

# Moving Toward Recovery:

## Findings from the 2010 Job Bank Survey

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### KEY FINDINGS

- There was a 32 percent increase in assistant and open rank faculty positions advertised, a sharp turnaround from declines experienced in 2009;
- Yet, total openings for these types of positions remain below historic averages and did not fully recoup the declines experienced during 2009;
- The number of new PhDs declined sharply (23 percent) between 2008 and 2009, most likely because of students delaying completion;
- 80 percent of advertised positions yielded a new faculty hire, down slightly from the 83 percent observed in 2009;
- Just over half (53.6 percent) of advertisements for assistant and open rank faculty positions were placed by research and doctoral institutions;
- There are several notable mismatches between the fields of interest of graduate students and the fields in which departmental searches are most common.

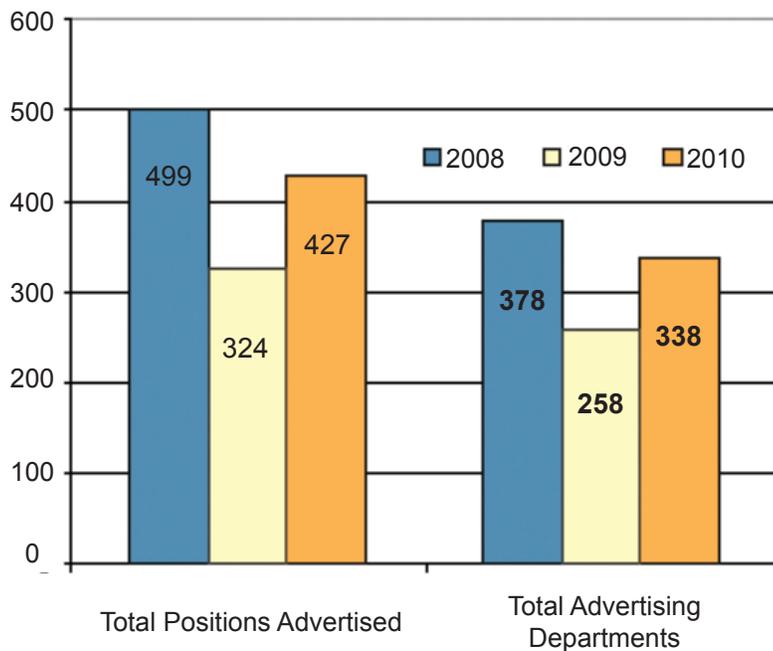
In 2009 we saw a dramatic decline of 35 percent in the number of assistant and open rank faculty positions advertised in the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Job Bank, the major source of job listings for the discipline (although not all jobs available to sociologists are listed). Likewise, there was a dramatic 32 percent decline in the number of departments advertising these positions (Spalter-Roth, Jacobs, and Scelza 2010).

By 2010, the job market in sociology appears to have bottomed out and a recovery seems to have begun. The number of assistant and open rank positions advertised in 2010 increased 32 percent, while the number of advertising departments increased 31 percent (see Figure 1). This growth is a cause for some optimism among sociologists seeking positions as assistant professors, although the "overhang" of unplaced or under-placed scholars will likely continue to make the job market challenging for newly-minted PhDs for several years to come. Fewer academic positions for new PhDs were advertised last year (calendar year 2009) than there were new PhDs, with a ratio of 0.70 jobs per new PhD. For calendar year 2010

there was about 1.2 jobs listed for each sociologist receiving a PhD in 2009 (the last year for which data is available). However, part of the increase in jobs per person is the result of a decline in the number of new PhDs (which dropped from 477 in 2008 to 368 in 2009). This decline of 23 percent most likely represents a strategy of students delaying the completion of their degree in hopes of improvements in the job market. In contrast to the increase in academic jobs, there was a 16 percent decline in the number of non-academic jobs. The largest share of these positions is post-doctoral fellowships, followed by jobs in applied settings (see Table 1). The share of assistant professor or open rank jobs advertised by either stand-alone sociology departments or joint sociology departments remained constant at about 62 percent, with the rest of the advertisements for these positions placed by departments outside of sociology, not all of whom hired sociologists.

