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David Givens is a graduate student specializing in modern American religion in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Pittsburgh. His current research focuses on contemporary Christianity, religious group identity formation, and the intersections of religion and American politics. Givens is currently defending his MA thesis, "Shared Visions in Shared Space: Latino and Euro-American Identity Negotiation at Saint Regis Catholic Church."

All graduate students, perhaps especially those studying religion, are frequently asked what they hope to do when they finish their degree. Unfortunately, just about every answer to that question involves intense competition with other qualified candidates. To face this obstacle, finding innovative ways to better one's research and résumé is an integral part of the graduate experience. This pursuit has become even more necessary in light of the economic troubles plaguing the national and global economies. As job markets have shrunk in all sectors, the professional need to be both competitive and novel has never been more imminent.

When I entered my graduate program I was well aware of the uphill career path I had chosen, and I was determined to use all the tools at my disposal to improve both my mind and my work. In addition to the resources and advice offered by my professors and advisors, I also decided to invest time exploring the promises of technology to help me in my studies. Electronic resources have become staples of university life and work. Both the prominence of technology within academia and the competition in our field will likely continue to increase in the years to come.

With this in mind, now is a key time to investigate what useful online services are available to academics. After poring through university library websites and a host of online academic resources, I found five free, remotely hosted, up-and-coming websites with particular potential. These sites, all of which are still relatively new, include Academia.edu , inDegree.com , Acrobat.com

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[Mendeley.com](#)
, and
[GraduateJunction.com](#)
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These five sites generally do one of two things. [Academia](#) , [Mendeley](#) , [Acrobat](#) , and [Gradua teJunction](#)
all provide some measure of networking and file-sharing capabilities that are useful to individuals who produce high volumes of writing and research. Since they are all free (except for select features of
[Acrobat](#)
), researchers can pick whichever site suits them best.
[Mendeley](#)
and
[Acrobat](#)
are useful for sharing current or published research, while the more developed social networking capabilities of
[GraduateJunction](#)
and
[Academia](#)
are better suited to keeping colleagues involved in academic conversation and finding new peers with similar research interests. Lastly,
[inDegree](#)
is designed to connect employers to graduates and professionals, as well as to help universities keep track of their alumni.

These sites are tools that can facilitate academic conversations or complement collaborative research. While there is no silver bullet that will instantly make one a better graduate student or researcher, each of the programs listed here have specific benefits that can complement the reading, research, and synthesis of thoughts that make up the core of graduate life. [Mendeley](#) or
[Acrobat](#)
may be useful if you want to edit or review papers with a professor or advisor who frequently travels;
[Academia](#)
or
[GraduateJunction](#)
could be used to find new conversation partners in a particular subfield your interested in;
[inDegree](#)
is designed to be used if you are seeking a position that requires a graduate degree. Ultimately, these and similar sites are useful to the same extent as most other communications technology

— they help us connect and converse with one another in discourse relevant to our studies and objectives.

On a broader scale, programs such as the ones mentioned here represent the progression of a key component of academic life into a virtual forum. Whether one is presenting a lecture, talking with colleagues or students about one's ideas, or reading or writing a body of work, the constant in each situation is academic engagement and communication. These online resources enable this same dialogue and intellectual development, but experiment with doing so in new formats indicative of the twenty-first century.

At this point in time, one could easily have an illustrious and productive career without using these or other new research and communicative tools. But one of the most important aspects of graduate school is getting involved at the forefront of academic conversation. We need to be able to get feedback and advice on our own work while staying abreast of developments and publications in the field, and we are always looking for others who share our research and professional interests. With that in mind, the advent of sites like [Academia](#) , [inDegree](#) , [Acrobat](#) , [Mendeley](#) , and [GraduateJunction](#) is a modest but welcome addition to the scholarly tools available to us.