

Recent Trends in the Research-Oriented Clinical Psychology Academic Job Market

David C. Schwebel, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*, and Marc S. Karver, *University of South Florida*

A scattering of publications geared toward academic psychology job-seeking (Brems, Lampman, & Johnson, 1995; Darley & Zanna, 1979; Iacono, 1981; Klesges, Sanchez, & Stanton, 1982; Linehan, 1983; Nelson, 1983; Ng, 1997; Phillips, 1982; Plante, 1996; Rohsenow, 1985; Sheehan, McDevitt, & Ross, 1998), plus broader guides that span disciplines (Kronenfeld & Whicker, 1997) and academic careers (Darley, Zanna, & Roediger, 2004), serve as the primary aids for academic job-seekers in clinical psychology and related fields. Although many aspects of these publications ring true today, some advice has become dated. This article updates the academic job-searching literature, and is designed to assist applicants, educate hirers, and provide anecdotal observations about recent trends in the job-search process. The focus is on positions filled by research-oriented clinical psychologists, positions in which the hired individual devotes at least 50% effort to research and smaller portions of time to teaching, clinical practice, and/or service. Most, but not all, of such positions are located in psychology departments at Research I universities.

This article is organized into two sections. In the first, six recent trends in the job-searching market are identified and discussed: (a) increasing competition, (b) the Internet, (c) applicant-position match, (d) publishing and funding potential, (e) postdocs, and (f) the hiring window. Discussion of each trend is followed by a brief segment outlining implications of that trend for job applicants. The second section of the article integrates recent trends into a discussion of the steps required to search for and obtain a research-oriented academic clinical psychology position.

Trend 1: Increasing Competition

In 1970, 1,890 doctorates were awarded in psychology. By 2001, that figure had doubled to 3,623 (Kohout, 2003). Within the subfield of clinical psychology, the growth has occurred

most dramatically within the last 15 years. Across the years 1987 to 1989, an average of 1,189 clinical psychology doctorates was awarded annually in the United States. By 1999–2001, the most recent data available, the annual average had grown to 1,351 (Hoffer et al., 2002; Sanderson & Dugoni, 1999). A large proportion of clinical psychology doctoral recipients desire careers in private practice (44% of 1999 psychology doctorate recipients reported primary full-time positions in practice-oriented settings; APA Research Office, 1999), but a sizable portion seeks jobs in the academic arena (29% of 1999 graduates; APA Research Office, 1999).

The trend for universities to award more Ph.D.s in clinical psychology is particularly troubling to job seekers because financially strapped universities have simultaneously limited hiring of tenure-track assistant professors in recent years (J. Kohout, personal communication, July 22, 2002; Wood, 1998). Over the past decade, the number of new academic appointments has remained stable despite the increase in graduates seeking jobs (J. Kohout, personal communication, July 22, 2002). Together, these trends create a supply-demand ratio that favors hiring departments even more than in the past.

Implications for Applicants

With increased competition for limited positions, today's clinical psychology job applicants frequently seek postdoctoral experience (Trend 5) to increase their publication rate and grant-writing potential (Trend 4) before applying to jobs. They also use the Internet (Trend 2) to increase their preparedness and locate more positions to apply to.

Trend 2: Internet Use

The Internet has transformed academia over the past decade, so it is not surprising that one of the most significant changes in the academic job market over the past decade is the use of the Internet in the job-seeking process. This trend, touched upon in recent publications (e.g., Darley & Zanna, 2004),

but missing from the bulk of dated job-seeking resources, begins with job advertisements. Numerous listservs (e.g., New Psychologist listservs run by APAGS and Yahoo groups) and Web sites (e.g., APA, Chronicle of Higher Education) advertise positions. The APA PsycCareers Web site permits categorized searching for jobs by psychological subspecialty and geographic location.

The Internet also provides a wealth of resources for applicants preparing applications. Among the resources available are step-by-step guides to obtain a job, lists of possible interview questions, and examples of how to prepare teaching and research statements, cover letters, and CVs. Further, the Internet affords careful study of universities, departments, and faculty. Whereas previously candidates were expected to learn details about a department during an interview, today most of that information is available on faculty, departmental and university Web sites, and through computerized literature searches of faculty member publications. Therefore, candidates generally know basic information about the faculty, department, and university before arriving to an interview. In fact, combined with the trend for increasing competition (Trend 1), the availability of Internet resources at departmental Web sites has transformed interview experiences from the bidirectional fact-finding sessions described in existing resources into more formal unidirectional evaluations of applicants by hiring departments.

Implications for Applicants

Most of today's applicants are highly familiar with and adept at using e-mail and the Internet, and they use these skills to their advantage. In particular, applicants use the Internet to (a) ensure they have applied to all relevant jobs, (b) educate themselves thoroughly about departments before going on interviews, and (c) communicate electronically with department chairs and search committees. Because applicants are expected

to use the Internet to study departments they apply to, there is added expectation during interviews that applicants ask sophisticated questions to demonstrate their knowledge of and interest in the hiring department.

