Careers for Family Science Ph.D.s Outside of Academe: Trends and Implications*

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Faced with decreased opportunities for employment in academe, there is an increasing trend toward nonacademic employment among doctoral-level graduates. This article examines the career prospects, issues, and obstacles for family science Ph.D.s outside of academe. Specific recommendations are offered for doctoral-level family science graduates as well as for faculty members and graduate departments for confronting this changing employment situation.

Graduates of doctorate-level family science programs today face an employment market that differs markedly from the market faced by earlier graduate cohorts. Paralleling declining student enrollments and the increasing number of Ph.D. graduates, the employment prospects for new doctoral-level graduates in the traditional academic world has decreased considerably since the early 1960s (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; National Research Council, 1983). The number of career slots in academic settings has failed to keep pace with the increasing number of new Ph.D.s from family science programs (Vance & Leslie, 1985).

Although the lack of employment opportunities in academe as well as the chances for secure employment has been somewhat compensated by the increasing availability of jobs in the nonacademic sector (e.g., business and government), many family science doctoral-level graduates are unaware of these opportunities. Many also lack the necessary skills, strategies, and professional support to successfully compete for these positions (Bowen, 1985).

This article examines the career prospects for family science doctorate-level professionals outside of academe. To provide a context for the discussion, this article first discusses the changing employment situations for Ph.D.s in general, outlining data that pinpoints why doctorate-level professionals should be considering alternatives to the traditional career in academe. It then identifies specific obstacles that may hinder the ability of family science professionals to pursue academic career alternatives. The

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article concludes by outlining specific recommendations for both doctorate-level graduates as well as for faculty members and graduate departments for enhancing the employment potential of family science doctorate-level professionals.

CHANGING EMPLOYMENT SITUATION FOR PH.D.S

An increasing number of doctoral-level graduates are leaving their graduate programs with a degree in one hand and unemployment and high debt ratios in the other (Gross, 1983; National Research Council, 1983). This section discusses the economic climate that has made academic employment somewhat more difficult to obtain and retain by recent Ph.D. cohorts, and the employment strategies and alternatives that are being pursued by an increasing number of graduates.

Decreasing Employment Opportunities and Security in Academe

A question of supply and demand. The growing number of doctoral degrees awarded in social science fields since the 1970s, as compared to earlier decades, is a major factor contributing to the employment squeeze faced by Ph.D.s in the job market today. Of the estimated 358,600 science and engineering Ph.D.s who were residing in the United States in 1981, nearly 52 percent earned their doctoral degrees between 1970 and 1980 (National Research Council, 1983). The production of science and engineering Ph.D.s has approximately doubled from decade to decade during the past 30 years. In fact, almost as many doctoral scientists and engineers earned their doctoral degrees during the four year period, 1977-1980, as had done so between the 20 year period, 1938-1959.

Unfortunately, the employment demand for Ph.D.s in traditional academic settings has failed to keep pace with the increasing supply. This situation is compounded by declining college enrollments which parallel demographic declines in the number of college age youth. In fact, the number of 18-year-old males and females is estimated to remain 20% to 25% below 1975 levels through 1998 (Bureau of the Census, 1977). As a consequence, the job market for recent doctoral-level graduates has grown extremely competitive, and the proportion of new graduates securing employment in academe has decreased markedly (Watkins, 1983). For example, only 54 percent of the 1977-1980 behavioral and social science cohort was employed in academic positions, compared to 71.2 percent of the 1960-64 cohort, a 41 percent decrease (National Research Council, 1983).

