In the summer of 2005, I had what was probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, indeed, one that very few writers are ever afforded. I discovered, by chance, a blog that had just been created by a group of students and faculty who were about to begin reading and discussing my book The Academic Self: An Owner’s Manual. I followed their commentary as it was posted and found the entire experience of overhearing the unfiltered responses of two dozen or so readers at once incredibly intimate, somewhat unsettling, and extraordinarily illuminating. Of course, I had read reviews of my books before, including The Academic Self, but they were usually delicately expressed and carefully edited, and certainly were temporally separated from the actual reading experience. Few of us ever get to experience our readers’ reactions, more or less, as they are reading. I never revealed to the bloggers that I was listening in, and no matter how much I wanted to say, “No, no, that is not what I meant at all . . .” I simply let the discussion continue as it should, without an overprotective author there to jump in and defend his assumptions or assertions.

But one comment has stuck with me because it revealed just how much things have changed and are continuing to change on some of the issues that the present book also addresses. On June 10, one blogger (“Tiruncula”) posted the following comment and questions:
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Hall complains early on that the 4–4 loads that come with many available jobs “were never even mentioned” by grad school professors. While I take his point that grad school professors implicitly or explicitly train their students to replicate their own research careers and that grad school typically offers little direct preparation for teaching-intensive jobs, I’m flummoxed by the notion that one could get all the way to the job-search stage of a PhD and have no idea what was out there waiting. Did Hall pay no attention at all to the job searches of those a few years ahead of him in his program? Did he have no contact with alumni of his program? Were his interactions with professors limited to those old and sheltered enough not to have passed through less glamorous jobs on the way to the the [sic] exalted positions in which they were privileged to teach the (no doubt extremely irritating, if highly self-motivated) Mr. Hall? (Sorry, I’m getting a little crabby here.)

(http://academicself.blogspot.com/2005_06_01_academicself_archive.html)

In retrospect, I probably was extremely irritating to some of my professors, but the larger concern expressed here is that there were professional development opportunities that were available and that I (and many others, too) simply ignored.

That was not the case, and demonstrates thankfully how far we as a profession have come in just a few years. In 1989 and 1990 there were no professional development talks, panels, or visits by alumni. Any discussion of jobs that entailed a 4–4 course load was muted or nervously avoided because the University of Maryland, at that time, was interested in raising its profile nationally and certainly did not want to be perceived as a feeder program to teaching schools. One of my mentors (and the job placement advisor during my two searches) wrote later in a dialogue we published on graduate education that she had always seen herself as “preparing students for a very narrow band of jobs, from the equivalent of my own at a large research university to posts in four-year liberal arts colleges or branches of state universities, preferably not in departments with four-course-per-semester teaching loads unless the student clearly doesn’t want to do writing or research” (“That Was Then, This Is Now,” 214). Those teaching in the graduate program at the University of Maryland who had actually moved up through the ranks, so to speak, of “less glamorous” jobs—and I
know now there was at least one—never discussed that history with those of us on the market; if their silence was attributable to shame or simple lack of concern for us is something that I will never know. But, frankly, very few members of the faculty spoke to us about their careers. Others and I certainly were self-motivated in many ways, but questions about the wide variety of jobs out there as possibilities never occurred to any of us. The writer above goes on to say in the same posting that I seem to have moved through my PhD program in “a very blinkered way,” but truthfully many of us were blinkered in 1990. I’m certainly not blaming the (mostly very) good folks at the University of Maryland for any of the above; it was simply a different time and a different mind-set that has largely been supplanted. Inside of one paradigm today, it is hard to imagine that another was operant just a few years ago.

As is no doubt clear by now, I believe that the rise of professional studies and professional development in PhD programs over the past two decades have been very positive things generally. Yes, it means that student anxiety levels have increased in some ways; graduate students no longer simply worry about acquiring knowledge and planning a dissertation, but also about giving conference papers, publishing, and otherwise building a vita. But by encountering those stressors now, students are much better informed about the stress that they will encounter for the rest of the careers they are contemplating. Through programs that do inform students now about the range of career paths possible in and outside of the academy, we are doing a much better job generally at recognizing our students’ needs and the realities of their future work lives. After all, the vast majority of students exiting the PhD program at the University of Maryland in the early 1990s entered jobs exactly like the one I found, at regional comprehensive universities or small colleges with teaching, not research, missions. I would say that we in graduate education, and students exiting our graduate programs, are far less “blinkered” today than was the case just a few years ago.

