**Workshop 1, Leaving the Academy**

**Open Post Academics** ([Contact](#))

**When:** Wednesday Sept 21, 2022, 3 pm to 4 pm ET/GMT-5 (60 minutes)

**Event page:** [Event Page](#)

**Facilitators:** Beth M. Duckles & Borhane Blili-Hamelin

### Goals for this Event

- Connect with other folks who are interested in the experiences of people leaving the academy.
- Explore how to meet the needs of our communities on the topic.
- A prioritized list of what we want to learn in this study.

Project Goal: Co-create an open participatory research project exploring the stories and the realities of leaving the academy, particularly since the pandemic.

- Read more about this ongoing participatory open research project on our blog.

### Greetings!

- Welcome, we are so glad you’re here!
- We’re using Zoom for video calls & Google docs for notes (gifs, emojis and +1s encouraged).
  - Comment in the notes at any time by adding a new bullet.
  - Multiple people writing in one online document can get a little bit full. It’s always ok to step away and add your thoughts later.
- NOTE: This document is part of Open Post Academic’s **public documents**. What we write here is visible to folks with the link to our public [Google Drive](#), and may also be shared openly and publicly online. Materials on our public drive and our outputs will be shared under a CC BY 4.0 license.
  - If you have resources to share, we welcome them!
- We draw from the Chatham House Rule as a way of creating open dialogue around the complex topics we discuss. People reading this document will be able to see who attended from the sign-in. (This will also allow us to credit you as a contributor to this research.) But we strive to avoid associating specific comments to specific people in the course of the workshop. We also strive to avoid attributing specific comments to specific people after the workshop.

### Sign In [0:00-0:05]

*Name/Pronouns/Location/email or social media*

- Wendy Jacinto / she, her / Portland, OR / wendykempsell@yahoo.com
- Beth Duckles / she, her / Portland, OR / @bduckles
- Borhane Blili-Hamelin / he, him / NYC / @borhane_b_h
- Avigail Oren / she, her / Pittsburgh, PA / @HistorianOren
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- Victoria Rickard/she, her/Erie, PA/torieanner@gmail.com
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- Kathryn Lum, she, her, Porto Alegre, Brazil, kathryninlondon@hotmail.com
Icebreaker Question: **ON A SCALE OF TURTLE (1 TO 9), HOW DO YOU FEEL TODAY?**

- 4 - I’ve got my eyes on everything
- 3 - yawning
- 2
- 2 - just waving to my peeps +1
- 7 wooooooow dude
- 1 tired and depressed but hopeful
- 8
- 7 - slept so late and had wacko dreams!
- 5 - like, noooooooooo
- 5 - harried but trying to focus the scattered energy
- 9 - chillin’ after a lot of work
Community Participation Guidelines

- We invite you to be respectful, honest, inclusive, accommodating, appreciative, and open to learning from everyone else.
- Do not attack, demean, disrupt, harass, or threaten others or encourage such behavior.
- You can find a link to the full OPA Code of Conduct (here)
- Reporting: please report any issues to Beth or Bo.

Outline of Today’s Session

- Free Write
- Breakout room
- What we’re doing with this project
- Discussion of what we hope to learn from this study as a group

Free Writing [0:05-0:20] - Beth

We’re going to do some sentence stems to get our minds going. Please write anything that comes to mind in response to these prompts and feel free to write multiple responses.

A question I have about leaving the academy is _________.

- Am I too old? What are my transferable skills? Moving careers and countries at the same time, silly idea?
- Why don’t more people do it?+1+1+1
- What are the long-term emotional and psychological impacts?+1+1
- How many people go back? ++1+1+1
- Is it sexism or is it something else?
- How to come back on more favorable conditions?+1
- How to continue applying for grants and doing research without having official academia affiliation? +1+1
- What doors are really closed for good upon leaving (i.e. the tenure track, certain funding sources, etc.)? +
- Why doesn’t everyone do it?+1
- I graduated so long ago - can I still describe myself as ‘leaving the academy’?
- I’ve left, not really a question but “leaving” as an identifier of my journey is not applicable unless its defined by the university and it’s existing systems of privilege and power, capital and bullshitery +1
- How can I lose the chip on my shoulder about ‘failing’?+1+1
- Are my fantasies about finding an intellectual community simply that? Is there anywhere where people are thriving as an intellectual community WITHIN the academy? +1
- How can I stay connected to current research and developments in my field? +1+1
- What counts as “leaving,” what counts as “academia”? There are different definitions out there.