Trend 3: Applicant-Position Match

Concomitant with the increasing size of the applicant pool for entry-level academic positions (Trend 1), the importance of applicant-position match has grown dramatically. Existing job-seeking resources omit this topic. Most departments have particular strengths they hope to complement with future hires. For example, a behaviorally oriented department is unlikely to hire a psychodynamic thinker. A department driven by theoretical approaches to psychopathology might be hesitant to recruit a more applied researcher. Further, most departments have specific niches to fill (e.g., a teacher for the graduate-level child psychopathology course or a biologically oriented clinician to serve as a consultant on existing funded research projects). Since the supply-demand balance favors the hirers, top programs readily dismiss good applicants in favor of good candidates who also fill niches.

Implications for Applicants

Identification of the applicant-position match that departments desire is frequently challenging and sometimes impossible for applicants prior to applying. In some cases, the department has multiple niches to fill and there is internal debate over which are the top priorities. In other cases, the department has a clear niche to fill, but if they receive a particularly extraordinary application in a different area, they might consider that individual anyway (and therefore keep recruitment advertisements purposely vague).

Most applicants choose a two-pronged conservative approach. First, they attempt to identify departmental needs (through Internet searches, careful readings of recruitment advertisements, and personal connections to faculty in hiring departments), and if possible emphasize in their applications how they might help to satisfy identified needs. Second, most applicants apply widely, anticipating that some applications will be quickly rejected by hiring departments who recognize a poor match. Recent data from nearly 100 job applicants for academic psychology positions suggest the correlation between job applications sent and job offers received is $r(89) = .28$ ($p < .05$) and that 50% of applicants do not receive any offers, frequently because they did not send enough applications to land a good “match” (Todd & Ortmann, 2004).

Trend 4: Publishing and Funding

Potential

Hiring departments have long emphasized applicants’ publishing potential (Quereshi, Buckley, & Fadden, 1981), and existing job-searching resources emphasize this fact prominently. Recently, a related trend has emerged. Publishing history and potential has been surpassed, or at least equaled, by a second factor in a job candidate’s portfolio: grant-writing potential (Ng, 1997). An applicant without a good record of publications—including a coherent research program evidenced by first-authored publications in prestigious peer-reviewed journals—is unlikely to land a position in a research-oriented academic department. But an applicant with a good publication record and no history or promise of extramural funding is also unlikely to land a position in that department. Financially strapped departments and universities are increasingly dependent on external funds, and therefore recruit faculty members who will contribute to their financial coffers through extramural funding.

Implications for Applicants

To be successful, applicants must: (a) develop a coherent research program that demonstrates an interest in one research area through graduate school and a postdoc, (b) publish that research widely, largely through first-authored publications in prestigious peer-reviewed journals, (c) show the ability to receive grants by funding dissertation or postdoc research through small (or even large) extramural grants, and (d) demonstrate plans for a research program that will soon be fundable through extramural grants.

Trend 5: Postdoctoral Experience

Clinical psychology is moving in the direction of neuroscience and other fields: postdocs are expected prior to a tenure-track appointment. This is not yet absolute but is a trend for at least three reasons. First, because they have spent a few years postgraduate school, applicants with postdocs often have publishing and grant-writing records that better demonstrate a cohesive and dedicated program of research (Trend 4). Second, postdoc experience expedites clinical licensing. Although laws vary somewhat, most North American jurisdictions require postdoctoral clinical training before licensing. Junior faculty who are able to supervise clinical work by graduate students and/or conduct clinical work as part of their job responsibilities are generally preferable to applicants who still require postdoctoral supervised clinical hours before licensing.

A third reason for obtaining postdoc experience is due to other activities applicants complete during the postdoctoral years. Most research-oriented academic positions require teaching. A postdoctoral teaching position

provides valuable teaching experience and course preparation.

Implications for Applicants

Although it is possible to obtain an academic job immediately following the clinical internship, it is increasingly difficult. Research-oriented Ph.D. graduates with solid publication and funding records often send both job and postdoc applications simultaneously during the fall and winter of their clinical internship year. Without an established research program, research-oriented Ph.D. graduates generally seek a 1- to 3-year research-oriented postdoc before applying to jobs.

Trend 6: The Hiring Window

Contrary to indications from existing resources, the timing of applications for research-oriented academic jobs is far wider than that of graduate programs or clinical internships. In fact, the job market window has widened considerably over the past decade. Some departments advertise, interview, and offer jobs early in the fall, with application deadlines as early as mid-September. Other hiring departments wait until late winter, with deadlines in late February or even early March. Why the breadth? To some extent, it is due to competition: early-advertising departments hope to “grab” top applicants before they get other offers. Funding is also a factor. Some departments do not get funding approval from their universities until late in the season, and advertise then, hoping to draw from the wide and talented pool of applicants still remaining.

