

Who Will Teach at U.S. Research Universities? California Graduate Students Reject “Publish or Perish” Lifestyle

A new study by Mary Ann Mason, Marc Goulden and Karie Frasch of graduate students has found that students are wary of the lifestyle of their current mentors and, instead, seek work settings where they believe they will better be able to balance work and family life and advance in their careers. Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the study reports on survey results of 8,373 graduate students (response rate: 43%) at nine of the ten University of California campuses. The research is reported in The January-February issue of *Academe Online*.

As shown in the chart (below), over the course of their graduate studies, both women and men indicated that the career goals changed in terms of the employment sector they planned to work in after completing their doctoral degrees. At the start of their graduate programs, 45% of men and 39% of women reported in the 2006-07 survey that they had planned to prepare for employment in universities similar to the University of California, that is, as professors with a research emphasis. However, by the time of the survey, only 27% of women and 36% of men reported this same career goal, representing a precipitous decline in women's aspirations towards positions in research-intensive institutions. Instead, both men and women respondents indicated that they were more inclined to seek employment in “business, government and other” sectors.

Why such a change in career goals? According to the survey results, respondents cited the “publish or perish” hyper-competitive mentality of research-intensive institutions as particularly problematic. As graduate students at University of California's campuses, these students witness the lives led by their advisors and mentors. Students perceived that there is little time away from the job, with 45% of women and 35% of men who responded indicating that “Professional activity was too time-consuming.” Men and women were statistically equally likely (46% of women, 44% of men) to indicate that “Negative experiences as a Ph.D. student” caused them to rethink their career paths.

Women were particularly emphatic that “other life interests” (48%) or “issues related to children” (46%) were significant in their changing career aspirations. Only 35% of men cited “other life interests” and 21% “issues related to children” as their reasons for re-evaluating their career goals. Women were also more likely than men to cite geographic issues (40% of women versus 28% of men) or “spouse or partner issues or desire to marry” (32% of women and 22% of men) as instrumental in their career calculus.

In a nutshell, the usual constellation of family issues—marriage concerns, children, and geographic locations—were more important to women than men in their decisions regarding academic careers. How did men's reasons differ from women's? Men were more likely than women to say that “Career advancement issues” (34% men, 27% women) and “Monetary compensation (salary, benefits)” (31% men and 23% women) were important in their decision to plan employment outside of a research-intensive academic institution.

According to the study's authors, the current generation of graduate students differs from previous ones. Doctoral students now have “different expectations and values . . . primary among them the desire for flexibility and balance between career and other life goals. But changes to the structure and culture of academia have not kept pace with these major shifts: assumptions about the “ideal worker” prevail, including a de facto requirement for inflexible, full-time devotion to education and employment in a linear, lockstep career trajectory.” As baby boomers retire in the coming years, academic institutions that are best able to accommodate these expectations and values, according to these authors, will have a competitive advantage in recruiting talented new professors.

Of course, this conclusion assumes that new professors will generally be U.S. citizens and permanent residents, an assumption that is potentially questionable when considering doctoral degree production data

trends in recent years. As shown in the more recent edition of [Professional Women and Minorities: A Total Human Resources Data Compendium](#), in some fields—notably engineering, computer science and economics—non-U.S. citizens earned more than half of the doctoral degrees awarded in 2006. So it is possible that as U.S. citizens veer away from research-intensive academic positions, the gap could be filled by non-U.S. citizens who desire to remain in the United States after they complete their graduate studies.

Respondents' Career Goals at the Start of Ph.D. Program and Currently				
(Source: CPST analysis of data reported in Mason, Goulden, and Frasch 2009.)				
	Women		Men	
	Start of Ph.D. Program	Current	Start of Ph.D. Program	Current
Business, government, other	29%	41%	32%	42%
Professor, research emphasis	39%	27%	45%	36%
Professor, teaching emphasis	28%	27%	20%	19%
Other academic	4%	5%	2%	3%
Number of respondents	3,994	3,936	3,710	3,675

On the Web:

The research results reported in *Academe Online*: <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/>

A PowerPoint presentation of findings, original survey form, etc. <http://ucfamilyedge.berkeley.edu/>

To view all of the latest *CPST Comments* articles, click [here](#).

To visit the CPST webpage, click [here](#).