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JOBS FOR HUMANITIES PhDs: THE PROBLEM AND SOME SOLUTIONS

Lewis C. Solmon

Higher Education Research Institute, Los Angeles, California

The Problem

Most readers of the *Bulletin* probably no longer need to be convinced that there is a crisis in the academic job market for humanities PhDs. Although this paper deals with all humanities fields, the discussion is quite likely to be directly relevant to the field of religious studies in particular. Nevertheless, there is an obvious need for those concerned with the health of religious studies programs to begin to collect and analyze data on their own field.

In general, new jobs develop in academe for three types of reasons.

Replacement demand occurs when the need arises to replace faculty members who retire, die, or leave academe. However, since so many young faculty have been hired in the past decade, over the next twenty years deaths and retirements will be below historical rates. Early retirement programs have generally not been successful in opening new academic jobs; since the programs are very costly, most faculty do not participate in them, and many who opt for early retirement then proceed to take jobs at other colleges. Moreover, rampant inflation and recent laws ending mandatory retirement rules will further reduce incentives for early retirement. The possibilities of faculty members moving to other employment sectors will be discussed below.

Enrichment demand occurs when student/faculty ratios fall, but this type of change is costly. Given recent declines in public enthusiasm for higher education and the general economic recession, enrichment demand is not likely to occur to help solve the academic job crunch.

Finally, *expansion demand*, which results from increases in the number of college students, is unlikely to arise, given that the effects of the post-World War Two baby boom have ended, and high school graduation rates and progression rates from high school to college seem to have peaked. Although some are looking toward new clienteles for higher education, particularly returning older people, this author does not have too much hope that adults will make up for the declining numbers of traditional-aged students (Cartter and Solmon, 1976). A constant sized student body requires a constant sized faculty, so new slots are not likely to open soon because of expansion demand.

The problems for the humanities are even more severe than those for academe as a whole, since students are becoming increasingly disinclined to study in arts and humanities areas. Between 1970 and 1978, the share of first-time full-time freshmen who anticipated majoring in the arts and humanities (other than English) fell from 12.7 per cent to 7.3 per cent—and this percentage is to be applied to a smaller total pool of college freshmen (Astin, et al, 1978).

Reduced faculty demand is a problem only if new doctorates are produced who are intent on getting faculty positions. Some point optimistically to a downward shift in humanities PhD production over the past couple of years. However, this is at least in part due to the fact that doctoral students are extending their period of graduate study since the job market is so tight. This implies that, as this group of delayed labor market entrants begins to receive their doctorates, further pressure will be felt in the academic job market. Furthermore, one-third of the 1978 recipients of humanities doctorates were still seeking employment at the time they received their degrees. (This compares, for example, to an unemployment rate of 10 per cent for new chemistry PhDs). Of course, in contrast to the 1960s, when many doctoral candidates received jobs before graduation, most academic employers now require job candidates to have their degree in hand before they are considered. Many of the recent PhDs who are categorized as being employed are holding short-term, non-tenure track, or even part-time positions, and so will be back in the job market again in the next few years.

To summarize, fields in which alternatives to jobs in academe have been rare (e.g., humanities, where roughly 90 per cent of doctorate holders historically have worked in academe) are fields that have shown the greatest undergraduate

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The last category includes both positions calling for more than one specialization and positions where no specialization was indicated. These figures can be compared to the finding on areas of doctoral specialization in Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion*, chs 11 and 13.

³R. G. D'Andrade et al., "Academic Opportunity in Anthropology, 1974-90," *American Anthropologist* (December 1975), 753-73; "Special Report," *Metaphilosophy* (April/July 1977), 232-48

⁴The optimistic assumptions are based on *Projection of Educational Statistics to 1986-87* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics, 1978). The pessimistic estimates are based on Allan Cartter, *Ph.D.s and the Academic Labor Market* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). The total current religion faculty is estimated at 5,500. The replacement rate (faculty retirements and deaths) is estimated at 2 per cent per year in the optimistic projection and 1.6 per cent in the pessimistic. Both projections assume that religion enrollments are a constant proportion of total college enrollments. See Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion*, 97-106, for an earlier set of projections and a discussion of methods used in making projections.

