



## Going Alt-Ac: A Guide to Alternative Academic Careers

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In a climate of shrinking tenure-track jobs, where most new PhDs in theological and religious studies will not enter the professoriate right out of graduate school, a mini-industry has been emerging that provides advice and support for those who want to turn that PhD into an alternative career. Since the publication in 2001 of *“So What Are You Going to Do with That?”* (Basalla and Debelius, Farrar, Straus and Giroux), more books, articles, webinars, websites, and workshops have appeared, dedicated to alternative career paths for PhDs. *Going Alt-Ac* is the latest addition to this genre.

Like its earlier counterparts, it is not specific to theology or religious studies, but it is filled with practical advice and resources that will aid PhDs in these fields to move intentionally and productively toward a wide range of career options. As its subtitle suggests, *Going Alt-Ac* focuses on non-professorial careers within the academy, only briefly addressing external options. Other books, such as *Succeeding Outside the Academy* (Baker and Fruscine, University Press of Kansas, 2018) and *Building a Career Outside Academia* (Brown and Linver, American Psychological Association, 2018), are better choices for those seeking to leave academic settings entirely. *Going Alt-Ac* is highly relevant for anyone in religious studies or theology who wants to broaden their horizons within the academy and it will help graduate advisors better mentor students with diverse goals.

One of the many strengths of this book is its consideration for people at every stage of their career and in varied circumstances, including an entire chapter on life partners seeking careers together in academia (87-95). Recognizing that people not only begin the search for alt-ac while in graduate school, but they leave alt-ac positions to accept faculty roles, move from faculty to alternative careers, combine roles, retire into alt-ac, and more, the authors include a chart advising the reader where to dive into the book, based on current career stage and goals (xiv-xvi).

Another strength is the abundance of resources in the form of lists and links. For example, there are lists of places to hear interviews with alt-acs (41-42) and lists of professional associations for various alt-ac careers (154-156). Readers are prompted to use *Going Alt-Ac* as a workbook to create their own lists, including skills they have (50), need (51), or want (52) as they build a personal career profile. There are also lists of other career coaching websites and job-seeking tools (8-9). Although not mentioned, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) provide similar [tools](#) to their members, and AAR’s Applied Religious Studies Committee hosts panels and workshops on alt-ac careers each year at the AAR/SBL meeting.

*Going Alt-Ac* not only addresses benefits, such as avoiding publish-or-perish stress, but challenges of alt-ac, such as competition from PhD holders in many disciplines. Chapter 16 discusses the importance of connecting disciplinary knowledge, both directly and indirectly, to specific alt-ac roles. Theologians and religious studies scholars must think about the unique skills and knowledge sets they bring to the academy, translate them to new situations, and seek jobs accordingly. Real-life alt-ac success stories provide inspiration throughout the book.

All three authors have PhDs, expertise in distance learning and educational technology, and experience in university alt-ac careers. Although they wrote this book pre-pandemic, their advice is perfect for our times. Whatever higher education looks like post-pandemic, *Going Alt-Ac* will be a valuable guide.