



Down Market? Findings from the 2008 ASA Job Bank Survey

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Those searching for new full-time assistant professor positions in academic sociology during the 2008-2009 academic year faced a difficult job market. Some schools in need of new faculty were not authorized to conduct searches, while others found their positions frozen and searches already underway cancelled. Other disciplinary associations, such as the American Historical Association and Modern Language Association (MLA), have reported declining numbers of jobs for PhDs advertised at their meetings or on their websites. As a result of what they refer to as "turmoil in financial markets" and "what appears to be a non-trivial economic downturn," the American Economics Association has asked employers who have listed positions in JOE (Job Opportunities for Economists) to announce any suspension or cancellation of listed jobs.

In the face of tight job markets, the American Sociological Association (ASA) conducted an analysis of the academic job market for sociologists to provide as complete a picture as possible to its members. In a previous study of the job market, based on 2006 advertisements in the ASA Job Bank, we found that there were 610 advertisements for assistant professor jobs.

In a follow-up examination of 2008 advertisements in the Job Bank reported in *Footnotes* (2009), we found that the number of advertisements for assistant professor positions advertised with the ASA fell 40

percent from 610 in 2006 to 370 in 2008. Each advertisement could contain advertisements for multiple positions for assistant professors.

In 2007, 573 sociologists received PhDs. This brief suggests that in 2008 there were academic job OPENINGS for about 80 percent of them. As we will see, not all of these openings were filled. New PhDs undoubtedly find the tight job market frustrating, and they may need to broaden their searches to community colleges and research, applied and policy positions outside the academy (see Spalter-Roth, *Beyond the Ivory Tower* (2007).

We decided to go beyond simply counting the number of jobs advertised in the Job Bank and, instead, conduct a follow up survey of the 2008 advertisements in order to ascertain whether searches were cancelled or jobs were filled and how this varied by the type of school and department. We decided also to include open-rank positions for which new PhDs could apply in the survey.

As a result of the follow-up survey, we found that there were 499 jobs for assistant professors or open rank positions advertised. Of the 415 jobs that survey respondents told us about, 6.7 percent of job searches never got started because they were cancelled or suspended and another 9.6 percent were cancelled midstream for a total of 16.3 percent. Searches that were cancelled after the advertisement was placed or even after the search began contributed to a tighter job

¹ The authors would like to thank Karen Edwards and Jamie Panzarella of ASA's Membership Department for their help in providing Job Bank information.

market. In addition, an unknown number of searches may have been cancelled before advertisements could be posted. On a more optimistic note, roughly 70 percent of assistant professor and open rank positions advertised were filled and 76 percent of searches resulted in a filled position.

The survey also reveals how many schools were unable to agree on a candidate, how many were unable to fill the position because the candidate declined the offer, and how many schools “backfilled” vacant positions with graduate student and adjunct instructors. Moreover, the brief also tells us about the institutional context of the searches, including the hiring rates of different types of departments and different types of institutions.

The Job Market Survey

We designed a deliberately short survey that was sent to contacts at each school that posted an advertisement for at least one assistant professor or open rank position with the ASA Job Bank. The intent of the survey was to determine whether the department carried out searches, whether positions were cancelled, whether the position was ultimately filled, whether temporary faculty will be used to fill positions, and how this varied by institutional characteristics. The survey was administered on-line using Qualtrics, interactive survey software that allows respondents to fill in their responses on the screen. We sent the survey to two contact people in each department, usually the chair and the staff member who had placed the job advertisement. We followed up with three reminders, and then we attempted to contact non-responding schools twice via telephone.

We also monitored two websites: the “sociology job market rumor mill” <http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/> and “socjobs 2009,” the sociology job market wiki <http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>. These sites, compiled by graduate students actively on the job market, listed useful information about the status of searches and schools that had cancelled searches.

Table 1. All Assistant and Open Rank Positions Advertised Through the ASA Job Bank in 2008

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Total Jobs Advertised by 378 Departments	499	100.0
Jobs Advertised by 314 Responding Departments	415	83.2
Jobs Advertised by 64 Non-Responding Departments	84	16.8

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

Table 2. Types of Jobs Advertised

	<i>Rank</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Total Jobs Advertised¹	Assistant Professor	345	69.1
	Open Rank	154	30.9
	Total	499	100.0
Jobs Advertised by 314 Responding Departments	Assistant Professor	288	69.4
	Open Rank	127	30.6
	Total	415	100.0
Jobs Advertised by 64 Non-responding Departments	Assistant Professor	57	67.9
	Open Rank	27	32.1
	Total	84	100.0

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

¹. Rank totals differ from those reported in *Employment Prospects: An Introduction to the 2008 ASA Job Bank Study* published in *Footnotes* (2009). This total includes advertisements containing multiple openings in a single advertisement and open rank positions that at least hired at the assistant professor level. It also omits positions that began prior to August, 2008.