I can attest to that firsthand and from a couple of different angles. Chairing hiring committees at a teaching-centered university (Cal State Northridge) for almost a decade (1995–2004) and interviewing hundreds of candidates for the twenty or so new positions that I hired for, I saw a dramatic shift in candidates’ abilities to discuss their priorities and a new depth to their understanding of careers at teaching schools. Over the
years, they have generally become far less likely to expect careers exactly like those of their graduate school mentors. Now that I teach in a doctoral program preparing students for possible careers in the academy, I see how different the discussion and training are compared to what I encountered. Alumni do return to talk about their jobs to aspiring academics, and we on the faculty often speak with students about our careers with the vagaries, joys, and disappointments on relatively full display. I believe that we have largely demythologized the position of “professor,” especially compared to the heyday of the academic “star” in the 1980s when certain privileged academics were treated like, and often believed themselves to be, beings worthy of near-religious worship. Thankfully, that is no longer the case. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham, who ran Tulane’s Program in Literary Theory during the star system’s height, has remarked, “[W]hat we now call the ‘profession’ is not generating stars, so that yesterday’s stars remain today’s, but older and fatter and generally less stellar than they used to be” (“End of Theory,” 193). If the process of “professionalization” killed the star system, as Harpham elsewhere in the same essay implies, then that is yet another reason to be thankful for it. For all academics to be seen as human rather than otherworldly is better for students and the professorate alike. No one benefits from a system that encourages even more inflated egos among a group that already has a tendency to think of itself as much smarter than the general population.

Nevertheless, I still think that there are ways that we can continue fine-tuning our processes and goals in graduate education. Reading job applications and conducting interviews provide a venue for a form of outcomes assessment, and having been involved now in about two dozen hiring processes in the past decade, I applaud our successes but also want to point to some opportunities that present themselves still. Through their processes of professional development, our graduate programs today are usually creating researchers and writers who know—or are clearly learning—how to disseminate their work in print and conference presentation, teachers who are increasingly up to the challenge of educating diversely skilled groups of undergraduates and integrating new technologies into their classrooms, and thinkers who are beginning to see their careers as ones not tied to a simple or fixed narrative of what constitutes “success” in the academy. These are strengths that we can build upon because several challenges remain.
Indeed, one useful way to refine even further our expectations for graduate training is a version of what I proposed in my last chapter on undergraduate education. While our expectations for graduate-level work are certainly different from and more rigorous than they are in the undergraduate classroom, we are training in both venues well-informed and highly skilled participants in the conversations that comprise their fields of study. In both venues it is also important to emphasize that to be a responsible participant in a conversation is, in effect, to be a responsible member of a community or set of communities. Indeed, for those graduate students training for an academic career, it is vital for them to recognize that certain communal/conversational dynamics and responsibilities link the work that academics do in the classroom, in their scholarly fields, and in their institutions. It is that last aspect of our work lives in the academy that deserves even greater attention in the professional development process. We have developed excellent teaching and research workshops and manuals for our graduate students; however, service and other collegial interactions and activities are major professional responsibilities that still receive far too little notice in our conversations with aspiring academics.

This is where the interview as “outcomes assessment venue” offers useful data. Out of the hundreds of interviews I’ve conducted, only a handful of applicants have been able to muster an answer to a question on the type of service that would interest them, beyond a vague, “Oh, I’m happy to do some.” Even fewer have talked about service as a welcome component of their projected careers, even with considerable prompting on my part. Of course, more training in service and other forms of collegial interaction is occurring in graduate programs now than was the case a generation ago. It is much more common today for students to sit on major department committees, including some hiring committees, and for students themselves to put on conferences and other events that require committee work and hours working collegially with other students and faculty members. But, still, little is written or said about institutional citizenship as a concept and set of activities that is connected intellectually and intimately to the other work that we do. We on the faculty rarely discuss it among ourselves and even more rarely broach the topic with students.

We might clarify our terms here by recognizing that “service” as a professional practice is the placement of communal needs above our own
narrow interests and desires. Whether manifested in department committee work, in the mentoring of junior colleagues, in work on program oversight bodies, in participation in senates or assemblies, or in activity as readers, evaluators, or public educators, it requires a deflation of the individual ego in the service of broad social rather than narrowly self-interested values. In a sense, it represents the opposite of the bloated self-regard of the “star” or “diva,” because it demands humility, a sacrifice of time and energy that could be used instead for careerist purposes, and an ability to reach consensus, or at least agree to disagree, and then to move forward with a group process. If, as Harpham maintains, professionalization killed the star system, then a deepening emphasis on service as a valuable and necessary component of our professional lives can put the final nail in its coffin.

Indeed, a productive emphasis on service as institutional citizenship allows us to address with students a topic that is often wholly avoided when discussing academic careers: collegiality. It is worth remembering, of course, that collegiality as an issue in tenure and promotion cases was long abused by retrograde forces in the academy—it was deployed to deny tenure to women, people of color, individuals working in identity political fields, and those who resisted harassment or attempted to change a culture of abuse. Sometimes it was referenced with less explicitly nefarious intent but with the same consequences, when departments simply did not understand the shifts that were occurring in the broader academy and reacted with incomprehension to still untenured agents of change within their own institutions.