President William G. Bowen of Princeton University estimated that approximately 25,000 to 30,000 new doctorates will be awarded each year from 1980 to 1995. On the other hand, he estimates that only about 100,000 college teaching jobs will become available during this entire period of time (Tenner, 1984). Ernest May and Dorothy Blaney, joint authors of *Careers for Humanists*, have predicted that by 1995 the chances of a new graduate securing an academic appointment will be about one in seven (Tenner, 1984). These projections are supported by recent Bureau of Labor Statistics which estimate that the demand for college and university faculty will decline by 15 percent from 1982 to 1995 (Evangelouf, 1984). In a list of the 20 most rapidly contracting occupations, college teaching is in ninth place, between farm laborers and roustabouts (Evangelouf, 1984). When combined, these figures suggest a very different employment context for recent and projected Ph.D.s compared to the employment situation for earlier cohorts.
An increase in non-tenure track positions. Among more recent graduate cohorts who obtain positions in academe, an increasing number are being employed in nontenure-track positions. For example, 17 percent of academically employed Ph.D.s who received their doctoral degrees in science and engineering fields from 1973-1976 did not hold tenure-track positions. For purposes of comparison, this percentage increased to 26 percent for the 1977-1980 graduate cohort who were employed in academic settings (National Research Council, 1983). Only 4 percent of the 1960-1964 graduate cohort were in academic jobs that did not lead to tenure (Watkins, 1983).

Not only has there been an increase in the proportion of nontenure track positions for recent doctoral-level cohorts, but also, for more recent graduates who are in tenure track positions, the attainment of tenure status has slowed over the years. While 60 percent of the academically employed 1969-1972 cohort of behavioral and social science Ph.D.s were tenured 5 to 8 years after the doctorate, only 50 percent of the 1973-1976 cohort were tenured in 1981. This projected increase in the number of years between receiving the doctorate and receiving tenure status appears to be driven by a combination of factors, including increased competition in more junior academic ranks, projected declines in student enrollments through the 1980s and early 1990s, the resulting reduction in the number of new faculty positions, and the tendency of academic schools and departments to avoid becoming too tenure weighted with tenured faculty.

A Rise in the Availability of Postdoctoral Appointments

The increased competition for traditional employment in the academic world is somewhat compensated by the increased availability of postdoctoral appointments. Selecting postdoctoral study rather than employment following receipt of the doctorate is a trend that has increased over the past 20 years for new Ph.D.s in the behavioral and social sciences (National Research Council, 1983). By comparison, only 6 percent of the 1960-1964 graduates and 5 percent of the 1965-1968 graduates had plans to pursue postgraduate study immediately after receiving the Ph.D.; the comparable percentage for graduates of the 1977-1980 cohort doubled these earlier percentages: 12 percent. In general, however, Ph.D.s in the behavioral and social science fields have far fewer postgraduate opportunities open to them than Ph.D.s in other career fields, especially those graduating in the life sciences; as a consequence, they are more likely than other graduates to enter the job market as soon as they graduate (National Research Council, 1983).

Since the acceptance of postdoctoral appointments immediately after the doctorate delays the entry of graduates into tenure-track positions, it is important to compare the career paths of those who pursue postdoctoral appointments after graduation to those that elect to seek employment opportunities in academe. Findings from the National Research Council (1983) indicate that the pursuit of postdoctoral appointments as compared to academic employment not only affects the eventual attainment of tenure status, but also affects academic promotion. For example, among the 1973-1976 cohort of science and engineering Ph.D.s who were academically employed in 1981, 59 percent of those having definite employment plans immediately after the doctorate were tenured by 1981. On the other hand, only 16 percent of those with firm postgraduate commitments for postdoctoral study were tenured by the same date. In addition, more than 60 percent of the academically employed 1973-1976 science and engineering Ph.D.s with definite career plans immediately after the doctorate held the rank of full or associate professor, compared to only 22 percent of those with definite plans for postdoctoral study.
In summary, these findings suggest not only more limited opportunities for postdoctoral appointments for graduates of behavioral and social science programs than for graduates of other programs, but also delayed career status and security for those with definite postdoctoral study plans at graduation as compared to their contemporaries with firm commitments for academic employment after receiving their doctorates. These facts bring into question the level of compensation that increases in the number of postdoctoral appointments can have on the employment and career success of new Ph.D.s.

