

The Job Market for Political Scientists in 1998: The Good News and The Bad

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Ph.D. political science departments reported an overall placement rate of 71% for 1998. That is good news, inasmuch as it indicates that 1998 job candidates found work at about the same rate as their predecessors. In addition, the percentage of jobs available in Ph.D. programs has held fairly steady at 40% over the last 10 years. The bad news, or at least a portion of it, is that just under 30% of those with advanced degrees in political science do not find employment in a typical year, and nearly a third (31%) of those who do find work accept temporary positions. As a consequence, the job search is made more difficult for new entrants to the political science marketplace as a substantial proportion of the un-, irregularly, and underemployed job candidates from previous classes continue or resume their job searches; in 1998, 43% of job seekers were "repeat customers." Also confounding the success of political science job candidates in 1998 was an unexpectedly low demand for new faculty in M.A. departments, and the continued de-

cline in demand by undergraduate-only departments.

The data presented in this article come from APSA's annual placement survey of Ph.D.-granting departments of political science. During the fall of each year, APSA sends out surveys to all doctoral departments, asking for information on the placement class of the previous year. In 1999, 87 departments (70%) provided information on their 1998 placement candidates. Despite repeated followups, 44 departments did not return surveys, making this report somewhat less than fully representative of the experiences of all 1998 political science job seekers.

Table 1 shows the basic demographic profile of the 1998 placement class. There were 955 job seekers, of whom 820 were U.S. citizens. The majority were men (68%), and individuals with Ph.D.s in hand constituted three-fifths of the placement class. Even though ABDs find jobs at a much lower rate than Ph.D.s, many still go on the market each year. American government and public law scholars made up 30% of

the class, with comparativists (27%) making up the next largest cohort.

Over the last 10 years, the number of job candidates has risen substantially (with some variation in the trend), but the overall placement rate has remained fairly constant. Any fluctuations in the latter ratio can likely be accounted for by the varying response rate of Ph.D. departments. The proportion of candidates on the job market for at least a second year decreased slightly from 1997, but is much higher than in 1988.

Table 3 shows several important trends. First, nonacademic placements have almost doubled, rising from 8% to 15%, over the last 10 years. Second, the number of hires by M.A. and undergraduate departments has fallen sharply since 1988. Finally, postdoctoral placement, which we only began tracking in 1997, held steady at 6%. It is important to note that postdoctoral scholars hold temporary positions of widely varying prestige and compensation.

TABLE 1
Profile of 1998 Placement Class (N = 955)

Citizenship	U.S. Citizens (n = 820)	86%	Non-U.S. Citizens (n = 135) ^a	14%
	White (n = 706)	74%	Permanent Resident	3%
	Minority (n = 87)	11%	Nonpermanent Resident	10%
	—African American	6%		
	—Latina/o	3%		
	—Asian American	1%		
	—Native American	1%		
	Other (n = 26)	3%		
Gender	Women (n = 267)	32%	Men (n = 553)	68%
Degree	Ph.D. (n = 594)	62%	ABD (n = 358)	38%
Fields	American Government/Public Law	30%	Public Policy	3%
	Comparative Politics	27%	Public Administration	2%
	International Relations	21%	Methodology	1%
	Political Theory	14%	Other	1%

^aPercentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2
Trends in Placement

	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1992	1990	1988
Number of Job Candidates	955	1112	984	799	1037	763	823	740
% of Overall Placement Success	71	70	65	72	69	74	72	69
% of Candidates Repeating Job Search	43	46	46	41	40	33	32	32
% of Ph.D.'s in Placement Class	62	58	57	56	59	59	59	64
% of Women in Placement Class	32	28	29	28	27	30	26	25

Note: Response rates to APSA placement survey of U.S. Ph.D.-granting political science departments vary by year. 1998: 87 departments (70% response rate); 1997: 105 (81%); 1996: 97 (76%); 1995: 95 (73%); 1994: 106 (81%); 1992: 110 (87%); 1990: 118 (93%); 1988: 115 (92%).

TABLE 3
Placement by Type of Hiring Institutions, 1990–98 (%)

	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1992	1990	1988
Ph.D. Department	40	24	40	39	42	45	41	40
MA Department	11	14	16	16	14	11	16	17
Undergrad Department	25	29	29	30	31	31	32	33
Two Year College	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Non-Academic	15	15	13	13	11	10	10	8
Post-Doc	6	6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Don't Know ^a	0	9	—	—	—	—	—	—

^aThe number is 0 due to the rounding off of percentages.

