

History Job Market Is Hot—for Now

Statistics show more jobs available and fewer new Ph.D.'s, but trend may be short-lived

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THE TEMPERATURE OUTSIDE was in the mid-30's, but William C. Van Norman was sweaty and out of breath by the time he reached his fourth job interview of the day. His previous interview had run long, and he had had to jog 10 blocks to meet history professors from James Madison University, who were gathered in a room at the Wyndham Hotel. When they saw how winded he was, they offered Mr. Van Norman a drink of water and a chance to relax before the interview began.

In all, Mr. Van Norman had 18 job interviews over four days this month at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association. That number of interviews for a single candidate is virtually unprecedented for a historian, and Mr. Van Norman's experience is a sign of one of the most robust faculty job markets in the field in recent memory.

A report on the history job market for 2004-5 shows that faculty jobs advertised in the history association's magazine, *Perspectives*, were up 13 percent last year over the year before—for a total of 966 jobs at all levels. Jobs advertised specifically for new assistant professors of history were up by even more—about 18 percent—for a total of 801 jobs. That is the largest number of junior-faculty jobs advertised through the association in 13 years.

Robert B. Townsend, assistant director of research and publications for the association, says early indications are that job openings will increase again this year. The number of positions that colleges and universities interviewed candidates for at the meeting this month was up by about 15 percent over last year, he says.

At the same time, the number of people earning Ph.D.'s in history is falling. According to the historical association, that number dropped by about 14 percent in the 2004-5 academic year from the year before. From a job candidate's viewpoint, that amounts to a reduction in competition for jobs, which makes his or her chances that much better.

But historians are only cautiously opti-



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mistic about the healthier job prospects. Over the past few years, the number of graduate students entering doctoral programs in history has been rising again, while the proportion of faculty members approaching re-

ment and optimism as we have today."

While job openings in U.S. and European history are the most plentiful, accounting for more than half the beginning assistant professor or instructor jobs advertised in 2004-5, the proportion they represent of all advertised positions in the field has been falling.

Much of the increase in job openings came in more-specialized areas outside the major fields. Advertisements for beginning faculty jobs in African history, for example, were up 92 percent in 2004-5 over the year before, and jobs in Middle Eastern history were up by 64 percent.

'FULL-SERVICE DEPARTMENT'

That trend appears to be continuing this year, says Mr. Townsend, with jobs in Latin American history and Asian history on the rise as well. But there is a mismatch between Ph.D. production in the field—in terms of specialty—and where jobs are growing.

While the federal government's "Survey of Earned Doctorates" found that two-thirds of new Ph.D.'s awarded in history go to those who have studied North America

and Europe, only about half of new jobs are in those specialties. As a sign that history positions in areas like Latin America and Africa are growing, the survey specified for the first time in 2004 how many people earned doctorates in those fields, rather than lumping them into a broader category.

"You need to have a more full-service department now," says Linda K. Kerber, president of the history association and head of the department at the University of Iowa.

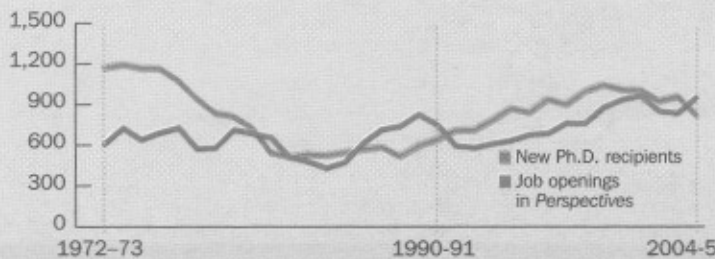
Jobs in the history of the Middle East are most likely on the rise because of political events, historians say, while those in Latin Ameri-

can history may reflect demand from an increasingly diverse student population. Over all, departments are taking a more global, non-Western view of the world and adding positions accordingly.

