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# Career Outcomes of Political Science Ph.D. Recipients: Results from the Ph.D.s Ten Years Later Study

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The completion of the Ph.D.'s Ten Years Later study, a national study of the career paths of doctoral degree recipients, has allowed us to provide detailed information about the actual employment patterns of nearly 4, 000 PhDs recipients in biochemistry, computer science, electrical engineering, English, mathematics, and political science. In previous research notes and reports<sup>1</sup>, we have provided a general picture of the career paths of these doctoral degree recipients. With this particular report, we offer a more specific examination the career paths of those who complete the Ph.D. in Political Science.

Most political science Ph.D. recipients sought jobs as professors. However, political science, with its various subdisciplines, has strong connections to non-academic labor markets as well. While graduates in subfields, such as political theory, are mostly limited to the academic job market, others, such as those in comparative politics, international relations, or public administration, for example, may have good opportunities for non-academic careers closely related to their doctoral education. Thus, in contrast to the situation faced by humanities graduates, political science Ph.D. recipients know of careers outside academia, and pursue such careers. Therefore, we expected to find fewer lecturers in year-to-year appointments.

Political science Ph.D. recipients sampled for this study were drawn from the pool of graduates who received their doctorates in the academic years 1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85 and identified the field of their degree as “Political Science and Government” or “International Relations” in the Survey of Earned Doctorates. In these three years an average of 491 people per year received a Ph.D. in political science (NRC, 1985, p. 58).<sup>2</sup> This number represents a

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<sup>1</sup> Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny, “Postdoctoral Appointments and Employment Patterns: Patterns of Science and Engineering Doctoral Recipients Ten-plus Years after Ph.D. Completion” *Communicator*, VXXXV(7), August-September 2002; Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny, “Postdoctoral Patterns, Career Advancement, and Problems” *Science*, 3 September 1999, Vol. 285; Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny, “From Rumors to Facts: Career Outcomes of English PhDs” *Communicator*, Vol XXXII (7), Fall 1999. Reprinted in *ADE Bulletin* no 124, winter 2000. Association of Departments of English, New York: the *Modern Language Association*; Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny, ““So You Want to Become a Professor!”: Lessons from PhDs—Ten Years Later Study” in Enriching Graduate Education to Prepare the Next Generation of Faculty Eds. Ann E. Austin and Donald H. Wulff (Jossey-Bass, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> The Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) asks doctorate recipients to categorize the field of their degree according to a predetermined list of fields and subfields. Our study sampled only those political science Ph.D. recipients who identified their field as either “International Relations” or “Political Science and Government.” Thus we have excluded Ph.D. recipients who identified their field as “Public Policy Studies,” although these degrees may have been earned in Political Science departments. In 1983 the SED began to report Ph.D.s awarded in “public policy studies” as a separate subfield, but this subfield accounted for only 69, 54, and 70 Ph.D.s in 1983, 1984, and 1985, respectively. The subfield “International Relations” is still heterogeneous including everything from national

significant drop in the production of Ph.D.s when compared to the decades prior and after 1985. Between 1975 and 1985, the number of Ph.D. degrees awarded annually in political science decreased by almost half, dropping from 862 to 485 (NRC, 1985, p. 58). The continuing increase in Ph.D.s awarded since 1992 shows that the field of Political Science remains an important and attractive field of study. It is both timely and appropriate, therefore, to examine the career patterns over a period of ten to fourteen years of doctoral degree recipients in this field more closely.

### *Study Design and Methodology*

The Ph.D.'s Ten Years Later study involved almost 6,000 Ph.D. recipients from 61 doctoral-granting institutions across the United States. Six disciplines were chosen to represent major fields of study: life science (biochemistry), engineering (computer science and electrical engineering), humanities (English), physical science (mathematics), and social science (political science). The 61 universities were selected based upon their participation in the 1982 National Research Council (NRC) doctoral program assessment, the availability of doctoral programs in the selected disciplines, level of Ph.D. production (i.e., minimum of six Ph.D. degrees in the three years sampled), geographical distribution, and a representative mix of private and public institutions. Once an institution was selected, all doctoral degree recipients of the relevant programs were included in the survey population. No sub-sampling occurred. The survey population accounted for 57 percent of Ph.D. degrees awarded at all U.S. institutions in the six selected fields between July 1, 1982 and June 23, 1985. (Table 1 depicts the distribution of the survey sample across several basic characteristics).

