

## How the Economy Will Affect Academic Hiring & University Life, March 18, 2009

A session of the *Faculty Conversations on the Academic Job Search and Academic Life*. Co-sponsored by Career Services and the Associate Provost for Education

**Dr. Rebecca Bushnell**, *Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and Thomas S. Gates, Jr. Professor and Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania* and **Dr. Glen Gaulton**, *Executive Vice Dean and Chief Scientific Officer, Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania* discuss the effect of the recession on faculty hiring and other aspects of university life this year and in the future.

Dean Bushnell began:

Different US universities are being affected differently by the downturn. Luckily Penn is less dependent on its endowment than peer institutions. 10% of SAS revenue comes from endowment. The downturn has an effect on more than endowment, however; most schools are seeking not to increase undergraduate tuition at the higher rates of the part, and tuition is the single largest source of revenue source for SAS; we are also generating less from development. While the pull back has far reaching effects, universities are looking forward to increased federal support for science.

A few comments that pertain to US universities in general: there are and will be significant budget cuts at state universities, many of which have been required to cut their operating budgets by 5 to 7%. This often includes hiring freezes of staff and faculty. Similar measures are being taken at private universities. Many institutions are even reducing their graduate admissions.

Tenured faculty pose a particular difficulty for budgeting because their salaries can only be altered if they leave, retire or die. Thus the only way to control faculty spending is by controlling who is coming in. SAS had already announced its plans to reduce the size of its faculty by 5 to 7% over the next three-four years before the fall downturn.

The faculty job market this year varied tremendously by field. Dean Bushnell had some anecdotal information on Penn departments. Science Ph.D.s, many of who move on to postdocs and industry, were less adversely affected. It has been reported that History saw a 50% reduction in the number of positions. Classics, a bright spot, had a pretty good year. The social sciences fell somewhere between the physical sciences and the humanities. Hiring will be slow for a minimum of another hiring cycle.

Bushnell recommends taking the long view, being flexible, and making the best of non-tenured positions. It is likely that there will not be a cutback in undergraduate teaching. Although some measures will be taken internally (no course release for administrative posts at Columbia, for example), universities and colleges will need people to teach. In the humanities it was already the case that many new Ph.D.s took short-term positions (lectureships, visiting assistantships, etc.). This can be a good thing if followed by a tenure-track job because, de facto, it increases your tenure clock.

Dean Bushnell went on the market for the first time in 1982 with a degree in Comparative Literature from Princeton. She was turned down for a tenure-track Renaissance job in the Penn English department out of hand, but later in the year was hired as a leave replacement for \$18,000 a year. She decided to make the most of her position by treating it as if it were a tenure-track assistant professorship. She developed a repertoire of classes, began revisions of her dissertation, and volunteered for duties not required of her like committees and advising.

Two years into the job, she was offered a tenure-track job. By her sixth year review she had had eight years in which to complete two books.

Dean Bushnell assures doctoral students that current professors will retire. After the recovery begins, positions not filled during the downturn will become available. She recommends that recent Ph.D.s employ themselves productively in the meantime.

Dean Gaulton continued:

Dean Gaulton seconds Dean Bushnell's general comments.

Motivation and dedication are required in times like these; both are qualities of a particular personality type that succeeds in higher education.

Addressing himself to the sciences, he suggests that Ph.D.s think broadly about jobs available to them, even the variety within academe, for example, a position in a biology department vs. a medical school, or in a clinical department vs. a basic science department. It is important to determine your goals, be they primarily research or primarily teaching.

In cell and molecular biology, there is a baby boom of scientists that entered the tenure track at the end of the '70s and '80s, when NIH began serious funding of university research. The first part of this generation will be reaching retirement age soon. Their retirement will affect all of higher education by expanding the job market in new scientific disciplines.

Dean Gaulton offered a review of the typical employers of scientists, what they require of their faculty and how they are faring in the current climate:

- At most small colleges, faculty will be required to complete modest levels of research. It is common to collaborate with university researchers, particularly in the summer. Since colleges are mostly funded by tuition in combination with endowment, all have taken a hit in the recession. There have been hiring reductions across the board from Haverford to Cabrini College.
- As to research universities, they require more aggressive approaches to independent research and excellence in education for faculty. The current climate in medicine emphasizes novel scholarship above all other aspects.
- Medicine is less dependent on tuition than SAS. Scholarship and external funding drive their budget. 70% of the budget is grant-funded while 10-15% falls to tuition and the remainder is endowments. The boom for NIH in the stimulus package looks to promote a budget increase of 3-5%. At Penn Medicine, they are still hiring at a fairly robust rate with only a small cut back from what was planned. Each institution varies in this approach and needs to be looked at individually.
- Research institutes like Wistar, Scripps, and others are essentially soft money institutions in which researchers have no teaching requirements but rather rely on research funding. In the downturn, their endowments have lost ground but grant monies are up, putting them in a situation perhaps better than small colleges but worse than the Med School.
- Industry/for-profit science is driven exclusively by commercial research but can often have a university-like atmosphere. They are the hardest hit by the recession, which came at a time of major industry re-formatting. It is difficult to find positions in industry at present, given the wave of mergers and

downsizing. Large firms are laying off employees so hiring in the short term is not in the works. This is particularly the case for big pharma, which was already re-shuffling before October; some smaller biotech firms are in better shape.

The upside to the recession is that the stimulus package is creating short-term funding for research. Large research institutions with good grant-funding continue to hire. It's possible that some stimulus money may help in other academic hiring.

Dean Gaulton finished his degree in 1981 and held a postdoc at Harvard for three years, making a whopping \$13,500 per annum. Jobs at the time were not forthcoming; neither the NIH nor the NSF were funding. He took a second postdoc at Harvard, worked to increase his connections in his field, beefed up his publications, and managed to better his title so that he was able to write grants. Shortly thereafter, NIH began a large, sustained round of funding that he was well-positioned to take advantage of.

In the sciences, hiring can swing quickly. It is a great time to be applying for postdocs as, by the time you complete yours, grants will be in place.