"With all of the public discourse about globalization, students need to be learning about the world, not just about the U.S.," says Mr. Van Norman, who earned his Ph.D.

Historians' Job Market: Supply and Demand

The job market may be getting better for history scholars. Job openings listed in the American Historical Association's *Perspectives* magazine last year outpaced the number of new doctorates in the field for the first time since 1990-91.



SOURCE: AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

tainment age has been falling. Those trends could collide to create more competition for fewer job openings in the future.

"In the short term, there is a lot of cause for optimism," says Mr. Townsend. "But there's a reason to wonder whether a sharp increase in the number of students admitted and receiving Ph.D.'s eight years down the line will give us as much cause for excite-

from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill last year and specializes in Cuba and the African diaspora in Latin America.

Susan P. McCaffray, who leads the history department on North Carolina's Wilmington campus, says history is becoming increasingly specialized. "Once upon a time, there was someone whose specialty was U.S. history, and no one in the department taught Russian history, so this U.S. historian took that on, kind of as a side thing," she explains. "When that person retires, you have to hire in both areas. You get laughed at if you advertise 'U.S. South and Soviet Union.' No one does that anymore."

Seven of Wilmington's history professors traveled to the meeting here this month to hold interviews for three positions, including one in Latin American history. "We'll find out in the next month what we'll have to do to try to land someone," says Ms. McCaffray. "For once, the candidates in this field may have a little leverage."

Six history professors from Marshall University, in Huntington, W. Va., piled into a rented minivan to make the eight-hour drive to Philadelphia. Along with an-

other colleague who met them here, the professors interviewed 67 candidates for five jobs, including one in Asian history and another in Latin American history.

"We were afraid that candidates might think we were a sinking ship with all of these

Where the Jobs Are in History

The number of junior-faculty openings for positions specializing in the history of foreign regions rose substantially in 2004-5.

Specialization	Junior-faculty openings in 2004-5	1-year increase
Africa	48	92 %
Middle East/Islam	41	64
World/Non-West	50	28
Europe	188	25
Asia	96	19
North America	257	9
Latin America	51	4

SOURCE: AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

positions," says Donna J. Spindel, who directs the department. "On our Web site, I put a small statement indicating the reason for all

the hirings." What did it say? Retirements.

According to the history association, academic departments listed fewer than 700 professors in the emeritus category 10 years ago. Now they list more than 2,300. "It's worth noting, however, that this trend is slowing," says the report in *Perspectives*.

A PLACE TO CHILL

This year's history meeting left many job candidates exhausted, which for prospective academics is an unfamiliar feeling in relation to the job market. Indeed, considering the fact that many newly minted Ph.D.'s in history never expected to get more than a couple of nibbles, the exhaustion ended up feeling a little like bliss.

Myrna Ivonne Wallace Fuentes, who is completing her doctorate in Latin American history at Duke University, served as chairwoman of the association's committee for graduate students last year. In between her seven interviews at the meeting here, she collapsed in a hotel room that Duke converted to a chill-out zone for its graduate students and professors.

The association's statistics on the job market have Ms. Wallace Fuentes feeling optimistic, but she also realizes that she will be competing against candidates who earned their doctorates a few years ago, when the market was weaker, and who have yet to land tenure-track jobs. "We have so many people who have created a backlog," she says. "It's going to take many years of a strong market to make up for that."

Mr. Van Norman was hoarse after the four-day meeting was over, but he wasn't complaining. He knew that packing 18 interviews into a few days was probably crazy, but he didn't want to turn down any prospects.

"It's such a gamble on the way the whole process works. How do you say no?" asks Mr. Van Norman, who holds a one-year teaching position at James Madison this year and interviewed for a tenure-track opening there. "The one you turn down may be the one that you'd end up getting a job with. Even if you're in a hot market, you still have to snap up every opportunity."

For Mr. Van Norman, it looks like it will be a busy spring. The day after the meeting ended, he began getting telephone calls requesting follow-up interviews. ■