To ensure the highest possible response rate, addresses for doctoral degree recipients in the selected fields and institutions were obtained from the participating institutions, commercial locator agencies, professional association membership directories, the national faculty directory, the national telephone directory, and online search engines as well as library author searches. Surveys were mailed out between October 1996 and October 1997. There was a total response rate of 66 percent from domestic Ph.D. recipients (U.S. citizens and permanent residents) and 52

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security research to development studies. The subfield "Political Science and Government" is likely to be even more diverse, including everything from American politics to political theory and public administration.

percent from international Ph.D. recipients (temporary visa holders at the time of their doctorate completion).

Respondents completed a 22-page survey instrument focusing on employment history, the job-search process, and factors important in the decision to accept the first and current positions. Respondents were also asked to provide a retrospective evaluation of their doctoral program and the usefulness of their doctoral degree. In addition to the survey instrument, in-depth interviews were conducted with 64 respondents to provide information about the context within which career decisions were made.

The Ph.D.'s Ten Years Later data set has been integrated with the National Survey of Earned Doctorates data of the same cohorts, allowing comparative analyses by type of institution, time-to-degree, program size, parental education, and fellowship support. Analyses were run using data weighted to be representative for the entire population of 172 Ph.D.-granting institutions rated in the 1982 NRC doctoral program assessment. Only small differences between weighted and un-weighted results were found. Consequently, results of un-weighted data analyses that exactly represent respondents' answers are reported here.

### ***Gender, Race, Time-to-Degree, and Age Distribution of Political Science Ph.D. recipients***

A total of 525 survey respondents who earned the Ph.D. in Political Science are represented in this study. As is common among most social science doctoral programs, the distribution of this group by gender favors men (75.4 percent) and white students (89.6 percent). Asian American and underrepresented minorities (African American, Native American, and Latino/Chicano) constituted 2% and 8%, respectively.<sup>3</sup> These proportions are close to those found in the relevant population of political science Ph.D.s.

Time to degree is a commonly discussed metric of the efficiency of doctoral degree production. Fifty-three percent of the Political Science Ph.D. recipients in this study earned their degree in 9 years or fewer. Another 20 percent took between 9 and 11 years, while nearly 27 percent earned their degrees after a period exceeding 11 years.

The median age of those completing the degree in Political Science was between 32 years old for men and 33 years old for women. (See Table 1.) The median age for students who are

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<sup>3</sup> Racial categorizations refer only to US citizens and permanent residents.

white (388) and African American (17) was 32 years old. Hispanics complete their degree between the ages of 30 (2 for Puerto Ricans) and 32 (6 for Mexican Americans). Asian Americans (12) at degree completion, as a group, were the oldest at 34.

**Table 1: Median and Mean Age at time of Political Science Ph.D. Conferral**

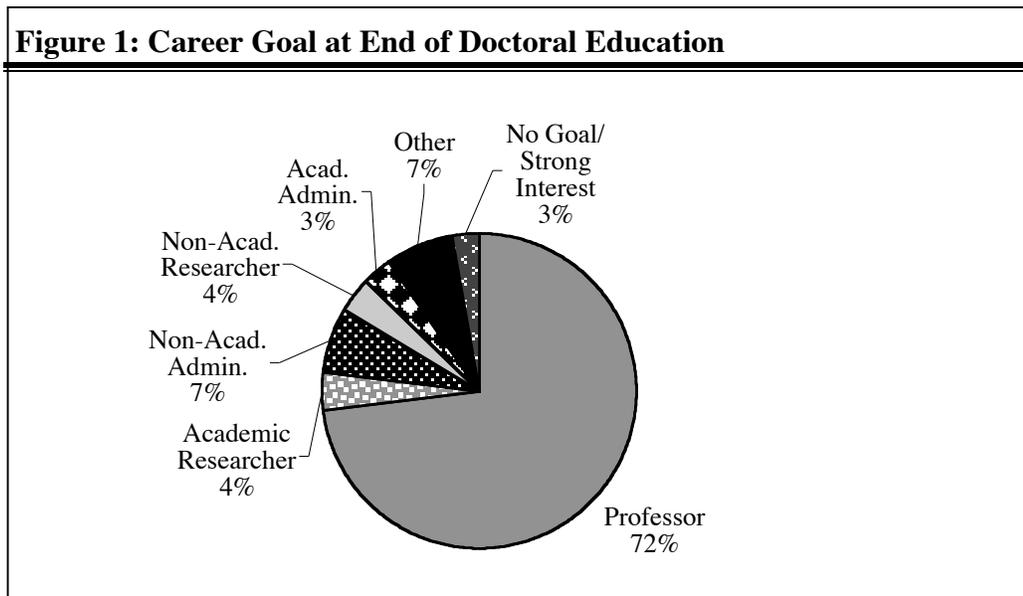
Gender	N	Median	Mean
Men	396	32	34
Women	129	33	35

