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# Back to School

It's never too late for an education. Enjoy these recent works of fiction set in the world of academia.

Bellow, Saul. **Ravelstein** (2000)

After penning a bestseller, brilliant professor Ravelstein (seemingly based on the late Allan Bloom) and his friend Chick travel to Paris, where they discuss mortality, philosophy, history, and friendship. On their return, the professor begins to suffer the effects of AIDS, and asks Chick to be his biographer.

Caldwell, Ian & Thomasan, Dustin. **The Rule of Four** (2004)

Two Princeton students struggle to discover the secrets of a Renaissance text. Their research is complicated by the fact that other researchers working on the riddle are being murdered off.

Carter, Stephen. **The Emperor of Ocean Park** (2003)

When law professor Talcott Garland's father, a judge, dies, Talcott tries to piece together his father's secret life and make sense of his father's mysterious final requests. He soon finds himself caught in a web of intrigue involving a former CIA agent, his law school colleagues, Mafia "uncles," and others.

Chabon, Michael. **Wonder Boys** (1995)

Grady Tripp and Terry Crabtree met in college, where they both determined to make their mark in literature. Grady is now a professor at a small Pennsylvania college. He's also a compulsive philanderer who's ruined three marriages, has a pill addiction and can't finish his novel. Terry is his irresponsible, sexually predatory editor. They're joined in their mischief by James, a talented but odd writing student, and a series of darkly comic misadventures follow.

Coatzee, J. M. **Disgrace** (1999)

David Lurie, a white, middle-aged professor at a South African university, has an affair with a coed. When the girl's parents demand his resignation, he withdraws to his daughter Lucy's farm. His fears about her living alone in the country are realized after they are attacked at the farm. Lurie struggles to understand the attack and Lucy's refusal to move from her remote home.



McCall Smith, Alexander. **The Portuguese Irregular Verbs** series  
**Portuguese Irregular Verbs** (2004)  
**The Finer Points of Sausage Dogs** (2004)  
**At the Villa of Reduced Circumstances** (2004)

This comic trilogy features Dr. Mortiz-Maria von Igefled, professor of philology at the Institute of Regensburg, and his never-ending quest to win the respect he feels is his due.

Perrotta, Tom. **Joe College** (2000)

Yale junior Danny spends semester breaks working at his father's lunch wagon. He has much to contend with over Spring break, including several romances, a turf war with New Jersey mobsters over the lunch truck's route, and finishing Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

Prose, Francine. **Blue Angel** (2000)

A married Vermont writing professor becomes entranced by his most talented student. Angela, the pierced, aggressive student, wants Ted show her work to his editor, who declines to read it. Angela's novel (about a young girl who becomes involved with a teacher) is troubling—is Angela entrapping him to conduct research for her book?

Rogers, Thomas. **Jerry Engels: a Novel** (2005)

Set in the early 1950s, this novel follows a 21-year-old Penn State student as he chases women and gets into one awkward situation after another. When he becomes smitten with a divorced English teacher, their unlikely courtship threatens to settle him down.

Roth, Phillip. **The Human Stain** (2000)

71-year-old Coleman Silk, a distinguished professor at a small New England college, has lost his position because of a perceived racial slur. He loses his wife and friends, and begins an affair with a 34-year-old illiterate janitor at the college. On top of all this, Silk is revealed to have a surprising secret that's caused him to live a lie his whole life.

Russo, Richard. **The Straight Man** (1997)

Hank Devereaux Jr. is the interim chair of a squabbling English department at a small college. Budget cuts ensue, and Hank refuses to prepare a list of expendable professors. Instead, he jokes on television that he will kill the campus geese until his budget is restored. When a goose is acutally killed, Hank becomes the prime suspect. Meanwhile, he struggles with family issues and the ghost of his late father, a well-respected academic to whom he can never measure up.

Sittenfeld, Curtis. **Prep: a Novel** (2005)

Indiana teen Lee Fiora wins a scholarship to a prestigious Boston prep school and finds her sense self rudely challenged. At 24, she recounts her experiences and lessons learned.

Wolfe, Tom. **I Am Charlotte Simmons** (2004)

A naive college freshman from backwoods North Carolina begins her studies at the fictional Dupont University, and gets quite an awakening. Wolfe conducted research at Stanford and Michigan on what he clearly considers the outrageous behavior of today's students.