The increase in the percentage of academic positions advertised in the ASA Job Bank occurred in other humanities and social science disciplines as well. However, the 35 percent increase in jobs for assistant

**Figure 1: Assistant & Open Rank Faculty Positions Advertised, 2008 - 2010<sup>1</sup>**



Source: ASA Survey of Academic Employers, 2009 and 2010.  
<sup>1</sup> Excludes foreign institutions.

professors in sociology is higher than those reported for two other disciplines for which specific figures are available. The American Political Science Association reported a 15 percent increase in advertisements for assistant professors in its job listings (Jaschick 2011). The American Historical Association reported a 21 percent increase in all positions over the same period last year (Schmidt 2011) in contrast to the previous year, which was described as “the worst year ever.”

## THE JOB MARKET SURVEY

This is the third survey of the job market done by the ASA research department (see [Too Many or Too Few PhDs? Employment Opportunities in Academic Sociology](#) for findings from the 2008 survey and [Still a Down Market: Findings From the 2009/2010 Job Bank Survey](#) for findings from the 2009 survey). The intent of these surveys is to determine whether departments that advertised academic jobs conducted successful searches, whether those positions went unfilled and for what reason, and how searches varied by institutional characteristics. This year for the first time we also matched the frequency of the specialty areas for which departments sought applicants

and the frequency of specialty areas chosen by student ASA members who were perspective PhD candidates with a master’s degree. The coding categories were based on “areas of special interest” listed on the ASA membership form.

We employed the previous year’s short questionnaire and sent it to contacts at each of the 338 departments or schools that posted an advertisement for at least one assistant professor or open rank position in the ASA Job Bank in calendar year 2010. Many of these advertisements were for jobs that began in the fall of 2011. The survey was administered through Qualtrics, which allows respondents to respond online. We sent the survey to two contact people in each department, usually the chair and the person who had placed the job advertisement. We followed up with three reminders, and then attempted to contact non-

responding departments via telephone. This year the response rate was substantially lower than in the previous year (71 percent compared to 91 percent), with significant variation in response rates by type of department and type of institution. This lower response rate may be because we started the survey later in the year when more department chairs may have been on vacation. The tables presented in this research brief limit counts and outcomes to those jobs available in the United States.

## Job Counts

Table 1 shows the full count of jobs available in the U.S. advertised in the ASA Job Bank in 2010. The 427 academic jobs that new PhDs could potentially fill (including assistant, open rank and unspecified rank) constituted nearly 9 out of 10 of all faculty positions advertised in the ASA Job Bank during 2010. The assistant professor position is clearly the principal portal for entry into academic careers. Assistant professors may be more attractive to colleges and universities because of their lower salaries and the energy and focus they bring in anticipation of the tenure-review process. It may also be the case that some higher ranked faculty recruitment is not fully

reflected in the ASA advertisements because these are not completely open searches. As noted above, the number of academic jobs potentially available to new PhDs increased by 32 percent compared to those advertised in 2009. If we count non-U.S. advertisements for assistant professors, open rank, and unspecified rank academic positions (including those in Canada) there were an additional 44 positions advertised.

**Table 1: Positions Advertised by U.S. Institutions in 2010<sup>1</sup>**

Type of Position	Total Advertised
<b>Academic</b>	<b>482</b>
Instructor/Lecturer	37
Assistant Professor	303
Associate Professor	6
Full Professor	2
Open/Multiple Rank	125
Unspecified Rank	9
<b>Nonacademic</b>	<b>212</b>
Sociological Practice	80
Postdoc/Fellowship	88
Other Academic (Admin)	41
Multiple Position Types	3
<b>Total Positions Advertised</b>	<b>694</b>

Source: ASA Survey of Academic Employers, 2010.

<sup>1</sup> Total positions advertised may be higher than shown due to many recruiters placing advertisements in 2010 for an unspecified multiple number of openings.

**Table 2: Assistant and Open Rank Faculty Positions Advertised in 2010<sup>1</sup>**

	Total Departments		Total Jobs	
	N	%	N	%
Respondents	239	71	304	71
Non-Respondents	99	29	123	29
<b>All Departments</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: ASA Survey of Academic Employers, 2009 and 2010.

<sup>1</sup> Excludes foreign institutions.

Almost all of an additional 212 non-academic jobs or post-doctorates were likely available to new PhDs. If these positions are added to the academic positions then there would be about 1.7 jobs available for each new PhD (Of course this does not count the number of PhDs from prior years that did not find jobs that matched their interests, those who took one-year positions the year prior, or who completed post doctorates in previous years.)

