Commentary

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Notes from the Trenches: Reflections from Recent PhD Graduates on Navigating the Academy

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Abstract
PhD planning graduates face an increasingly competitive academic job market. In this commentary, seven recent graduates provide qualitative descriptions of the complicated and ever-changing expectations graduates face. We situate this within a larger reflection on the neoliberal academy that promotes a culture of competitiveness over care and production over purpose. We emphasize how this system is seemingly antithetical to the transformative planning work needed to address the most pressing planning issues of our time and provide suggestions for meeting shifting expectations, evolving training and support needs, and opportunities for a more compassionate tenure-track market. Our commentary has implications for doctoral pedagogy, the tenure-track market, and the academy.

Keywords
doctoral education, academia, job market, teaching

Resumen
Los graduados de doctorado en planificación se enfrentan a un mercado académico cada vez más competitivo. En este comentario, siete graduados recientes ofrecen descripciones cualitativas de las complicadas y cambiantes expectativas que enfrentan los graduados. Situamos esto dentro de una reflexión más amplia sobre la academia neoliberal que promueve una cultura de competitividad sobre el cuidado y la producción sobre el propósito. Enfatizamos cómo este sistema parece ser antitético al trabajo de planificación transformadora necesario para abordar los problemas de planificación más apremiantes de nuestro tiempo y ofrecemos sugerencias para cumplir con las expectativas cambiantes, las necesidades de formación y apoyo en evolución, y las oportunidades para un mercado de tenencia en la carrera académica más compasivo. Nuestro comentario tiene implicaciones para la pedagogía doctoral, el mercado de tenencia y la academia.

Palabras clave
Educación doctoral, academia, mercado laboral, enseñanza

摘要
规划专业的博士毕业生面临着竞争日益激烈的学术就业市场。 在这篇评论中，七名应届毕业生对毕业生面临的复杂且不断变化的期望进行了定性描述。 我们将此置于对新自由主义学院的更大反思中，新自由主义学院提倡竞争胜过关怀、生产胜过目的的文化。 我们发现这个系统似乎与解决我们这个时代最紧迫的规划问题所需的变革性规划工作背道而驰，并为满足不断变化的期望、不断变化的培训和支持需求以及更富有同情心的终身教职市场的机会提供建议。 我们的评论对博士教育学、终身教授市场和学院都有影响。

关键词
博士教育, 学术界, 就业市场, 教学

Introduction

As the academic job market becomes increasingly competitive, doctoral planning students are challenged to navigate paths toward fulfilling careers. Dr. Joanna Ganning recently published an analysis of the planning doctoral job market to inform students and job seekers about employment prospects and spur pedagogical discussions in the discipline (Ganning 2022). While this quantitative study provides important insights, the analysis overlooks the equally relevant lived experience of recent PhD graduates who persevered or are navigating demoralizing academic job markets, pursuing multiple pathways following graduation, and making complicated decisions about remaining in academia. As a group of planning PhD graduates from R1 universities in the United States and Canada, we have collectively gone through 24 application cycles, applied for 210 jobs, and participated in 62 interviews. Currently, three of us are tenure-track professors, four are postdoctoral fellows, and three have lecturer or adjunct positions. While our experiences may not reflect all planning graduates, given the lack of recent qualitative research documenting those experiences, we felt compelled to provide a commentary with a more nuanced description of the job market landscape that PhD planning graduates are encountering.

Ganning (2022) analyzed the job market by comparing 3 years (2017-2020) of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) job advertisements against survey data on the number of PhD graduates and their employment outcomes from 68 planning programs. She found that 25% of PhD graduates secure a tenure-track position following graduation, 35% pursue positions outside of academia, 20% enter the secondary market, and 20% desire but do not secure a job in academia (Ganning 2022). While her article provides quantitative insights into an "over-supplied academic job market [that] exerts a sorting process on its applicants" (Ganning 2022, 3), we want to center the lived experiences of the 75% of doctoral planning students who were trained to be tenure-track faculty but were unable or unwilling to secure such a position. We are not here to explain the nuances of the quantitative analysis but rather to lift up issues the analysis obscures.