•
The pandemic has changed the conversation about leaving academia by _______.

- Making remote work possible +1
- Centering burnout (it used to feel more of a conversation of “plan b”) +1
  - Work life balance → burnout
- Revealing the downward trajectory of many institutions - top-heavy and not providing much for students
- Making it harder (one would think) for academics to claim “flexibility” as a unique perk of the sector 😞
- I’m not convinced it has, but I hope so because “screams” +1
- Exposing the rot within +!
- Elevating awareness and reflection about holistic mental health +1
- Opening the door to remote opportunities.
- Making mental health more visible +1
- Exposing the incredible inequity in academia +1
- Online stories by people +1
- Bringing to light the difficult conditions facing teachers in general stories
- Creating (unfortunate) opportunity to refocus on priorities
- Making me think about my safety/comfort level in different settings

- Making virtual communities more common. +1
- Failure and de-investment of public institutions is more visible (like public health, universities)
- Everything went online and the world became more connected, it became possible to work remotely ++1
- Mental health crisis especially among those who care about others +1

- Exacerbating pay gap and demands between academia and industry (esp when remote work is possible)

I’d like to learn ______ from people who have left academia.
• What they are doing now in terms of job titles, actual work tasks, fields
• Which professional networks (societies, conferences) do they find most fruitful?+1
• about their complete career trajectory.
• How to make a living from the skill set
• The mindset that helps to strive outside of academia +1
• And the mindset that helps to continue researching and publishing outside academia
• All the creative ways people want to or are applying their degrees, expertise, and passions creatively +1
• Which values they miss
• What do they miss? +2
• How to present yourself when you in transition/unemployed but already not in academy+1+1
• What’s fulfilling and meaningful about their work
• How fulfilled are you professionally?
• In hindsight, what were they seeking inside the academy? Can it be found elsewhere? +1
• numbers: how many job applications did they send? How many offers? What was their starting salary? What is their current salary?
• Do you value the experience you gained in academia?
• How did you explain the “gap” in your time if you went back to academia?
• How have they continued to teach, mentor, etc.

• What new skills have you learned? +
• How are you thinking about your career trajectory?
• Do you feel connected to your scholarly organizations?
• What is fulfilling and intellectually stimulating about your career?+1
• Is a university staff role “leaving academia?”
• Is research outside academia much harder/faster? What are the differences?+1

The stories about people leaving academia tend to focus on ____. 

• Institutional dysfunction
• Liberation or regret (binary)
• Personal/family/lifestyle choices that pulled people out rather than real institutional problems +1
• Survivor bias? “All better outside” +1
• In my cohort of academic leavers, the dear john letter style “quit lit” we see more conversations about moves towards tech careers now, and I see a little bit more about how research/disciplinary expertise is being used in those tech spaces.
• Reframing skills
• Dealing with the transition
• “Still doing X”
• UX/UX research as a possible new path +2
  ○ Striking to me how specific sectors like UX bubble up as visible pathways too (and how that affects people’s perceptions of career options)
• Guilt about leaving academia +1
• How to convince someone to hire them.
• Why academics make good employees.
• What seems like extremely inflated remuneration stories - are they true? My job/s outside academia were breadline or worse
Toxic workplaces and cultures
Folks getting $$$$$$ jobs in tech right away
Publication treadmill (in industrial research positions)
Discrimination of marginalized groups +1
Poor pay
Extreme burnout
Toxic work conditions
Best strategies to get new jobs

FTE % of time that are NOT accurate, more “made up” to cram as much work onto one person as possible +1
I have left and I definitely talk about “better outside” and “why academics make good employees/entrepreneurs”

Networking and not relying on Cv
Business around getting hired in industry - programs
Finding a healthier environment more inclusive and equitable in other places
Less stability
People don’t talk enough about the mental prep in transitioning from academic work expectations to industry work expectations. Things like frequency of communication, pace of delivery +1 +1 +1
I think stories are too often about individuals and we aren’t hearing the stories about a racist/sexist/ableist/capitalist infrastructure whose MO is to exploit humans … +1
It seems like a lot of the “leaving academia” discourse continues to center PhDs from elite universities, rather than from the full spectrum of graduate programs.
Also, I wonder about the status of ABDs in these conversations. Lots to talk about re: structural reasons why people leave PhD programs before completing dissertation, but with so many PhDs now leaving the academy, pursuing alt-ac, etc, I wonder if ABD voices are getting lost.