Table 3. Searches Conducted for Assistant and Open Rank Faculty Positions Advertised Through the ASA Job Bank in 2008 (Responding Departments Only)

	<i>N</i>	<i>% of Total Jobs Advertised</i>
Total Jobs Advertised by Responding Departments	415	100.0
Searches Conducted	378	91.1
Successful Searches	287	69.2
Searches Conducted, But Jobs Later Canceled or Suspended	40	9.6
Searches Conducted for Jobs Not Filled for Other Reasons	51	12.3
Searches Not Conducted	28	6.7
Missing Information	9	2.2

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

Information from the survey was quite consistent with the information reported on the graduate student discussion site. Using data from all these sources, we obtained information about 83.2 percent of the advertised jobs (see Table 1). Table 2 shows that approximately the same percentage of assistant and open-rank positions were advertised by departments that responded to the survey and departments that did not.

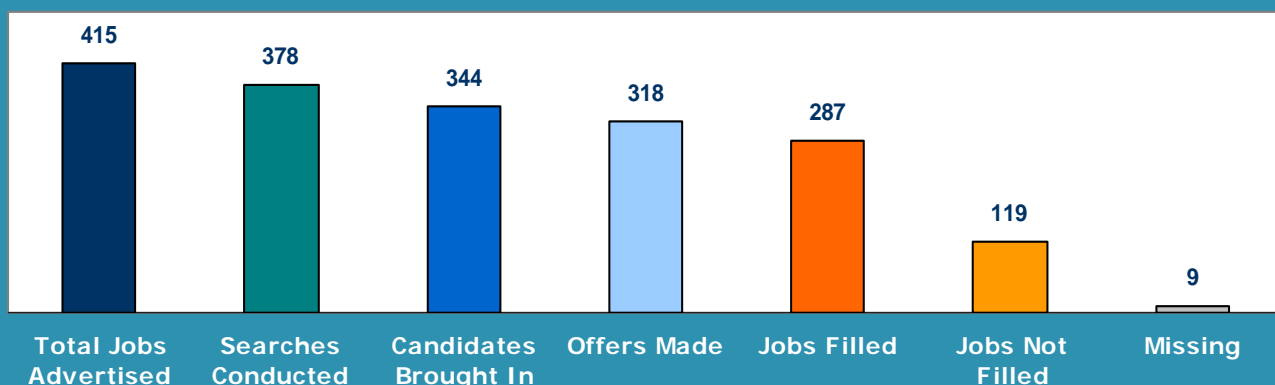
The Job Search Process

Searches were conducted for 91.1 percent of the assistant professor and open rank positions advertised about which we had information (for a total of 378 searches). Some of these searches were cancelled or suspended before the search began (6.7 percent) and some while the search was on-going (9.6 percent). In some cases, these advertisements included the qualification “conditional on the approval of funding.” These figures are shown in Table 3.

Jobs Filled

Figure 1 depicts the academic job market as a multi-step process including searches begun, candidates being brought in, offers being made, and jobs accepted, and filled.

Figure 1. Hiring Process for Assistant and Open Rank Faculty Positions Advertised Through the ASA Job Bank in 2008 (Responding Departments Only) ¹



Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

There is attrition at each stage: not all schools conduct searches for advertised positions, not all searches yield a consensus candidate, not all candidates accept the position. Given the multiplicity of stages that transpire before a hire is made, it is unrealistic to expect that 100 percent of advertisements will translate into hires. During the academic year just completed, the overall yield rate (hires/ advertisements) for assistant professor or open hire positions was approximately 70 percent while the yield for job searches (hires/searches) was 76 percent. Once a search commenced, most schools were able to agree on candidates, bring them for interviews, and make an offer, but at each stage of the process, there is some slippage. We found that of the 378 searches that began, 344 schools brought in candidates to interview, 318 made offers and 287 filled the position. In 119 cases, the position was not filled.