In this commentary, we discuss embodied aspects of the increasingly competitive academic job market and some pragmatic implications of the shifting expectations for graduates. We unpack how people navigate systems that are seemingly antithetical, or even hostile, to the very type of transformative and radical planning work needed to address the most pressing planning issues of our time (Corbera et al., 2020; Mountz et al., 2015; Porter et al., 2012). We situate this conversation in a larger reflection on the neoliberal academy that promotes a culture of competitiveness over care and production over purpose that is always present but especially visible in the "sorting process" described by Ganning (2022; Museus and Sasaki 2022). Finally, we offer suggestions for additional research, transparency, training needs, and a more compassionate tenure-track process. While we focus our commentary on tenure-track training and job markets, we are not suggesting tenure-track career paths are the only, nor the best options, for graduates. We hope this commentary contributes to, and challenges, ongoing discussions about doctoral pedagogy, the academic job market, and the neoliberal academy.

Navigating the Neoliberal Academy

The academic environment in which our career journeys take place is often an inhospitable one that promotes a productive monoculture tailored to market demands. As our education and careers progress, we become disciplined (or not) to the expectations of the job market to become ideal candidates and ideal workers (or not). For some of us, this is an experience of being overworked through exploitative labor practices. For others, the failure to conform to market expectations is an experience of being overlooked as unproductive crops, discarded as waste, or uprooted as noxious weeds. To recognize the consequences of conceding to market logics, we need to understand how competitive neoliberal logics redefined the careers we may have aspired to, and how they processed us into market supply. Here, we apply the term neoliberal as an economic and political system that promotes competition and allows the market to determine the cost and availability of goods and services (Harvey 2007). We also reference neoliberalism as a force that reduces human experiences and relationships to quantifiable metrics that economize life (Brown

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2015; Murphy 2017). In the case of this commentary, we use the former definition to explain the neoliberal academy and the latter to provide language concerning the academy's impacts on our experiences.

Reflecting on Ganning's article raised questions about what happens when students and recent graduates are framed as "over-supplied"? Or the impacts of mentors, colleagues, and disciplinary thought-leaders becoming "demand" actors that sort the over-supply into competitive and non-competitive candidates? These questions are not a critique of Ganning's well-researched article, but instead problematize how we have normalized the neoliberal logics of productivity over purpose and well-being. The framing of doctoral studies as preparation for a primary job market transforms approximately 275 North American planning PhD graduates a year into "supply," 60 universities with open tenure-track positions as "demand," and 240 faculty on search committees into "sorting agents" (Ganning 2022). Interrogating how this disembodied framing of neoliberal logics plays out is necessary to understand the impact of that framing on individuals, planning, and society.

Normalizing the disembodied concept of the job market obscures some sense of responsibility for the impacts of this "oversupply" and how it fuels a culture of hyper-productivity. Under a disembodied framing, planning programs no longer have to reckon with consistently producing four to six times more PhD students than they hire (Ganning 2022). This normalization obscures some of the ways tenure ladders, grant funding, and university programs incentivize bringing in doctoral students to increase university prestige and productivity without addressing how the overproduction of PhDs perpetuates a competitive job market based on scarcity. A disembodied framing allows programs to sustain the pragmatic, but problematic, advice that although the market is hyper-competitive, students will rise above the odds if they are productive enough. This is one way that PhD students from across disciplines are conscripted into an impossible standard of hyper-productivity based on job scarcity maintained by the very programs that are training them (Ivancheva, Lynch, and Keating 2019). The scarcity and escalating productivity cycles subsume students and faculty into neoliberal and extractivist enterprises exploiting our desires to become permanent members of the university by creating self-governing exhausted workers rendered to a quantifiable unit of academic publications (Klikauer and Young 2021).