Breakout room [0:20 - 0:35] - Bo

We will be breaking up into groups of 3 or 4. Please give everyone a chance to speak. If you’re having technical challenges, use the chat window to talk to Beth or Bo and we will try to help.
• Say hello and introduce yourself! (name/location/pronouns)
• As you’re discussing, write what you hear in the report out section below!
• Prompt:
  ○ Take one of the topics in the free write that is most interesting to you and expand on what you want to know .
    • What are the unknowns for you in this topic?
    • What would you like to learn?
    • What might be surprising to learn?
Report out

- Stereotype, quitting academia controlled by former CS people
  - Gap in what this looks like when you’re from a field like CS, vs other fields +
  - People don’t hear about everyone else
  - E.g. question: “I’m an organic chemist, how do I get into a data science position?”
  - The majors don’t define you, even at the PhD level
  - From a humanities background, there isn’t a clear narrative of where people land.
    - More oh god, what do I even do with my skills. +1
    - Less of a mass of people from different fields
  - We don’t hear about what success looks like in different fields
  - We don’t hear about what failure looks like in different fields
  - Social sciences gap in qual vs quant
    - UX
    - Policy/quant work/impact evaluation/etc.
    - There’s an older generation (like the physicists who became quants in the 2000s). Want to hear more from people in their third job after the PhD
    - Diversity of experiences across academic disciplines is crucial to highlight. +
    - Failures of academia to train, corruption, taking advantage of post-docs
    - MA graduates as missing voices in this conversation – even more exploitative than PhD programs, but where is their role in the conversation? What is relationship with academia?
  - Feels like failing regardless of when, how, why - how to deal with that
    - Feels like leaving a cult+!!yes!
    - "Get associate before I leave" is the type of benchmark it’s hard to walk away from

- Why is it always women (except for Bo) in these conversations / spaces? +1
  - Experience of being only woman in department, having rules created that only apply to individual
  - Old boys club still exists, even when there isn’t as extreme of a gender imbalance – feels like nothing has changed, it’s uncomfortable. +1
    - Starts in graduate school, pros advocated harder for male students
  - Senior women being sexist/patriarchal – target young, talented lecturers.
  - Women are being let down by the whole system.
  - Women get pushed out, particularly as they get older (sexism intersecting with ageism). Sometimes pushed by other women, sometimes by utterly hapless men.
    - Class intersection too – higher class, easier time in academia
      - In UK Equality Act, class is not a protected category (cannot LEGALLY be discriminated against)
  - Affective labor
    - Care burnout
    - Women supporting women – understand what pressure other women are under, so work even harder to support
- Resilience - women have had to learn coping skills (b/c of social/cultural structures) and also recognize that their burnout is often bigger than them, systemic – look to leave
  - Are women outside the academy doing better than men who leave?
    - Because we know when we aren’t doing well and we recognize the failures of the institutions...
- A lot of literature focuses on the first job, and the moment of transition.
  - Now that I’m x years into a non teaching position, I’d like to hear more about next stages (3rd/xth job after grad school) +1
  - If we’re thinking about the people that are not heard; lots of discussion of older generations experiencing this, but without a community/cohort feeling.
  - Pre 2008 crisis; traditional quitting path for physics phd was quant finance (stay in academic physics; or sell out and become a finance quant)
  - 2009, felt impossible to get industry positions; upended that construction in the job supply
  - Now there are a lot more diverse ways to quit academia.
  - No longer a clean binary division between academia and non-academia
    - Lots of people who still teach too, without having teaching as a primary source of income
- Labor structural conditions
  - We should talk about unionization, protection, etc.
  - “Hamster wheel”
  - Leaving a cult vs structural stories.
  - Having a sense of purpose not attached to a paycheck/job - how this connects to identity post academic.
- International (non-usa for example) people who leave - how to include these stories? Int’l graduate/phd students who can’t find TT - what happens next?
- Exposing the rot within.
  - How much awareness is there about academia’s failure to train? +1
  - Politics of career transition and lock in patterns
  - Post docs as holding pattern for PIs.
  - Now marketed as training position but there’s a failure to train properly for PI jobs, let alone alt-ac jobs
  - Creating another fragile labour class+1
  - Placement of what the university has come to mean in our society.
  - Perception of academia as place that grants social justice to the world+1
  - Commodification of degrees; just need the ___ to get ___ + salary I want.
  - Universities have been capitalizing on that.
  - Voice of folks with masters & masters programs?
    - Have to pay for it!
    - Does it really train you for anything?
- We would like to learn ___ ___ ___ from people who left academia
  - The initial “escape plan”; what did you do next? How did you negotiate a salary in the new job (and benefits) if there was a big difference b/w old and new job salary and benefits?
  - How have you made time for/maintained research collaborations?
○ How have you networked outside of academia, or strategies to network w/ other post-acs before, during, or leaving the academic world, that feels so isolating
○ How have you done freelance or independent contractor work
○ Have people had success re-entering after exiting (perhaps at a different institution)