Jobs Not Filled

What were the main causes of schools being unable to fill their positions? Table 4 details the reasons. This past year, the leading cause was position cancellations. In 51 cases, schools reported that the search was cancelled. Of these, 25 searches had already begun (see Appendix Table 1). In another 15 cases the search was “suspended” (either before or after the search began). In sum, the number of jobs not filled as a result of job cancellations or suspended searches represents 13.4 percent of all advertisements placed. In 20 cases, the candidate declined to accept the position, and in another 8 cases, there was no agreement on a candidate.

Temporary Hires

When schools did not fill their positions with a permanent, tenure-track candidate, were they authorized to hire someone else on a temporary basis? In Table 5, we report some pertinent findings about the 119 jobs that were not filled. In almost 30 percent of the cases, a temporary replacement position

Table 4. Reasons Assistant and Open Rank Jobs Were Not Filled ¹

	N	%
Total Jobs Not Filled	119	100.0
Canceled	51	42.9
Suspended	16	13.4
Offer Declined	20	16.8
No Agreement as to a Candidate	8	6.7
Offer Still in Negotiation	6	5.0
Other	11	9.2
Reasons Not Given	7	5.9

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

¹. Data from responding departments only.

Table 5. Jobs To Be Filled by Temporary Faculty ¹

	N	%
Total Jobs Not Filled	119	100.0
Temporary Faculty Will Be Brought In	34	28.6
Department is Considering this Option	15	12.6
Temporary Faculty Will Not Be Used to Fill the Gap	53	44.5
No Response	17	14.3

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

¹. Data from responding departments only.

was authorized, and temporary hires were being considered for an additional 13 percent when the survey was administered during May and June. In 45 percent of the cases, departments had not been authorized to “backfill” these positions. There were 17 jobs where departments did not indicate intentions for temporary hires.

Variation by Department and Institutional Type

In examining the job search process we were curious as to whether institutional or structural characteristics made a difference. First, we examine variation by type of department. Second, we examine variation across types of institutions of higher education.

Variation by Type of Department

In Table 6 we classify departments by whether they are “stand alone sociology departments,” joint departments, criminal justice departments, social work, social and behavioral sciences, or “other” types of departments. The Table compares positions advertised by departments that answered the survey with those that did not. Stand alone sociology departments advertised more than half (54.5 percent) of all positions and 57.8 percent of all positions advertised by departments that responded to the survey. The next largest set of positions were advertised by “other” types of departments such as women’s studies, black and ethnic studies, cultural studies, public policy, history, and even economics. A higher percentage of these “other” departments did not respond to the survey. These departments probably advertise in a variety of newsletters and other sources and the field of the PhD filling the position may be open. Third largest, were jobs posted by departments where sociology was joined with another discipline (15.9 percent of jobs).

Department Type	Number of Departments	Jobs Advertised	
		N	%
All Departments	378	499	100.0
Sociology	198	272	54.5
Joint Sociology	57	71	14.2
Criminal Justice	23	27	5.4
Social Work	1	3	0.6
Social/ Behavioral Science	16	21	4.2
Other ¹	83	105	21.1
Responding Departments	314	415	100.0
Sociology	174	240	57.8
Joint Sociology	52	66	15.9
Criminal Justice	17	19	4.6
Social Work	1	3	0.7
Social/ Behavioral Science	11	12	2.9
Other	59	75	18.1
Non-Responding Departments	64	84	100.0
Sociology	24	32	38.1
Joint Sociology	5	5	6.0
Criminal Justice	6	8	9.5
Social Work	0	0	0.0
Social/ Behavioral Science	5	9	10.7
Other	24	30	35.7

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

¹. "Other" includes American Studies, Business, Communications and Media Studies, Cultural and Ethnic Studies, Economics, Education, Environmental Studies, Gender and Sexual Policy, Government and Public Policy, Health and Human Development, History, International Studies, Legal Studies, Management and Organizational Studies, Medicine, and Public Affairs.

Table 7. Hiring Process by Type of Institution

<i>Type of Institution</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Total Jobs Advertised</i> ¹	<i>Searches Conducted (N=378)</i> <i>% of Jobs Advertised</i>	<i>Candidates Brought In (N=344)</i> <i>% of Jobs Advertised</i>	<i>Offers Made (N=318)</i> <i>% of Jobs Advertised</i>	<i>Jobs Filled (N=287)</i> <i>% of Jobs Advertised</i>
Research	71	157	87.9	78.3	68.8	59.9
Doctoral	32	46	91.3	89.1	87.0	76.1
Masters	88	112	90.1	78.6	74.1	69.6
Baccalaureate	44	54	98.1	96.3	90.7	87.0
Other	38	46	91.3	86.9	82.7	71.7
All Responding Institutions	273	415	91.1	82.9	76.6	69.1

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

¹ This table represents a process and does not add to 100%. The percentages read across.