Implications for Applicants

Many of today’s job applicants discover they have job offers – and concomitant pressure to accept – while still sending new applications. In some cases, applicants will be stuck and must make difficult decisions. To the extent possible, applicants should clump interviews in January and February, delay job offers, and advise late-advertisers of existing offers.

Job Application Steps

Applying for an academic job in clinical psychology takes monumental amounts of time, but is eased through careful organization and planning. Below is a sketch of the steps involved. Candidates should consult other resources (e.g., Darley & Zanna, 1979; Iacono, 1981) to supplement this brief review designed to update the field.

Step 1 involves building the foundation. Ideally, the applicant starts preparing for an academic career while in graduate school (Trend 5). Applicants should identify a “burn-

ing question” and conduct a series of research projects on that topic to build a research program that produces publications and funding (Trend 4).

Step 2 is preparation of the job application. Because the hiring window has moved earlier (Trend 6), applicants must start the process sooner. As early as winter of the year before applying, applicants should identify three or four individuals who will write enthusiastic letters of recommendation; explore departments by Internet (Trend 2); consult with peers and mentors for advice on preparing a CV, cover letters, teaching and research statements; and attend job talks of the cohort 1 year ahead.

Step 3 involves searching for job advertisements and sending applications. As detailed elsewhere (e.g., Darley & Zanna, 1979, 2004; Iacono, 1981), applications generally include six pieces: a cover letter, a CV, a teaching statement, a research statement, relevant reprints, and three to four letters of recommendation.

Because the hiring window has inched earlier (Trend 6), applicants should begin glancing at advertisements in May and search carefully from August through the following March. Many resources are available, but most research-oriented jobs are listed in the *APA Monitor*, the *APS Observer*, and/or the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The Internet (Trend 2) offers numerous advertisements through psychology and behavior science e-mail listservs and Web sites. Applicants should look and apply widely (Trend 1): although clinical psychology positions in psychology departments are likely most familiar, clinical psychologists also land academic jobs in school, counseling, or developmental psychology and in departments or schools of medicine, education, nursing, public health, social work, and other disciplines (e.g., Milling & Walker, 1991).

Successful applicants often contact programs judiciously by e-mail (Trend 2) to learn more about advertised or soon-to-be-advertised positions. In addition, applicants should conduct careful Internet searches on the departments they apply to so that application statements and cover letters can be tailored to match the needs of the position and program (Trend 3).

Step 4 frequently co-occurs with Step 3. Departments make initial phone contact to elicit applicants' continuing interest and investigate applicant-department match (Trend 6). This can occur as early as October. Successful applicants prepare for such phone calls by gathering materials from the Internet on each department (Trend 2). In particular, if applicants have a notion of the match being sought (Trend 3), this is the time to emphasize it: during phone calls most departments seek to narrow their pool from a short list to an interview list. Of course, applicants should not

lie to create matches. Accepting a position where a match does not exist could result in the applicant being unhappy with the job and the department being unhappy with the applicant; such unhappiness often leads to negative tenure decisions a few years later.

Step 5 is the interview. Because of the earlier hiring window (Trend 6), this can occur as early as November and is typically a 2-day affair paid for by the hiring institution. Most departments interview one to four applicants for a single position. Applicants should prepare to take time off from internships or postdocs and have a job talk prepared well in advance. The job talk, given as a colloquium to the hiring department, is among the most critical parts of the entire process and should be prepared, practiced, and critiqued meticulously. Interviews and job talks provide an opportunity for the hiring department to evaluate applicants for publishing and funding potential and for match (Trends 3 and 4). They also provide, to a lesser degree, an opportunity for applicants to evaluate the department. As detailed elsewhere (e.g., Linehan, 1983; Rohsenow, 1985), successful applicants prepare a series of questions to ask at interviews, consider their answers to a range of potential interview questions well in advance, and mail/e-mail thank-you notes expressing continuing interest and emphasizing match soon after visits.

Step 6 is negotiating the offer. Formal job offers typically occur 1 to 8 weeks after an interview. During interviews, applicants may be asked about start-up research budget. To prepare, applicants should discuss needs with recently hired faculty and mentors. Once an offer is extended, the applicant suddenly has the upper hand and can negotiate requests: a second evaluative visit, perhaps with a spouse/partner; start-up money and supplies (computers, software, equipment, pilot study funds, graduate student assistants); reduced course loads; higher salary; summer salary; laboratory space or resources; moving expenses; and so on. The applicant can also delay, to some extent, the decision time in order to determine status at other universities (Trend 6). Details are available elsewhere (e.g., Darley & Zanna, 1979, 2004; Iacono, 1981).

Conclusion

Application to academic jobs in clinical psychology is an evolving process. Six recent trends, lacking in dated resources, have been identified. Combined with other resources (e.g., Brems et al., 1995; Darley & Zanna, 1979, 2004; Iacono, 1981), both applicants and hirers should feel up-to-date on the academic clinical psychology job market.

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