

Proposed Dissertation Abstract -- *The Migrant Creative*

Creativity has been the driver of my life as a freelance writer, producer, and educator for over twenty years. The life of the “migrant creative” was how I affectionately, and more often cynically, described the challenges of a creative, itinerate lifestyle. The migrant creative is more a reality in today’s economy than ever before. The Bureau of Labor Statistics in their *2008-2009 Occupational Outlook Handbook* notes that about 60 percent of the creative market has been engaged in contract work. This trend is rapidly accelerating across a variety of employment sectors.

I teach media at a historically black university that is part of the University of North Carolina system. Everyday, I remind students that employment in this chaotic economy, coupled with the transitory nature of the industry, requires an entrepreneurial mindset and more than talent. Students will undoubtedly have to create their own jobs and they are competing against skilled professionals with years of experience. This is not meant to scare -- but to prepare students for a turbulent ride that goes beyond networking. Technological awareness is not enough and will always be changing. They need to understand that the new workforce is fluid, creative, collaborative and global. Individuals may have to work on per-project basis. The idea of a permanent job is becoming scarily laughable. That is why it is imperative that we study and analyze the world of the freelance contributor. What are the skills needed to thrive as an independent, self-propelled creative solopreneur?

This dissertation, *The Migrant Creative*, explores how freelance and consulting work is revolutionizing employment opportunities throughout the world. There are now online social networking freelance unions, creative collectives and message boards where work-specific issues in the new economy are discussed. The coffee house, formerly the freelancers’ alternative office, is where creative individuals come to share ideas, java and escape from home. How do people deal with the psychological isolation and the demands of continually reinventing themselves? Many freelancers, needing to connect, are renting shared spaces and collaborating on projects. *The Migrant Creative* is their story. Freelancers, rather than being marginalized, are now being institutionalized within the business structure. As the job market morphs into a new model free of perks, offices, insurance, and the promise of regular employment -- it is imperative to examine the freelancers and consultants role and how they navigate in this global economy. What can we discover from these individuals about the nature of past, present and future creative work?

The film, television, video gaming, music, advertising and Internet-driven industries regularly employ freelancers. Professionals with varying skills come together for relatively short periods of time, contribute to the project, and then leave. Some production crews retain the same loose-knit group for years. What can employers and contract workers teach us about organizational teamwork -- and who works? What are the inherent qualities that make someone marketable as a freelancer that transcend cultural boundaries? How do factors such as age, diversity, religion, gender, openness, like-mindedness, professionalism, reputation, body language and humor affect the hiring process? Stories and surveys from media freelancers, the executives that contract talent, and the individuals that work alongside them will paint a picture of life as a migrant creative in the USA and overseas.

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