I am certainly not advocating a return to the use of “collegiality” as a murky and highly subjective assessment field in tenure reviews. Personnel processes should always rest upon clearly documented and verifiable evidence, and collegiality rarely provides that except in the most egregious instances of its absence. However, I do think collegial behavior is necessary for the effective functioning of an academic community, is a subject worth discussing (especially during mentoring sessions) with those individuals newly joining a given community, and is also a topic we must address with graduate students aspiring to reach that stage. Collegiality means responsible citizenship within our institutions, embracing the same qualities that one would hope for in responsible citizens of the nation and globe: thoughtfulness, attentiveness to the needs of others,
and a willingness to listen carefully and engage in meaningful communication across and in spite of differences. It means an ability to work collaboratively to solve problems and set priorities, and, finally, it means a commitment to the ethical treatment of others, and especially those in disempowered positions (such as staff members, part-timers, and junior faculty, in an academic context). All of this may sound like a no-brainer to some graduate student readers of this book, but we who work in large and diverse departments know how often collegiality breaks down or is threatened by the dysfunctional among us, including those with tendencies toward cynicism, egomania, and paranoia.

In fact, I am sure I am not alone in knowing competent teachers who publish prolifically, but who also act abusively toward staff members and colleagues (to the point of ridiculing, yelling, and sometimes even making thinly disguised threats). I have always been stunned when people have defended such egomaniacal or “diva”-like behavior, inside or outside the academy. No amount of talent or “genius” gives one the right to treat one’s fellow department citizens as objects of scorn or as pin cushions for abuse. As many of us know well, those egomaniacs are as just common among groups of radical queers, feminists, and Marxists as they are among the “old boys” who used to control all sectors of the academy. Frankly, I do not care how famous someone is or how fabulous his or her research may be, an egomaniac should not be a member of a department community in an educational institution if she or he refuses to treat staff and colleagues with respect. While such extreme problems are outside of the scope of this discussion, certainly it is always a core job responsibility of administrators to document carefully and address forthrightly any abusive workplace behavior. In most institutions, verifiable evidence of abuse already is, and certainly always should be, considered gravely as a part of any promotion, tenure, or posttenure review.

But the question remains here, how do we frame the professionalization of graduate students to help mitigate potential problems by embracing fully all of the areas of professional responsibility catalogued above: teaching, research, service, and collegiality? An emphasis on conversation and the ability to participate productively and humbly in dialogue can provide that frame and an overall strategy for the mentoring and development of new professionals. Successful teaching demands an ability to engage productively in classroom conversations. Responsible
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Indeed, the overarching point of this book is that if we are going to be agents of change within our departments, institutions, research fields, and broader communities, we have to be able to engage in caring and careful dialogue, embracing the possibilities of an intellectualism that is professionally self-aware and eager to engage others in potentially transformative exchange. It is worth reiterating, these are not feel-good, chicken-soup-for-the-soul musings and suggestions; they are ones fully supported by some of the most significant work in contemporary philosophy and research on subjectivity and social change. Hans Herbert Kögler, in a provocative book titled *The Power of Dialogue*, suggests that by synthesizing Gadamerian conversation and Foucauldian specific intellectualism and situated knowledge, we can construct a paradigm of intellectual work “in which the reflexive self becomes aware of its origins and thereby becomes the possible source of new identities” (275). This shift demands a conversational dynamic, because “the perspective from the other’s point of view . . . sheds a specific light on ourselves that we could not have generated by ourselves” (252). The result of this emphasis on the “reflexively critical self” is an ongoing “ethical practice . . . in which respect for the other as well as a furthering of possible forms of self-realization are reconciled” (275). This transformative, conversational process really rests on a few basic principles: we listen carefully to others, allow their perspectives to denaturalize our own assumptions, engage with enthusiasm in explanations of our own lives and perspectives, and learn to work within that process of dialogue toward understanding, mutual tolerance of abiding differences, and social and political structures that allow for and even value such differences (a process that captures well the dynamic of “listening rhetoric” described by the late Wayne C. Booth in his last major work, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*). Yet as relatively simple as this might appear on the surface, especially, one might think, for skilled academics, it is surprising how often conversations and collegiality break down in department meetings, committees, and hallway interactions.
In fact, a Gadamerian emphasis on openness, humility, and an overarching commitment to engaging in dialogue helps address some concerns expressed by previous commentators on academic professional training and graduate education. In the mid-1990s, David Damrosch worried that “[w]e scholars rightly cherish our independence of mind and our originality of perspective, but we need to balance the hermeneutics of exile with a more creative hermeneutics of community” (We Scholars, 213). His suggestions for greater collaboration among graduate students and an opening up of possibilities for new dissertation models remain timely and useful. Similarly, Bill Readings in the posthumously published, and still justly famous, The University in Ruins called for a new paradigm for education: “[T]o think beside each other and beside ourselves, is to explore an open network of obligations that keeps the question of meaning open as a locus of debate” (165). This is education that values the training of both students and professors in the ability to speak with an audience that “is not [simply] a general public; it is an agglomeration of people of widely differing ages, classes, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and so on” (165). More recently, Frank H. T. Rhodes worries that PhD training does little “to meet the fundamental needs and address the larger issues of contemporary society . . . ; to foster research only coincidentally promotes citizenship that addresses the needs of society. To develop skills in some exquisitely refined area of research may contribute little to the large-minded view of knowledge that a university teacher should exemplify” (Creation of the Future, 124). To refine our goals in processes of graduate training and especially professional development to embrace engaged and self-reflective conversation helps mitigate the destructive force of what Damrosch terms the “myth” and too often “reality” “of the scholar as isolated individual” (We Scholars, 188).

