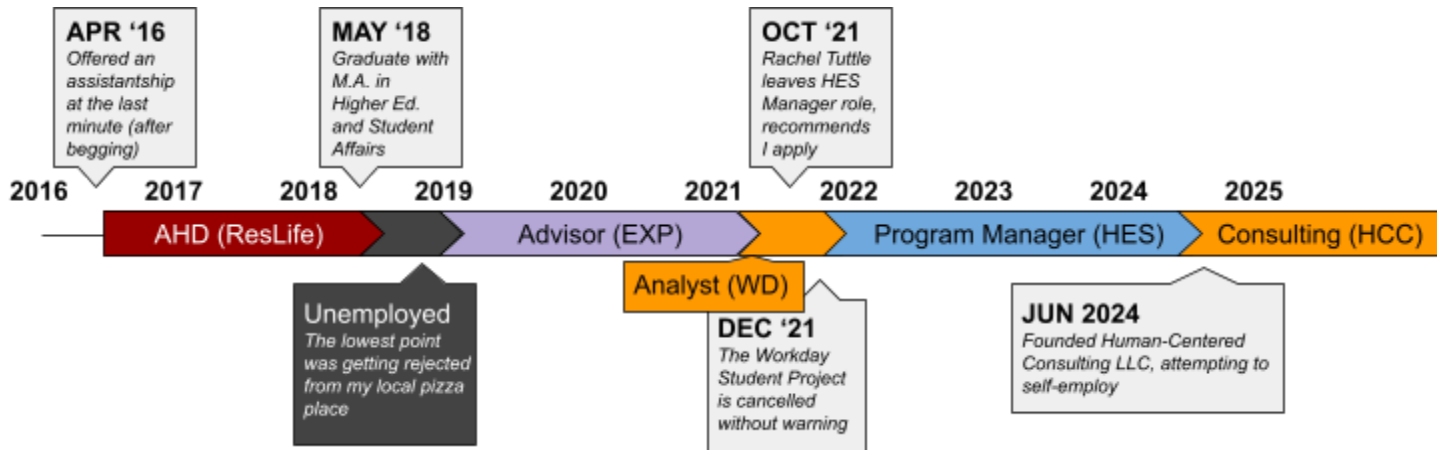


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I'm Leaving in a Big Way!

I'm leaving Ohio at the end of this summer, and would love to see folks before I go. My last date of employment will be Friday, August 16 (or sooner). My successor has already started taking over the Humanitarian Engineering Scholars program, as I wrap up some year-end processes and help onboard him to the role. **This letter is both an overview of my experience at OSU, as well as an explanation of my departure and next steps, followed by some words of gratitude.** I appreciate you taking the time to read it!



When I first arrived at OSU in 2016, I was floored by the energy of this place - some specific memories:

1. Being welcomed with a necklace of poisonous nuts I had never heard of
2. Hearing a stadium full of people boo-ing at a ref's call during the Big Game
3. Seeing an OSU-painted pumpkin outside a business 100 miles from campus
4. The first time I got "O-H'd" by a stranger while wearing OSU gear in another state
5. Driving through the solo-cup and empty-can aftermath of football weekend parties



I quickly started referring to this as "drinking the kool-aid", and promised myself I wouldn't give in to the overwhelming presence of OSU's brand recognition and cultural impact. But over time, I started seeing the benefits of this energy, and the power it had to bring people together. In my time here, I have developed such a strong community of thoughtful, passionate, and kind-hearted people. More than anything, leaving this community will be the hardest part of my departure.



I literally have my dream job, running the Humanitarian Engineering Scholars program. It affords me the flexibility and autonomy to focus on projects that are interesting and meaningful, to take on new opportunities such as lecturing and leading study abroad trips, and to build relationships with such caring, talented students and colleagues. I don't expect to hold another role like this again in my career. And yet, it keeps me bound to Ohio in a way my life cannot currently allow for.

“Why?” & Ohio Politics

I like to say Ohio has a ‘vortex’ that keeps people here. Despite only planning to be here for 2 years of graduate school, life circumstances kept extending that timeline. My fiancé Claire got a great job locally, so we stayed to get some years of professional experience. One thing came after another: marriage, starting my own career, transitioning, a pandemic, homeownership, and Claire's turn for grad school. I was grateful to share in these adventures with a partner, but that partnership was not sustainable, despite efforts to adjust and strengthen it. Last year, Claire and I chose to dissolve our marriage, and have since gone our separate ways.



