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The Academic Labor Market: Where Do We Go From Here?

The late Allan M. Cartter was chancellor and executive vice-president of New York University from 1966 through 1972 and then professor in the U.C.L.A. Graduate School of Education and director of its Laboratory for Research on Higher Education. An economist, he devoted the last fifteen years of his short but brilliant life to predicting academic trends, a subject which economists and educational administrators, until recently, have both neglected or mishandled, to our great misfortune.

This book, his last and most important, is one of a series sponsored by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. It does not mention Slavic studies or any problems peculiar to them. Moreover, every field of study differs in some ways from every other: Russian and East European studies, for example, constitute a relatively new field, with a faculty corps which will have especially large retirements in the 1980s because of the way it blossomed after World War II. Even so, all those interested in the future of Slavic studies—scholar-teachers and students, administrators and legislators, faculty members in large centers and in small colleges, should give careful thought to the information this volume presents.

Ph.D.'s and the Academic Labor Market[1] is a superb, mature piece of research and analysis, well-organized, remarkably lucid, modest in its presentation, prudent in refusing to make recommendations, and highly stimulating. Cartter improves the methods previously used for such market forecasts, for he injects into his estimates calculations concerning likely responses. In short, he has considered all factors involved. His book will be important even if it affects only the methods of those in educational administration who try to predict enrollments.

Cartter's volume has especial authority because of his successes in analyzing the academic labor market in the 1960s, when others were spectacularly incorrect. Cartter noted then that the other analyses ignored long-range demographic trends, did not include those who received their Ph.D.'s *after* they had begun to teach, and neglected feedback. Thus, the National Education Association and the Fund for the Advancement of Education in the mid-1960s predicted huge shortages of college and university teachers by 1970, a position Cartter challenged as early as 1965, when he began to predict some shift to a buyer's market. The Office of Education and the National Science Foundation late in 1968 predicted a great shortage of teachers in 1974. Legislators, foundations, universities, faculties, and students all made massive "investments" based on those estimates, thus deepening and prolonging later overproduction.

1. Allan M. Cartter, *Ph.D.'s and the Academic Labor Market* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), xx, 231 pp. Tables. $12.50.

In preparing this report, I have benefited from the opportunity for research and writing which the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences has provided.

https://doi.org/10.2307/2495041 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cartter begins by describing the complicated problems involved in predicting the academic demand for those with newly-granted Ph.D.'s, reviewing the estimates made in the previous fifteen years, and explaining why most forecasts proved inaccurate and misleading. He then analyzes recent enrollment trends and projected enrollments (based on fixed coefficients), explains the significance of these undergraduate figures for the market for new teachers, and studies anticipated market responses, such as the effect upon graduate school enrollment of this relationship between supply and demand. He also explains the likely effect changes in tenure and retirement policies, revised and restrictive administration positions toward graduate education, and the relative decline of academic salaries will produce on the size of faculties. As we all know, professors began to lose ground in 1966, compared with others' wages and salaries. Since 1971, the purchasing power of the average professor's salary has declined absolutely, and most observers predict little relative improvement until the 1990s. Cartter believes these variables, which other analysts have generally ignored, are already affecting the flow of young men and women into graduate school and will have an increasing impact. He was therefore more optimistic when he completed the book in 1976 than when he began in 1974.

Briefly, Cartter explains that the academic labor market will be in crisis for the next two decades because of the way in which all of us responded to the laws of supply and demand in the past fifteen years. Our universities, carried away by the massive expansion in higher education which began in the 1950s, invested so heavily in graduate programs that an oversupply of new Ph.D.'s will continue to reach the market long after a rapid decline in demand has set in. About 50 percent of new Ph.D.'s enter teaching (90 percent in the humanities and 75 percent in the social sciences), so the cause of the crisis is simple.

The United States had 2,600,000 students in 1950 and 2,500,000 in 1957. It now has over 11,000,000 because of "the combined effect of a sharp rise in the adolescent population and a steady increase in the tendency to seek higher education" (75 percent of high school graduates in 1970). Between 1957 and 1967, enrollments in higher education increased 7.75 percent annually. From 1967 to 1973, they rose 4 percent annually. The annual increment began to decline in 1971, and the rise from 1973 through 1980 will be slight: it will average 2 percent annually in the 1970s. From 1980 through 1992, the size of the 18–21 age group, and therefore of those entering higher education, will decline, simply because birth and fertility rates both began to decline about 1960. Thus, the number of births in 1973 was 28 percent lower than in 1961. The birth rate in 1973 was lower than in 1936, the lowest year in the depression, and it has declined further since 1973. The percentage of those attending college after high school has reached the approximate maximum, and even continued increases in the number of blacks and women attending college will not make significant differences. Moreover, Cartter has taken into consideration the likelihood that institutions may choose to enrich the faculty and curriculum by improving quality, reducing the student-faculty ratio, expanding recurrent education, and encouraging innovation and experiment.