Yet even as commentators have for years called for changes in graduate education, there have been few specifics. Tweaking the design of the dissertation or calling vaguely for civic-mindedness hardly helps a graduate director who is interested in rethinking her program or a faculty member who wants to begin a discussion or make concrete recommendations to a department on how better to meet the needs of graduate students. I offer some of my own suggestions below and also know that many of my readers could offer many “best practices” that are not yet programmatically validated. These need to be aired in conversations within programs.
Indeed, every graduate program—whether granting the MA, MFA, clinical, or doctoral degree—should engage in such conversations to define precisely its goals and expectations, and I believe these should always embrace explicitly how best to provide student training in institutional and broader forms of citizenship. This does happen already, but it can be even more clearly emphasized in several different arenas:

**In Graduate Classes and Seminars**

After seven years as a graduate student and then another sixteen teaching in graduate programs, I have some very decided opinions about what should and should not occur in graduate classes. The most stressful and (in retrospect) useless courses that I took as a grad student were ones that pitted student against student in forms of antagonistic and hypercompetitive gamesmanship. To be sure, some of us were able to compete adroitly in such an environment; after all, graduate students are usually quick-witted and driven to succeed, otherwise they wouldn’t have made it, or even wanted to make it, as far as graduate school. Some of us were quite able to marshal a caustic comment, point out a flaw with deadly accuracy, and try always to make the smartest comment in class and thereby effectively keep center stage—if the professor demanded and rewarded such behavior. I remember one young professor who loved to see seminar participants humiliated by classmates eager to rip apart an argument and shred an ego. No doubt he had participated in the same dynamic in his own (then still recent) graduate school experience. This is the model of the graduate seminar (and indeed the graduate program) as a venue for a Darwinian process of natural selection and survival of the fittest, wherein the students are encouraged to be “red in tooth and claw.”

Of course, graduate seminars must encourage careful thinking and skillful analysis. Graduate programs do involve processes whereby some students succeed and others fail. Students who are ill-suited or inappropriately skilled for an academic career should not be encouraged to continue on, especially if they are incurring large amounts of debt. However, that process of selection is the responsibility of the graduate faculty, who are grading seminar projects and judging students’ qualifying and special field examinations. It is not useful or responsible to encourage students
to attack, demean, or “toughen up” each other. While vigorous debate should always be welcomed, encouraging hypercompetitiveness and combativeness among graduate students simply creates and re-creates an academic culture of egotism, suspicion, and generally antisocial behavior. We reap the harvest of that training in our own overly contentious faculty meetings and vicious departmental squabbles.

Even in graduate classes and seminars, communal thinking must be encouraged and rewarded. While it sounds very “undergraduate,” I regularly build group work into meetings of even my doctoral-level classes. To have students work in pairs or trios to generate an interpretation of a text or analytical response to an issue or question is to train them in the skills that I want to see in new colleagues: those of negotiation, compromise, a willingness to agree to disagree, and an ability to present to a larger group the main points of and most compelling reasoning behind a group opinion. I do not demand consensus and certainly allow for expressions of dissent in a group report back to the class. However, what I do expect is a willingness to engage in dialogue and to articulate some shared goals or points of agreement, even if significant differences remain. As students respond to each other’s work in class—whether in group settings or in individual presentations—I also ask that they commend what is positive and successful even if they express disagreement or find problems with an argument or a specific line of reasoning. Productive conversation always demands a dynamic of generosity even in the midst of significant disagreement.