Ohio has been a far better and kinder state than I ever gave it credit for. It's helped me change my perspective on so many aspects of life: the power of diversity in community, how to coexist *with* the passage of time (thanks seasons!), and rediscovering my love of the outdoors. But it's also lowered my expectations regarding social change, structural inequality, politics, and activism - some specific moments:

1. My cohort's 2016 election watch party shattering our faith in a well-meaning, informed populous
2. Seeing public threats of violence against my mentor for her empathy toward a murdered student
3. Marching for an end to police violence, past fully-armed humvees in downtown alleys
4. Seeing literal nazi's intimidating my community during a drag brunch at one of my favorite bars
5. Watching OSU continually walk back progress made toward meaningful social equity in response to the rise in bigotry across the state legislature

In many ways, I am protected from the worst impacts of these trends, especially relative to other trans people. I have a stable job and housing, a strong support system, and I live in an urban environment more accepting of diversity. However, I no longer trust OSU as an institution or employer, as they have shown they are happier to quietly capitulate than stand by their values of inclusion. And while there are many pockets of equity-minded people and offices, their efforts are hindered by 'the powers that be', and I am not hopeful for meaningful change anytime soon.

I have struggled with the idea that I am running away, instead of staying to 'fight the good fight'. I am privileged in terms of my abilities as well, and have a lot I can give to my community. I know that any successes have come from the hard work of individual people, and I am capable of really good work. However, I have lived my life up until this point in service of what I can offer others. I've made myself and my desires small in order to prioritize helping people, trying to leave this world better than I found it. Taking steps to transition was the first

thing I felt like I was choosing for me, despite how it might impact others. I hope to continue loving myself in the ways I love others, and prioritize my own joy in life.



I am at a crossroads of my life, untethered from my obligations to others, and lucky enough to be able to leave this place. I'm not so naive that I believe these problems are unique to Ohio, or even the U.S., and don't expect to be free of them when I move. And I hold a lot of sadness at leaving the life and community I have here. But I have dreams and goals that I've pushed down for a long time, and I need to take this opportunity to pursue them.

What's Next?

This is the question of the year, the short answer to which is “_(ツ)_/”, informed by three goals:

1. Leave Ohio
2. See the World
3. Don't Run Out of Money

I'll be trying to accomplish this by moving to the Netherlands, a country in the EU with great public transit and urban infrastructure, low religiosity, and meaningful policies supporting human welfare and environmental sustainability. I've visited 3 times now, once in 2016, then twice in the past year, and loved every minute of those trips. I have long-time friends who just moved there this year, as well as a vibrant queer community I've connected with over my travels. Though they could never replace my Columbus community and support system, I'm glad to have some head start at building a new life.



I'll be taking advantage of the Dutch-American Friendship Treaty to get residency through the establishment of a Dutch business. My plan is to work as an independent consultant for educational organizations, starting with my network from OSU and hopefully expanding out from there. If you are reading this: please consider dropping my name in meetings about: curriculum development, software implementation, program planning, or organizational restructuring. Or, drop the name of my new Ohio-based company: Human-Centered Consulting. While I'll enjoy being unemployed & not in school for the first time in my life, the savings I have will only go so far, and I'll need to reach sustainable income eventually.

I am making this move because I can, and I want to find out what's in store for me. It's possible that I'll stay in the Netherlands permanently, but I'm not setting my expectations on any one outcome. I still expect to come back and visit, and I know that I have a wonderful community to come back to if staying there doesn't work out (or isn't what I want anymore). If you've made it this far in the letter, I hope we will keep in touch regardless of geographic distance. I'll always be reachable by phone, and hope to provide updates through my social media and (eventual) personal website, keohane.gay.

Recognition

I'm uncertain but optimistic about my future. None of what I'm doing would be possible without the support, perspective, and opportunities given to me by the incredible community of people I've worked with at OSU. I am grateful to them beyond description, but will try to offer some:

To my UCSD mentors Keith McCleary, Wayne Yang, Mandy Bratton, and Tony Jakubisin, for expanding my curiosity beyond topics of science and technology, and role modeling the kind of educator I wish to be.

To the HESA Faculty, especially Dr. Jen Gilbride-Brown, Dr. Tatiana Suspitsyna and Dr. Amy Barnes, thank you for the opportunity to pursue my true passions in education, and providing structured support to the start of my professional journey. The academic foundations I developed in that program underlie all the work I've done since as a more thoughtful, critical scholar-practitioner.

To my HESA friends, especially Kristen, Marcell, Cat, Elyssa, Anna, Ryan, Gena, and Louise, thank you for making my move across the country easy. Having friends like you felt like an instant community far away from home, and made grad school so much more bearable. You made me feel seen and respected in my gender during a time I couldn't yet face the difficult decision to transition, and for that I will be forever grateful.