Productivity over Purpose

Our experiences applying for research faculty positions have made it abundantly clear that productivity, and therefore competitiveness, is first and foremost measured by publications. Despite the strengths that a scholar might demonstrate in the classroom, the policy and public realm, or in community service, publications—especially single-authored publications in high-impact journals—are the de facto initial sorting mechanism for tenure-track jobs. From our first year in PhD programs, we are repeatedly reminded by program faculty that publishing in high-impact journals is the dominant, if not sole, metric of value for research-focused tenure-track positions. While we cannot speak to PhD student experiences at R2 or R3 universities, we assume they receive similar advice if they plan to apply for research faculty positions. A successful publication track record benefits the reputation of the department and the university, which relies on publication output and citation metrics to attract prospective students, faculty, and funding. In this manner, publication metrics are a symptom of a neoliberal academy intricately focused on the return on investment and undervaluation of community work and other espoused values that cannot be so readily measured.

The dominance of publications as the primary metric of value creates tensions between being legible to the academy and putting efforts into areas that are equally impactful, important, and necessary. For example, as emerging scholars, we dedicate our time to building community within and outside of the university, reflecting and enacting effective pedagogy, producing reports with policy impact, and creating structural change. These types of activities are essential to the ideals that planning espouses around "deep and sustained community engagement with multiple publics," (ACSP n.d.-b), "preparing students to practice planning in communities with diverse populations," (Planning Accreditation Board 2017), and to "implement . . . changes which can help overcome historical impediments to racial and social equity" (AICP 2021). But these efforts can leave us feeling bereft of accomplishment because they are often incompatible with a "publish or perish" approach to academia.

When the academy discards these robust, labor-intensive, and necessary contributions, we are left in the demoralizing position of questioning our values and efforts: do we actively participate in endeavors outside of research and publications because it is meaningful, or do we focus only on publishing to secure and advance our careers? This form of thinking encourages early career scholars to detach from local communities and to become myopically focused on protecting time for research and writing. When we prioritize our efforts beyond mainstream production metrics, not only do we risk being squeezed out of the university or forced to decide to leave, but we are also shrouded in feelings of personal failure and shame. By failing to support robust characteristics, values, and efforts that form complete and well-rounded humans, the neoliberal university ruptures potential for solidarity and community.

Who and What Gets Sorted Out?

Outside of productivity metrics, we know from personal experience and research that the planning academy can be hostile to students and faculty who experience marginalization based

on race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, and sexuality (García, Jackson, Greenlee, et al. 2021; Jackson et al., 2018). Those aspects were excluded from Ganning's analysis (2022, 2) which leaves critical questions unanswered about who the planning academy "sorts out" and what perspectives on the field are lost as a result. Failing to evaluate these aspects means that planning runs the risk of falling further out of alignment with broad aims to address structural inequalities and more specific goals regarding student and faculty diversity (ACSP n.d-b; Planning Accreditation Board 2017).

Even without Ph.D.-specific data, research on planning graduate students shows that inequitable outcomes of a broken academic system fall hardest on those already subjected to marginalization (García, Jackson, Harwood, et al. 2021; Greenlee et al., 2022; Jackson et al., 2018). Studies of ACSP faculty have consistently demonstrated limited advancements in retaining faculty of color (Kwon and Nguyen 2023). For example, the percent of Black tenure-track planning faculty only increased by 1 percent from 2009 through 2018 (ACSP 2018; Kwon and Nguyen 2023). Faculty experiencing marginalization have also noted various forms of discrimination across all stages from hiring to promotion (ACSP 2018; Kwon and Nguyen 2023; Nguyen 2019).

Research also demonstrates that for faculty of color, securing a position is not a shield from precarity, and in many cases, only escalates the productivity demands to meet tenure requirements (C. L. Ross 1990; Wubneh 2011). Scholars of color are more likely to engage with affective or other forms of invisible academic labor that involve tradeoffs of time and resources that could otherwise be channeled into more "productive" pursuits (Diggs et al., 2009; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group 2017). In planning, laudable efforts to recruit faculty of color decades ago were countered by inadequate support and a resulting wave of tenure denials in the mid-2000s that contributed to a collective trauma that scholars of color have endured in the planning academy (Gauger 2020). Through these processes, the system creates a revolving door phenomenon where scholars of color are exploited for their labor and then released back into the market.

