



## Where the Jobs Are (and Aren't)

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WASHINGTON -- The field of political science is sometimes criticized as being too theoretical and not focused enough on real world problems. While there is still plenty of talk of theory and simulation at this year's annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, the overall theme is very much about the real world: "The Politics of Hard Times." There are sessions on hard times and the developing world, hard times in North America, courts and hard times, migration and hard times, national interest and hard times, and more.

But no list of those experiencing hard times would be complete -- at least at a meeting where many grad students are looking for jobs -- without one more "hard times" panel: "Hard Times and Ph.D.s."

The reason for the session? Andrea Louise Campbell, associate professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said that hard times are affecting "every aspect of our lives" and many graduate students are "freaking out." The information presented here might not have relieved the audience members, many of whom were clearly anxious graduate students. But the message from the speakers was that while the job market is tighter than anyone would like, in particular for tenure-track jobs, the overwhelming majority of new Ph.D.s in the field are finding employment. The key shifts are that more of those jobs are off the tenure track or outside academe.

The latter trend is viewed by many as a good thing -- and much of the session was devoted to having political science Ph.D.s who are working outside academe offer tips on such career paths. But the session also revealed tensions over such choices, with some political scientists wary of making such a leap and some of those outside of academe not necessarily viewing academic credentials with as much respect as one might want to see.

Those arriving for the APSA annual meeting knew coming in that jobs weren't going to be plentiful. The association said last month that [the number of openings for assistant professors was 445 during the 2009-10 academic year](#), down from 716 just two years earlier.

Sean Twombly, director of member services for the association, presented some new data on another way to examine the job market -- placement records of graduate departments, using those who were on the market in 2009 as the focus. Of departments reporting data on the nearly 1,000 new Ph.D.s on the market that year, all but 4 percent were employed, but only 48 percent were employed in permanent academic positions. Another 21 percent held adjunct jobs and 11 percent won postdocs.

One of the more dramatic differences in the pool was that 16 percent took positions outside academe, up from 10 percent in the last such survey, in 2002. (Many people seeking graduate training for political science-related work enter master's programs in public policy, so academic careers have been the norm for those pursuing doctorates.)

Among the other notable shifts were that far more people went on the market only when they had their Ph.D.s in hand (83 percent, compared to 63 percent), and the share of those doing repeat searches from the previous year was down (30 percent, compared to 42 percent).

Those subfields most likely to result in permanent academic positions were American politics and public policy, while those least likely were political philosophy and international politics (excluding for both highs and lows for those subfields that are so small they didn't

have at least 20 people each on the market).

James A. Stimson, a professor of political science and graduate placement director at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, reinforced those data with anecdotal evidence from his recent graduates. He said that his department's 2009 cohort started out with the year "looking like a disaster" and everyone ended up employed -- just with many of the jobs coming through later in the cycle than would have been desirable. So far, he said, 2010 "looks like a normal year."

Stimson strongly backed the trend of political science graduate students holding back -- and not going out on the market until they were making real progress on their dissertations. "Whatever job you could get will be less than the job you could get the next year," he said. At North Carolina, he said, his department has a specific rule and works with students on jobs only after they have written and had approved one analytic chapter of their dissertations.

He said that, in his experience, those who have not done so "give lousy job talks" because they have not really thought through all of the issues they will cover. Inevitably, he said, when someone hasn't written a chapter and has that work grilled by a committee, during the job talk someone will pose a question along the lines of, "Have you thought about this issue?" only to have the person say, "Oh, I haven't thought about that yet." When writing and answering committee members, "you confront all the questions," he said.

Those reviewing a job talk will forgive someone who answered a question in a different way than they would have, but they are harsh on anyone who hasn't thought through an issue they thought about during the presentation, Stimson said. He added that while he personally believes that search committees give too much weight to job talks, he believes that isn't going to change -- and that candidates aren't wise to go on the market until their work is at a stage that allows them to be truly effective in a campus visit.

#### Outside Academe

Much of the presentation was devoted to a group of political scientists who have had successful careers in government agencies and the lobbying world, talking about how to prepare for such jobs. The various speakers sounded enthusiastic about their careers and several made a point of saying that their agencies are hiring new Ph.D.s now -- so jobs are available.

While the reports were optimistic, these political scientists warned the doctoral students about choices they might have to make if they leave academe. Edward Kutler, a lobbyist who was Newt Gingrich's chief adviser on health care when he was speaker of the House of Representatives, said that academics tend to be more tolerant than are lobbyists or politicians of those who evaluate candidates and issues one by one, without party loyalty. "The uniform you wear matters," he said. "People will want to know: Are you a Republican or a Democrat?"

Roy T. Myers, a professor of political science at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, warned the grad students about another problem: too much advocacy. Myers worked for the Congressional Budget Office after earning his Ph.D. and before he moved to UMBC. He said that some of his analyses offended various lawmakers, who didn't want him to advocate solutions to various issues, but only to report on them rather dryly. Academics moving into government need to be ready to "be ignored, rejected or even subject to retribution," he said.

During the question-and-answer period, several exchanges pointed to lingering cultural gaps between academic departments training political scientists and those entities that might hire them. One woman from a government agency said that she loves to hire political science Ph.D.s, but is frustrated when so many discussions lead to statements like: "My adviser really wants me to become a professor. Am I selling out?"

The woman with jobs from a government agency asked, "How can we move beyond that, and understand that we are all political scientists?"

Others in the audience suggested that there are real biases from those who are considering hiring a Ph.D. One said that someone who interviewed her remarked on her move from academe and said, "You know you have to come in every day, right?"

— Scott Jaschik