

Stories of Becoming: Demystifying the Professoriate for Graduate Students in Composition and Rhetoric, by Claire Lutkewitte, Juliette C. Kitchens, and Molly J. Scanlon. University Press of Colorado, 2022. 202 pp.

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Engaging recent scholarship regarding graduate education and the professionalization of rhetoric and composition graduate students, *Stories of Becoming: Demystifying the Professoriate for Graduate Students in Composition and Rhetoric* provides reflective questions and insight into the discipline while arguing for a different approach to graduate education (Badenhorst et al.; Brooks-Gillies et al.; Macauley). Addressing the current state of higher education generally and rhetoric and composition specifically, the authors examine trends across U.S. higher education to consider how reductions in student retention in English courses, subsequent decreases in funding, and the elimination of many tenure-track positions impacts graduate education. Based on a study spanning four years, the authors conducted a nationwide survey of two hundred new assistant professors in the field of composition and rhetoric and engaged in follow-up interviews with ten survey participants. The authors collected and analyzed professional documents from the interview participants, including CVs, cover letters, and teaching philosophies, using the professional documents to interrogate the professional academic identity construction of their participants.

Exposing the intricacies of navigating transitions from graduate student to full-time faculty and balancing the many demands and roles each position encompasses, including teaching, research, service, and administration, the book is informative for graduate students and those developing graduate education curricula alike. The book provides context and strategies for its rhetoric and composition graduate student audience as it reviews the current academic job market and demonstrates why discussions about the job market must expand beyond R1 tenure-track positions. In this way, the book not only tells a story about academic professionalization through its study of early-career faculty but also engages in the academic professionalization of graduate students as it contextualizes the discipline.

The first chapter emphasizes the importance of stories in the discipline, arguing that stories allow humans to relate to each other and allow for reflection on “who we are and who we are becoming” as scholars of rhetoric and composition (22). Embracing narrative inquiry as a method, the authors interrogate constructions of academic and professional identities by examining the identity construction of their research participants. They also explore disciplinary commonplaces circulating in rhetoric and composition to uncover

micronarratives about the discipline that resist “disciplinary lore about the job market, hiring processes, and new-faculty transition” (28). Chapter one’s exploration of academic identity construction becomes a connecting thread continued in chapters two and three, wherein the authors discuss how professional documents constructed for the job market provide insight into the professional identity construction of academics.

In chapter two, the authors explore graduate students’ job market preparedness, arguing that graduate students feel their doctoral programs “helped students develop an effective strategy for the job search” (40). However, despite this phenomenon, the authors stipulate that participants were still overwhelmingly worried about their chances in the job market; participants argue that their graduate education left them feeling unprepared for jobs outside of R1 tenure-track positions. As a result, the authors claim that how we talk about the job market matters and that framing the job market as something to be survived by graduate students reinforces “the institutional practices that make it daunting and worrisome” (41). Instead, the book argues that graduate education should address the changing landscape of the academic job market and encourage graduate students to use their time on the job market “as a personal learning experience in crafting a professional identity” (43). The chapter concludes with strategies for graduate students to use when approaching the job market, including monitoring job ads and looking at professional organizations’ position statements to think critically about how to craft their professional identity through professional documents.

Chapters three and four zoom in on the ways that faculty members are expected to split their labor between teaching, research, service, and administration (TRSA), which they define as a “tetrad.” Highlighting a central tension throughout the book, the authors stipulate that how the tetrad is interpreted changes as graduate students transition into faculty positions; for instance, some institutions may value teaching or administration over research. As the text makes clear, this is markedly different from how graduate students are taught to value research. Thus, the authors advocate for doctoral programs to better prepare graduate students for their transition into new faculty by providing resources on how to manage their time and responsibilities according to the tetrad. It’s important to note that the authors contrast their construction of the tetrad with the traditional triad known as teaching, research, and service. This is because they argue that administration is often overlooked by graduate education and needs to be more clearly addressed by doctoral programs to prepare graduate students to transition into their role as faculty.

Chapter five discusses how to transition from the time management expectations required during graduate school to the ones necessary as a faculty member. Reflecting on how institutional identity and requirements regarding

faculty time management heavily influence the construction of faculty members' professional identities, the authors are careful to examine how a "lack of explicit communication regarding expectations of the position" leaves faculty members feeling confused and hesitant (105). The book argues that, as early as possible, graduate students should learn about the institutional demands and time constraints that will be placed on them as they transition into full-time faculty roles.

Chapter six focuses on the importance of collaboration and learning to collaborate with diverse people. The authors claim that doctoral programs should encourage more collaboration between doctoral students and faculty and amongst doctoral students, especially within administrative positions. The authors contend that doctoral programs should grant graduate students in those positions more power, autonomy, and exposure to the intricacies and hard work necessary to embody an administrative role. Through analysis of professional documents, the authors provide insight into how "collaboration is a part of and affects our graduate experiences. . . our professional time, and the elements of TRSA" (126). The authors argue that fostering collaborative relationships across various contexts, such as with other graduate students or WPAs, prepares graduate students for administrative work where they will be expected to work within and across departments and diverse faculty while producing writing visible to others (140).

The authors conclude by offering three suggestions for redeveloping graduate education. These revisions include developing even more support resources, which would include more research into the experiences and needs of new faculty and creating creative funding opportunities for graduate students and new faculty alike. The second revision is formalizing professional development across the discipline; importantly, the authors stipulate that professional development is an ongoing process, so professional development opportunities should come from a variety of sources, including invested, horizontal mentoring relationships (Keller; VanHaitsma and Ceraso). Finally, the authors argue that graduate education needs to do a better job of capturing the day-to-day activities of new faculty to better prepare graduate students to meet the various demands placed on them in terms of research, service, teaching, and administration, within the institutional contexts they navigate post-graduation.

As a graduate student, reading this book was informative for considering how I position myself in the discipline and the goals I have for my academic career. Ever since deciding to pursue a doctoral degree, I've been told about how awful and dismal the job market is. But while the text is careful not to paint a cheery picture of current conditions, it makes clear there are a variety of jobs and experiences available to graduate students after graduation. This text is helpful for other graduate students as they begin to consider how they wish

to locate themselves in the discipline and contend with the creation of their professional identity on the job market. It is also helpful for administrators and professors in charge of developing graduate curricula and on job hiring committees, who can attend to the various suggestions included in each chapter detailing ways for graduate education to be more responsive to current market conditions. The text is clear about the influence of graduate education on the overall direction of the discipline, making transparent what is at stake in the current neoliberal landscape.

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Works Cited

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