### Response Rates

Table 2 shows the number of assistant and open rank faculty positions advertised in 2011 by departments that responded versus departments that did not respond to the survey. Responding departments advertised more than 70 percent of all jobs.

Table 3 includes two units of analyses, departments and jobs. The response rate for each type of unit of analysis is similar, because most departments advertised only one job. Freestanding sociology departments advertised the most jobs. These departments also had the highest response rates (86 percent). The second largest number of departments and job advertisements were from non-sociology departments, including criminal justice, government and public affairs, international studies, cultural and ethnic studies, and communication. They also include schools of business, in which sociologists are often hired to teach courses such as organizational analysis. Non-sociology departments or schools likely advertised their jobs in other disciplinary job banks along with the ASA Job Bank. These departments had significantly lower response rates than did sociology or joint departments (at 52 percent). Joint sociology departments (most often coupled with anthropology or criminal justice) placed substantially fewer ads than non-sociology departments, but had a substantially higher response rate (76 percent). Although there has been a decline in the response rate since 2009, the 2010 response rate is substantially higher than other disciplines (for example, economics had a 43 percent response rate to its latest survey).

The remainder of the findings presented in this brief is limited to the 71 percent of departments that responded to the Job Bank Survey, providing us with information about 304 of the 427 jobs advertised.

**Table 3: Assistant and Open Rank Faculty Positions Advertised in 2010 by Type of Department <sup>1</sup>**

Type of Department	Departments		Jobs	
	Total Departments Placing Advertisements	Response Rate (%)	Total Jobs Advertised	Jobs Advertised by Responding Departments (%)
Freestanding Sociology	133	86	167	87
Joint Sociology	75	76	91	77
Non-sociology	126	52	165	53
Unknown Type	4	25	4	25
<b>All Departments</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>71</b>

Source: ASA Survey of Academic Employers, 2009 and 2010.

<sup>1</sup> Excludes foreign institutions.

### The Job Search Process

Searches were conducted for 99 percent of the assistant and open rank positions in departments that responded to the survey, for a total of 300 searches about which we have information. This percentage was about the same as for the previous year, but the percentage of successful searches in which a candidate was hired was somewhat lower than in 2009 (80 percent versus 86 percent). However, the percent of successful searches were substantially higher in both years than in 2008 (69 percent). In 2010, the percentage of jobs that were canceled after the search began was relatively low, but not as low as in the prior year (7 percent compared to 4 percent). Table 4 shows the 2010 figures. Although slightly lower than the previous year, in 2010, fully 8 out of 10 jobs ended successfully, with the hiring of a candidate.

### Jobs Filled

The academic job market is a multi-step process that includes beginning a search, bringing in candidates for interviews, making job offers, and filling positions. We also asked hiring departments whether the position was filled at the assistant rank, and for the first time, whether a sociologist was hired. Figure 2 illustrates this process and shows the attrition at each stage. Not all schools conduct searches for advertised positions, often because the positions are canceled or the search is suspended. Not all searches yield a

consensus candidate. Not all candidates accept an offer. And, not all successful searches result in the hiring of sociologists. Given the multiplicity of stages that take place before a hire is made, it is unrealistic to expect that 100 percent of advertisements will translate into hires. During 2010, the overall yield rate (hires/advertisements) for assistant professor or open hire positions and the yield for job searches (hires/

**Table 4: Searches Conducted by Departments in 2010 (Responding Departments Only)**

	N	%
<b>Total Jobs Advertised by Responding Departments</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Searches Conducted</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>99</b>
Successful	244	80
Later Canceled or Suspended	22	7
Not Filled for Other Reasons	29	10
Not Filled for Reasons Unknown	6	2
<b>Searches Not Conducted</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Search Conducted, but Hiring Status Not Given</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

Source: ASA Survey of Academic Employers, 2009 and 2010.

searches) were both approximately 8 out of 10. The yield was slightly lower than in 2009 when the overall yield rate was 8.2 out of 10, and yield for job searches was approximately 8.6 out of 10.