In addition to who gets sorted out, planning also loses valuable and cutting-edge scholarship when 75% of PhD graduates do not secure tenure-track positions. From our own experience, the definition of what counts as planning scholarship factors heavily into securing a job and gaining tenure. Although fieldwork and participatory action research approaches may be the most effective way to promote equity in planning, scholars are often discouraged from using them because of the time, uncertainty, and impacts of both these factors on publications. At multiple stages, early career scholars with aspirations to impact structural change in communities or the academy are counseled to wait until they are tenured to be "political." In our experiences, many PhD students who embrace community-engaged equity research or center critical perspectives are often discouraged from pursuing such "niche" specializations because it will negatively impact their ability to secure a tenure-track job and get tenured under the current metrics of success. Research on tenure-track faculty found that scholars were often told that community-based research takes too much time to keep pace with publishing demands and is not really "planning" but rather geography, sociology, or "activism" (Gauger 2020). While planning can be an interdisciplinary field, tenure evaluations often focus on "contributions to the discipline," and require disciplinary external reviewers. Research framed as geography, sociology, or activism may add additional burdens to demonstrating contributions to the discipline and in finding external reviewers who can adequately evaluate those contributions (Benson et al. 2016).

We recognize that the struggle to acknowledge these types of research and contributions extends beyond the department level to other decision-making scales, which sympathetic senior faculty or administrators have limited control over. We would like to call attention to universities that are showing promising changes to the tenure system like the University of British Columbia, Portland State University, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Michigan State University, which are changing tenure metrics to include community-engaged work. For example, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign allows faculty to be evaluated as "Public Engagement Research Scholars," which entails alternative evaluation criteria and nonacademic external evaluators for tenure and promotion cases (Faculty Senate of University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign 2021). If similar efforts expand across a majority of planning programs, it may significantly shift the dynamics discussed above.

While the above may not singularly apply to planning programs, contemporary planning ideology proclaims to support and improve community building, unlike some other related disciplines. The repercussion of who and what gets sorted out extends beyond individuals or groups to the very ability of the planning field to remain relevant to society. As Bergland (2018) notes, despite a nod toward interdisciplinarity, the neoliberal academy emphasizes racist, gendered, colonial, and otherwise oppressionist rationales which is fundamentally at odds with a planning profession that is marketed to people with a vested interest in advancing social justice (ACSP n.d-b; AICP 2021; Planning Accreditation Board 2017). As Greenlee and colleagues emphasized, "If . . . students' individual experiences are not adequately addressed within planning education, can we expect students to rise to the challenge of 21st-century planning practice in which the politics and concerns related to diversity are even more multivalent?" (2022, 345). Planning programs intentionally try to recruit and retain more students of color, first-generation scholars, and community activists. How can we ensure that planning curriculum, scholars, and scholarship reflect their experiences, interests, and concerns if the scholars and scholarship addressing these issues are more likely to be sorted out of the academy in the name of market logics?

Sacrifices to Ride out Precarity

An additional outcome of planning programs producing more graduates than they hire is that increasingly more individuals move through the academy without clear pathways to their own futures. Little emphasis is placed on preparing students for living through the emotional and financial precarity required to weather this uncertainty. For many, the recognition of stiff competition necessitates a willingness to "ride out" precarity while collecting CV accomplishments. To secure employment, early career scholars are more likely to take on extra jobs, tolerate insecure employment, and sacrifice time, money, leisure, or parenting to demonstrate their value (Cech 2021; Morgan et al., 2021). This reproduces an expectation of the "ideal worker" who is dedicated and self-sacrificing, which then prevents any challenges to this norm and overworking demands (Cech 2021). Programs have responded to these issues by educating early career scholars about the narrowing academic market, providing information to improve competitiveness, and offering limited skill development to make other careers viable (Ganning 2022). We are not suggesting that programs admit fewer students to "solve" the supply problem. Nor are we arguing that students are "guaranteed" a job. We are advocating for programs to be more intentional about how they treat, train, and guide students through academia.