⁵The papers from that panel and other material about the vocational crisis were published in *CSR Bulletin* 9/3 (June 1978).

BULLISH ASPIRATIONS IN A BEARISH MARKET: THE JOB CRISIS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

It is time, perhaps urgently past time, to become serious and specific about the various sorts of "vocational crisis" that exist within the field of religious studies.

The facts are startling and sobering. Seventy-three per cent of all persons earning PhDs in the social sciences and humanities have traditionally been employed in colleges and universities. Sixty per cent of them become teachers. In the humanities more specifically, 90 per cent of those receiving PhDs go into academic employment. The nation produces more than 30,000 PhDs each year, and this number is increasing. During the 1960s, 184,000 new PhD degrees were granted, more than in all previous American history combined. By the end of the 1970s, that figure will have more than doubled. Forecasts vary, but some predict that between 1980 and 1994, the number of college-age students in North America will decrease by as much as 25 per cent. Some believe that as many as 100,000 regular faculty positions will be abolished during the next decade and a half. This means that between 1981 and 1985, academe will be able to absorb somewhere between 3 and 15 per cent of its PhD output. If significant changes occur, that percentage may be increased, perhaps to 17 or even 20. But the consensus seems to be that only 10 per cent of those persons currently enrolled in a PhD program in the humanities can expect to become employed in a regular and sustained faculty appointment.

Tenure policies and the educational boom of the 1960s are interdependent background forces. In that decade, graduate school enrollments increased by 168 per cent, master's degrees by 165 per cent, and doctorates by 200 per cent. Large enrollments and increased federal and private funding of research created a veritable wealth of new vocational opportunities. Hence, by 1972, 42 per cent of all full-time faculty were forty years of age or younger, and less than 25 per cent were over fifty. In contrast, by 1990, less than 25 per cent of the faculty will be forty years of age or younger, and more than 50 per cent will be over fifty. Assessing the implication of this, one analyst suggests that the present tenure system appears to be "protecting an aging faculty mindlessly overbreeding itself." He adds that "it's beginning to look like a permanent age-related caste system, perpetuating indefinitely the generational conflicts of the Sixties."

No matter how one feels about it, there is no denying that a large problem exists. And yet the number of persons being admitted to graduate programs continues to increase. Over the past several years, graduate schools, faced with a cutback, have increased and accelerated their recruitment efforts. For, as regular economies diminish, universities are becoming increasingly dependent upon the graduate-student work force, both to fulfill research needs and to carry a larger proportion of teaching responsibilities. When new graduate recruits raise questions about longer-term professional opportunities, academic administrators and faculty counselors have been known to respond, "Yes, there is indeed a national problem, but our PhDs are very well trained; all but a few of them get jobs." What is not always reckoned is that such "jobs" are increasingly one or two-year appointments in non-tenure track positions. This practice enables placement offices to quote statistical summaries that are encouraging, though misleading, while providing employers with a way to fulfill affirmative-action quotas and still keep costs down.

For their part, graduate students are subject to other illusions. Lewis Solmon reports that approximately 90 per cent of all PhD candidates in the humanities regard themselves as exceptions to the rule. They believe that, one way or another, they will be among the lucky 10 per cent who will find teaching positions after graduation.

And, as placement possibilities become closed, opportunities for mobility for established faculty members have been severely diminished and, in some fields, well nigh curtailed. Not unrelatedly, Robert A. Scott reported to the 1979 National Conference on Higher Education that the ratio of administrators to faculty increased from one to five to one to four during the period 1972 to 1976. This is a significant trend, and Scott is certain that it will continue.

