



# PREPARING FOR THE ACADEMIC JOB SEARCH

The published accounts sound promising: for the first time in years, the academic job market is starting to look a little brighter. Can Ph.D.s finally expect more tenure-track job offers?

Not exactly, says Andrew Green, Ph.D. career counselor at UC Berkeley's Career Center. Though statistical evidence indicates greater job availability—a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports employment ads in many tight fields are up 13 to 28 percent—placement figures for graduates in most departments remain relatively unchanged. If anything, new graduates must get in line behind those who have been awaiting their chance for several years already.

"There's still a huge pool of people who have either part-time jobs or visiting jobs, who have their Ph.D.s and some publications, who are applying for those jobs," Green explains.

"There's also a large pool of very talented people who took positions at places that weren't their first choice and are looking to trade up, so to speak."

All is not hopeless, however. Green suggests several ways in which doctoral students can be competitive in the academic job market before they even apply for an opening.

## • LOOK OVER JOB ADS IN THE SCHOLARLY JOURNALS OF YOUR FIELD.

With the job market tight, a candidate's flexibility can make a difference to a committee. Oftentimes, Green says, graduates will not be teaching courses only in their subject of specialization. "Students need to figure out how to take their tree and contextualize it in the broader forest," Green says. "People hire for forests, they don't hire for trees."

A student who sees how jobs are

categorized and, by extension, what courses fall under those positions, can try and teach classes in those areas while still in the doctoral program. Green himself taught a wide array of political science courses as a graduate student to give himself as broad a background in his field as possible.

With only 50 to 60 major research universities hiring professors to teach exclusively in their area of specialization, students may do well to tailor their resumes to the hundreds of liberal arts and state schools around the country. "These can be very fulfilling places to work, but they're not going to be willing to hire someone who looks and sounds and acts like they can just teach South Korean auto industry," Green says.

## • APPLICATION MATERIALS SHOULD SPEAK TO A SPECIFIC INSTITUTION.

Search committees quickly figure out who's taken the time to learn about their school and the department, Green says. Candidates who show they understand the expectations of a department and are ready to meet its challenges will be considered more seriously than those who pitch their materials to a major university and simply send the same packet to smaller schools.

Green cites a recent conversation he had with a woman who teaches physics at a respected liberal arts college in Massachusetts. The professor told Green that the committees on which she served looked at people who emphasized teaching and wanted close relationships with their students, important for a school with small class sizes.

They also sought applicants who had considered integrating undergraduates into their research in ways appropriate to undergraduate skill levels but capable of yielding publishable science.

With limited funds for research, smaller colleges seek candidates who are capable of pursuing their work in creative ways, Green explains.

It requires little effort to learn more about the university or college offering a position. Green says many useful materials are readily available on a school's Web site—mission statements, course descriptions, departmental pages, faculty profiles. All can help an applicant consider ways he or she can contribute to the particular institution.

## • PREPARE FOR THE SCHOOL WHERE YOU'D LIKE TO TEACH.

Although there's no guarantee students will get an interview with their first choice of schools, they can obtain at least basic qualifications to help them stay competitive. Green encourages graduate students to consider what type of academic environment they'd feel satisfied working in and prepare their application materials accordingly. Students wishing to teach at a big research university, for example, should have CVs emphasizing published articles, papers presented at major conferences, fellowships, and teaching experience. Similarly, students interested in colleges where teaching is at least 50 percent of the work, should demonstrate a fair amount of experience.

"A good rule of thumb is, the more the institution you're applying for diverges from Berkeley, the more elaboration you have to provide in terms of your teaching. If you're applying to Michigan, they'll assume you can teach because teaching there is the same format as here. They want to know if you have research potential. If you're applying to Purdue or Cal State Hayward, where research matters but not as much as teaching, they'll want to know up front the extent of your teaching experience and what that experience has yielded in terms of your skills and abilities as a teacher."

Green also recommends that students who teach a class invite a profes-

sor to sit in to observe occasionally. Letters of reference from faculty that speak firsthand to a student's classroom performance are more meaningful than those simply stating that the student would make an excellent teacher, Green says.