Although we do not provide any concrete steps to tackle structurally entrenched market logics in this piece, we do see raising awareness on the issue and elevating it from the individual level to the systemic level as a pragmatic first step. To understand why care is needed to counteract this inhospitality, we need to understand the harm that is being done, how it is being obscured, and what the roots of that harm are. We need to interrogate how these systems and logics not only fail to recognize or value the work that is being done and the diversity that already exists, but also how they actively work to suppress it. It is our aim in this commentary to make clear what logics are operating when we center "the market" and the impact on graduates aspiring to academic careers.

In disciplining ourselves, our education, our work, and our lives to better meet market demands we undermine our ability to respond to, or prioritize, other demands and aspirations, particularly those that may threaten prevailing attitudes and dominant power structures. For graduates, it may be helpful to reconceive an academic career as "a job" instead of "a calling," which may facilitate disentangling a sense of self from a single institution. That disentangling can be essential in questioning the exploitative structures in academia and recognizing our role and collective power as workers. In raising consciousness of our position and struggle in the academy, we affirm the necessity for solidarity and hope to contribute to the growing support for labor action in universities.

Pragmatic Shifts

Alongside efforts to address the structural barriers outlined above, we believe that preparing students for a hyper-competitive market must be marked by compassion. Here, we offer some pragmatic suggestions to reform the current system.

Transparency, Research, and Training

Ganning (2022) recommends that programs communicate the highly competitive nature of post-PhD life. Postgraduation employment information (i.e., employer and position acquired) should be provided on the three most recent cohorts at each institution and for ACSP PhD planning programs as a whole. In addition, Ganning's analysis does not provide information on demographics like race or gender, nor on degree-granting institutions, all of which influence how people get "sorted" (Lee 2022). For example, Lee's (2022) planning faculty placement scholarship suggests that 42% of faculty at Planning Accreditation Board (PAB)-accredited universities were hired from five institutions: Berkeley, MIT, UCLA, Cornell, and UNC-Chapel Hill (Lee 2022, Appendix 2). More systematic tracking of graduates' employment information along with demographic data, publications, and teaching experience would increase transparency and provide a fuller picture as to who is being left out or pushed out of academia. Qualitative interviews on PhD student experiences and outcomes could follow similar designs as the robust mixed-methods research on undergraduate and master's planning students and programs (García, Jackson, Greenlee, et al. 2021; García, Jackson, Harwood, et al. 2021; Greenlee et al., 2022; Jackson et al., 2018). While PAB-accredited programs track demographic data for undergraduate and master's programs, to our knowledge, PhD programs do not track similar information. Institutionalizing data collection and analysis has been advocated for by the ACSP Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, the Persons of Color Interest Group, and the Faculty Women's Interest Group, and could support efforts to increase transparency and address systemic inequalities.

Furthermore, given that approximately 55% of planning PhDs do not secure faculty positions, doctoral programs need to develop multiple career pathways beyond the tenure apprenticeship model to position students for non-faculty jobs. Beyond planning, recent doctoral graduates in other disciplines, such as health care, are opting to pursue nonacademic jobs because industry and government agencies have created research scientist positions (McMahon, Habib, and Tamblyn 2019). This, in turn, shifted doctoral training to include leadership, management, community engagement, and communication skills that may allow doctoral candidates to succeed in the industry beyond academia (McMahon, Habib, and Tamblyn 2019). Future research could build on existing work (see T. Ross et al., 2018) exploring how to

redesign PhD planning programs to enable multiple career pathways. For those continuing in academia, below we provide three ideas for training shifts and give suggestions for making the academic job market more compassionate.

