9-1997

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Recommended Citation
Bell, M. C., & Goodie, A. S. (1997). A comparative survey of job prospects for the period 1991-1996. APS Observer, 10(5), 16-18.

A Comparative Survey of Job Prospects For the Period 1991-1996

A selective analysis of the* APS Observer Employment Bulletin *reveals trends in experimental psychology jobs

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A Difficult Job Market?

How discouraging is the job market for young scientists these days? It seems that most scientists who have tried to land a job in recent years can tell you, unambiguously, "Very." Are prospects bleaker for some experimental psychologists than for others? To us, it subjectively seemed so. In an effort to answer this question more rigorously, we analyzed issues of the *APS Observer Employment Bulletin*, published by the American Psychological Society, from 1991-1996. Admittedly, the number of classified ads for jobs in a specific category is only one index of the job prospects for that category, but it is a start.

The *Observer* categorizes each job in each issue to help the job-seeker quickly scan for appropriate jobs. This categorization, however, is not necessarily systematic across issues, as different levels of categories appear from issue to issue. Over the six years examined here, 5,495 jobs had been assigned to 315 specific categories. In order to analyze these categories more fruitfully, we collapsed them into 28 broader but exclusive categories. The broader categories were chosen to try to reflect the various content areas within psychology in order to provide a general picture of job availability. The categories are admittedly imperfect and some of the specific areas could have been placed under several different general headings. We placed specific categories within what we considered to be the appropriate general category based on the job title and job description. Both the General and Specific categories and their frequencies are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Findings

Our main interest was in the absolute and relative prospects for basic researchers. Because of this, we include applied behavior analysis in the "Applied" category, and organizational behavior management under "Industrial/Organizational," with apologies to our friends and colleagues in these disciplines.

We compared in Table 1 the job prospects of non-applied, specialized, experimental psychologists, namely those under the headings Animal, Behavioral/Learning, Biological, Cognitive, Developmental, Language, Neuro..., Personality, Physiological, Quantitative, Sensation/Perception and Social.* Of the 2,515 advertised jobs in these categories, only 109 (4.34%) were in fields of Animal Psychology or Behavior/Learning. In contrast, Cognition and Language accounted for 461 (18.7%). The markets for the traditional fields of Sensation & Perception and Physiological Psychology were comparatively small (113 and 135 jobs respectively, 4.49% and 5.37%), and those for Social and Developmental Psychology were quite large (553 and 401 jobs respectively, 22.0% and 15.9%). The newer fields with the prefix "Neuro" were robust, offering 246 jobs (9.78% of the total).

It was interesting to more generally compare the percentage of jobs available to basic researchers compared to applied or clinical researchers. When the general "Experimental" category was added to the categories mentioned above, 2,923 of the

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Table 1

General Job Ad Category	Number of Ads	Percent of Exp'l Ads That Are Nonapplied, Specialized, Exp'l Jobs
Animal	7	0.28
Applied	178	
Artificial Intelligence	5	
Behavioral/Learning	102	4.06
Biological	98	3.90
Clinical	609	
Cognitive	413	16.42
Developmental	401	15.94
Educational	159	
Evolutionary	4	
Experimental	408	
Family	44	
Gender	40	
General	736	
Health	235	
History/Philosophy	8	
Industrial/Organizational	349	
Language	58	2.31
Multicultural	62	
Neuro...	246	9.78
Personality	97	3.86
Physiological	135	5.37
Public Sector	47	
Quantitative	292	11.61
Sensation/Perception	113	4.49
Social	553	21.99
Substance Abuse	79	
Miscellaneous	17	
Total	**5,495**	**100.00**

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5,495 total jobs (53.2%) were accounted for. This means that over half of the job listings in the *Observer* are for experimental psychologists. For those who are interested in the availability of jobs in their particular area, Table 2 presents a detailed breakdown of the job frequencies.