To David Ternier and Michael Volkman, thank you for the endless support and feedback in my first professional role. You made me feel capable and respected, while continuously pushing me to improve on personal, academic, and professional levels. I never once doubted that you had my best interests and wellbeing at heart.

To Stephanie Clemons-Thompson, thank you for showing me what it really means to stand up for what is right despite the risks. You demonstrated kind-hearted empathetic leadership I hope to emulate throughout my career.

To Jamie Paulson, thank you for taking me in for my practicum, and teaching me so much about educational data, their analysis and visualization, and the potential for quantitative work to effect organizational change.

To Amy Treboni, thank you for taking a chance on me. The job offer for Exploration Advising was a bright light at the end of a very long, depressive period of my life. Your belief in my potential was the springboard to every success I've had in my career, and I don't know where I would be without it.

To my first 'work family' in Exploration - Ericka, Kennetia, Sesan, Kathryn, Melissa, Nicole, Stephanie, Margaret, Deb, Courtney, Brian, Dominique, and Peter - thank you for making me feel so welcome, and creating the best office environment I've ever worked in. The sense of comfort and capability you helped foster allowed me to finally examine my life up to that point, and was a primary catalyst in realizing my need to transition.



To Shannon Peltier and Sarah Howard, thank you for all you do to support advisors, and for always being receptive to my questions or feedback. You are the backbones of this entire operation, and I'm grateful for the times we were able to collaborate.

To Cassie Kasler and the rest of the Workday Student team, thank you for being the smartest, most capable, take-no-bullshit women I have ever had the privilege to work with. I wouldn't have rather tackled the many (many!) roadblocks of that project with anyone else, and I consider it a privilege to have worked alongside you.

To Rachel Tuttle, thank you for remembering a conversation I had with you several years prior, and giving me a chance at my dream job. I expect to reach no higher honor in my career than having your trust to run HES. Thank you for being THE role-model of kindness in your work and life - the way you make others feel special and valued is something I hope to emulate throughout my life.



To Shalonda Makupson-Tilford, thank you for sharing a wall with me for 2.5 years, so I could bug you with questions, commiserate about the difficulties of our jobs, or just talk about our lives. This job wouldn't have been half as fun without having you as my ally.

To the EASE Team - Mary, Mike, Rachel, Stephanie, and Gianna - thank you for being so welcoming and kind. My predecessor set high expectations as a colleague and friend to you, but I never felt like a replacement. The EASE suite felt like a second home to me, thanks to the environment you all fostered.

To the HE Squad - Patrick, Kristen, Chris, Adithya, Michael, Ray, Greg, and Howard - thank you for going above and beyond, out of your way, and generally taking the more difficult path of trying to make the world a better place. You inspire me to build - connections, programs, and meaning - in spaces that otherwise foster

the status quo. You opened my eyes to an entire field of smart, dedicated people, working across the planet to prioritize human wellbeing over systems of profit and extraction.

To Cherish Vance, my comrade through an incredibly tumultuous semester in both our personal lives, thank you for your honesty and encouragement. I learned so much from working with you, especially how to bring students actively into the lesson plan, and overcome my own overthinking about how to lead lectures.

To Patrick Herak, my co-conspirator for student trivia, karaoke, and other UK shenanigans, thank you for reminding me that education can, and should, be fun. Your open-mindedness and continuous desire to improve your skills are an inspiration to me - I hope to never stagnate, become complacent, or overconfident in my abilities.

To every other colleague, work friend, acquaintance, passerby, or person I've had a fleeting conversation with, thank you for being part of this vibrant community, and such an important chapter of my life. I believe that meaning in life comes from our connections to others, so if we ever connected in some way, thank you, and I hope you feel empowered to make more connections with others in my absence.



To Yasmine, Debbie, and Zoe, thank you for caring, about your work and about me. For keeping my wild ideas in check, holding me accountable to my words, and sharing the responsibility of running HES. I am honored to have supervised such wonderful, kind, and dedicated young people, and I hope your work with me felt meaningful and worthwhile toward your future plans.

To all the students I've worked with, from RAs now deep into their own careers, to this past years' freshmen, thank you for everything. Know that learning is a lifelong process, but already as you are, you are more capable than you think, and that I've learned more from you than any teacher I've had. My final lesson to you: this world you know, that sometimes feels so oppressively complex, is constructed - built up by people, groups, and forces with vastly different motivations. YOU have just as much right to take part in that (de)construction as anyone who came before you, and I hope you can keep imagining different, better ways for this world to be.

ADA'S FAREWELL

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