**Career Alternative Outside Academe**

Given the employment situation in academe today, it is not surprising that a growing number of Ph.D. graduates are obtaining nonacademic positions. Over the last 20 years, there has been an increasing trend toward employment outside of academe for Ph.D. behavioral and social scientists, their traditional place of employment. In fact, nearly half (46 percent) of the 1977-1980 cohort were employed in nonacademe, primarily in business and industry (16 percent), government (11 percent), and other nonacademic settings (18 percent), including self employment (National Research Council, 1983).

A recent survey by Vance and Leslie (1985) of 392 members of the National Council of Family Relations who are currently employed in nonacademic positions revealed a diversity of employing organizations for family scientists, including non-profit organizations (37 percent), profit business organizations (27 percent), and government organizations (15 percent). Employment in these nonacademic positions did not necessarily mean that family scientists had to work outside their academic specialties. The majority of respondents (81%) reported that they were working in specialty fields related to their degree.

The increasing trend toward nonacademic employment among behavioral and social scientist Ph.D.s results in part from the declining availability of academic positions as well as a growing dissatisfaction of recent graduates with pay, benefits, and promotion opportunities within academe (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; National Research Council, 1983). More attractive career options have also induced many doctoral graduates to accept employment outside of academe. For example, of the 1973-1976 cohort of behavioral and social science graduates who were employed in 1981 outside of their Ph.D. field, 41 percent gave "more attractive career options" as the reason for accepting employment outside of their doctoral specialty (National Research Council, 1983). Other major reasons reported by this cohort of respondents included: lack of an available position in one's career field (20 percent) and better pay (13 percent).

Given the present market economy within academe, it will be critical that Ph.D. graduates in the behavioral and social sciences over the next decade carefully consider career alternatives to traditional academic employment. It is likely that an increasing proportion of future graduates will seek positions in government and the private sector. Although there is evidence that opportunities are available for doctoral-level graduates in nonacademic settings, an increasing number of graduates will be competing for these positions as well. As a consequence, it is necessary for members of the academic community to plan for this inevitability and to gear graduate programs and employment support services to this demographic reality. An important first step is to identify obstacles that may hinder doctoral-level graduates from pursuing and securing careers outside of academe.
OBSTACLES TO SECURING CAREERS OUTSIDE OF ACADEME

It is clear that career opportunities do exist for Ph.D.s outside of academe. There is also evidence that Ph.D.s compete very successfully for entry-level jobs in industry and business, even against more technically trained MBA candidates (Groneman & Lear, 1985). However, it is another matter altogether for newly graduated Ph.D.s who have found academic jobs unavailable to take advantage of nonacademic job opportunities (Moore, 1983). Many graduates complete their academic training discouraged about the lack of job prospects, heavily in debt, and without a significant support system to assist them in their job search (Moore, 1983). For those who have spent their academic career planning and preparing for a job in the academic world, a number of obstacles may delay their facing the realities of the job market and pursuing employment alternatives, including what has come to be labeled by Bowen (1985) as the "defector syndrome," as well as a lack of information about employment alternatives, a lack of job-related experience, and a lack of contacts.

The Defector Syndrome

A social-psychological phenomenon, the "defector syndrome" represents the sum of ambivalence that an academically-oriented graduate may have toward pursuing employment outside of the academic arena. Although it is certainly possible to continue to be an active and productive scholar outside academe, it may be very difficult to leave a secure environment where the culture of success is well understood for the often less familiar world of employment in the government or private sector. Many Ph.D.s have flourished in the academic environment since early youth. They have a long history of rewards through academics, and, for many, their primary reference and support groups exist within the academic community.

Graduates who pursue nonacademic career paths may also feel a sense of betrayal to their faculty mentors. Feelings of obligation and responsibility to one's mentors are facilitated in the academic community by the lengthy apprenticeship of graduate students and by the investments of faculty members into the molding of a student's career. Students may even be snubbed by faculty members for demonstrating interest in nonacademic career paths (Tenner, 1984).

The "defector syndrome" can present a serious obstacle to facing the realities of the employment environment. It may not only pose great stress to the new graduate, but also limit the planning for possible different career scenarios during the graduate years. In addition, it may cause the graduate to narrowly define suitable employment options.