We do not yet have accurate comparable statistical summaries regarding the situation in religious studies. But we know that the problem is a large one particularly because of some related substantive problems and developments. For example, religious studies, as presently conceived, is a relatively new academic undertaking. While no longer in its earliest stages of development, it nevertheless remains both exuberant and fragile. Thus, a vocational crisis forces the field to deal with a

problem of large magnitude before it has had time to enjoy a more seasoned maturity, and certainly before it has become conscious of its longer-range intellectual capacities and academic strengths. In addition, being both textually-ordered and cross-culturally focused, religious studies depends very heavily upon cognate fields, language training in particular. Many of these support fields are currently suffering from attrition and enforced limitation. Diminishment of cognate-field strengths is also diminishment of religious studies resources, and restricts the range by which realistic vocational opportunities are marked out. Also, the relationship between religious studies and the humanities, more comprehensively considered, is currently being modified in an increasing number of colleges and universities. With core-curriculum development, enforced lower-division requirements in the humanities, and diminishing budgets, religious studies scholars have been drawn into assuming larger shares of responsibility for keeping general-studies programs staffed and going. But as they do so, they are also being pulled away from their specialties. When this occurs, the academic study of religion becomes less distinct. And the vocational ramifications are bound to be significant.

Considerations of this sort indicate that the vocational crisis is no simple matter of changes in proportions of supply and demand. Were this the case, the profession might be content to allow the ineluctable processes of the free-market system to work their ways. But the issue runs deeper. It affects not only the number of academic possibilities open to persons trained in the field, but also the ways in which they conceive the substance of the subjects they teach.

There are strong hints in all of it that there are firm limits to the support society can give to what academicians are fond of

doing. It is frequently said, for example, that the larger public appears to be becoming increasingly unappreciative of the humanities. And yet, hundreds of thousands stand in long lines for hours waiting to witness the King Tut exhibit; or they rave about Sir Kenneth Clark's television portrayals, or Bronowski's "The Ascent of Man," or they watch the Ninian Smart-inspired "The Long Search" again and again. Similarly, Coles, Lifton, Erikson, and others not only register as good and capable psychologists, but have also learned to communicate with persons not necessarily psychologically tutored. Some sociologists have developed the same capacity; historians too. This is not to suggest that when an academic field develops the capacity to address a more comprehensive range of human issues, it resolves its inherent vocational crises. Certainly this would be a simplistic appraisal. But it is worth considering that vocational opportunities would increase were subjects presented in new terms, thought through in new ways, and were professional incentives thoroughly reevaluated. This is neither to counsel intellectual gimmickry nor to ask a legitimate academic enterprise to become something it isn't. It is rather to invite the discipline to use its corporate imagination (following Stephen Toulmin's lead) "to respond to new situations in novel ways."

It is too early to be perceptive about the adjustments and novelties that will be called for in the months and years ahead. But it is becoming increasingly clear, to quote Chancellor Charles Young of UCLA, that "there can be no steady state within the university." Simply to "hold our own," as it were, is to adopt a progressively insulating posture. With greater insulation comes ever-diminishing support, refined but narrower bases of respect, and the growing threat that intellectual interests will be made subservient to other causes. Someone else



Zygon

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has observed that, as present tendencies continue, there is a very real prospect that academicians, being ever faithful and true, will simply clone themselves out of existence. In the long run, this would indeed be a solution to the vocational crisis. Such measures might be applauded, but the outcome is ex-

treme. The alternative is to find ways to respond that strengthen substance and increase vitality. Or, put differently, we must be industrious, creative, and inventive so that, simultaneously, we will be able to do what is needed, what we truly want, and what we know needs fundamentally to be done.

THE SOCIETIES

CSR

COUNCIL ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION

1979 ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Council on the Study of Religion was held October 13 in Chicago, IL. In addition to the official delegates and executive officers from the twelve constituent societies, observers were present from the North American Academy of Liturgy and the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion. The NAAL, with its 270 members, was subsequently received into membership in the Council and the CGSR was admitted as an affiliate society.