Variation across Institutions

How do these patterns vary across types of schools? We divided school types in four types based on prior Carnegie coding and by highest degree offered. We then recombined them into five types. These are Research Institutions, Doctoral Institutions, Masters Institutions, Baccalaureate Institutions, and “other” types of institutions (including community colleges, medical schools, and other professional schools). Table 7 shows that there are differences among types of institutions. The greatest number of jobs advertised is at Research Institutions (157 jobs), followed by departments at Master’s Institutions (112 jobs). The smallest number is at Baccalaureate Institutions (54 jobs). The greatest difference in hiring rates is between departments at Research Universities and departments at Baccalaureate Institutions. Baccalaureate Institutions conducted the highest percentage of searches (98.1 percent of all jobs they advertised) while Research Institutions conducted the lowest (87.9 percent of all jobs they advertised). Of these searches, Baccalaureate Institutions

brought in the highest percentage of candidates and Research Institutions brought in the lowest. Baccalaureate Institutions filled 87 percent of the jobs they advertised while Research Institutions filled about 60 percent. Further analysis is required to determine if more searches were cancelled at one type of school than the other, if Research Institutions were not satisfied with the candidates that applied for positions, or if administrators at larger departments think that departments have more options for covering courses.

Summary and Conclusion

There was a major drop in the number of advertisements for assistant professor positions in the ASA Job Bank between 2006 and 2008. As noted, advertisements can have multiple listings for positions. In 2008, of the 499 jobs advertised, information about 415 of those jobs was provided by the Job Bank survey and by two sociology job web sites. The preliminary results presented here show that of these 415 jobs, 16.1 percent were cancelled or suspended. Although

there are anecdotes that the rate of job cancellations and suspended searches has increased greatly, with estimates that as many as 50 percent of jobs are being cancelled. This anecdotal estimate seems to be much higher than our research findings would suggest. We do not have statistical evidence about the change in the rate of cancelled or suspended searches between 2006 and 2008, because we did not do a survey of what happened to the jobs that were advertised in 2006. As a result, we don't know if the rate was higher in 2008 than in 2006. Even without this evidence the decline in advertisements is worrisome. As noted, new PhDs undoubtedly find the tight job market frustrating and they may need to broaden their searches to community colleges and research, applied and policy positions outside the academy.

On a more optimistic note, other factors can explain some of the drop in the number of jobs advertised between 2006 and 2008. Budget cutbacks could result in more jobs being advertised on list-serves, in section bulletins, and on regional sociology

organization's web-sites to avoid the costs associated with advertising in the Job Bank. Although there were only 499 jobs advertised for assistant professor and open rank positions about 70 percent of the 415 jobs about which we had information about were filled, with the highest rate of filled jobs at Baccalaureate Institutions.

When we repeat this survey we will see if state budget cutbacks and endowment declines continue to restrict the number of academic positions open to new PhDs in sociology. But, next time, we will have a baseline of information to compare with the new findings.

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APPENDIX I

Appendix Table 1. Status of Assistant and Open Rank Faculty Positions Advertised Through the ASA Job Bank in 2008 by Search Process

	<i>N</i>	<i>% of Jobs Advertised by Responding Departments</i>
Total Jobs Advertised by All Departments	499	-
Total Jobs Advertised by Responding Departments	415	100.0
Searches Conducted		
Filled	287	69.2
Not Filled - Canceled	25	6.0
Not Filled - Suspended	15	3.6
Not Filled - Other	45	10.8
Not Filled - No Reason Stated	6	1.4
Total	378	91.1
Searches Not Conducted		
Not Filled - Canceled	26	6.3
Not Filled - Suspended	1	0.2
Not Filled - No Reason Stated	1	0.2
Total	28	6.7
Non-Responses	9	2.2
Status (All Jobs)		
Jobs Filled	287	69.2
Jobs Not Filled ¹	119	28.7
Incorrect Job Description	9	2.2
Total	415	100.0

Sources: ASA Job Bank Survey, 2009; 2008-2009 Sociology Job Market Rumor Mill (<http://socrumormill2008.blogspot.com/>); Sociology Job Market 2008-2009 (<http://socjobs2009.wikidot.com/>)

¹ *Includes canceled and suspended positions, which represent 16.1% of all jobs advertised by responding departments.*



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