

The Positive Impact of WRK4US (now The Versatile PhD)
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WRK4US (pronounced “work for us”) was a national email discussion list about non-academic careers for humanities and social science PhDs. Founded in 1999 by Dr. Paula Chambers, at that time dissertating in Rhetoric and Composition at The Ohio State University, it grew to 2,300 subscribers across the United States and Canada. Those subscribers included humanities and social science Ph.D. students and Ph.D.s or ABDs already working in non-academic careers. By sharing information and advice, subscribers helped each other understand and navigate the non-academic world and in the process became a rich, cohesive community of likeminded souls.

Guest Speaker Discussions were an important feature of WRK4US. In a Guest Speaker Discussion, three to five individuals, all with graduate degrees in humanities or social science and all working in the same non-academic field, would join the list, tell their stories and answer questions from subscribers. These discussions provided quality first-hand career information unavailable anywhere else—and were archived for public benefit on the WRK4US website (<http://www.studentaffairs.duke.edu/career/wrk4us>). WRK4US was also an excellent source of non-academic job announcements appropriate for Ph.D.s; about 175-200 were posted each year.

In a subscriber survey conducted in April 2008 (response rate = 35%), **98% of subscribers reported having benefitted in some way after subscribing to WRK4US for at least 6 months.** Specifically:

- 67% discovered at least one interesting career path they didn't know about before
- 49% received an emotional boost and felt more positive about their futures
- 41% discovered they have more skills than they had previously realized
- 34% received personal advice that helped them through a specific career situation

“Thank you so much for organizing & maintaining this list! It was a tremendous help to me as I was making the agonizing decision to leave academia during my final years of graduate school...being able to read about the experiences of others who were in a similar situation or who had left academia despite heavy pressure to remain in the ivory tower was inspiring and helped me feel like it was actually okay to take a different path. After reading this list for several years, I feel like I have a wealth of intriguing career possibilities available that I never would have thought about before this list. So thank you!”

“I think WRK4US has been one of the most enlightening, important resources I have found in my nonacademic career research...WRK4US is a necessary, welcome fount of job posting, career advice, and discussion, and I am grateful for the information and community I have found here.”

“It really is the best listserv I've ever subscribed to (and I've subscribed to many).”

“I literally would not be achieving what I am today, academically and professionally, without the support of the list along with my other resources.”

“Even if I do remain inside the academy, I feel that I've learned a lot from this list that will help me give good advice to friends/family/students about their career situations.”

“I think WRK4US fills a very important niche in the universe of career counseling and humanities-oriented graduate education -- one that universities have been notoriously poor at filling. Thanks!”

“I used to be distressed in the extreme to admit that I wouldn't be a professor...Now I'm looking forward to see what I can create.”

The WRK4US listserv has now become The Versatile PhD website. The community has adapted well to the change and is thriving in its new web-based environment, independent and financially sustainable for the first time ever, thanks to the new Premium Content Service to which universities may subscribe.

www.versatilephd.com