Response to "Ranking Doctoral Programs by Placement"

As recent graduates of Princeton's doctoral program who both, separately, landed our dream tenure-track jobs at a small liberal-arts college, we read with a mixture of curiosity and dismay "Ranking Doctoral Programs by Placement: A New Method" (July 2007).

In that piece, Benjamin M. Schmidt and Matthew M. Chingos count graduates who have landed jobs such as ours as having not landed any job at all.

They do this assuming, they say, that the number of liberal-arts jobs is "limited compared to those at doctoral institutions." This is a dubious assumption at best; in 2005–2006, according to an APSA report, 36% of jobs listed through the association's e-jobs service were at B.A.-granting institutions, only slightly less than the 43% that were at Ph.D.-granting institutions. With master's institutions comprising an additional 20% of all listed jobs, there are—contrary to Schmidt and Chingos's inference—more academic jobs at non-Ph.D.-granting institutions than at Ph.D.-granting institutions.

More fundamentally, though, Schmidt and Chingos do not seem to believe that anyone would enter a doctoral program in political science aspiring to do anything other than work at a large research university. This view reflects a provincialism that is as stunning as it is unwarranted. Of course, since Schmidt and Chingos both obtained their undergraduate degrees at Harvard, we cannot claim surprise at their oblivion to the potential appeal of academia outside research universities. Ignorance, however, excuses neither the conceptual flaw in their approach to ranking doctoral programs nor their arrogance in presuming to speak for all Ph.D. candidates everywhere. Contrary to their assumption, graduates of liberal-arts colleges such as Williams and Amherst (our respective alma maters) often seek a Ph.D. precisely because they wish to return to a liberal arts college.

That Schmidt and Chingos are surely not alone in their pretension that the only jobs worth having are those in Cambridge, New Haven, Palo Alto, and Princeton is of little comfort. Despite the fact that graduate admissions committees across the country seem content to populate their programs with graduates of institutions such as Bowdoin, Carleton, Grinnell, Haverford, Oberlin, and Swarthmore, there is little respect for Ph.D. students who, at the conclusion of their graduate careers, seek—and then successfully obtain—jobs at those same institutions. Given that many liberal-arts colleges offer a 2/2 teaching load (the same as Harvard's), the promise of small classes with students of the highest caliber; competitive salaries; generous travel and research support; and a better-than-reasonable chance at tenure, the rationale for such a potent bias against jobs at these institutions is puzzling. Obviously there are legitimate reasons why one might prefer a faculty position at a research university to a liberal arts college, but there is far from a clear pecking order between the two.

Even if one takes publication as the measure of professional success, liberal arts professors of political science have an impressive track record. The list of liberal arts college faculty who have distinguished themselves by their research—a list that would include James MacGregor Burns (Williams), James Kurth (Swarthmore), and E.E. Schattschneider (Wesleyan)—is extensive in its own right. Far from fading into academic obscurity, these political scientists have found the atmosphere of liberal arts colleges conducive rather than detrimental to their scholarly success. Yet under Schmidt and Chingos's peculiar conception, their respective graduate programs failed them; they did not spend the bulk of their careers at Ph.D. granting institutions. As far as we are concerned, any rankings system that would result in Walter Dean Burnham, Robert Keohane, William Riker, David Truman, and Aaron Wildavsky—all former APSA presidents who took first jobs at liberal arts colleges—reflecting poorly on their graduate institutions is itself a poor reflection of our discipline.

We respond to Schmidt and Chingos to defend neither our current employer nor our graduate alma mater (though we suspect Princeton would fare better in these rankings if liberal arts college jobs were counted as successful placements). Rather, we respond simply to counteract a pervasive but perplexing, widely-held but wildly misguided, conception of what it is we at liberal arts colleges do and why it is that anyone might actually want—instead of being forced—to do it.