Race	N	Median	Mean
Native American	1	43	43
Asian	12	34	34
Black	17	32	33
Puerto-Rican	2	30	30
Mexican American	6	32	32
Other Hispanic	6	33	33
White	388	32	34
Other	1	*	*

**Initial Career Aspirations, Faculty Expectations, and the Job Search**

The survey asked respondents to share their retrospective career aspirations upon completion of the Ph.D. As shown in Figure 1, Political Science Ph.D.s overwhelmingly aspired to careers as professors (72 percent).



The next most cited career goal was to become a manager/administrator inside or outside academia (7 percent). This career goal was followed by the desire to become researcher both within and outside of academia (both 4 percent). These career aspirations mirrored with what the survey respondents reported were the career expectations of their faculty for the students within their programs. Table 2 shows that 61 percent reported the faculty encouraged them to pursue academic positions.

**Table 2: Political Science Ph.D.s Views on Faculty Expectations for their Students**

Pursue academic jobs	61.00%
Pursue jobs in both sectors	18.74%
Pursue BGN jobs	0.22%
No specific ideas/encouragement	20.04%

The strong encouragement by faculty to pursue academic careers is further indicated by the fact that less than one percent of students reported receiving encouragement to specifically pursue Non-Academic careers. Nineteen percent reported receiving encouragement that was balanced between pursuing academic and non-academic careers. Twenty percent reported receiving no specific type of encouragement and often said the faculty did appear not to care.

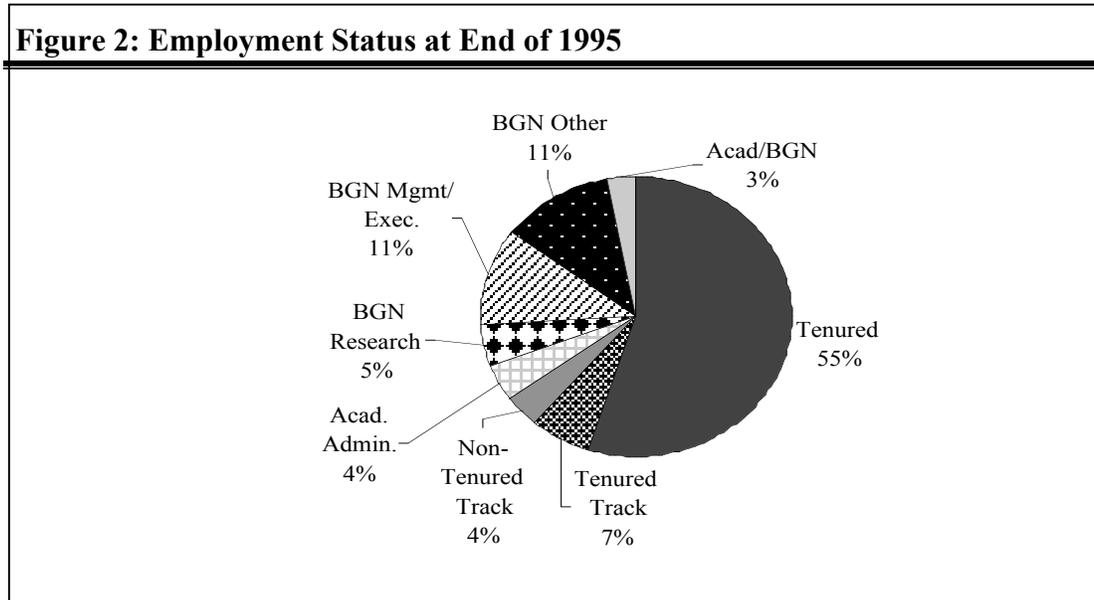
Searching for their first job as freshly minted PhDs, slightly over half of respondents received leads and advice from faculty members and their PhD advisor. However, only about a third of respondents who evaluated the faculty's help as useful (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Four Most Used and Useful Sources in the Job Search**

Source	Used	Useful
Job announcements in newspapers	57.29%	18.0%
Advice from Faculty	55.88%	15.0%
Advice from my Ph.D. advisor	54.95%	19.0%
Already had professional contacts	25.26%	8.0%