- [Item from free write]
  ○ [Discussion notes]
- How has the Academy changed since we left?
  ○ Is the culture the same as what we remember?
  ○ Commoditization of degrees - are universities just diploma mills churning out worthless masters degrees in data science?

- [Item from free write]
  ○ [Discussion notes]
- [Item from free write]
  ○ [Discussion notes]
- [Item from free write]
  ○ [Discussion notes] +1000

What we’re up to with this project [0:35-0:40]

- Bo

What is this project about? Why are we doing it collaboratively?

Overview

- We notice a need for new work on the experiences and stories of people leaving academia!
About five years ago, Beth did a survey of women who had left academia and it was really well received.
The discourse about post academic careers seems to have significantly shifted since. We want to understand that.

- Our core method for this project will be survey based qualitative research.
- We will be gathering the post academic community throughout in participatory workshops to help shape
  - Our research questions and focus
  - Our survey question
  - Our survey analysis
- We intend to move fast with this project, using a satisficing mindset.
- Everyone who contributes to this project in any way (including by attending our participatory workshops) will be credited as a contributor.
- The outputs will be released openly under CC BY 4.0
- We see this as an experiment at the intersection of participatory research and what we call open workshops — one of our favorite things at Open Post Academics (and our sibling project Accountability Case Labs).
- Data is going to be open when we’re done with this
  - Hard to find open datasets
  - We’ll ask for permission to share the data openly
  - We’re doing to make sure to screen the data to maintain confidentiality
- We’re open to folks wanting to do additional research in connection with this
- We’re open to folks wanting to help analyze the data
- We’re open to folks wanting to help write the outputs

Questions?

Feel free to write questions here

- How do you define “leaving the Academy”? Does it include anyone who has been a graduate student and is not now faculty, or is there a prerequisite that you at one point intended to remain in the Academy indefinitely? Is it mostly a relevant description for students of the humanities, and less relevant for ‘hard’ sciences?
  - For us that’s an open question
  - That might also be something that calls for workshopping, maybe also for a survey question
- More of a comment than a question: have been wanting to write transitioning to alt ac for dummies; could this be approached as a collaborative document? Even practical things like how do you report to management? How do you talk about your skills
  - We’re definitely interested in supporting this kind of collaborative work
- Is this meant to be US based?
  - What’s the geographical scope?
Discussion [0:40-0:55] - Beth

As a group, let’s reflect back on our conversation!

Given all you’ve heard and talked about in this workshop today. What is the most interesting topic to explore?

- What is your impression of academic culture (within departments, PhD programs, academic discipline associations, etc.) these days esp. when it comes to career paths/pursuing jobs beyond the tenure track? +1

- What systematic forces pushed you out or contributed to your departure? +1+1+1
  - (I see this as a probe or subquestion to a broader question)
- Do you regret your time in the Academy?
  - and, have your feelings about this changed over time or depending on your life/career situation?