Lack of Information

Information about employment opportunities outside of academe is a necessary condition both for preparing for different employment scenarios during the graduate years as well as for mounting a successful employment search toward the conclusion of graduate studies. If students know about career alternatives outside of academe, it is likely they can tailor their graduate program to include coursework and experiences that better qualify them for these positions.

Doctoral-level students intending to pursue careers as marital and family therapists are an excellent case in point. For those students who wish to go into full-time private practice after graduation rather than pursue an academic career, it is likely that they will
concentrate more heavily on clinical coursework as compared to research coursework (Atkinson & McKenzie, 1984). In a similar vein, it may be advisable for students who wish to pursue employment in employee assistance programs in the private sector to enroll in some business-related courses, such as courses in personnel management and organizational dynamics.

Unfortunately, doctoral students are frequently unaware of employment prerequisites for settings outside academe. Others deny that they will not be able to find a position in academe after graduation. Even those who know about employment alternatives outside academe and the requisite qualifications necessary to compete for these positions may lack information about how to make employment application. For instance, it is vital that doctoral students who wish to pursue employment opportunities in the federal government know about Standard Form 171, a lengthy application form that must be completed and submitted to the Office of Personnel and Management, U.S. Government. To compound this situation, it is often the case that professors in family science programs have little information about employment opportunities outside academe, much less the logistics of the application process. Professors may also lack the contacts with nonacademic employers to create potential employment opportunities for students.

Many academically-oriented family science professionals may have little understanding of the "culture" of organizational settings outside of academe. Such a lack of understanding can be a major barrier to securing employment in these settings. For instance, while a "weighty" resume with priority given to publications may be an important employment criterion in academe, a corporate vice president searching for a director of employee assistance may perceive such a resume as demonstrating a lack of discretion. In a similar vein, the "ABD" (i.e., "All but Dissertation") which is often listed on the resumes of doctoral candidates as a positive designation may be interpreted quite differently by the corporate manager: "All but Discipline." It is critical that the "ABD" be translated into the language of the employer. This requires that applicants for positions in these settings gain information about the "culture" of the work setting before making application.

Lack of Professional Job-Related Experience

An important source of information about different career alternatives outside academe is actual professional job-related experiences in nonacademic settings. Unfortunately, many students go straight from the undergraduate classroom to graduate school with few professional job-related experiences before receiving the Ph.D. Even for those with nonacademic employment experiences, these experiences are often quite limited and may be only tangentially related to their field of study.

Although some doctoral-level family science students pursue graduate-level internships in the government and private sector, this seems to be more the exception than the rule. Of graduate students in family science doctoral-level programs, clinically-oriented students are probably most likely to have internships in nonacademic-type settings, frequently in community helping service agencies.

Professional job-related experiences may not only be an important learning opportunity for doctoral-level students, but also these experiences may provide students with a valuable source of information about employment opportunities. In addition, such non-academic work experiences often link the student to an extended network of nonacademic professionals who may themselves be viable sources of employment opportunities and referrals.
Lack of Contacts

Although the last obstacle to be discussed, the importance of professional contacts is vital in the job search, whether one is seeking employment in academic or nonacademic settings. While doctoral-level students may have academic mentors who will provide a source of linkage to academic positions, they may lack viable sources of contacts in the nonacademic world.

Nonacademic contacts, particularly those who will serve as employment sponsors and brokers for the graduate, are an invaluable source of assistance to the graduate in locating employment opportunities as well as getting invitations for job interviews. They can make the difference between employment and unemployment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

As emphasized in the recently published book, The Corporate Ph.D. by Carol Groneman and Robert Lear (1985), Ph.D.s have an abundance of skills that nonacademic employers such as government and business value in their employees. For example, Ph.D.s tend to be self-motivated and are accustomed to stiff competition as well as to tight deadlines (Jacobson, 1983). They also tend to have good writing and speaking skills, skills invaluable to almost any professional career path. In addition, they are accustomed to analyzing complex ideas, and have, often by necessity, learned to use time and resources effectively (Jacobson, 1983). Unfortunately, they do not always know how to present these skills to prospective employers. In fact, if they follow the academic style, which tends to underplay rather than overplay one's abilities and skills, they may actually downplay some of their strengths.