### Career Outcomes

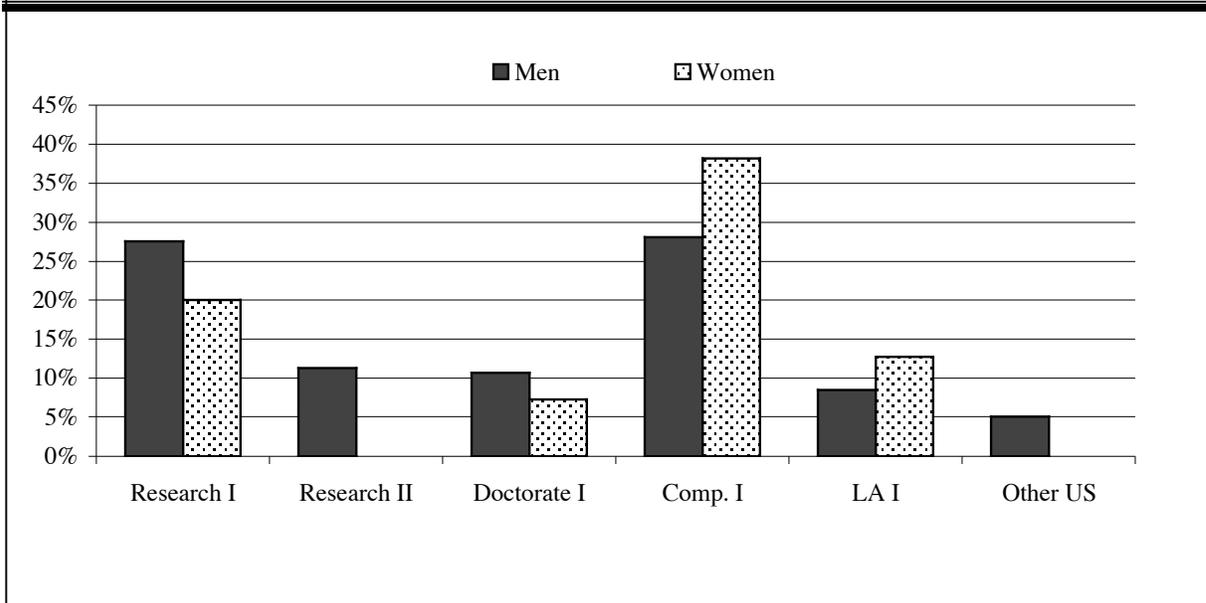
In 1995, 55% of Political Science Ph.D.s were tenured and another 7% were in tenure-track positions (see Figure 2).



Compared to their English Ph.D. counterparts, a very small proportion were non-tenure track faculty (4%) or occupied other academic positions (4%). Altogether 70% worked in the academic sector and 30% worked in business, government, international agencies and the non-profit sectors (BGN). Among those who secured tenured positions, one fourth (26%) of the Ph.D.s worked at the kinds of Carnegie<sup>4</sup> Research I institutions at which most were trained (Figure 3). Fewer women (20%) than men (28%) were tenured faculty in Research I institutions, women constituted a larger proportion of faculty in non-PhD granting, comprehensive institutions (38% versus 28%).

<sup>4</sup> See definition according to the Carnegie Commission's report, *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, 1987 edition.

**Figure 3: Tenured Faculty by Institutional Classification and Gender, Dec. 1995**



As we saw earlier, not everybody aspired to become a professor. What about those who did have that career goal? How many of them achieved this goal? Two thirds (66%) of political science PhDs who wanted to become professors at the time of degree completion held tenured or tenure-track faculty positions ten to fourteen years later.

### ***Postdoctoral Appointments***

Holding a postdoctoral position is not a standard component of an academic career in political science. Nevertheless, 9% of political science respondents held postdoctoral positions for an average of 1.5 years.

### ***Political Science Ph.D.s in the Business, Government, International Agencies, and Nonprofit Sectors***

In December 1995, 98 surveyed political science Ph.D.'s were employed in business, government, and nonprofit organizations (see Table 4). Over half of them occupied managerial positions, either in general management or as top executives, the remaining worked in schools, in legal positions, writing, government relations careers, or in financial positions.

