

We Are All Yaśodā: Creating Future South Asian Scholars

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One of the most prominent gaps or lacunae in current South Asian Studies is the generation gap. That is, the demographics of the practitioners in the field are aging. Who will be the next scholars and teachers of South Asian Studies? In a post-Cold War globalized culture, where terms like “transnationalism” dominate the critical landscape, is there a way to create and maintain scholarly interest in carving out, addressing, and creating knowledge about specific areas of geography, demography, history, or culture? What then will be the new models for funding and promoting the teaching of world areas and societies? How do we create interest and excitement for this field in those who sit in our classes and seminars, and who will eventually take our place as scholars, researchers, and educators? How do we communicate to them the passion we feel for this field, and the rigor necessary for success within it? This article addresses most of these questions by examining our dual roles as scholars and as teachers, and suggests a reconsideration of the way we present and work in the field, that may lead to bolstering the ranks of the next generation of scholars of South Asia.

Kṛṣṇa’s foster-mother Yaśodā is my model for this argument. This next generation of scholars, those we are tasked to train, those who will take up after us, are not ours to keep. We engage them, then nurture them, then teach them, and then move them out into the world. We are not Devaki or Vasudeva. These are not our children. And the *darśan* they give us when they open their mouths—the visual revelation of the Divine, or a

holy person, or a sacred artifact—is not a vision of the universe, but rather a recognition that our work has not been in vain, and will continue.

There are serious cultural forces aligned against the future of South Asian Studies as a discipline. Transnational globalization is perhaps the most fundamental of these forces, but there are also movements and trends within and without the academy itself that chip away at the stability of a continued existence for area studies. Addressing all of these is impossible here, but I'd like to collect four significant factors and roll them up into an argument that can be considered in such a span.

The first force mitigating against the continued existence of South Asian Studies as a specific discipline is the dearth of both students and potential jobs for those students when they are graduated. The table below represents the most recent data available for the number of students who are graduated from a Title IV institution in the U.S. with a degree in Area Studies. However, "Area Studies" as a data collection point here covers a wide range of ground. It includes study in all geographic areas as well as other trans-disciplinary study areas, like Women's and Gender Studies. The data here are culled from the U.S. National Center for Educational Statistics:

Table 1. Degrees Conferred at Title IV Institutions, by Level of Degree and Field of Study: United States, Academic Year 2010-11

Field of Study	Total	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctor's degrees: research / scholarship
Total - All fields	3,351,169	849,572	1,650,014	693,025	57,151
Area, ethnic, cultural, & gender studies	10,848	199	8,621	1,775	253
Area Studies as % of Total	.32%	.02%	.52%	.25%	.44%

What we see above is just how few students enter into our field. Here's a breakdown: at best, one out of every 192 bachelor's degrees awarded in the 2010-2011 academic year was in Area Studies. For every 400 master's degrees awarded that year, one may have been in Area Studies. And one out of every 227 doctoral hoods was reserved for a student of Area Studies.

Although these numbers may point to the shrinking of the pool of our replacements, they nevertheless dwarf the number of positions available in Area Studies at Post-Secondary Title IV institutions. Although concrete data are not readily available, a search of the faculty positions open in the U.S. for South Asian History / Studies reveals seven postings between September 2012 and May 2013, five of which were temporary positions, either Visiting or Post-Doc Fellowships ("H-Net"). Obviously, not all those who were graduated with a Ph.D. in Area Studies in 2011 wished to become academics. But if only one in twenty-five of those graduates wished an academic position in South Asian Studies, the market would have been glutted.

Numerous scholars have staked out positions regarding the future of area studies, many extrapolating from such an analysis to posit questions concerning something as fundamental as the efficacy and value of the gaining and granting of an advanced degree in general. Some of the more significant are Matthias Basedau and Patrick Köllner, whose 2006 discussion paper noted that,

Globalisation, as epitomised by the spread of the Internet, would flatten differences between the regions of the world and would promote convergence and greater homogeneity in a number of are(n)as—or so its evangelists claimed. Rather than to concentrate on national or local specificities (which were bound to diminish in the face of globalisation), the focus should now be on

global trends or on overarching theories and generalised analytical frameworks which could be fruitfully applied to whatever region of the world. (6)

This view was framed at a national level many years earlier by David Szanton, who reported on the trend that “Area Studies departments have often shrunk and become increasingly marginalized and embattled. They continue to produce small numbers of MAs and PhDs, but provide many fewer employment opportunities in the university and beyond than internationally oriented degrees in the social science and humanities disciplines” (n.p.).

