

Part IV. Bye, Felicia

The closing section of this collection is a collection of pieces for readers who are considering leaving academia, partially or fully, for greener pastures. At one time, this was thought of as a failure. Some may still feel that way, which is highly regrettable. What individuals going into academic careers must realize is that it's not you that makes this work challenging—it's the scheme. The system is broken and prides itself on disposable, cheap labor. Therefore, if anyone can better themselves, or must better their circumstances, in terms of obtaining healthcare coverage, raising a family, buying a home, and so on, more power to them. It's not shameful. It's simply looking out for the greater good.

- In “Breaking Up with Higher Ed,” Lee Kottner chronicles how she gave up on the freeway flyer lifestyle due to sheer exhaustion and poverty-like wages. She states, “I now work for a great non-profit, with fantastic colleagues, a better salary than I’ve ever made in my life, excellent health benefits, and a growing retirement fund. We just formed a union, too, for which I’m a shop steward.”
- Andrea Verschaeve and Jason Porath were both ABDs in their doctoral studies when they realized an academic career wasn’t the path they wanted to choose. They now both teach and work within the North Carolina state prison system, where they are happier, hold a great deal of professional freedom, and are compensated fairly.
- In “Contracting and Consulting: Crafting a Career,” Ian S. Ray and Brandi Wren use their combined 25 years of experience as adjuncts and independent contractors to explore three areas in which adjuncts may find non-teaching, contract-based work: research support, educational support, and administrative support.
- Steven Yates explores in his chapter the history of anti-intellectualism and neoliberalism in the US and how those two forces have combined to create the academic precariat of today. He uses his personal story to show the similarities between working on the non-academic gig economy and working as an adjunct, and he advocates for creating a new network of thinkers willing to live and work outside of current exploitative systems.
- In “We Are the University,” Debra Leigh Scott discusses her academic journey, where she found herself “teaching year after year on one-semester, low-wage, single-course contracts.” She says, “Although my teaching wages were desperately low, I was able to cobble together an income by teaching at multiple universities.” She advocates for contingent faculty leaving colleges and universities in a mass exodus, which would bring all higher education campuses to their knees overnight.

- BC Dickenson tells of adjuncting for many years with a side job of mowing lawns just to keep afloat. Then, at the age of 50, he accepted a tenure-track position to work with a group of kindred-spirit comrades at a small, unionized community college. Now, he issues a common-sense warning to those who are trying to “make it” in academia about making sure you love your work.

At this time in 2022, academia seems to be at a crossroads. The United States and other countries in the world are in the midst of what’s being called the Great Resignation, caused by working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contingent faculty, no doubt, have felt this pinch more than anyone else in the academic ranks. Along with concerns about how well their health is being protected at work during the pandemic comes the constant pull between the heart (love of teaching) vs. head (can I support myself doing this?). I would not tell individuals what to do with their careers, but the current setup is that of an unethical and unkind business model. It is my hope this collection helps people, whether that’s by inspiring them to carry on, strike, or find alternative work elsewhere. In the end, educators should know their worth, and they are deserving of all the support in the world.