The highest rate of slippage in the job search process was between the job offer and the job acceptance, with 89 percent of offers made resulting in candidates hired. This percentage was slightly lower than in the previous year (93 percent). Of the 244 successful searches in 2010, about 82 percent were filled by sociologists. This number may be an overestimate since the response rate for jobs outside of sociology departments was only 52 percent, and these departments are probably less likely to hire sociologists. For example, as one chair of a criminal justice department explained,

*We actually advertised for three criminal justice assistant professor positions. All three positions have been filled, and one of the three new assistant professors is a sociologist.*

In some cases, sociologists were the preferred hire but did not accept the job. Another chair stated:

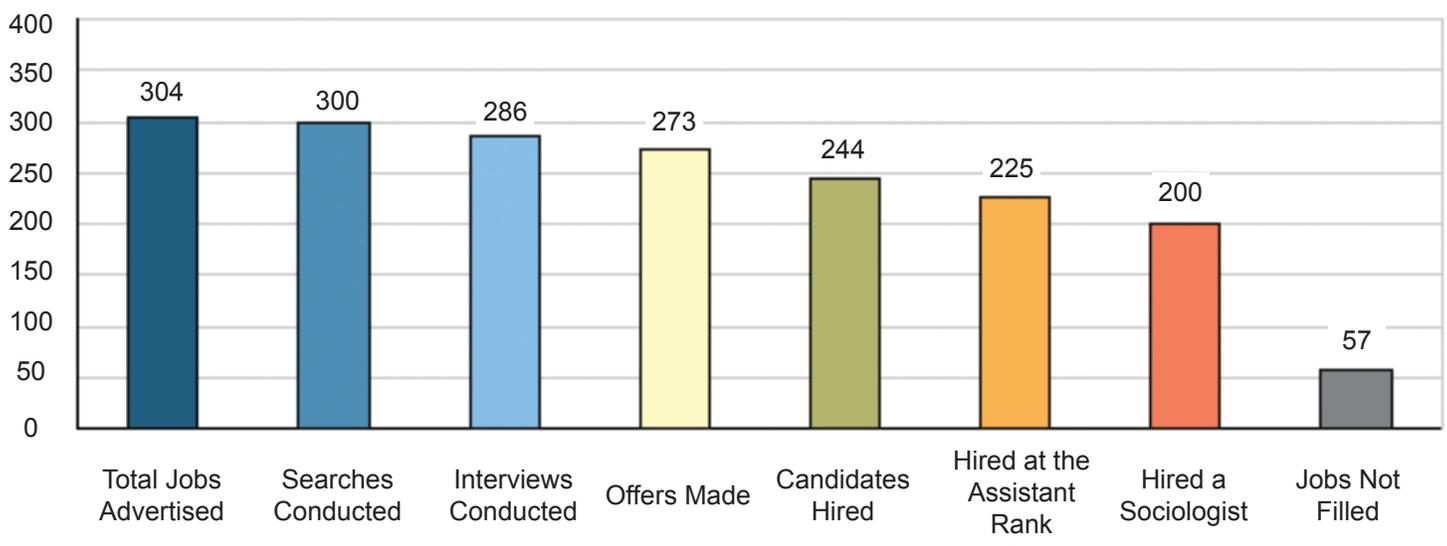
*A sociologist was the top choice for the position and a letter of offer was extended. The sociologist did not accept the offer, so we offered it to the second person on the list and that person was a political scientist.*

## Jobs Not Filled

A slightly higher percentage of jobs went unfilled in 2010 than in 2009 (19 percent compared to 16 percent) but the rates in both years were higher than in 2008 (with 29 percent unfilled). Table 5 details reasons why departments or schools were unable to fill positions. In 2009, the most common reason for unfilled positions was that the search was canceled or suspended. Close to one-half (46 percent) of the 48 unfilled positions was the result of cancellations or suspensions. Likewise, these were the most common reason for unfilled positions in 2010, but the share was lower than in the previous year (39 percent). As one chair complained,

*This was one of the more aggravating experiences of my academic career. I had resisted beginning this search because I feared there weren't funds for it, but my Dean and Provost insisted. Two weeks before the search closed, when applications were coming in at a rate of something like 10 a day, we were told the funding had been rescinded. I had to write to everyone who'd applied, apologizing profusely. I may also have permanently damaged my relations with the Dean and Provost, because I told them in uncensored terms what I thought of their leadership abilities. They said the position was simply postponed, but now they're*

**Figure 2: The Hiring Process for Assistant and Open Rank Positions Advertised Through the Job Bank (Responding Departments Only)**



Source: ASA Survey of Academic Employers, 2009 and 2010.

