event

- Local target audience (UNC altacs) involved in development

- Audience both local (UNC) and beyond

- **Feedback: include jobs boards!**

- Challenges:
  - Updating (now; when national conversation was exploding ~ 2013-2015)
  - Findability: Where to locate on libraries' website(s) and how to publicize
  - Non-UNC: instructions for licensed resources

https://guides.lib.unc.edu/altac

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Altac (Alternative Academic) Careers: What is Altac?

Resources about Alternative Academic (Altac or Alt-ac) Careers and Resources for Developing Altac Careers

What is Altac? | Altac @ UNC | Altac in the News | General Altac Resources | Humanities & Social Sciences Resources

STEM Resources | Jobs Boards (All Disciplines)

About Altac: Alternative Academic Careers

Altac (or Alt-ac) is a term coined in 2010, according to an Inside Higher Ed article, referring to two post-PhD career tracks, most often the first:

- positions inside academia other than traditional tenure track faculty positions; may include teaching or research, adjunct or fixed term faculty appointments, or primarily administrative positions
- research or administrative positions in the public or private sectors outside academia.

How to use this guide:

- **Altac In the News** (2nd tab above): provides links to books, articles and web sites that focus on the politics or philosophy of altac.
- Resources that focus on developing an altac career or finding altac positions are on the **General, HSS, or STEM Resources** pages.

Thank you! Questions!

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https://guides.lib.unc.edu/altac

Why Pursue a Non-Academic Career: Statistics

American Association of University Professors
Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession
https://www.aaup.org/report/annual-report-economic-status-profession-2018-19

National Science Foundation
Survey of Earned Doctorates
https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvydoctorates/

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System
Use the Data
https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data

U.S. Government Accountability Office
Contingent Workforce
https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-49/

Supporting statistics for Slide 3