The following are some "do's" and "don'ts" for doctoral-level family science professional who wish to pursue careers outside academe. Selective recommendations are also offered for faculty and graduate departments who wish to become more supportive of their doctoral-level family science graduates who are facing contemporary employment realities.

Recommendations for the Graduate

Develop a five and ten year employment plan. It is extremely difficult to achieve any end in an effective and efficient manner without a plan of action. Doctoral students in family science programs are encouraged to develop five and ten year post graduation employment plans relatively early in their doctoral studies, replete with explicit career goals and strategies for achieving specified goals. The objective is to make the career path more purposeful and directed, less the product of a possible random series of events and influences. Students should share these plans with their major faculty advisors to receive feedback as well as to forge a joint plan of action. With effective planning, students might be able to take some out-of-major courses as electives or pursue a special internship during their academic program to provide them with career-related experiences. For a primer on career development, students are encouraged to read the long-running best seller, What color is your parachute?, by Richard Nelson Bolles (1978).

Work to resolve the defector syndrome. For recent Ph.D. graduates who had planned to pursue academic careers but suddenly find themselves shut out because of lack of employment opportunities, resolving the defector syndrome may be a major challenge. It is possible to continue to be a productive and respected scholar even though you earn your living from a nonacademic job. Failure to resolve the defector syndrome can lead
to a pattern of unemployment and underemployment as well as itinerant exploitation by the university system. It also can lead to a situation of serving two masters: meeting the expectations of both the nonacademic employer as well as those of a reference group primarily from the academic community. Often, the rules of success are very different in these two environments. To the extent that they compete, the graduate is likely to feel a sense of both role conflict and role strain. It may be necessary to receive some professional career counseling. It may also be helpful to attend some of the programs designed to help retool Ph.D.s for nonacademic careers. For example, since 1978, a number of universities have begun to sponsor summer institutes designed to retool academicians for business-related careers, including Harvard, New York, and Stanford Universities, as well as the Universities of California at Los Angeles, Pennsylvania, Texas at Austin, and Virginia (Jacobson, 1983; Tenner, 1984). Most of these programs include deprogramming sessions that assist Ph.D.s to accept the possibility they may not teach (Tenner, 1984).

Conduct informational interviews. It is advisable for doctoral-level students to conduct informational interviews with people in jobs that follow their own career intentions. A convenient source of information is often faculty members who are involved in continuing education programs as well as adjunct professors who often have nonacademic jobs during the day (Palmer, 1983). These preliminary interviews can be a valuable source of information about the "do's" and the "don'ts" in different employment contexts, and can provide important information to students about how to present themselves as well as their skills to prospective employers. Students should never go into job interviews without doing their homework, finding out as much as possible about the potential employer and the issues and challenges they face. This is true whether one is pursuing nonacademic or academic employment prospects.

Recommendations for Faculty and Graduate Departments

Establish linkages in the nonacademic community. Faculty mentors often play an important sponsorship role in helping newly graduated Ph.D.s secure jobs in academe (Giles & Endsley, 1988). This role as "employment broker" is facilitated by the extensive contacts that many professors have developed in the academic community over their years of tenure as well as by the high level of mutual respect and professionalism among most academics. For instance, it is not unusual for professors to have several generational cohorts of former students and colleagues in different academic institutions to draw upon in helping students locate employment opportunities. In many cases, doctoral students will even feel a sense of generational linkage with former students and colleagues of their major professors.

Unfortunately, faculty often lack such extensive networks in the nonacademic employment community. Although faculty members can provide former students with letters of recommendation, their role as "employment brokers" may be more limited within the nonacademic arena.