Address Mismatch between Hiring and Training

Ganning highlights the tensions and gaps between doctoral preparation and the job market, but more research is needed to reveal specifics about the changing standards for publications and teaching. One to two articles under review or in-press were previously sufficient to be a competitive candidate for tenure-track positions (The Irrepressible Women Planners 2011). In our experience, the expectations are now higher, with some applications requiring three publications for assistant professor jobs and search committees weighing candidates based on their publication records.

We are hesitant to contribute to the hyperfocus on publications and recognize that many PhD students, especially community-engaged researchers, may not be ready to publish in their first or second year. However, given market expectations, developing a publication record should start in the first year of the doctoral program (Sletto et al. 2020). Faculty should incorporate this into their mentorship by including students as research partners on projects needing further analysis, updated literature reviews, or helping them develop their master's project into a paper. As Sletto and his colleagues (2020) in their paper on PhD pedagogy suggest, students should get appropriate authorship for their contributions and accompanying mentorship would develop research skills and methodologies while demystifying the publication process. Programs could offer courses that help doctoral students prepare for the publication process and job market complexity. In addition, considering the three-paper dissertation model might better align dissertation outcomes with a journal-article-focused discipline and publication-driven job market (Sletto et al. 2020).

Evidence of excellent teaching is also a job market expectation, yet opportunities are limited at many institutions. Ganning (2022) found that 60% of programs offer teaching experience, but that figure included teaching assistant positions. Opportunities to be the instructor on record are limited as only 21 out of 49 PhD programs on the ACSP website have PAB-accredited bachelor's programs, and universities often only allow PhD students to teach undergraduates. For PhD students at the 28 other institutions, there are few opportunities to teach undergraduate planning-relevant courses. This is a structural challenge, given that hiring committees view candidates with strong teaching experience as more hirable (The Irrepressible Women Planners 2011). Solutions to this mismatch could include providing PhD candidates with co-instructor opportunities or relaxing the terminal degree requirements, similar to how practitioners without terminal degrees are often hired as adjuncts or lecturers based on their practical experience. For publication and teaching experience expectations, it is important to note that the "demand" requirements for tenure-track positions come from the same institutions creating the "supply," which provides an opportunity to better align hiring and training standards.

To and from the Tenure-Track Job Market, with Love

The tenure-track application and interview process is another area that would benefit from a more coordinated approach, especially one that emphasizes care. From our experience, there are a few simple ways to make the process more compassionate. First, reduce the required application materials to match the appropriate stage in the application process. Initial applications should ideally only require a CV and a cover letter. Requesting separate research, teaching, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statements after the initial screening can save time and effort for applicants and committee members alike, assuming that well-rounded cover letters will sufficiently touch on all of these topics. Asking applicants to submit niche syllabi is a potentially exploitative practice and is especially unnecessary for an initial application review. Letters of recommendation should wait until a committee debates job talk invitations. This would greatly reduce applicant stress and lighten the burden for faculty who are likely writing letters for multiple students applying to numerous jobs and fellowships with different submission portals or instructions.

Second, early responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provided evidence that a condensed interview process is equally effective and more compassionate for candidates and search committees (Clary 2021; Scholz 2021). For longlist or initial interviews, providing questions in advance and posting the questions in the chat function gives candidates sufficient time to consider the question and produces more focused responses. Virtual and in-person campus visits could be pared down in terms of duration, easing the schedules of both candidates and search committees. Some institutions already engage in half-day campus visits, reducing the process to its most essential components: job talk, search committee interview, and respective meetings with the Dean, Chair, faculty, and students. Compressed visits reduce candidates' stress levels and simplify logistics for the search committee.

Third, improve communication during the application stages. Our group has multiple examples of never hearing from committees following our applications, in some cases even after completing first-round interviews. Timely emails informing candidates they did not advance at each stage is a simple way to reduce the tendency of the job market to feel dehumanizing. For candidates that advance to job talks but not offers, receiving constructive feedback from the chair can be extremely valuable as it helps inform the candidate's preparation for future interviews and is appropriate given the time commitment from candidates to prepare for and participate in campus visits. Academic searches in the United

Kingdom have a similar model (e.g., CV and cover letters for the initial application; references only for campus interviewees; and compressed campus visits), demonstrating that a simplified model is not only possible but already successfully employed.