Conclusion

The picture is bleak indeed for some types of jobs. On the other hand, the "Cognitive Revolution" has succeeded in making Cognitive Psychology highly robust in terms of available jobs. Social Psychology and Developmental Psychology seem to have weathered the revolution well. Interestingly, despite technological advances, the traditional fields of Physiological Psychology and Psychology of Sensation & Perception represent relatively small pockets, most likely being subsumed by the neurological categories, focusing on the underlying neurology. Somewhere, perhaps, Jean Piaget and William McDougall are smiling. Gustav Fechner, Hermann von Helmholtz, and John B. Watson are not.

Caveat

It is important to mention that this survey does not necessarily represent the actual chances of success for someone seeking a job in a particular area. For example, the small number of animal learning positions should not discourage students interested in animal learning from pursuing this area because the ratio of people to jobs may be constant across disciplines. The number of people pursuing animal learning is much smaller than the number of people pursuing cognitive psychology, for example. As an illustration of this point, graduate students studying animal learning at UCSD have been quite successful in obtaining jobs related to their graduate training, despite the scarcity of advertised positions. Of the eight graduates from the experimental analysis of behavior program over the last six years, two have tenure-track positions in animal learning, four have postdoctoral positions in behavior analysis or a related area, one accepted a job in the private sector applying his training, and one, the most recent graduate, is actively applying for postdoctoral positions.

* While jobs listed under the general term "Experimental" are ignored by the job-seeker at his or her peril, they did not help our primary objective of comparing the robustness of the various specialties within experimental psychology, and so were not considered in the present analysis.

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Table 2

Specific Job Ad Category	Number of Ads
Animal	
animal behavior	1
animal cognition	4
animal learning	1
primates	1
Applied	
applied	12
applied behavior analysis	2
applied cognitive	1
applied experimental	3
applied pediatrics	1
applied research	3
applied social	1
conflict	2
consumer	2
driving safety	1
eating/weight disorders	1
eating disorders	2
ecological (community)	4
engineering/(applied)	21
environmental	3
ergonomics	2
feeding/food	4
forensic	1
forensic (clinical)	6
human dynamics	1
human factors	49
human performance	1
justice/judicial	3
legal	7
marketing	3
marketing research	3
professional	1
program evaluation	5
service delivery	1
sex therapy	2
smoking	4
social work	1
sport	2
testing/(assessment)	10
toxicology	1
transportation	3
treatment assessment	7
video graphics	2
Artificial intelligence	
information systems	1
information technology	1
networking	1
neural networks	1
robotics	1
Behavioral/Learning	
behavior analysis	11
behavioral	6
behavioral science	8
exper.l anal. of behavior	1
human learning	2
human motivation	3
learning	54
learning theory	2
motivation	15
Biological	
behavioral pharmacology	10
behavioral psychopharm.	1
biological	37
biosonar	1
pharmacology	1
psychobiology	28
psychopharmacology	20
Clinical	
abnormal	10
adolescent psychopathology	1
adult psychopathology	1
anxiety disorders	1
child clinical	54
child therapy	1
clinical	410
clinical neuropsychology	3
clinical science	2
cognitive therapy	1
counseling	73
etiology	1
evaluation	9
group therapy	1
human services	1
intervention	1
learning disorders	1
medical/medicine	7
medication development	1
medicine	3
mental disorders	1
mental health	14
mental retardation	2
mental services	2
pediatric/child abuse	1
psychiatric interview	1
psychiatry	3
psychosocial (services)	2
psychotherapy	1
Cognitive	
cognition	43
cognitive	270
cognitive neuroscience	41
cognitive processes	1
cognitive psychophys.	1
cognitive science	5
cognitive systems	2
decision-making	6
human cognition	2
human engineering	1
human neurocognition	2
human-computer interaction	6
information processing	1