Similarly, I never disallow collaborative work even in final seminar or class projects. I allow students to choose the format that best suits their talents and personalities. Frankly, I have never enjoyed collaborative writing or research. I love working with colleagues in meetings and on various institutional tasks, but then I also relish the time I spend alone writing and following an idiosyncratic train of thought. However, to those students who do find in collaborative writing and project design a form of work that they can love, I say, “Go for it.” I remind them, of course, that most academic careers in the humanities have not succeeded or failed to date on the basis of collaborative research and writing (I can think of only a handful in my field of English—Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, being preeminent). However, that situation may change in the future, and there is no reason why students should not experiment with collaborative
work to see if it suits their styles, especially as it may lead to collaborative teaching efforts (which many of them express a great interest in). Of course, they must also acquire the self-confidence and skills necessary to pursue capstone projects (theses or dissertations) that will usually be solely authored, but the ability to collaborate is such a rare and laudable skill in the academy that I would never disallow students the opportunity to exercise it. Indeed, no matter how much we encourage collaboration, I have full confidence that the ability to work alone and in self-interested fashion will never be endangered in our profession.

**In Research and Dissertation Projects**

Even if our students’ capstone projects and much of their other research that leads to publication or presentation is very often solely conducted and single-authored (especially in the humanities and social sciences), we can still impress upon them how such work is always done in dialogic fashion. In every field of research, one’s own articulation must engage with previous articulations. I stress to students always that they are, through their work, entering a conversation with their predecessors and their peers. They must understand and acknowledge previous contributions to the conversation, its norms and points of disagreement, and then they must prove themselves to be responsible and credible contributors to the ongoing dialogue. Conceptualizing their contributions in this way means that they can avoid the trap of thinking that they must provide the “last word” or definitive statement on a topic or research question. I remind them often that the conversation that they are entering will continue long after they have contributed to it, hopefully with a generous acknowledgment of their contribution, but in ways over which they have no control. As I stress in *The Academic Self*, it is never useful to obsess over the response or acclaim that we hope to receive for a given project or piece of writing. For graduate students, too, it is best to focus on the responsible and skillful completion of the project itself, and the joys that can be derived from pursuing it. Its impact or reception will always be chancy. In fact, framing all of their work in that way helps reduce the likelihood of the always dreaded “writer’s block,” which so often is the result of a quest for an impossible perfection.
Of course, many students do want to publish and disseminate their contributions to a wider audience, to participate in conversations beyond those of their classes or home departments. Certainly, as they contemplate going on the job market or building a career after they secure a job, publication is key to establishing their credibility as recognized contributors to the knowledge base in their fields. It is helpful, even then, to emphasize that such dissemination is part of a conversational, even collegial, process. They are always writing or speaking to an audience whose needs must be understood and met. Furthermore, they are engaged in dialogic exchanges with conference organizers, editors, and publishers, the success of which can lead to opportunities to disseminate or that can lead to rejection. In this way, all successful research and writing has to involve a decentering of the author from the position of sole authority. She or he must listen carefully as well as express skillfully. I stress to students that if they do not learn first how to listen carefully to feedback from faculty and from their peers, then they are certainly doomed when they have to work with readers’ reports; outside evaluations on grant proposals; and other responses inherent to the research, dissemination, and publication process. In every graduate class I teach, I remind them of this conversational dynamic as they work on their final projects. It infuses all aspects of a successful research life—from the conceptualization of a project through writing to an imagined or known group of readers to the mechanics of working with funding agencies, editors, and a publishing production team.

In the Professionalization of Graduate Students

This emphasis on conversational skills and commitments allows us then to fine-tune also our definition of what “professionalization” actually means. Certainly in the venues above—the classroom and in research mentorship—we work to make our students more aware of the norms and best practices of academic professional life. But the graduate programs that are most concerned with meeting their students’ needs attend also to that professionalization process by offering seminars, roundtables, workshops, and other activities to students intent on or just thinking about pursuing an academic career. In all of these it is important to note that aspiring academics are not only entering the conversation represented by
their research fields, but also the conversation of a dynamic and multifaceted profession.

This means encouraging literal conversations among graduate students and recent graduates who have taken a wide variety of positions—from high-profile academic, to teaching-centered, to those in the publishing industry and a wide variety of nonacademic fields. I started this chapter by noting that I had never heard from or about individuals who had taken jobs like the one I eventually took. Certainly I could have sought out those individuals on my own (though I didn’t know them personally, since they were not part of my cohort group), but it is also true that those individuals were not generally recognized as ones to emulate.

One hopes, given the terrible prospects that most new PhDs face today as they enter the academic job market, that such snobbishness has waned. As a caveat, however, I would never go so far as to say that we should tell students that “any job” is better than “no job” or that they should simply “take what they can get.” Conversations with individuals in a variety of postgraduate school positions can lead to much better-informed choices by job candidates. Some individuals would be terribly mismatched with certain positions—weak teachers who live for research should not take positions at teaching universities unless they are willing to reprioritize and devote their energies to improving their pedagogies. Similarly, I have known superb teachers with modest research skills who have taken wholly inappropriate positions at prestigious universities and then lost those jobs for low research productivity during third-year or tenure reviews (unfortunately, they sometimes got their jobs in the first place because they were able to—and were counseled to—market themselves within certain highly sought-after identity political fields but with no recognition of their own individual needs or abilities). A discussion of who will be happy and will succeed where must be part of any broad conversation on the academic profession.