On the other hand, the supply of new Ph.D.'s has increased at precisely the wrong time and will continue to do so for about another decade. In its golden age in the 1960s, funding of higher education rose from 1.2 to 2.4 percent of GNP. Students poured in, faculties expanded, salaries soared, facilities mushroomed. Graduate student enrollment rose by 153 percent in the sixties. It is still rising; Cartter estimates an increase of 11 percent between 1975 and 1980, and another 5 percent increase in the succeeding five years. Between 1967 and 1973, the number of first-year graduate students rose by 155,000, or 34 percent, forty universities joined the group awarding Ph.D.'s, and the number of degrees rose by 46 percent. American universities awarded

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2,000 Ph.D.'s in 1930 and 9,000 in 1954. In 1973, they granted 33,000 (1,200 in history alone), one-tenth of the total awarded since the first one in 1861.[2] The number of degrees awarded between 1966 and 1974 was one-half the total granted in our history. The Russian and East European field enjoyed this same heady expansion: it granted 400 degrees from 1960 through 1964 and 2,522 from 1964 through 1973.

Cartter estimates that higher education will appoint one-sixth as many new teachers in the 1980s as it did in the 1960s. The United States will produce one-third more Ph.D.'s than necessary in the 1970s and 50 percent more than needed in the 1980s. Production of new Ph.D.'s will reach a peak in 1980 and 1987, just those years when he estimates a negative number of new positions will be available. In the worst possible circumstances, the proportion of new Ph.D.'s entering college teaching may drop from 60 percent in the mid-1960s to 15–20 percent in the mid-1980s.

One must remember that Cartter is cautious and careful in his analysis and that he takes into consideration the probable response of institutions and individuals to this supply-demand situation. He is less alarmist than most concerning a situation which threatens the fabric of higher education, darkens the future of instruction and research, raises serious problems for our society, and of course constitutes a personal tragedy for thousands of young men and women.

What does this mean to each of us in the Russian and East European field? How should each respond? What can be done? Where do we go from here?

We must first of all acknowledge that higher education has overexpanded in many ways, including training Ph.D.'s. We all share responsibility for this, because everyone assumed that expansion was a fixed law. We derided those few who began pointing out ten years ago that Russian studies had reached a plateau, that we should stabilize our programs, and that we should adopt a birth control policy for new centers.

At the same time, we should eschew panic, self-pity, and renewed pleas to Washington for increased financial assistance. We should be candid concerning employment prospects, but we should not discourage intelligent and highly motivated young men and women from entering any discipline in the Slavic field. We shall never have a surplus of first rate scholar-teachers, and closing the doors in panic would be even more foolish than the indiscriminate expansion of the past fifteen years.

Our problems are both internal and national, and we should resolve them within our institutions, our disciplines, and our fields. Moreover, we should appreciate that all fields face similar problems, and that the Russian and East European area still enjoys funding benefits which fields such as American history, English literature, and economics have never enjoyed. We should recognize the remarkable achievements in the growth and spread of Slavic studies; the quality of those trained; the character of the programs and libraries, which are bases for continued improvement; the position these studies have won in our disciplines and institutions; their contribution to expanding knowledge and understanding of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and to raising the quality of higher education in general; and the continuing attraction they offer to hundreds of gifted young men and women. Those who helped found Slavic studies in academe, men such as Archibald Cary Coolidge and George R. Noyes, would be surprised and delighted at their growth and quality, the support they receive, the goals they have attained.

In particular, we should place this problem in perspective and recognize the needs and opportunities which face our field. American students and the American public have not yet begun to approach the knowledge and understanding of Russia and Eastern Europe which they require. After all, the first course on "Northern

2. As late as 1968, Christopher Jencks and David Riesman (*The Academic Revolution*) predicted that American universities would award a total of 14,000 Ph.D. degrees in 1974.