Finances. The Council's finances are in a healthy state. A special note of gratitude was extended to Wilfrid Laurier University for making space and facilities available to the Council.

President's Report. Walter Capps noted that the Council continues to facilitate communication among its constituent societies and to call attention to research needs regarding long-range scholarly and professional development and to the problem of vocational (or employment) possibilities for persons with advanced degrees in religious studies. The 1979 CSR caucus of departmental chairpersons (now in its third year at the annual AAR/SBL meeting) will focus on changes that have occurred in curricular and departmental concerns over the past decade. The President recommended that these concerns be further recognized by the Council through appointment of a standing CSR committee of departmental chairpersons. He noted that the agenda of the CSR annual meetings has been modified to confine business matters to the morning session with the afternoon reserved for substantive discussion of significant or pressing issues. This year Lewis Solmon was invited to report and comment on the employment picture in the humanities.

Scholarly Development and Research. Chairperson Mary Gerhart presented four proposals that had been generated at a meeting of this committee the previous day: (1) that a generic picture of research in the profession be provided in a future issue of the *Bulletin* by means of brief synopses of the research orientation, methodology, tensions, and paradigms of each of the constituent societies; (2) that a research caucus be held in conjunction with the next CSR meeting to discuss in a substantive way what notions and types of research are operative in each society; (3) that experts in various subfields of religion be asked to provide a critique of the Wingspread articles which have appeared in the *CSR Bulletin*, along with a restatement of priorities and a constructive elaboration on research needs; (4) finally, that the individual societies be asked to offer suggestions—perhaps in the form of publishable monographs—on how the Wingspread articles have affected the research needs of their particular societies.

Publications. The various publications sponsored by the CSR continue to be effective means of communication in the field of religion. *TOIL*, at the suggestion of the AAR, has introduced a new section entitled "Faculty Exchange" to facilitate mobility of faculty and serve as a registry for faculty members who wish to teach temporarily in an institution other than their own. *Religious Studies Review*, in order to provide better coverage of certain areas, has appointed two new editors. A new edition of the *CSR Directory of Departments and Programs of Religion in North America* is planned for 1981 or 1982. The *Bulletin* will perhaps inaugurate a new section to deal specifically with departmental concerns. The Council is now cooperating with the Institute of Religion in an Age of Science in the publication of *Zygon*. The Council took formal action to drop the title "Research" from the name of this Committee and to add that function to that of the Committee on Scholarly Development.

Relations with Other Societies. An enabling motion was passed which authorizes the Council to provide up to \$1,000 to support scholars from the Third World or from Eastern European countries while attending the International Association for the History of Religions' XIVth Congress to be held at the University of Manitoba in August 1980. The individual constituent societies of the Council were encouraged to sponsor scholars to this Congress. The Committee reported that during the past year it had processed eighteen applications for ACLS Travel Grants; eight grants were awarded.

Officers. Elected as officers for 1979-1980 were the following: George MacRae, Harvard Divinity School, *Chairperson*; Vera Chester, College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minnesota, *Vice-Chair*; Philip Hefner, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, *Secretary*; Luke Salm, Manhattan College, New York, *Treasurer*. Walter Capps was appointed to a third term as *President* of the Council and Harold Remus continues his term as *Executive Associate*. A resolution of gratitude was tendered to Hans Hillerbrand for his service as *Secretary* of the Council.

Humanities Job Crisis. During the afternoon session the Council heard a report by Lewis Solmon, Executive Officer of the Higher Education Research Institute in Los Angeles, on proposed solutions to the decline in academic job opportunities for doctorate-holders in the humanities. A revised version of his presentation report is published elsewhere in this *Bulletin*.

ASM

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MISSIOLOGY

1979 ANNUAL MEETING

The American Society of Missiology met at Techny, IL, for its 1979 annual meeting June 15-17. The theme for the meeting