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Susan McWilliams
Assistant Professor, Pomona College

Reply to Drs. Crowe and McWilliams

We absolutely agree with Crowe and McWilliams that there are many highly desirable jobs outside large research universities. Ph.D.-holders do critically important work not only at liberal arts colleges, but also at foreign institutions and even outside academia entirely. Ideally, all academic jobs would be included in our ranking. We exclude placements at non-doctoral institutions from our ranking not to slight them, but because the algorithm we employ requires a self-referencing network. The cost is excluding jobs at institutions that do not produce their own Ph.D.s. As we state in our paper, the benefit is a ranking of schools that we think is more informative than raw placement data, and that adds a new facet to a rankings landscape based largely on publication counts and reputation surveys.

We do believe, though, that the large majority of prestigious teaching jobs in political science are at doctorate-granting institutions. The share of faculty positions at liberal arts colleges is modest—about 14% of untenured tenure-track faculty in political science teach at liberal arts colleges (defined as all four-year colleges that grant more than 50% of their degrees in the arts and sciences), according to the 2004 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty. The experience of teaching at an elite liberal arts college as described by Crowe and McWilliams, we suspect, does not describe the majority of jobs in the bachelor's and master's institutions that they rightly cite as an important feature of the academic landscape. Those who are interested only in careers at liberal arts colleges or in other BA and MA institutions, we concede, may not find our ranking useful. We hope, though, that some readers will combine

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ours with other statistics to gain a richer understanding of the profession.

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Response to "Social Networks in Political Science"

Can we please stop the navel-gazing exercises like the article on social networks and Ph.D. placements in the October 2007 issue of *PS* ("Social Networks in Political Science: Hiring and Placement of Ph.D.s, 1960–2000," by James H. Fowler, Bernard Grofman, and Natalie Masukoa)? The article is objectionable on many levels. I will emphasize two.

First, we have more important things to do. Why is so much of our energy spent on talking only to each other, playing the academic game, and then measuring who are the best players? When the most powerful country in the world has abysmally ignorant citizens, our professional duty to provide civic education should take precedence over everything else. Why worry about the pecking order in our profession when it has so little influence in public discourse? For example, why are we not more embarrassed that we had so little capacity to explain the follies of U.S. foreign policy to the public prior to the Iraq war?

Second, the article insults all those in our profession who agree with my first point and CHOOSE not to work at Ph.D. institutions. Many of us consciously reject those jobs and embrace the important work of civic education at smaller institutions. Pardon my impoliteness, but many of us at baccalaureate institutions believe—no, we know—that what we do is more important than what many of our colleagues at Ph.D. institutions do. What we do reaches real people outside of our profession. But by the methodology of the article, we do not count.

Even if these navel-gazing exercises can be justified, the assumptions that prestige, publishing, and Ph.D.-granting institutions all go together and there is no need to look elsewhere are also insulting. In less than 10 years since earning my Ph.D. from Syracuse, while teaching a 4-4 load, I have published two books, three book chapters, and seven journal articles, including in the *American Political Science Review* and *International Studies Quarterly*. But Syracuse somehow failed and gets no credit in the article because I wanted to work at a liberal arts college like McKendree.

It is instead our profession that is failing. We need to stop publishing articles that have no meaning to anyone beyond ourselves. We need to pursue research that benefits our students and our citizenry. We need to teach. And we need to be public intellectuals in the wider culture and provide the civic education necessary to solve problems in our increasingly smaller and more complicated world.

Brian Frederking
McKendree University

Response to Professor Frederking

We thank Professor Frederking for the time he has taken to respond to our article. We are puzzled, however, by the argument that we are irrelevant on the one hand and deeply insulting on the other.

We think a certain amount of self-evaluation in our discipline is important. *PS* in particular carries a lot of articles like ours because it is for and about the profession (as the eponymous section of the journal suggests). However, we were actually motivated to write this article more for its method than its content. Network analysis is underutilized in political science, and we think that using it to study the profession will stimulate interest and serve as a helpful introduction for scholars who want to use network methods to advance their substantive interests (as we have done for voters, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court). We thus think of this work as contributing to our professional duty to provide civic education and advance research on the pressing issues of the day. To argue otherwise would be to denigrate the entire subfield of political methodology.

Finally, we note that network analysis requires us to define links between departments. We chose Ph.D. placements because they represent one important link, but one could easily imagine other links (like joint authorship in political science journals) that would incorporate non-Ph.D. institutions like McKendree into the network. We look forward to work like that in the future.

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