However, the death knell tolled by the confluence of global and discipline-specific factors is countermanded by another strain of thinking, where the local is still privileged and indigenous self-determination is sacrosanct. Scholars like Drake and Hilbink counter the prevailing trend and attest to an enduring place in both the academy and policy-making institutions by acknowledging that, “local and regional traditions and politics will continue to influence events and outcomes in all parts of the world, and knowledge of those traditions and politics will continue to be essential for policy makers and academic theorists” (26).

This tension between two competing views of the processes of history is situated within a larger hand-wringing process, one which sits beyond any specific field, questioning the continued existence of the academy, or at least to the existence of one of the core areas of the academy itself. In 2012 a group of five senior professors at Stanford University, headed by the then-president of the Modern Language Association, citing “an increasingly global and cosmopolitan 21st century society,” considered the relevancy and future and of the humanities Ph.D. at their institution. Their conclusion was dire: “We believe that the humanities are *unlikely* to remain relevant, unless significant changes are made in how professional humanists are trained” (Berman et al 1). Their

solution to the problem of relevance is a “bold rethinking of humanities graduate curricula” (1).

The national and international conversations on this issue are studded with commentaries that question the value of an advanced degree in any area, not just in Area Studies. The online voices of academics like William Pannacker, William Deresiewicz, and Brian Burnsed echo throughout the Web, and boom out a message of doom.¹ Although they all have individual agendas and points to make, they can nevertheless be seen as collective Cassandras, posing gloomy prophecies about the future of the academy. Area Studies, or even the Humanities in general, do not suffer alone in this devaluation. Reporting in *Nature*, Cyranoski and others note that “the number of science doctorates earned each year grew by nearly 40% between 1998 and 2008, to some 34,000, in countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)” (276). Couple this with their awareness that, “people who have trained at great length and expense to be researchers confront a dwindling number of academic jobs, and an industrial sector unable to take up the slack” (276), and we see that the value of an advanced degree in the much-ballyhooed STEM fields has been subjected to reconsideration.

These agonizing reappraisals, economic arguments, and attacks from without work in conjunction with two other internal factors. As highly specialized scholars, we may all be familiar with the quotation attributed to either William or Charles Mayo: “An expert is one who knows more and more about less and less, until he knows everything about nothing.” My first reaction to hearing this several years ago, was outrage. The research I was doing was important. It was earth-shattering. It had implications for every reader, every thinker. I couldn’t just be pigeonholed or placed in a silo. My impact could be world-wide. And then I saw anecdotal figures that suggested that the average academic article was read by only five people (not including the author and three peer

reviewers). Beyond any anecdotes, here are the facts: Ulrichsweb lists 99,059 active academic or scholarly journals being published in 2013, of which 70,120 are in English (*Ulrichsweb*). The Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge access over 23,000 journals in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities (*Web of Knowledge*). Elsevier indexes and presents over 2,700 academic journals, mainly in the scientific and medical fields (*Elsevier*).

These numbers sent me digging for some recognition that my work wasn't so easily buried, and I came up with more comforting figures for our scholarly work, suggesting that articles, at least in the sciences, were read by somewhere between 50 and 140 readers. King, Tenopir and Clarke's 2006 study made me feel a little better, as they note that the advent of electronic publishing, and the ability to collect metrics on downloads, "has essentially demolished the myth that articles and journals are not well-read" ("Measuring Total Reading"). In fact, their figures are impressive. Their survey of pediatricians reading articles within the first three months after publication led them to the conclusion that "the average number of readings per article is about 9,500 readings per article, which increases to 14,700 readings when subsequent reading beyond three months is projected" ("Measuring Total Reading"). But their caveats remove some of the buoyancy behind such numbers. They caution, "One should not extend the above estimates of amount of reading per article to other professional fields or specialties, because many of them will not have the large population of potential readers found with *Pediatrics* . . ." ("Measuring Total Reading"). And they acknowledge that the reasonable assumptions they make about the non-respondents to their survey may not extrapolate so well, as over 65% of those they surveyed did not respond to their questions. ("Measuring Total Reading").