Furthermore, it is important for students to understand and discuss the ways departments and college function, their substrata of committees, rules, and processes. When students fill out evaluation forms in my classes, many have never even been told that those are reviewed by an elected faculty committee charged with making recommendations on tenure, promotion, and pay raises. Similarly, when students offer suggestions about changes to individual classes or the design of a program, they usually are
unaware of how such changes are instituted through curricular and other oversight bodies. There are ample opportunities for us to discuss institutional governance and service possibilities if we see those as worthy of discussion. They are a significant component of the “text” of an academic career that we must help students read and understand.

Indeed, it is vital to invite students into conversation on such matters as often and as early as possible. At the beginning of every meeting of every graduate class I teach, I ask if there are any questions on the minds of the students regarding their program, general professional issues or processes, or the often unexplained norms of academic life. Even if students are sometimes too shy to ask what they really want to know in class, their recognition of my willingness to address such issues means they often show up during office hours to ask what they consider an embarrassing question (“how do hiring committees make decisions?” or “what do you say in a cover letter when you send out an article for consideration?”). We have to let students know that we are willing to share information with them in an honest and practical manner. As I have insisted repeatedly here, we must be open texts for them to read and learn from in their own processes of professional interpretation and skill-building.

And I believe it would be useful to build some of the expectations above into the desired outcomes of our graduate programs. In fact, I haven’t heard of any programs that articulate specific goals for professionalization processes, but I think we should be asking what specifically we wish the end product to be of those seminars, workshops, and other conversations about academic life. I would offer that an overarching goal might be to help our students become more supple and skilled participants in the wide variety of conversations that comprise an academic career. By necessity, acquiring this conversational skill means learning the value of being both multivoiced and open to the perspectives of others.

This bears some explanation. By multivoiced I am not implying that students should learn to be Machiavellian or duplicitous. Rather, I mean that all of us who are thriving in our careers have learned to speak within a wide variety of contexts and to choose our language carefully depending upon the venue. I would never speak in class as I do in some of my more theoretically dense writings. I would never speak to administrators from other departments as I do to those in my home department who use the same terms and points of reference that I do. Finally, I would never speak
to the public exactly as I would to a scholarly audience at a conference. Being multivoiced in this way means being aware of our conversation partners’ needs and placing their need to understand above our own desire to express ourselves in intellectually self-serving ways.

And this is, in fact, an important component of being open to the perspectives of others. Yet that openness also means allowing one’s own beliefs, values, and opinions to be challenged and transformed by contact with those of conversation partners, which is Kögler’s point in the quotations above. This does not mean being unwilling to defend one’s beliefs (whether on matters concerning the ethical treatment of others or on minute points of interpretation), but it does mean being able to position oneself at least partially outside of oneself in the process of conversational exchange. It means, for example, working to understand how the general public perceives the academy (and the issue of tenure, for example). It means trying to see the world through the eyes of a different generation of professors who may use very different methodologies or theoretical touchstones in their work. It means listening to other committee members from different departments and trying to understand the assumptions that they bring to a shared task. Above all, it means seeing one’s own sacredly held positions as ones that exist in a landscape of positions, many of which are also sacredly held. For those beliefs that we do return to with renewed commitment after that process of conversational exchange, we are often even better able to explain and defend them in subsequent conversations. This is true in our interactions with the public; with colleagues in department meetings; and with administrators over matters of budget, personnel reviews, or programmatic design.

As I’ve suggested in earlier chapters and as The Power of Dialogue argues cogently, this is a hermeneutic move, and indeed, one indicator of “success” in our graduate programs is the extent to which our students understand their professional lives as a series of such hermeneutic moves. Through the professional conversations that they enter, they are able to reflect upon their standpoint epistemologies and adjust their performances in a variety of roles and venues. As teachers in training, they enter conversations with peers and with students that afford opportunities to hone their pedagogies. As researchers in training, they receive feedback from classmates, faculty, audience members at conferences, and reviewers at journals and presses that provide external perspectives on their work.
Indeed, only by listening carefully to and changing (sometimes significantly and sometimes incrementally) by way of those external points of reference are researchers able to fine-tune even their most revolutionary and iconoclastic ideas (no doubt, even Nietzsche, from chapter 1’s discussion, could have benefited from that process). Furthermore, as future committee members and participants in faculty governance bodies, they must learn to speak with a wide variety of colleagues whose different opinions and disciplinary perspectives will challenge and should enlarge their own. Finally, this dynamic is especially important when dealing with the larger public in ways that I will explore in chapter 5. As Kögler notes, it is this hermeneutic practice that “constitutes the move away from the socially situated self toward the reflexively critical self. Because this shift turns unrecognized distinctions into ones that are understood, it can be the starting point for directed and reflective social action” (275).

