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Alliance *viewpoint*

More Ph.D.s Means More Analytical Thinkers

There has been quite a bit of talk over the last few years about the number of Ph.D.s entering the job market. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that 1997 was the twelfth consecutive year that universities awarded a record number of Ph.D.s, and some have quoted this fact as if it were proof that academe is producing too much of a good thing. Opinions vary depending on who is doing the talking and whether they are talking about women, minorities, or the disabled with Ph.D.s; humanities Ph.D.s; engineering and science Ph.D.s; etc. Some say there is a glut in the higher education market, and that there are too many



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Ph.D.s. We say that there are far too few minority scholars with Ph.D.s, especially in the life and physical sciences. How can there be too much education? Since when do we have too many analytical

thinkers, and why should we limit the pool that spawns our great thinkers? Academe is not an overstuffed market; it is a vital enterprise that has produced the research establishment from which our great country has contributed so much to the lives of the global human community.

There is no glut of Ph.D.s. The trend of record numbers of Ph.D. awardees is already slowing, and some pundits are predicting a market downturn within the next few years. While there may currently be an excess of newly minted

Ph.D.s in some areas of the humanities—a situation that could change rapidly—this is not the case in the sciences.

We will need more Ph.D.s to help interpret the massive data being generated.

The fifty years since the end of World War II have seen unprecedented growth in scientific research. It has truly been a renaissance. In 1997, U.S. government investments in health research alone exceeded \$14 billion, while private sector investment in health research and development exceeded \$17 billion.

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Toward an Interdisciplinary Approach

More Ph.D.s Means More Analytical Thinkers for the Future

Academe, like every successful capitalistic enterprise, must adjust its product to meet changing market demands. Current and developing markets demand the interface of technical disciplines with the humanities, social sciences, and applied sciences. The continued success of this country and our world leadership will depend upon better and more selective graduate education programs that provide a closer tie with global markets in a changing technological world, better longitudinal assessment and prediction models, and a change of faculty understanding in the graduate programs that are training Ph.D.s who will be able to fit many niches, not just academe.

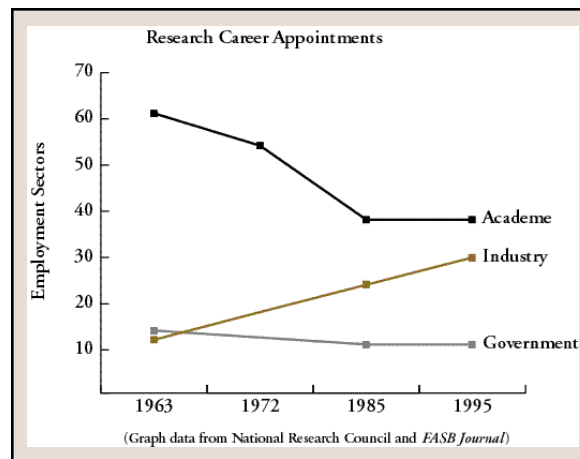
How will this interface work? Looking at the exciting menu of opportunities presented by just one major initiative, the Human Genome Project, we will need more Ph.D.s to help interpret the massive data being generated by DNA sequencing of the human genome. We will also need psychologists, sociologists, and cultural anthropologists to help us usher in public policies that are fair and culturally sensitive, as well as ethicists and philosophers to make sure that the issues of moral behavior are observed.

No one can predict who will bring forth an idea, a technique, or have a significant effect on a field that may change the future for generations to come. The U.S. educational system must produce a large pool of analytical thinkers, and it must do this by providing opportunities to all. Organizations like the Leadership Alliance, a consortium of twenty-seven research colleges and universities, are dedicated to providing opportunities for traditionally underrepresented students to develop their analytical and research skills at the Ph.D. level. The issue, however, is not only education but also employment. As we become an ever more diverse nation, we need to tap the

total, not just a fraction of the human talent pool, bring forth the best and brightest, and let unbiased market conditions dictate who gets what jobs.

What emerges are two fundamentals:

First, a new world of interdisciplinary scholarly interactions will increasingly affect the health, education, and welfare of future generations. Second, we will need more, not fewer, Ph.D.s. The vital enterprise called academe must continue to adjust and readjust itself to meet market demand by bringing forth an interactive product of science Ph.D.s who ask why the thing works; engineering Ph.D.s who ask how the thing works, and humanities Ph.D.s who ask what will make the thing work best for us all.



Alliance viewpoint is a semi-annual policy letter published by the Leadership Alliance, a consortium of twenty-seven institutions of higher education, including leading research and teaching colleges and universities, dedicated to improving the participation of underrepresented students in Ph.D. programs. Please direct all comments, questions, or requests to the Alliance press office, (212) 854-2968, or executive offices, (401) 863-1474.



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