*acknowledging that we're not going to get it back this coming year. I don't expect to see us doing any hiring in the next 2-3 years minimum.*

A higher percentage of job candidates turned down jobs than in the prior year (28 percent compared to 21 percent), perhaps because the job market was better in 2010 and they received more than one offer. As one chair stated,

*We interviewed four candidates, made three consecutive offers, and when unsuccessful, postponed the search until the following year. This summer at [the ASA Annual Meeting] we're restarting the search.*

There was also an increase in the percentage of jobs that were unfilled because the department could not agree on a candidate or could not find one that was well-qualified enough for the positions (19 percent of unfilled jobs compared to 13 percent in 2009).

**Table 5: Reasons Why Assistant and Open Rank Faculty Positions Were Not Filled in 2010 (Responding Departments Only)**

	N	%
<b>Total Jobs Not Filled</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
Canceled	13	23
Suspended	9	16
Search Still in Progress	2	4
Candidate Turned Down Offer	16	28
No Agreement as to Candidate or Lack of Qualified Candidates	11	19
Reason Not Given	6	11

Source: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2010.

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked to select all reasons why a position was not filled. In most cases, multiple reasons were selected where offers were turned down and the search was ultimately canceled or suspended, or that the pool of qualified candidates was exhausted once the offer was turned down..

### Variation Across Institutions

Thus far, we have seen the results of the hiring process for all types of institutions. In Table 6 we examine the job search process among different types of institutions. We use the 2005 Carnegie classification system to categorize these institutions.

A smaller percentage of jobs were filled by all types of institutions than in the previous year, except at Very High Research or Research Extensive institutions, where there was essentially no change (filling 78 percent of jobs in 2010 compared to 77 percent in 2009). These institutions, which have the highest number of faculty per department, advertised the largest number of jobs, and this number was higher than in 2009 (113 jobs compared to 98 jobs). While 78 percent of those jobs were filled in 2010 (about the same that were filled in 2009), this percentage was slightly smaller compared to other types of

**Table 6: Assistant and Open Rank Faculty Positions Advertised in 2010 by Type of Department**

Type of Institution	Total Depts.	Responding Departments					
		Response Rate (%)	Number of Jobs Advertised	Searches Conducted	Candidates Brought In	Offers Made	Jobs Filled (%)
Very High Research	115	75	113	111	105	99	78
High Research/Doctorate	66	83	80	79	75	71	81
Masters	90	67	70	70	67	66	80
Baccalaureate	56	61	37	37	36	34	86
Associates/Special Focus	11	36	4	3	3	3	75
<b>All Departments</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>80</b>

Source: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2010

advertising institutions. It may be that Very High Research Schools are more selective than the other types of institutions because they have access to more graduate students and adjunct faculty to teach courses if they do not fill a position. Both High Research/Doctorate and Master's Comprehensive schools that responded to the survey advertised more jobs in 2010 than in 2009 (80 compared to 55), but had fewer searches that resulted in hires. Responding Baccalaureate-only institutions, which have the smallest departments on average, advertised fewer jobs than in 2009 (37 compared to 43). Although they advertised the fewest jobs, those Baccalaureate-only schools that responded (61 percent) filled the highest

percentage of jobs (86 percent). This type of school may be more likely to advertise on regional listservs, rather than a nationally-oriented job bank. Associate and special focus schools advertised only four jobs.

### *Match and Mismatch Across Specialties*

Among the reasons for failure to complete searches may be the mismatch between the specialty areas in which departments wish to hire and the areas in which candidates specialize. Table 7 compares the specializations listed in all assistant and open rank positions advertised in the Job Bank in 2010

**Table 7: Comparison of Specializations Listed in All Assistant and Open Rank Job Bank Advertisements in 2010 to Areas of Interest Selected by PhD Candidates on ASA Membership Forms in 2010.**