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Europe," that is, Russia, Poland, and Scandinavia, was offered only in 1894. The first Ph.D. degree in Russian history was granted in 1909. In 1914, only two American institutions offered courses in Russian history and only three had Russian language and literature departments (180 did in 1946, and 600 by 1960). In 1918, The Inquiry, a group of scholars organized to provide President Wilson information for the Paris Peace Conference, included only three specialists on Russia and Eastern Europe; the contributor on the Baltic was a scholar in American colonial history. Samuel Cross, the most brilliant student Leo Wiener had in thirty-five years of teaching at Harvard, received his first (part-time) teaching appointment more than ten years after he had completed his Ph.D. and had devoted a decade to analyzing trade with Belgium and the Netherlands for the Department of Commerce. In 1938, the United States had only a dozen specialists in Russian history and four departments of Slavic languages and literatures. The department at the University of California at Berkeley in 1940 had produced only five Ph.D.'s in forty years; four of the recipients were natives of Russia and one of Yugoslavia. In the six years before the war, American universities awarded only six Ph.D.'s in all disciplines in the Russian and East European area. Military intelligence employed a total of twelve "specialists" to work on the Soviet Union. Only two of them knew Russian and had professional training. The Department of State had six specialists, the Departments of Commerce and of Agriculture one each. The Library of Congress in 1901 had 560 books on Russia and 97 on Poland. When World War II began, it had not yet established the Slavic and Central European Division. Indeed, the Yudin collection of 80,000 volumes which it obtained in 500 crates in 1907 had not yet been catalogued; these volumes were formally added to the collections only in the 1950s.

From this small base a great research and instructional system has been created. Columbia University opened its Russian Institute in September 1946. By 1951, the United States had five Russian and/or East European area programs; the number leaped to forty by 1964, and to more than eighty in 1971. The number of Ph.D.'s awarded in all disciplines on Russia has been more than four times those awarded for Eastern Europe, yet 184 were awarded on Eastern Europe alone between 1951 and 1965, before the deluge. The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, founded in 1959, had 600 members the following year, 2,200 by 1968, and 2,400 in 1977. More than 600 American scholars have now carried on research for a period of at least two months in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe; only 12 had as recently as 1956. Our library facilities and collections are now unmatched anywhere in the world, particularly in readiness of access. Russian and East European courses are now an accepted part of curriculums. Public interest remains high, fanned both by international politics and by intellectual interest and satisfied more by books by gifted journalists, such as John Gunther and Hedrick Smith, than by scholars. Many scholars have served as advisers to government agencies, and two now occupy senior positions in the new administration. We should not forget the differences between 1977 and 1937, or 1947, when we review our problems, which reflect growth and achievement, not failure and despair.

Cartter provides the established facts concerning overexpansion in training Ph.D.'s. We now have the obligation to act promptly and intelligently. In 1958, ten years after the great expansion of Russian and East European studies had begun and questions were arising concerning the road ahead, the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies obtained a large grant from the Ford Foundation and made a most useful study which led to three books, perhaps of special value today, and to many ideas which have contributed both to progress since and to the challenges we now face.[3]

3. Cyril E. Black and John M. Thompson, eds., *American Teaching about Russia* (Bloomington, 1959); Harold H. Fisher, ed., *American Research about Russia* (Blooming-

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Our reassessment of goals and policies this time should be quite different. First, it should not be national, not only because spending time and money on such a study is not necessary (the facts are available), but also because the central issue is one of goals or even values. Instead, we should reverse the emphasis which ready money, glittering expansion, and the mystique of training graduate students led us to give to graduate programs the past two decades. We should accept the suggestions made in the 1958 study (two of the volumes were devoted to undergraduate instruction) and concentrate upon instruction of undergraduates, which has always been our first responsibility, although we have not always recognized it. In fact, one of the principal discoveries in 1958 was that in the state of Indiana, a sample chosen because it reflected the nation in balance of large and small and state and private institutions, only 4 percent of the graduates that year had taken any course which provided information or insight concerning Russia or Asia and only 18 percent graduated with *any* knowledge of a foreign language. Even if those percentages have doubled, which they assuredly have not, we today face vast opportunities and responsibilities for expanding knowledge of Russia and Eastern Europe.