Most of the work done categorizing readership and citations of scholarly articles (a common metric for assessing the readership and impact of articles) focuses on the medical field as well as the life and social

sciences. Very few studies have included articles in the humanities, but those that do, across the board, offer results which demonstrate that humanities articles are read fewer times and cited less frequently than articles in the sciences. Philip Davis's most recent study, for instance, notes that the average number of citations in the 36 months after publication for an article in the humanities is two. For an article in the social sciences, that number increases to four. In the medical field and the life sciences, those numbers are 22 and 14, respectively (2132). So articles in the social sciences are cited twice as often as articles in the humanities, articles in the life sciences are cited seven times as often, and articles in the medical field are cited eleven times as often as articles in the humanities. I ignored the caveats that articles in the humanities were read less, and preferred to think that for me, those statistics were somehow different.

But Carol Tenopir's international survey in 2004-2005 was a shock. Her findings related that Humanities faculty read an average of 11.8 articles per month, while Social Science faculty members read an average of 19.4 articles per month, Sciences faculty members read an average of 27.6 articles per month, and Medical/Health faculty members read an average of 34.5 articles per month. , That is to say that, on average, Medical/Health faculty members read three times as many articles as Humanities faculty members (139).² If we extrapolate those numbers to a full year, we get a range of anywhere from 141 to 414 articles read by an average faculty member per year. These are, of course, far better numbers than five, but still not enough to move a university, let alone the world. On the other hand, two of the presenters at the 2013 Open Pages In South Asia Studies conference, both world-class scholars, have acknowledged that the number of members of the international scholarly community who would know, understand, and appreciate their research publications was, in both cases, no more than 30.³ This is rarefied air indeed.

This anecdotal evidence is supported by a more thorough study initiated in 2011 by Mark Bauerlein. He summarized his results for *The*

Chronicle of Higher Education: “More books and articles don’t expand the audience for literary studies. A spurt of publications in a department does not attract more sophomores to the major, nor does it make the dean add another tenure-track line, nor does it urge a curriculum committee to add another English course to the general requirements. All it does is ‘authorize’ the producers.” Bauerlein’s study is discipline-specific, looking only at scholarship in literary studies. But his critique of the hyper-focused attention to scholarly production is endemic of the academy as a whole.

However, there is a serious disconnect between the efficacy of our scholarly production and the institutional rewards we receive for such production. The academy, as a whole, rewards good scholarship far more than it rewards the other two legs of the traditional triangle, teaching and service. Academics host, present, or get invited to conferences because we produce work in the field. Despite the decades-old move to professionalize and institutionalize post-secondary teaching as its own discipline, the vast majority of scholarly work created in the academy is content-area and discipline-specific. We are rewarded with tenure, with promotion, with time in rank, and commensurate recognition, grants, and (hopefully) salary increases. And these movements in rank are tied most heavily to scholarly production. We all play the serious game of counting and weighing both the number and the placement of our publications, and our audience is determined by the penetration of the journals we’re in, by the prestige of our publishers.

If our scholarly production is what draws students to our field, then our institutions are doing the right thing, lauding us for promoting them, for furthering our disciplines, and for engendering interest in those who will take up the task after we have gone. But this is not necessarily the case. Don’t mistake me. I long for a seminar of graduate students who have read my work and have actually been instructed by it. But the overwhelming majority of my time is spent teaching large undergraduate classes where the students neither read nor care about the scholarship I

have produced. And although my case may be severe, we all face this dilemma in one way or another. We are all caught in the gap between what is necessary for the furtherance of our disciplines and what is necessary for the furtherance of our careers. (I offer an aside here to say that I recognize that I am writing for scholars and researchers, many rightly noted for their bodies of work. My research production may make me seem like an outsider casting stones, but that is not my intent.) I don't blame us, the professoriate. Rather, I blame the essential conflict between scholarship and teaching, and the consequent professional games we are forced to play, which are the crux of the problem.