And to make my own “meta” move now, this is not only true for graduate student success, it is also true for programmatic success. Solipsism and isolationism can plague graduate programs as well as individuals within programs. Faculty who fall out of conversation with their fields of specialization, their colleagues, and their students will be increasingly anachronistic and ineffective. Programs and departments that fail to engage dialogically and continuously with the needs of their students, faculty, and college- and university-level administrators will also become ineffective and certainly will be institutionally disadvantaged. But as important as these local conversations are, equally crucial is an engagement with the conversation represented by the exchange of ideas and identity-based information provided by other programs across the country. This, I believe, is one of the most important hermeneutic moves a graduate program (and really, any department or institution) can make, to see itself as part of a landscape of programs, and by way of that “meta” move, arrive at a sense of honed mission.

This happens most commonly today when outside evaluators or visitors are brought in to assess a program’s design and operations, and make recommendations for its improvement. While outside evaluations can easily go awry and should never be taken as hard-and-fast “truth” (simply as useful information that augments other information available), I believe they are essential to a program and department’s vitality. When I serve as outside evaluator, I always attempt to commend what is unique
about a program, what makes it (or potentially makes it) an important component of a national, regional, or local array (one might even say “menu”) of programs that would appeal to students in compelling ways. My comments are presented as limited suggestions only, but, I always hope, add to what would otherwise be a local and more limited conversation. Educational microsystems always languish and deteriorate if they remain artificially closed. Isolationism can be functional in temporary ways, but in the long term, it proves to be disastrous. In fact, I have sometimes been brought in, far too late, to evaluate programs that had become practically nonfunctional because they had, for decades even, internally reinforced their own limited perceptions and behavior patterns.

Indeed, outside reviews often take place only every five years or so and therefore hardly provide a consistent- enough stream of data for programs to rely upon them for self-assessment and improvement. That data should be sought out also by administrators who regularly attend professional studies conferences, visit other programs and campuses to exchange information, and allow their own assumptions and practices to be brought into question through those exchanges. Every dean and department chair undergoes (or should undergo) periodic evaluation by those to whom she or he reports. Part of that evaluation should attend closely to the ways in which the administrator under review maintains the currency of her or his knowledge about similar institutional units across the nation, and how often she or he engages in conversations with administrators from peer institutions. When we are evaluated as scholars (through the publication review process or evaluation by tenure and promotion committees), we are assessed on the currency and depth of our knowledge. The same should be true of administrators of graduate programs, who must demonstrate that they continuously refresh their knowledge base through research into the fields represented by their administrative appointments and through information sharing with colleagues holding similar positions.

I have long believed that this inside/outside move—from local norms, desires, and beliefs, to a broad engagement with other programs’ strengths and weaknesses—should lead to a sharpened (and continuously revisited) sense of focus and identity for any institution and unit within an institution. Even if a department or program is extraordinarily well funded, it cannot be all things to all people. As I indicate above, graduate programs, like universities and departments, must make difficult choices
about how to allocate resources and how to “position” themselves in the landscape of programs locally, regionally, and nationally. A lack of purpose and priority usually means a squandering of money and talent. Setting up little institutes that complement nothing else in the department, bringing in speakers who will attract no audience, running little conferences that have nothing to do with anything else the program is engaged in—these are common ways that energy and resources are expended with little payoff. Focusing and clarifying a sense of identity are keys to any unit’s success, and that identity can only be shaped in conversation with the expressed identities of other units with which it coexists and often competes.

This process of focusing and (to use an inevitable marketing term) packaging will often run contrary to some faculty’s sense of an ideal program or one that reflects their own interests and specializations. Yet every process of strategic planning demands a willingness on some individuals’ parts to sacrifice their own self-interest for the broader interests of the program, and this may present one of the most difficult tests of collegiality that a group will face. If an English program looks at its current strengths and offerings, and determines that its clearest identity base is in American literature, I, as a Victorian literature specialist, may have to accept that fact and give up my claim to be represented as a key component of the department’s focus areas and commitments. Of course all programs should train students in ways that are both broadly based and deep in certain areas, which means I will always have an important role to play in undergraduate and graduate education in my department. However, I may be peripheral, finally, to the department’s main sense of mission and distinction.

Certainly in the case of small programs with limited resources, a process of focusing is key to survival and to the placement of its graduates. I am very positively impressed, for example, with the decision made by the English Department of Illinois State University (which is not the flagship institution in that state) to focus much of its PhD program’s energies on children’s literature and culture. Having sat on numerous hiring committees looking for highly qualified candidates in that field (as we were adding depth to the teacher training program at CSU Northridge), I knew how dire the need was for a program devoted to filling that niche, one that many programs dismissed as lightweight or beneath their notice. Illi-
nois State is now producing PhDs who are highly sought after nationally, who are writing important books in the field, and who are exceptionally well trained to teach at the regional comprehensive universities that educate many of this nation’s K-12 teachers. ISU’s practicality and willingness to focus itself to meet a clear national need demonstrates how a relatively small and modestly funded department can decide to add uniquely to the panoply of American graduate programs, one in which there is far too much duplication and which turns out graduates who often run into terrible problems on the job market.