We offer these pragmatic suggestions as relatively easy measures to improve transparency in training and hiring practices. In so doing, we hope that these incremental changes can lead to a more equitable and accessible academic job market by spotlighting these issues and initiating a departmental conversation on the appropriateness and inherent biases of current recruitment criteria when evaluating the research potential of candidates. Considering the diversity of departmental contexts, specific equitable pathways need to be designed to redress the varying structural and cultural barriers that exist. So, at best, these suggestions may help candidates become more marketable and have slight reprieves while on the job market. They may help PhD programs and search committees alter existing approaches to make them slightly more useful and compassionate. However, by offering these suggestions, we also recognize the danger of promoting practices that maintain or perpetuate neoliberal tendencies within the academy. Here, we have tried to hold these two responses together, while simultaneously believing they are fairly irreconcilable and necessitate a much deeper process of introspection and changes in the planning academy to make it more equitable.

Conclusion

We offer this commentary as individuals and a group who care deeply about the current and future state of planning practice, research, and education. We were lucky to choose PhD programs (and have them choose us) that welcomed and supported our diverse interests and where we found life-long colleagues, friends, and co-conspirators in faculty and fellow students alike. As we progressed through our various programs we felt a rift growing between who we are, the scholarship, engagement, and teaching we value, and the pressures to become marketable. This gap expanded into a chasm as we entered the job market. Some of us secured tenure-track positions. Others joined the relatively new ranks of postdoctoral fellows. Some of us secured adjunct or lecturing positions, a more common trajectory that can be both a labor of love and an extremely precarious path. Some of us are still contemplating how to build a professional career that is impactful without sacrificing the very core of who we are and what we believe and that encompasses the social justice and community engagement work that we feel should be at the heart of what planning offers as a discipline and profession.

From early on in our graduate educations, we have grappled with decisions around staying or leaving academia, what concessions we are willing to make, and if the neoliberal academy is a place where we can do the type of scholarship, action, and teaching that is needed to meet our current moment. At the same time, we have had to face decisions about relocating to states or countries without support networks, where we no longer have bodily autonomy, where our relationships are unspeakable in schools, or where our children's gender or sexuality may be surveilled, recognizing that our decisions not only affect us but our families, communities, and students. The disembodied and uncaring job market we have encountered at every step has complicated our experiences and decision-making. The way we allow the job market to operate feels antithetical to the side of planning that claims social justice is at the center of our discipline and central to our research, teaching, and service.

In this commentary, we have presented our lived experiences of wrestling with deep structural issues in the planning academy and offered simple suggestions to help students prepare for the market and for search committees to make the job process slightly more caring. We end this response with a note of solidarity, acknowledging that the pressures and challenges PhD students and graduates face only increase exponentially for faculty. We offer an opening for continued discussion around the collective power we have to reshape and refuse the scarcity and productivity cycles. We recognize that we will not dismantle the neoliberal academy, and we are all caught up in the implications of that turn. However, the planning discipline's relatively small size may allow us to co-envision and co-create a more caring and compassionate path forward. What power do we have as 110 schools with 2,000 faculty and 400 students (ACSP n.d.-a) to organize for structural change, and what can we do in the interim? How can we influence the spheres we arguably have the most control over? How can we create a more compassionate discipline that better aligns with our core values? We think planning consistently finds itself at a crossroads between aspirations and reality. If planning schools advertise a commitment to social justice as a cornerstone of their programs, we should be able to build solidarity within those same programs to achieve those goals within the discipline. We invite further reflections from those with experiences in different disciplines and at all levels of academia. We hope this commentary supports ongoing calls for serious soul-searching in the planning field to address how our discipline functions and what future we want to co-create.

Authors' Note

Sarah Gelbard is also affiliated to Univeristy of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada.

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