Given the restricted employment market in academe today, faculty members are encouraged to expand their sources of contacts in the nonacademic community. For some, this opportunity will occur naturally as they work on contracts and grants under the auspices of various levels of government as well as with private institutions and nonprofit foundations. These nonacademic contacts provide a rich opportunity for faculty to inquire about the types of career opportunities that exist in these occupational settings for doctoral-level family science professionals. As faculty members begin to develop contacts and to place students in these nonacademic settings, the same type of professional networks and generational linkages will evolve over time between professors.
and professionals employed in nonacademic positions which currently exist among professors in the academic community. These networks and linkages will be an invaluable source of future employment opportunities for newly graduated doctoral-level students.

**Make creative use of adjunct professors.** Funding cutbacks in many universities and colleges have resulted in the increasing use of adjunct professors to teach courses. It is not unusual for adjunct professors to hold full time nonacademic positions in the community. In these cases, they are not only potentially important contacts for students for employment-related reasons, but also they can be invited by the faculty to provide seminars to doctoral-level students on nonacademic career alternatives.

Of course, these types of opportunities are not limited to only adjunct/professors. Many community professionals would view an invitation by a faculty member to present a seminar to doctoral students about nonacademic job opportunities and requirements as an honor.

**Expand student internships.** One of the best ways to secure employment is to already be involved in an employing organization. Although internships or practica are often required for students specializing in marital and family therapy, offered primarily in cooperation with community human service agencies, fewer nonclinical students elect internships.

It is recommended that faculty encourage nonclinical students to also serve as interns in nonacademic employment settings whose scope of work is related to the student's career interest, including governmental agencies, consulting firms, professional foundations, and community and human service agencies. These internships provide an important opportunity to increase the information that students have about nonacademic employment settings. They also provide important job experiences and the possibility of translating theoretical concepts and research skills from the classroom to real life situations.

Similar to clinical internships, these internships could be arranged by faculty where students receive credit degree hours for their work in these settings. It is important to emphasize that these internships would necessitate that faculty members be available for professional liaison with the field setting and for student consultation and supervision.

**Conduct departmental self studies.** Academic departments with doctoral-level family science programs are encouraged to form committees to study the employment situations and career paths of recent graduates and the implications of study findings for departmental policies and practices. Alumni surveys may yield important information about the career strategies, paths, and future plans of recent graduates. Such surveys could also provide valuable feedback to departments and faculty about how well students felt prepared by their doctoral program to face the realities of the job market.

These departmental self studies should not only focus on the employment demographics and patterns of recent graduates, but also consider the role and responsibilities that departmental faculty have in the employment placement and sponsorship of doctoral-level students. A key question has to concern the primary mission of the department. For instance, is the mission of the department primarily oriented to preparing doctoral-level students for academic careers? If so, what are the implications of this mission given the shrinking employment opportunities for students in academic?
The current trends in academic employment opportunities for doctoral-level family science professionals pose interesting challenges for academic departments which are generating an increasing supply of Ph.D. graduates in family science. Only by careful self study and discussion can these departments generate a responsible plan of action for helping students navigate an increasingly competitive employment market. It is critical that faculty members within family science departments provide the necessary leadership and advocacy at both the individual student level as well as at the departmental level in response to the growing employment dilemma for our Ph.D. students in family science.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1. In the study by the National Research Council (1983), the science and engineering careers fields were combined and included mathematics, computer sciences, physics and chemistry, earth and environmental sciences, agriculture, medicine, biology, psychology, and the social sciences.
2. The comparable proportion of graduates from the 1973-1976 cohort of behavioral and social scientists was slightly less, approximately 13 percent (National Research Council, 1983). Unfortunately, comparison data by graduate cohort is not provided in the research report by the National Research Council on the proportion of academically employed Ph.D.s in nontenure-track positions by subpopulation within the science and engineering fields. As a consequence, trend comparisons across cohorts within the behavioral and social sciences are not available for discussion.

3. Since this survey was not limited to only doctoral-level graduates, its findings should be interpreted cautiously for purposes of the present discussion.

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