Not all programs will define themselves that narrowly. But it makes no sense to try to do everything equally well. That vagueness does not allow one to make smart choices in distinguishing among relatively similar job candidates: does a given candidate add clearly to the department’s strengths or does that candidate do work that is highly specialized in ways that neither broaden nor deepen the department’s course offerings? I am not advocating a uniformity of perspective in a department; there are usually many ways a department can work toward a sense of complementarity among their faculty and activities without reaching a drab and intellectually static sameness. If anything, individuals approaching similar research questions but from significantly different methodological and historical perspectives would be an ideal scenario for productive collegial conversation and graduate student training.

Furthermore, a vagueness of purpose and identity works against the interests of prospective students who need to be able to choose wisely from among the many graduate program possibilities nationally and with some assurance that they will find complementary course offerings that will allow them to develop a well-supported field of specialization. A clear sense of focus or programmatic priority means that when students arrive at the department, they will find speakers, colloquia, conferences, and events that further support their work in a given field. This same sense of focus also means that admissions committees will have the ability to choose from among applicants the ones whose projected interests and projects can be supported reasonably with course offerings and other activities. It is unwise and unfair for a department to admit a student, no matter how well qualified, who desperately wants to specialize in Victorian literature, if the department knows that it will only rarely be able to offer a course in that area.
These are difficult decisions that every graduate program should make. It is clearly a process wherein a faculty's ability to engage in careful yet productive conversation may be tested in clear and dramatic ways. That some groups of faculty would fail such a test again demonstrates how a dialogically based hermeneutic process should be part of every future faculty member's training. Indeed, as a department engages in the discussions mentioned above, it should invite into the dialogue advanced graduate students. This inclusion adds important student-based perspectives on the topic of program design and also provides yet another venue for professionalization.

Providing that opportunity for students to participate in programmatic decision making and planning offers them a window into yet another area of professional activity with which they might otherwise have no experience: administration. We rarely talk with students about career paths that would include administrative appointments. Part of that silence may be due to our own suspicion of administrators as likely evildoers and part of it may be our prejudicial belief that administrators are simply failed scholars. Why would we talk to students about the possibility that one day they might be a department chair or associate dean if that assumes their inability to make a name for themselves as researchers?

However, if we demonstrate to students that administration is itself an intellectual activity, that successful administration demands the same hermeneutic moves required by successful scholarship and teaching, we do them and ourselves a service in preparing the future leaders of our programs and institutions. To allow them to participate in processes through which local needs and priorities are placed in dialogue with broader professional norms and trends, in which the profession itself is viewed as textually rich and interesting, and through which an energetic conversation emerges that involves a testing of evidence bases and a honing of interpretive assertions, is to ensure that we will have future colleagues, department chairs, and deans with whom we can interact productively.

We in the academy work in one of the very few professions where we have near complete control over the training of our own future colleagues. Law firms hire from law schools; engineering firms from engineering programs; high schools hire from university programs in education. However, we in higher education hire almost exclusively from among those whom we collectively train. That gives us more control over the
skills and attitudes of our future colleagues than practically any other field and more responsibility for changing what we do not like or what we perceive as failings. If we want our programs to produce a different type of professional, we do not have to convince any external body or group to take action—we only have to convince ourselves and our university colleagues that change is desirable.

The question then remains, what type of colleague do you want, and how is any program with which you have influence meeting the needs of its students and our collective future through their professionalization? We should all think of ourselves as agents of change in this arena. However, if we are tenured, especially, we have the responsibility to raise such difficult topics and initiate conversation on issues that may threaten some faculty. That risk taking, in research, teaching, and here, service, is the only justification for the job security that tenure represents and is even part of the contours of a career in the academy as we should discuss it with our graduate students. The period leading up to tenure is when one demonstrates one's skills at teaching, service, and research activities, the period after tenure is when one can most safely assume leadership in dealing with difficult issues and emerging crises. Sometimes we simply cannot wait that long before becoming agents of change, but certainly after tenure, we have no excuse for letting problems fester.

While the stereotype of the shy and fumbling professor has elicited laughs on television and in films for many years, in reality, ours is a more social and performance-based career than just about any other, outside of politics, public relations, and trial law. While gregariousness is hardly a job requisite, responsible and effective communication skills are. Our thoughtful participation in a variety of overlapping and discrete conversations will determine our collective fate as a profession and the health and stability of our individual departments and institutions. We must face that fact and train our newest colleagues in the skills necessary to meet all of those challenges.