**Table 4: Political Science Ph.D.s in the Business, Government, International Agencies and Nonprofit Sectors (n=98)**

<i>Job Title</i>	<i>N</i>
General Management	31
Top Executive	22
Finance	5
Marketing/Sales	1
Legal	8
Communications/Government Relations	7
Writing/Editing	6
Teaching	9
Administrative Support	3
Other	6

***Not in the Paid Work Force***

Fourteen (2.6%) of 525 political science respondents were not in the paid work force in December 1995 (Table 5). Of these only one person, was unemployed in the traditional economic sense of being involuntarily out of the work force and seeking work. Six of those not working did not provide explanations. Three women and one man were care-takers, mainly of children, two persons were retired, and one was not working because of poor health. In all, political science PhDs, both men and women were actively participating in the labor force ten plus years after PhD completion.

**Table 5: Not in the Paid Work Force – December 1995**

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Caretaker	1	3	4
Retired	1	1	2
Medical	1	0	1
Unemployed	0	1	1
Don't know why	4	2	6

### *Satisfaction with Career Outcomes*

Most respondents indicated being “very” or “fairly” satisfied with their jobs overall (Table 6). The highest percentage of satisfied individuals is found among those working in management or executive positions within the business, government, or nonprofit sectors (91.49 percent) and those working as academic administrators (88.24 percent) followed by tenure track professors (81.28 percent).

**Table 6: Overall Satisfaction with Current Job**

	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Not Satisfied</b>
Tenured	81.28%	18.72%
Tenured Track	67.86%	*
Non-Tenured Track	*	*
Academic Administrative	88.24%	*
BGN Researcher	76.19%	*
BGN Manager/Executive	91.49%	*
BGN Other	66.00%	34.00%
Academic/BGN	71.43%	*
ALL	78.77%	21.23%

(\* = n < 10)

A detailed analysis of selected dimensions of satisfaction yielded some interesting results. For this analysis, dimensions of job satisfaction commonly associated with the privileges of academia were selected and compared for respondents employed in the BGN and academic sectors (Table 7).

**Table 7: Satisfaction Dimensions of Current Job by sector**

	<b>Academic</b>	<b>BGN</b>
Content of work	93.33%	87.72%
Autonomy	92.99%	82.61%
Geographic location	84.15%	91.31%
Work environment	75.89%	79.13%
Prestige of organization	72.08%	75.86%
Career growth prospects	69.39%	75.00%
Intellectual stimulation	66.08%	69.30%

Among the 23 specific job satisfaction factors, content of work and autonomy ranked very high for PhDs employed in the academic sector, geographic location was ranked the highest for those employed in business, government, and non-profit sectors. Surprisingly, career growth and intellectual stimulation were job satisfaction dimensions that PhDs employed in the BGN sectors were more satisfied with than PhDs employed in academia.

### ***The Usefulness of the Ph.D.***

The survey asked respondents whether they thought completing the PhD was worth the effort or not. The vast majority of individuals reported that earning the Ph.D. was “definitely worth it” (80.%).

The survey further asked Political Science Ph.D.s., “knowing what you know now, if you had to do it over again, would you get a PhD again?, a PhD on your field? Or instead a another degree.

Table 8 shows that a large majority would not only choose to pursue the Ph.D. again, but would choose to do so in Political Science (78 %). Only 11% would opt for a PhD in another field and another 7% would get a professional master’s degree instead.

**Table 8: Would you do the Ph.D. again?**

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Yes: Same Field	77.80%
Yes: Different Field	11.45%
No: Professional Degree	7.01%
No: Professional Masters	1.87%
No: Academic Masters	0.70%
No Graduate degree	1.17%

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***Conclusion***

Overall, individuals who earned the Ph.D. in Political Science were working in the academic sector in large numbers. However, only about half were tenured ten plus years after degree completion. And although the tenured faculty reported a high overall job satisfaction rate, they placed third behind managers and executives in the BGN sector who reported the highest job satisfaction rate (91.5%).

Surveying PhD recipients in political science ten years after degree completion provides rich information about the career paths, job satisfaction, and their retrospective evaluation of the usefulness of the PhD. Understanding the variety of educational outcomes and the high job satisfaction of PhD recipients outside academia, leads us to conclude that a too narrow focus on the academic job market in doctoral education leaves a large proportion of doctoral student unprepared for a variety of intellectually satisfying careers.

This one-time study national study demonstrates the necessity of undertaking career path studies several years after degree completion. CIRGE, with funding from the Ford Foundation, will be launching a “PhD Five Years Out” survey for the social science in the upcoming year.