

Volume 2 Issue 2: Academic Poverty Special issue Editorial

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Educational attainment is often framed as positive, having the liberatory potential to free the socio-economically marginalized from their constraints. There is little, if ever, any mention of the unchained slavery of debt and low wages that ties working-class academics to perpetual bondage. Once welfare and working class academics become subsumed into the Ivory Tower, assumptions of class privilege are immediately attached to their bodies: they are perceived as solidly middle class. But many individuals within academic settings occupy marginal positions. This marginalization has led to the creative use and understanding of an ‘outsider within’ status. This special issue attempts to uncover the influences of class status (among other axes of identity) on academics who still occupy this socioeconomically disadvantaged position. Far too often, these stories exist in siloes of private messages, listservs, and Facebook groups. This special issue hopes to move these singular stories of pain and struggle to a forum where the commonalities among these stories as well as the structural influences sustaining these realities can be collectively recognized.

As [Deborah Warnock](#) (2016) illustrates, working-class academics describe the precarious nature of their existences inside the tower. In the work she conducted, she identified five key themes that comprise the marginal existence of working-class academics: 1) alienation, 2) lack of cultural capital, 3) encountering stereotypes and microaggressions, 4) experiencing survivor guilt and the impostor syndrome, and 5) struggling to pass in a middle-class culture that values ego and networking. In the context of the current issue, other intersectional issues will be addressed to highlight the precarious reality of welfare and working class scholars.

Take the following example as one such reality. On September 28, 2017, [The Guardian](#) published an article outlining the reality of an adjunct instructor who also engages in sex work to avoid living in poverty and becoming homeless. While reading this heart wrenching story, we were all quickly reminded about our realities of living paycheck to paycheck, or hoping our contract would be renewed, or wondering if we’d have enough for children’s childcare. The fear of failing in academia is a real concern.

This special issue seeks to reframe the narrative of failing within academia to highlight how academia has failed us, especially the economically marginalized. We were told to work hard, get an education, and rely on our merit to help us thrive and succeed. Approaching graduation

and upon entering our first faculty positions, most of us are quickly reminded that more is involved in thriving in the Ivory Tower. The experience outlined above is not isolated. While others may not engage in sex work, there are other things that many individuals within the cog of academia engage in to supplement their limited incomes and precarious experiences of feeling like second class citizens. The growing class of faculty with temporary and short term employment is a function of the increasing precariat in academia.

The contributors who provided commentary on their experiences within academia outline detailed descriptions of their contentious paths within academia. From moving into tenure track positions to highlighting academia through a lens of apartheid, these scholars express the reality of their professional paths. From the powerful opening of Foiles-Sifuentes' piece '*Your CV reads working class*,' this is an indication of the direction of not only this piece, but it appropriately weaves a thread throughout the entire issue of struggling as welfare and working class scholars at the intersection. Contributions within this issue also provide an examination of what it means to be queer and/or a woman of color which are among the most marginalized identities, and Gray & Chapple provide an overview of this intersection using a Black feminist framework.

This special issue, continuing along the path charted by Warnock and others, seeks to center these marginalized narratives. As Debra Leigh Scott, who is working on a [documentary](#) about adjuncts, states, 'We take a kind of vow of poverty to continue practicing our profession.' This concept rings true but we are hoping to charter a new reality within academia. We must continue to resist the corporate model that seeks to continue exploiting our labor and contributions with little reward.

The Special issue concludes with an interview with founding members of the Association of Working-Class Academics, which provides insights and lessons into the origins of an association that has been vital to the literature on working class studies.