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Specific Job Ad Category	Number of Ads
memory	22
problem solving	2
reasoning	8
Developmental	
adolescent	5
adult	1
adulthood	2
aging	17
child development	6
cognitive development	3
developmental	256
developmental disabilities	1
early child education	2
early childhood education	1
geriatric	1
geriatric neuropsychology	1
gerontological	4
human development	16
infancy	2
lifespan	15
lifespan (development)	33
parenting	1
pediatric	22
pediatric neuropsychology	6
perceptual development	1
social development	5
Educational	
computer-based instruction	1
educational	76
educational policy	2
gifted education	1
instructional technology	3
literacy	2
music education	2
reading	1
school	63
science education	1
special education	5
teacher education	1
training	1
Evolutionary	
behavioral genetics	3
evolutionary psychology	1
Experimental	
experimental	394
experimental applied	2
experimental psychopath.	11
human experimental	1
Family	
family	6
family structure	1
family studies/life	19
family therapy	6
marriage & family therapy	12
Gender	
gender	7
women's studies	8
women/females	25
General	
general	18
general (chair & director)	478
interdisciplinary	1
internship	1
postdoctoral	229
research	7
research assistant	2
Health	
AIDS	5
AIDS prevention	2
behavioral medicine	4
cancer prevention	1
epidemiology	1
exercise	1
health	142
HIV/(std) risk behavior	3
informatics (medical)	1
injury control	1

Specific Job Ad Category	Number of Ads
obesity	4
occupational health	1
oncology	1
pain	1
post-traumatic stress	1
prevention	7
psychoneuroimmunology	1
psychopathology	38
rehabilitation	4
stress	12
trauma	1
traumatic stress	2
weight management	1
History/Philosophy	
historical	2
history/systems	4
philosophical	1
theory & models	1
Industrial/Organizational	
human resources	2
human resources mgmt.	6
industrial/organizational	268
industrial	5
organizational	12
organizational (social)	36
organizational behavior	3
personnel	10
policy research (analysis)	7
Language	
communication	1
language	10
language development	5
language disorders	1
linguistics	4
mass communication	1
psycholinguistics	29
speech language	3
speech perception	4
Multicultural	
African-American studies	5
American Indian studies	2
black studies	2
cross-cultural	2
cultural	2
ethnic minority	2
ethnic studies	26
Latino studies	9
minorities	3
minority issues	7
multi-cultural	1
multicultural education	1
Neuro...	
behavioral neuroscience	44
cognitive neuropsyc.	12
experimental neuropsych.	1
brain	1
functional neuroanatomy	1
molecular neuroscience	1
neurobehavioral	1
neurobiology	10
neurochemistry	1
neuroethology	7
neuropharmacology	2
neurophysiology	3
neuropsychiatry	1
neuropsychopharmacology	2
neuropsychology	104
neuroscience	55
Personality	
personality	30
personality (assessment)	67
Physiological	
biopsychology	17
drugs and behavior	1
electrophysiology	3
motor processes	3
physiological	94

Specific Job Ad Category	Number of Ads
physiological neuroscience	1
psychophysiology	16
Public Sector	
community	13
criminal justice	1
law	7
mental health policy	1
military	1
political	2
public health/policy	11
public policy	4
science policy	2
social policy	1
urban issues	4
Quantitative	
biostatistician	1
mathematical	10
measurement	3
psychometrics	71
quantitative	58
quantitative/methodological	138
research methods/design	9
survey methodology	2
Sensation/Perception	
audition	4
haptic perception	2
hearing	1
olfaction	1
ophthalmology	2
optics	1
pattern perception	1
perception	13
perception/sensation	56
psychoacoustics	1
psychophysics	6
sensation	3
sensation/perception	9
sensory communication	2
vision	1
visual cognition	2
visual perception	8
Social	
emotion (& motivation)	12
group dynamics	1
prosocial behavior	1
social	380
social (applied)	7
social cognition	7
social issues	6
social-motivation	1
social-personality	130
sociocultural	1
violence	7
Substance Abuse	
addiction	1
addictive behaviors	2
alcohol	2
drug abuse	7
drug abuse/(treatment)	34
drug alcohol abuse	5
substance abuse	18
substance abuse/addiction	10
Miscellaneous	
administrative	1
humanities	1
laboratory coordinator	2
marine mammal biology	1
media lab	1
parapsychology	1
political science	2
sleep	2
social sciences	3
sociology	1
technology	1
writing	1