- How to change the research culture from outside of academia? +1
- how to do research for social good/justice rather than industry research? ++1+1
- Discipline distinctions, race, class, gender: access to traditional sources of capital (e.g. how do these narratives relate to the fact that like 95% of TT have parents who were in the academy/ have PhDs?) +2+1
- Does academia lead to outside opportunities, or prohibit them?
- Taking your PhD off your resume for future job prospects.
- I think there’s something here about how to avoid the perception of being overqualified (or too specialized) for a particular non-academic job +1
- Gender ++1+1+1+1+1
- How is the transition into alt-ac different coming from different disciplines / academic backgrounds?+1
- How long were you considering leaving academia before you actually left? (would this question give any insight as to how the institution could/could have retained faculty???)
- Do you consider yourself part of your field after you have left academia? How do you negotiate your relationship to your field? Just using the term “leaving” seems loaded. +1+1 +1+1+1
- Why did you leave?+1
- What do you find fulfilling/intellectually stimulating about your current job?+3
- The emotional aspects of leaving and forming a new identity+5
- What advice do you have for others’ when setting expectations for leaving?
- Would you encourage undergraduate students to pursue a graduate degree?
• How marginalized people are treated/why those who leave tend to be women/BIPOC/neurodivergent, etc. Non-inclusiveness of the academy. +1 +1000+1+1
• How can those of us who have left and feel settled into a new/different support those considering or early in their paths (Open Ac is one great way but diverse engagement is always good!) +1 +2
• What sort of mentorship from people who work beyond the academy would be most helpful to you in your career? +2+1
• How are you still involved in academia, or, if not, how would you or people like you want to be involved? +1
• Do you still have student loan debt?
• Why does leaving academia feel like failure?

Notes
• Project that supports post ac career transition in Europe: https://www.euraxess.es/spain/spain-network/euraxess-top-iv/rebeca-mentoring-programme
  ○ They have 1 to 1 mentoring; but they don't have a lot of community building

More from OPA

➡ Sign up for part 2 of this project!

• Leaving the Academy, a Participatory Research Approach! We're creating a collaborative research project on post acs!!
  ○ The second meeting will be on Wednesday Oct 12, from 3 to 4pm ET, noon to 1pm PT.
  ○ Follow up to this 2018 study
    ○ Join us!

➡ Sign up for other OPA Events Here!

• Coffee Chat is on the first and third week of the month.
  ○ Next month: October 7th and 21st
  ○ THREE weeks until next month's coffee chat
• Oblique Thinking Hour
  ○ Come join us for a surprising and thoughtful facilitated experience. We're doing 60-min workshops to explore new facilitation techniques we're developing for Organizational Mycology, a new consulting team we're building.
  ○ Join us to craft new collaborations, co-create new ideas for workshops and meet new people.
We'll be running workshops playing with topics like: Biomimetic thinking, future exploration, co-design, organizational transformation, restorative justice and more!

- **Free - join if you're interested!** Next one in October!

- 🏳️ The slack has a private channel called #queerspace. Send a note to Beth if you identify as queer/LGBTQIA+ and you'd like to join.

- 🎨 OPA Arts and Crafts
  - New time: 2nd Saturday of the month, 3pm! Zoom link will be in the Slack announcements channel! (next meeting Saturday 10/8?? 3pm pacific!)

- 📝 Writing time is planned through the #writing channel on Slack, you can also ask to co-work in that channel or the #accountability channel.

- ☕️ Our Open Post Academics' *Toolkit for Cross-Disciplinary Workshops* is available for you! [Blogpost](#) and [Toolkit](#)

- 📖 We have a Lending Library and you can borrow books and materials from other OPA members.

- If you're not already there, [Sign up for the Slack!](#)

**Show and Tell! (Share PROJECTS and COLLABORATION opportunities Here!!! )**

- [Free Wednesday morning co-working sessions](#) (these are fun, I promise!)

**What did you learn in this workshop?**

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- 

**Resources (Add your own!)**


  https://openpostac.org/blog/what-i-wish-i-had-known-before-leaving-academia/
  https://openpostac.org/blog/four-metaphors-about-the-academy/

![Resources about workshop design](image)

- Borhane Blili-Hamelin, Beth M. Duckles, and Marie-Eve Monette (Open Post Academics),
  *Toolkit for Cross-Disciplinary Workshops*. February 2022
  - [https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6026972](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6026972)
  - Blog post about the Toolkit:
    [https://openpostac.org/blog/toolkit-for-cross-disciplinary-workshops/](https://openpostac.org/blog/toolkit-for-cross-disciplinary-workshops/)
- Timelines (World-Building Activity)
    [https://cltc.berkeley.edu/2021/07/01/timelines/](https://cltc.berkeley.edu/2021/07/01/timelines/)
    [https://doi.org/10/gj2fkm](https://doi.org/10/gj2fkm)
    [https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445447](https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445447)
  [https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3934385](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3934385)

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**Feedback!!**

Please give us your thoughts

➕ What went well on this call?
- Great questions and encouraging space
- 
- 

⚠️ What would you like to change?
- Less typing or more time to read/think/listen and then type
- 
-
Is there more on this topic you’d like to learn/talk about?

What would you like to share gratitude for?

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