TABLE 4
Placement Experience of 1998 Political Science Doctoral Students, by Gender, Ethnicity, and Citizenship (%)

	U.S. Citizens N = 820						Non-US Citizens N = 135	
	All U.S. Citizens		Minority Candidates				Men N = 100	Women N = 35
	Men N = 553	Women N = 267	African American N = 47	Latino N = 23	Asian American N = 9	Native American N = 8		
Placement Class	67	33	6	3	1	0.8	74	26
Repeating	50	37	26	43	22	37	32	20
PhD	63	60	38	57	78	75	67	54
ABD	37	40	62	43	22	25	33	46
Placed	71	73	79	70	67	63	73	83
Place w/PhD	52	51	36	43	56	38	56	51
—Perm. Position	29	29	21	22	22	40	14	14
—Temp. Position	21	18	13	22	22	27	15	17
—Outside U.S.	2	4	2	0	11	0	27	20
Place w/ABD	19	21	43	26	11	20	17	31
—Perm. Position	7	9	23	9	11	15	5	20
—Temp. Position	12	10	19	17	0	0	9	9
—Outside U.S.	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	3
Not Placed	26	22	17	22	44	37	20	17
Unknown	2	3	2	4	0	0	5	0

TABLE 5
Placement Success, 1988–98 (%)

	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1992	1990
Overall % of Candidates Who Were Placed	71	70	65	72	69	74	72
% of those placed with a Ph.D	84	80	77	85	82	79	78
% of those placed with a ABD	53	53	49	56	50	66	63
% of those placed who are Men	72	68	62	72	67	73	73
% of those placed who are Women	74	73	70	71	74	75	70
% of Candidates Placed in Temporary Positions	31	33	29	34	29	32	21
Men	31	33	30	36	29	34	NA
Women	28	32	26	31	29	38	NA

Women in the 1998 Placement Class

Overall, women seem to be doing marginally better than they were a decade ago. As Table 2 shows, the percentage of women in the placement class has gradually increased over the past 10 years to 32%. This proportion has fluctuated over time, but has tended upwards.

Table 4 presents information about the placement class by gender, ethnicity, and citizenship. Though there are still twice as many men as women on the political science job market, gender does not seem to affect placement, at least among U.S. citizens. Seventy-one percent of the U.S. males found jobs, while 73% of U.S. females did. Encouragingly, three-fourths (74%) of all the women in the 1998 placement class found employment (see Table 5) and fewer women found it necessary to accept temporary positions in 1998 than in any year since 1988.

Minorities in the 1998 Placement Class

In 1998, 11% of U.S. citizens in the placement class were minorities: 6% were African American, 3% were Latina/o, 1% were Asian American, and 0.8% were Native American (see Table 1). By percentages, African Americans had the most success among members of the 1998 placement class; 79% found jobs. Latina/os found jobs at rates comparable to whites. Asians had the lowest placement rate among identified groups (see Table 4). Three percent of the placement class were identified only as "other."

The other category is not included in the minority figures.

Conclusions

Though 70% or so of political science job seekers consistently find some kind of employment each year, two-fifths of them find only temporary employment and about 30% do not find work at all. Over the last decade, an average of 81% of those placed each year have had Ph.D.s, while just over half of the ABDs on the market find employment in any given year. Many job searches are taking two or more placement "seasons," and many more candidates are opting for nonacademic jobs. What can we do to increase the proportion of students placed in permanent positions?

- We need to ensure that students understand the market and realize that going out too early and without the Ph.D. in hand is not generally a good tactic and leads to multiple years of possibly frustrating, and expensive, job searching.
- Students should be encouraged to attend conferences and workshops and to publish. More and more students on the job market have publications, making the job market increasingly competitive.
- Students need to start career planning early and must remain open to a variety of opportunities. Diversification in fields of study and ranges of skills can make students more appealing candidates for an academic job and could also help a student land a nonfaculty position.

Additional information on placement is available via APSANet

<www.apsanet.org/jobsplc/placement>

Tables on web site include:

- Placement Success (1988–98)
- Placement Success by Gender
- Placement Success of Minorities
- Placement Success by Field of Study (1990–98)
- Placement of Candidates in Different Fields of Study by Gender, Citizenship, and Ethnicity
- Distribution of Jobs According to Candidate's Field of Specialization (1990–98)
- Placement of Candidates in Academic and Non-Academic Jobs by Gender, Citizenship, and Ethnicity
- Placement by Type of Hiring Institution (1990–98)
- Placement Experience of 1998 doctoral Students by their Status of Repeating the Job Search
- Plans of 1998 Doctoral Candidates Not Placed in U.S. Institutions
- Ph.D. Departments' Evaluation of Placement
- Non-U.S. Citizens in 1998 Placement Class by Field
- Country of Origin of all Non-U.S. Placement Candidates
- Number of First Listings in PSN

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