As scholars, what we do is analysis. We take an issue, an instance, an artifact, and break it down into its constituent parts. We see how those parts connect, how they work together, how they create something that may or may not be more than the whole itself. And we are rewarded for this process. The old academic breakdown of scholarship, teaching, and service privileges our ability to conduct and communicate analysis, to offer insights into the parts of a thing, and then to build upon that to create an analysis of the whole. And we're good at this, or we wouldn't do what we do. Since it works for us professionally, we have also been led to believe that it will work for us institutionally. However, there has been pushback in recent years, with many scholars questioning this model, because they see where it leads us, to a siloing of fields of study. Holden Thorp and Buck Goldstein note that "the 'silo' mentality within institutions is becoming legendary, with each department essentially acting unilaterally in many projects that could, perhaps should, and in many instances need to involve the full participation of other departments, whose input at all levels of the process is important. But this importance is often seen only in retrospect." The European Commission on Higher Education has put some muscle behind these ideas, by tying them to funding. Robert-Jan Smits, director general of research and innovation at the European Commission, addressed academics calling for the social sciences and the humanities to

receive their own funding lines in the new EU Horizon 2020 scheme. His comments in 2012 are telling: “The social sciences and humanities have ... to get out of these silos and contribute to the enormous challenge that we’re facing” (qtd. in Gibney). The president of the European Research Council, Helga Nowotny, added, “We need the social sciences to take part and to work with other disciplines, and the other disciplines need the social sciences to tackle the grand challenges” (qtd. in Gibney).

These almost global reactions to the narrow disciplinarity of higher education allow us to infer what it is about the academy that makes such remarks necessary. In short, we have been rewarded professionally for building the walls of our silos, for demarcating the limits of our disciplines, for turning an ever-more-narrowly-focused eye toward the object under consideration. But really, this is not all our fault. This breakdown, this lyrical moment (to extend a metaphor from my field) is what we’ve been doing for decades. It’s how we get tenure, and how we get promoted. The fruits of our analyses are the fodder for our publications, and the prestige and number of these is the yardstick by which we are measured. While we recognize that the process of analysis always walks a knife edge between slavish repetition of what is already known and the gaping maw of obscurantism, we continue to do it because we do it well, and therefore run the risk of losing the big disciplinary picture.

However, as teachers, not as scholars, we have another purpose, one that is fundamentally opposed to analysis. Teaching is not analysis. While we may, in the classroom, break open a text or an artifact, unpack it through rigorous disciplinary processes, we never leave it at that. We always reframe the object, the idea, the movement, the phenomenon at hand, by placing it in a larger context. And, I argue, it is this synthesis that attracts the majority of beginning students to our field. When we stand in front of a class or a seminar, our job is to make connections, to demonstrate that what we’re presenting, what we’re walking through in front of and with these students, is something that connects to something

they already know. Students subsume small facts into larger generalizations, and we help this process along by reminding them of the foundations they are building on and connecting those with what is new to them. In essence, then, all teaching, at a certain fundamental level, is analogy, the yoking together of two disparate things in order to illuminate them.

A premise I offer, then, is that teaching is what engages beginning students with South Asian Studies, and scholarship is what engages advanced students with the field. The problem with this premise, however, is that we can have no advanced students without their first being beginning students. How then do we reconcile our duties to the discipline and its continuation with our duties to ourselves and our careers? How can we stand in the gap and further both agendas here?

If we continue to reward scholarship, continue to value our contributions to the discipline, the area, or the general corpus of knowledge, can we also value instruction? How do we create and sustain a vibrant community of scholars? Do we insist, as many administrators in higher education do, that our primary activity is the production and publication of our research? That will surely bring advanced students to the field. Or do we claim that classroom instruction is our primary activity? This will surely bring in beginning students, as a very recent study has shown. Scott Jaschik, reporting on a study by Christopher G. Takacs, sums up his findings: “Undergraduates are significantly more likely to major in a field if they have an inspiring and caring faculty member in their introduction to the field” (“Majoring in a Professor”).⁴ Time has shown that, despite what Ernest Boyer wrote over two decades ago, we can’t have it both ways.

