

## Proposal for 2013-14 Altac Working Group UNC-Chapel Hill Institute for Arts & Humanities

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For several years now, we have been involved in conversations, both on campus and nationally, about alternative academic careers, sometimes referred to as the “altac” path, for Ph.D.s. “Altac” has emerged as the constriction of tenure-track faculty lines, among other factors, has produced a significant number of Ph.D.-prepared professionals who are unable to obtain or who have decided not to seek faculty positions. Although some of those individuals work as adjunct faculty and some leave the academy altogether, there is a growing cadre who remain employed within the university but outside the faculty ranks. An extremely informal count on the UNC-CH campus has produced a list of more than forty such individuals in “EPA Non-Faculty” positions, approximately three-quarters of whom are women. Many of these administrators—here and elsewhere—continue to pursue their scholarly research, writing, publication, public speaking, engagement, and teaching while fulfilling their administrative duties for the university. They contribute in myriad ways to the academic mission of Carolina. Some of us have been meeting together informally from time to time for several years.

Building upon a proposal we initially wrote and submitted to the 2011 Academic Plan Steering Committee as well as a 2010 column we published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* calling for the development of policies and systems to more effectively leverage the contributions of administrator-scholars such as ourselves (see both attached here), we propose to establish an Altac Working Group to more formally explore the prospect of Carolina creating an innovative, robust, and coordinated program of research and teaching support and professional and leadership development opportunities for this unique contingent of its professional administrative staff.

With relatively modest administrative changes and financial support, we believe, the university could more fully realize, and indeed optimize, the value of this rich existing resource to support Carolina’s educational mission, while improving markedly the quality of the workplace and the prospects for long-term retention of this vital, highly capable contingent of the university’s professional workforce.

The Altac Working Group will explore the specific components that such a program should include, and particular matters that would need to be addressed for such a system to be put into place. We will also inventory any other efforts in development at other universities that might provide inspiration for what Carolina could do. Examples of questions and issues to be considered include:

- What sorts of support UNC “altacs” already have, and what they identify as their most important needs.
- How to build the program in a way that does not simply amount to overburdening an already-busy cohort of employees.
- How to build a program that is flexible enough to account for the variable needs of the many very different administrative offices in which “altacs” work.
- How to expand existing support structures to facilitate administrator-scholars’ research, publication, and teaching. While many or most of these support structures are already in place

for full-time Carolina faculty, they are extremely variable in the degree to which they are presently available to professional Ph.D.-prepared staff.

- How to design workload management, compensation, reward, and advancement structures that account for administrator-scholars' scholarly and teaching work in contexts in which administrative responsibilities must and do come first.
- How to address the issue of professional advancement.
- How to incorporate administrator-scholars who are teaching and doing research into departmental and university-wide faculty governance structures.
- How to extend the benefits of what might be learned through such a program to enhance career preparation and advising for UNC graduate students who might aspire to "altac" positions.
- How, and at what levels, to fund such a program, which would include questions of teaching and/or research stipends, staff support, and other factors. We would also like to explore the prospect of securing outside funding to start such a program.
- How to design a program that is flexible enough to accommodate administrator-scholars' varying levels of interest, desire, and ability to continue their scholarly work and teaching. It would be ideal, we think, to offer administrator-scholars an array of opportunities and pathways out of which they could assemble individualized work plans that accommodate their unique needs and interests as well as the needs and imperatives of the administrative positions into which these scholars are hired.

By building a comprehensive and intentional system for developing and nurturing its "altac" administrator-scholars, Carolina has a unique opportunity to design a nationally significant, visionary, innovative program that advances the university's academic mission while also making more efficient and effective use of existing resources, responding to calls for greater accountability and stability in teaching, addressing issues related to contingent and fixed-term faculty, fostering public engagement, advancing creative solutions for graduate education and the Ph.D. career crisis, retaining valuable and highly capable administrative employees, and building a cadre of professional women leaders for academe.

As co-creators of the Altac Working Group, we propose to invite 8-10 additional alternative academics at UNC to join the group for the 2013-14 year. We will plan to meet at Hyde Hall at least monthly. At some of the meetings, UNC faculty and staff, as well as others with relevant expertise, will be invited to speak with the group. At the conclusion of the year, we will present a formal proposal to pertinent members of the UNC-CH administration.

Possible speakers, topics, activities, or projects for the Working Group include:

- Chancellor Carol Folt
- New Provost
- Kim Strom-Gottfried, Director of the existing IAH Academic Leadership Program (a possible model)
- Steve Matson, Dean of the Graduate School
- Jan Boxill, Chair of the Faculty
- David Kiel, Center for Faculty Excellence
- Someone from university development and/or corporate/foundation relations (to investigate external funding prospects)

- Bethany Nowviskie or Katina Rogers from the University of Virginia, leaders in conducting research and building programs related to “altacs” and graduate education
- Joint meeting with altac colleagues from Duke and/or NC State
- Survey of UNC’s current altac population to assess current conditions and needs
- Open meetings/focus sessions with current altacs and with selected supervisors of altacs to see what they would suggest.