One of the abiding flaws of American education is the belief that working with graduate students is more important and satisfying than teaching undergraduates. Changing this value may be our most important goal. Every institution, and every student, could profit if we would devote greater attention to the quality of undergraduate education and to increasing the knowledge and understanding all students obtain concerning other peoples and cultures. The goal is not to add another specialist or more courses in this area, but to reach all students, to reeducate the faculty, to change the spirit of education. We should raise standards for faculty appointments; an institution which required that each new faculty member know a foreign language, have knowledge of one non-Western area, and have lived abroad, would do far more in a short time to change its spirit and the quality of its undergraduate education than would one which added three specialists on this area. We should enrich our programs, though not necessarily our curriculums, and raise the quality of instruction provided *every* student on our campuses. Thus, we should seek to inject knowledge of Russia and Eastern Europe into the basic courses in the humanities and social sciences and to expand and improve knowledge of foreign languages. We should ensure that future teachers in primary and secondary schools know at least one foreign language and have some knowledge of and interest in Russia and Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. In short, we face an opportunity, disguised as an emergency, to pierce and even destroy the "sheepskin curtain" which separates higher education from our secondary schools.

Most instruction concerning the rest of the world has long been conducted outside the walls of our educational institutions through the mass media and the publications of gifted amateur scholars and journalists. John Gunther and Hedrick Smith both benefited from the work of dozens of scholars, but their volumes on Russia have reached thousands more readers than all the scholarly books on Russia and Eastern Europe published in the United States: *The Russians* sold more than 300,000 copies in just the first few months. Raymond Aron remarked two decades ago that he was impressed by the quality of American research on Russia, and depressed by the absence of its impact upon informed American opinion. This criticism still applies. We scholars should become more active and effective in meeting the national need outside our

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ton, 1959); and Robert F. Byrnes, ed., *The Non-Western Areas in Undergraduate Education in Indiana* (Bloomington, 1959).

https://doi.org/10.2307/2495041 Published online by Cambridge University Press

institutional walls, which these and other such volumes to some degree satisfy. This requires conscious action toward reaching the interested general public, as well as drastic revision of our system of writing and publishing.

Graduate education should be our second priority. Where graduate programs exist, we should make searching self-studies, cooperating with administrators aware of the institution's total budget capabilities and of other requirements. Above all, we should place more emphasis in all graduate programs upon preparation for teaching: in words used in the 1960s, we should train more parish priests and fewer theologians. In addition, each department and program should assess its resources and its particular capacity to meet local, regional, national, and international needs. It should then adjust its commitments so as to make its maximum contribution. Some, after review, may conclude that their programs should remain untouched. Others may decide to end their graduate programs because other institutions more than satisfy demonstrated needs. Still others may choose to devote increased attention to neglected population groups or subjects for which they have or can build particular competence. Thus, some institutions should develop strengths in neglected fields, such as the arts, religion, education, and sociology. Others might concentrate on one or more non-Russian minorities; American training and teaching have both overconcentrated on the Russian in the Soviet Union. Eastern European studies have the same weaknesses or gaps; Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, for example, receive far more attention than the Balkans, and history, government, and economics are strongly emphasized. Many have long recognized this; we now have a special opportunity to reduce or eliminate these weaknesses.

We also should renew our determination to improve the quality of graduate education: knowledge of all the required languages should become mandatory; we should prepare each graduate student for continuing study abroad, in Western Europe in particular, as well as in the country of his special interest; we should instill in every graduate student an interest in and the necessary skills for undergraduate teaching; finally, we should attain an interdisciplinary approach, compared to a multidisciplinary one, so that the "vertical pillars of knowledge" finally become one in the early foundation of graduate work.

We have all benefited so long and have thirsted so lustily for support from our great foundations and the federal government that many see no solution other than funds from these sources. The foundations and the Office of Education have been most helpful. However, we should recognize, especially in this emergency, that the flow of federal funds has contributed to the unthinking overproduction of Ph.D.'s, that the great bulk of the financial support for Russian and East European studies (more than 90 percent even for those institutions most favored) has always come from our colleges and universities, and that this should remain so if we wish to remain free. Thus, the emergency should lead us to greater self-reliance and to more effective cooperation in building library collections and in sharing visitors. It should persuade us to help the AAASS become an evermore important instrument for the common good. Finally, it should encourage us to develop a new relationship with the federal government, so that fellowships become competitive on a national basis, as they were under the Foreign Area Fellowship Program and still are for IREX. The tonic of national competition should help end the undignified and dangerous competition for institutional grants; it should help raise our standards and create again the spirit which animated those who established this critical field of study.

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