Almost 25 years after the publication of Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered*, the academy as a whole is still grappling with the implications of his study. Boyer noted with dismay that historically in the United States, “as research gained in prominence academic reward and

recognition became increasingly linked to research performance and outputs. At the same time teaching loads were steadily increasing” (Hill 4). Peter Hill notes that the milieu in which Boyer was writing was constructed by the work of these forces, for “by the 1980s and 90s, the so-called massification of higher education, saw student numbers in many parts of the world increase exponentially—a trend which continues to the present. These factors conspired to exacerbate the imbalance between teaching and research” (Hill 4). Boyer himself saw the inevitable outcome, as competing demands of scholarship and teaching “demoralizes the professoriate, erodes the vitality of the institution, and cannot help but have a negative impact on students” (3). Boyer’s solution was to subsume all professorial activities under the aegis of “research,” as he delineated his now-famous “Four Scholarships.” His inclusion of teaching as a form of scholarship was revolutionary, but his vision of professional rewards that addressed equally the Scholarship of Discovery and the Scholarship of Teaching has been lamentably dismissed at many institutions. A pessimistic observer might note that his fourth Scholarship has given rise to nothing more than a new discipline, complete with its own silo, the study of teaching and learning. In the end, the academy has used Boyer to perpetuate what he himself struggled against, the walling off of areas of knowledge.

While Boyer’s paradigm seems to be honored more in the breach than in the observance, the status quo of privileging “pure” research, or the Scholarship of Discovery, continues. In a white paper prepared for Purdue University’s Strategic Planning Steering Committee, Weaver and Haghighi et al. sum up this problem most succinctly:

... the faculty reward system focuses primarily on the Scholarship of Discovery so that teaching and educational endeavors have a low priority for many faculty and Departments. There are few incentives and rewards for faculty to engage in developing

excellence in teaching and educational endeavors and some Colleges actually discourage junior faculty from making a heavy investment in teaching. The university needs ways to integrate high expectations for teaching and educational activities into the promotion and tenure process. (8)

Perhaps teaching is not rewarded commensurately with research because administrators cannot quantify it easily. Perhaps it is denigrated because it is not as likely as research to garner external funding sources. Perhaps it is left behind because, unlike scholarship, the evaluation of teaching cannot be placed on external validators (editors, reviewers, presses, etc.). Whatever the reason, at Purdue and at other institutions, teaching plays second fiddle. Bauerlein's work acknowledges this problem, and offers an implicit way forward: "By lowering research demands on professors, universities may be able to steer them toward more productive and meaningful practices" ("Literary Research" 15).

How do we change such a myopic view? Or, even more fundamentally, do we wish to do so? In order to do so, change must occur at various levels. At the institutional level, the white paper quoted above offers a way forward: we can attempt to value teaching as we do scholarship. This requires a serious reconsideration of the faculty reward system. Obviously, those of us with research appointments will not be as actively engaged in this as those of us who work on both sides of this research/teaching street. But the dissemination of information is the responsibility of all, be it published, presented, or the content of a lecture and discussion. So this is a struggle for all South Asianists, not merely one side or the other. As such, it dovetails with a larger issue.

At the disciplinary level, merely recognizing that good instruction is a necessary part of South Asian studies would go a long way toward addressing this disparity. But this would require some serious self-analysis, direct consideration of the implicit or explicit faculty hierarchies that we

have inherited. We did not build this system, but we have learned to live and thrive in it; we are thus the ones who can change it.

Finally, at the preparatory level, we may offer our advanced students, our M.A., M.S., and Ph.D. candidates, our ideas on how to teach what we love. We may especially demonstrate to them why we love it, and how they can reposition what we do. One of the most glaring lapses many of us see in our students is their inability to make the “So what?” turn. That is, they are unable to situate their knowledge in a larger frame of reference. We can help them by consistently doing this for our advanced students. This is not quite what we might call “Comparative Area Studies,” for it is not a balancing act between regional knowledge and general theory. And while it relies on inductive intra-regional, cross-regional, or inter-regional comparisons, the connections we make are between the “foreign” history, culture, literature, etc., and the students’ “home” culture. Yes, we must constantly guard against the Saidian Orientalizing that would be an easy pitfall here, but grounding our area studies in a global context is ultimately a matter of integrity.

