

A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum

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Book Review

A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum

By Jessica McCrory Calarco

Princeton University Press, 2020, 476 pages (paperback)

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Reviewed by:

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As I delve into '*A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum*' by Jessica McCrory Calarco, a distinguished sociologist of education, I am immediately reassured by her extensive experience and profound understanding of the subject matter. Her insights, enriched by her sociological expertise, make this book an indispensable tool for understanding academia's complexities, especially for graduate students. The author's adept use of real-life examples, such as selecting an appropriate supervisor, navigating the funding process, and publishing in prestigious journals, elevates this book to a must-read for potential and current graduate students as they navigate the "hidden curriculum" of academia.

She argues that this hidden curriculum privileges upper-class white, affluent, male, heterosexual, native-born and able-bodied students with big rewards in academia (Calarco, 2020, p. 3). Due to this hidden curriculum, they secure admission from so-called 'top' schools, receive fellowships and grants, publish in high-ranking journals, and secure jobs in top schools. She argues that privileged groups have more intense networks and social capital from their friends, family, and neighbours than non-privileged groups. In her book, she challenges the hidden curriculum by offering alternative perspectives for low-income, non-white, immigrant, and marginalized classes outside Good Mentor and Good Student. Through a thorough analysis, she provides an in-depth and detailed

analysis of how minority and marginal students overcome ‘imposter syndrome’ and its associated depression, anxiety and mental alienation in academia (Calarco, 2020, p. 8). While other books provide a general overview of university systems, funding, PhD student training, pedagogical issues, publications, and academic jobs (Berdahl & Malloy, 2008), focusing on the learning ecological model (Elliot et al., 2020), this book critically analyzes the hidden curriculum in North American universities, focusing on sociological and social theories perspectives, and highlights the importance of critical race theory in understanding its adaptation strategies. Moreover, she addresses hidden curriculum aspects across fields like lab sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences, incorporating discourse, illustrations, and structures. Her focus spans fellowships, instruction, scholarly publications, and academic training.

Jessica Calarco’s book transcends disciplinary boundaries. It is a must-read book for interdisciplinary social science students, covering application processes, funding, fellowships, roles, responsibilities, and necessary reading, writing, publication, and job training. This interdisciplinary approach makes it an essential resource for professors, instructors, teaching assistants, and research assistants alike, catering to the needs of all social science students.

The book is structured into twelve chapters, each covering a crucial aspect of graduate school, from planning the application and admission process to the various training and skill development opportunities available to Ph.D. students. In the first chapter, the author explained in-depth issues related to program choice, focusing on graduate program nature (master’s and Ph.D.), career goals and job preferences, funding and fellowship and merits and demerits of choosing disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields along with supervisor, co-supervisor and advisor choice issues. After that, she gives details and the necessary process and step-by-step information about how to make a practical application, focusing on application forms, fees, curriculum vitae, personal statements, writing samples, scores (GRE, GMAT, IELTS and TOEFL), undergraduate/graduate transcripts and letters of recommendation. This section is impressive because she provides the necessary standard format and templates for graduate school applications, as well as detailed visit strategies and summaries in the graduate school. In chapters 2 and 3, Jessica Calarco discusses graduate student networking and team building to mitigate academic conflict and promote equality. She brilliantly discusses academic jargon, including degree requirements, related terms, and university professor ranks.

Chapter 4, 5, 7 and 8 are crucial as they provide comprehensive guidance on reading and analyzing scholarly works at an advanced level. They offer detailed strategies for identifying the central thesis, arguments, contributions, key findings, methodology, strengths, and weaknesses of an article or book. Thus these chapters will enable graduate student to effectively incorporate others' ideas, including writing literature reviews and comprehensive articles. Personally, I found these four chapters enlightening and empowering, as they provided valuable strategies and tactics for reading, writing, and publication. The last three chapters (10, 11, and 12) focus on publishing research articles, presenting findings at conferences, navigating academia, and balancing academic and personal life. They provide valuable insights for low-income, marginalized, and immigrant first-generation students who aspire to succeed in academia but face challenges in finding jobs and establishing their identities. These chapters also compare the experiences of these students with those of the white and elite-dominant classes in academia.

One of the essential strengths of this book is its holistic approach to writing, based on research in both hard and soft sciences. It covers program choice, job market planning, and balancing academia, work, and family life. Compared to others, this book is in-depth and ground-breaking. It includes practical guides, email formats, fellowship applications, writing outlines, templates, and checklists. The author shares personal and others' experiences from grad school and social media. Importantly, the book addresses discrimination, inequality, and racism faced by marginalized non-white groups in Western academia, particularly in the USA, and explores strategies to combat these challenges using sociological data. As an international student, I found it valuable for adapting to new academic cultures, securing funding, training, and finding jobs.

In summary, this book is a comprehensive resource in Sociology, Criminology, and Legal Studies, filled with facts, storylines, templates, and outlines. New Ph.D. graduates, students, teachers, and general readers will learn effective writing and publication strategies from this masterpiece. Additionally, it offers valuable insights for professors and students, helping them modify attitudes and strategies while providing comprehensive training for graduate students.

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