Specialization	Advertised Specialties (N=427)		Areas of Student Interest in 2010 (N=4,511)		Difference in % of Specialties Compared to Interest <sup>1</sup>
	%	Rank	%	Rank	
Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance	30.9	1	17.9	7	13.0
Politics and Social Change	23.0	2	33.9	2	-10.9
Place and Environment	23.0	3	13.7	10	9.3
Race and Ethnicity	22.5	4	19.2	6	3.3
Medicine and Health	20.8	5	12.3	12	8.5
Inequalities and Stratification	19.7	6	34.7	1	-15.0
Quantitative Approaches	19.4	7	11.5	14	7.9
Work, Economy and Organizations	16.9	8	20.4	4	-3.5
Application and Practice	16.6	9	10.6	16	6.1
Theory, Knowledge, Science	12.6	10	15.0	9	-2.3
Family, Life Course, and Society	11.9	11	16.8	8	-4.8
Other Specialization	10.5	12	3.6	18	6.9
Gender and Sexuality	10.3	13	19.6	5	-9.3
Sociology of Culture	8.4	14	24.3	3	-15.8
Comparative and Historical Approaches	7.7	15	12.5	11	-4.7
Open Specialization/Not Specified	7.0	16.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Social Psychology and Interaction	6.6	17	11.5	13	-4.9
Qualitative Approaches	6.1	18	10.6	15	-4.5
Population and Ecology	5.6	19	6.8	14	-1.2

**Average specialty areas per job = 2.8**

Source: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2010

<sup>1</sup> When the percent of specialties advertised exceeds the percent of students interested in that area, the difference in percent is positive. When the difference in percent is negative, interest exceeds availability.

with those listed by PhD candidates on their ASA membership forms (As previously noted, both were coded using the ASA list of specialty areas on the membership form). Of the areas listed, there was more than a five percent gap in 10 cases and less than a five percent gap in the eight other cases. We also coded advertisements that did not list specializations, or stated that the specialization was open. There is no comparable category for this variable on the ASA membership form. There were four areas with more than a 10 percent gap. The largest gap was in sociology of culture which ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest specialty area among ASA PhD candidates but only 14<sup>th</sup> highest among advertising departments. The second largest gap was in inequalities and stratification (including race, class, and gender), which was the highest ranked specialty among students, but was the 6<sup>th</sup> most frequent specialty in Job Bank advertisements. The 3<sup>rd</sup> largest gap (13 percent) was in social control, law, crime, and deviance. Although it was the most frequently sought specialty by advertising departments, it was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> highest among students. The result was an encouraging market for those new PhDs who specialized in this area. As one chair noted,

*The market is very competitive for sociologists with backgrounds in criminology. We brought 14 people to campus for two positions and made six offers that were declined. We finally were able to hire two people at the end of the search.*

Population and ecology had the smallest gap (although it was also listed in the fewest advertisements). Theory, knowledge and science had about a two percent gap, and race and ethnicity had about a three percent gap. The differences may not be as large as the table suggests, however, because departments advertised an average of 2.8 specialties and students were permitted to list up to four specialties on their membership form. Further, the demand for specialties may not remain stable from year to year.

## CONCLUSIONS

New PhD sociologists can be somewhat more optimistic about the current job market for assistant professors with a 32 percent increase in the number of jobs advertised in the 2010 Job Bank, compared to the 35 percent dip in the previous year. There were more academic jobs advertised and fewer jobs advertised in applied, research, and policy positions than in 2009. Early indications suggest a continued improvement in the number of positions being advertised in 2011. In addition, supply-side competition may have lessened because there was a drop in the number of new PhDs. However, those PhDs who did not obtain jobs because of the poor job market in 2009 probably engaged in a job search this year, so that the jobs per person was probably not as high as reported. Moreover, if there is a group of advanced graduate students awaiting improvements in the job market, then the apparent decline in supply of new PhDs may be temporary. Nonetheless, the data do not indicate that the discipline as a whole is producing “too many PhDs,” the source of an on-going debate for at least a decade, although reducing the number of graduate students accepted has been the policy of numbers of universities over the last year or so (Jaschick 2009). A positive job market for new PhDs is especially likely if they and their departments consider jobs outside of the academy doing applied, research, and/or policy work as well as academic jobs. The comments from chairs also suggest that sociologists are competitive for jobs in academic departments outside of sociology, especially if graduate students consider, and departments support, some switch in specialty areas to include at least one of those where there is an undersupply of sociologists (such as criminal justice, environmental studies, public policy, and quantitative methods). Finally, we hope for a higher response rate next year by starting the survey before summer break when more department chairs may be at their offices.

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