The Pollyanna platitudes and their rough support in the paragraphs above certainly engender some significant problems. The first objection realizes the time constraints placed upon us. There are only 24 hours in a day, and academic work is a zero-sum game. Time devoted to synthesis is time taken away from analysis. Time devoted to research is, to a greater or lesser extent, time taken away from teaching. What’s more, given the rising levels of entitlement we see from students, and the increasing pressure from administrators to treat these people in our classes as customers or clients rather than as students, this endeavor may seem to be acquiescing to not one but two particularly disturbing trends in higher education. But much of the literature suggests that, in general, students will rise to the level of our expectations. We can still maintain rigorous standards for student performance by modeling them ourselves and by refusing to accept artifacts or attitudes that are not professional.

Raising the bar for students tells them that we believe they can perform at a certain level. That is the carrot for them. Our rigorous expectations, then, are the stick. We can spell out our availability and curtail it when necessary, but we must strike a balance between being locked in the archives and holding court in the coffee house.

Another objection might be the lesson we all learn sooner or later in our careers: many administrators are difficult to reason with. We could spend a great deal of time sharing horror stories about this, but we must be able to convince administrators that the Social Sciences and the Humanities are foundational experiences. These are what distinguish us from technical schools, job-preparation factories, and online university predators. And we cannot settle for mere head-nodding or hand-wringing. If administrators believe, with us, in the central position of the Social Sciences and Humanities in a contemporary university, they must demonstrate that belief through funding. Their monetary decisions betray their priorities and their beliefs. So words without fiscal actions are nothing but stalling tactics. I think one of the most elegant responses to this objection is to convince these administrators that acknowledging good teaching and flattening implicit or explicit faculty hierarchies is in their own self-interest.

This might be an easier task with those administrators who have come up through the ranks of the faculty, but even these new animals, these people whose discipline is not a content area but the administration of higher education itself, must eventually succumb to their own sense of self-preservation.

I'll look at one final objection, although there are others we could take on. In many ways it is a mirror image of the first objection: we're trained as scholars, and at some level, all this focus on student engagement is foreign to us. Our training is in content areas, not in the delivery of information, not in education, and especially not at the level I am asking us to consider.

But I don't think we need to approach this from a methodological perspective. We only need to ask ourselves one question: what do our successors need to succeed? I've begun a preliminary list of what we may come to agreement upon in answer to this question: an academic address, sufficient funding, the time to do research, access to primary materials, and the necessary supplies/equipment. The presumption behind this question is that, while these things have been available for us in varying degrees throughout our careers, we cannot, within the current system, guarantee their continued existence for those who come behind us.

As far as I can see, the one thing that ties all this together is the presence of someone to receive our knowledge. And so, to borrow another concept from literary studies, the "given world" of this text, the usually unquestioned milieu that is so basic that we take it for granted, is a cadre of interested undergraduate and graduate students. For many of us, these students spur funding models, determine research time and access to resources, and, in some small way, play a part in promotion and tenure decisions. We can work to ensure the closing of the generation gap in South Asian studies by working to engage more beginning students and pass down a legacy of scholarship and teaching to our advanced students.

Acknowledgement

This article is a revision of the keynote address given at the Open Pages in South Asian Studies Conference, Russian State University for the Humanities- Moscow, April 2013. The conference is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of areas for further research and development within the field of South Asian studies.

Notes

1. Examples include Brian Burnsed's "Understand the Value of a Graduate Degree," William Deresiewicz's "Faulty Towers: The Crisis in Higher Education," and numerous posts by William Pannacker in the Brainstorm blog for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

2. Tenopir acknowledges, as do I, that disciplines like the Humanities and the Social Sciences may rely on other transmission methods for their research. She notes, "Humanities faculty read fewer articles, rely more on browsing, and read older articles on average. This is not to say that humanities faculty members do not read, but they most likely read books, primary materials, and manuscripts" (147-48).

3. Both Alexandre A. Stolyarov, member of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and William Vanderbok, president of the South Asian Studies Association, remarked on the potential readership for their scholarly work. Stolyarov does research on early medieval North Indian land grants, and Vanderbok works on statistical data within the field of political science in South Asia.

4. Takacs presented a paper on the study at the 2013 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. The study was conducted by Takacs, a graduate student in sociology at the University of Chicago, and Daniel F. Chambliss, a professor of sociology at Hamilton College. The paper will be included in *How College Works*, forthcoming from Harvard University Press.

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