**• KEEP AN OPEN MIND.**

Many students pass up job openings based on pre-conceived notions of the institution's geographical location, Green says. While not every community boasts the Bay Area's diverse cultural offerings, many college towns across the United States share things in common with Berkeley. It's perfectly legitimate to ask questions about an institution's environment when speaking to a search committee, Green says. "They want you to view them as a desirable place, so ask the questions that matter to you."

There also are trade-offs to consider. "Maybe you'll have to give up 60

choices of Thai food, but on the other hand maybe you'll be able to afford a three-bedroom house," Green says.

Some students may decide relocating is not worth the cost of uprooting families or the loss of career opportunities for a partner. In such cases, Green says, there's plenty of satisfying work to do with a Ph.D. if teaching opportunities aren't readily available. "It's really about how a given individual uses the trade-offs involved," he says.

**• PREPARE A STRONG JOB TALK.**

"By the time you've got an on-campus interview, you've survived a winnowing process that may have gone from 350 applicants down to four," Green says. Unfortunately, after having come so far, many doctoral students end up giving "dreadful" presentations.

Notes Green, "Sometimes people will only get one or two interviews a year. And this is the first time they're giving a job talk?"

Doctoral candidates can prepare themselves for the critical moment by presenting a paper at least once during their program. Green suggests students give a paper at a regional conference or one of the campus centers, or even ask the professors they assist if they can lecture for one class. Good practice in advance will ensure candidates do their best at "the most important talk" of a job search.

**• DON'T EQUATE SUCCESS ON THE JOB MARKET WITH SELF-WORTH.**

A successful job search can have as much to do with luck or timing as experience, Green says. Just because a student does not get an interview or a job offer does not mean he or she isn't qualified. "With so many great candidates, if students are not getting jobs or interviews, it may have nothing to do with their ability," he says. At the same time, if two years have passed without any interview opportunities, students should take another look at their materials and talk to their faculty advisers or to Green himself.

To schedule a counseling session with Green, call 642-5207, e-mail [aegre@uclink4.berkeley.edu](mailto:aegre@uclink4.berkeley.edu), or drop by the Career Center at 2111 Bancroft Way. Green updates his Web site ([career.berkeley.edu](http://career.berkeley.edu)) regularly with handy advice and notices of upcoming workshops. This information can be found under "Specialized Programs: PhDs/Postdocs."

**AVERAGE FACULTY SALARIES IN SELECTED FIELDS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS, 1998-99**

DISCIPLINE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
Business Administration and Management	\$64,202	\$63,242
Cell and Molecular Biology	60,022	59,631
Chemistry	56,808	54,427
Communications	49,189	46,442
Computer and Information Sciences	62,784	55,983
Education	52,301	47,666
Engineering (general)	76,655	77,721
English Language and Literature (general)	50,269	49,478
Foreign Languages and Literatures	49,503	48,988
History	53,207	53,783
Mathematics	55,156	53,184
Psychology (general)	55,633	51,748
Social Work	50,880	47,147
Visual and Performing Arts	53,629	47,158
<b>AVERAGE SALARIES</b>	<b>\$56,446</b>	<b>\$54,043</b>

**Note:** The salaries shown are averages for all ranks combined. The figures are based on reports covering faculty members at public four-year colleges and universities and private four-year institutions. The figures cover full-time faculty members on 9- or 10-month contracts.

**Source:** College and University Personnel Association (*The Chronicle of Higher Education: Facts & Figures*, May 28, 1999)

**THE GRADUATE**

Published semiannually by  
The Graduate Division  
325 Sproul Hall  
University of California  
Berkeley, California 94720-5900  
(510) 643-7358  
[gradpub@uclink4.berkeley.edu](mailto:gradpub@uclink4.berkeley.edu)  
[www.grad.berkeley.edu/grad/](http://www.grad.berkeley.edu/grad/)

Joseph Cerny, Dean  
Mary Meikle, Management Services Officer  
Lisa Harrington, Editor  
Elizabeth Babalis, Writer  
Mary Engel, Contributing Writer  
Arnold Yip, Publications Coordinator

Copyright © 1999 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.