Doctoral Education and the Academic Job Market in Planning: 2019-2020

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September 10, 2020

Doctoral Education and the Academic Job Market in Planning: 2019-2020

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results from the final year of a three-year study on doctoral education and the academic job market in Planning. The project set out to describe the academic job market in Planning and its trends, including both the availability of jobs and the rate at which new PhDs are granted. At the project's end, the data show stability in several aspects of the academic job market in Planning, including the numbers of both graduates and jobs, timing of the job market, features of graduate training, and to a limited extent, the popularity of specializations.

There is a downward trend in graduation numbers, but each annual estimate lies within the confidence interval of the other years. Pooled, weighted three-year survey data of programs suggests the academy produces approximately 273 new Planning PhDs per year on average. Based on two years of survey data, approximately 65% of PhD students in Planning enter doctoral study with aspirations of an academic career.

The number of academic jobs posted also shows consistency over the study period. Job advertisements ranged from a low of 102 (in AY17-18) to a high of 110 (in AY18-19). A graph of postings by date shows a clear and consistent cycle in the academic job market. While there is more fluctuation year-to-year in the popularity of individual specializations in job opportunities, Environmental and Sustainability Planning positions have remained the most common, and Disaster Management the specialization sought least frequently by academic employers.

The placement rate of graduates into academic positions ranges from 41-46% over the study period. As an extension of this estimate, the pooled data suggest approximately 68% of doctoral students aspiring to an academic career secure one. While the ACSP job bank is an important source of information for job seekers, it remains the case that many graduates find opportunities other ways as well. Survey data show graduates identify opportunities at their degree granting institutions, at international institutions, and with allied academic disciplines that do not advertise through ACSP, and other openings. Even with these additional sources of employment, all evidence suggests the academic job market in Planning is very competitive, including competition from faculty members making lateral moves. Graduates are well-qualified, too: three-quarters of programs report either all or most doctoral students have teaching responsibilities at some point in their program, and half indicate the production of publishable research is a program requirement. Nearly all programs have a strong focus on publishing, even if it is not a requirement.

Introduction

Project Goals

This multi-year project seeks to describe doctoral education and the academic job market for Planning. By developing a database of job announcements, this study estimates the number of jobs from year to year as well as the specializations and ranks sought. A parallel survey of PhD programs, conducted in the late spring and summer, evaluates how PhDs students are trained in terms of teaching opportunities, the role of publishing, and specializations. The survey also enables an estimation of the number of new PhDs per year and an estimation of what share of those new graduates secures academic employment.

I hope this study is useful for programs considering investments in various curricular areas or enrollment targets. I also hope this report is useful for PhD students, by providing a view of the job market in terms of the demand for various specializations, the range opportunities across various job titles (tenure-track faculty, post-doctoral positions, researcher staff, etc.), and competition from existing faculty, among other insights.

Methods

Both the jobs database and survey methods for AY19-20 remained in place from Year 2[1]. Each job was entered into an Excel workbook as an observation. Characteristics of each job were recorded, such as institution, location, rank, tenure-track availability, specializations, expectations of teaching experience, posting date, and starting date. The ACSP Career Center is the primary source of job posting information, with some additions from Planners2040 and, rarely, Twitter. This report analyzes only full-time, academic year-long positions; term instructor and part-time advertisements are recorded but not counted. Additionally, job advertisements requiring a PhD in other fields, typically Landscape Architecture, and not also in Planning, are not considered. As before, job specializations were coded to belong to categories identified in Brinkley and Hoch (2018)[2], with a write-in option available.

The survey of doctoral programs was similarly consistent with the Year 2 methodology. Program websites were consulted to identify program directors for 67 programs at 66 universities. The count used to calculate rates in this report was adjusted downward to 64, based on feedback from programs. These 64 programs are listed in Appendix Table A1. The program directors, and often a department chair, were contacted in April, May, June, and July to participate in the online survey. The survey asks about the number of graduates and employment status, as well as questions about the program. As planned after Year 2, the AY19-20 survey asked programs about graduation figures within a specified 12-month span, rather than by semester, responding to the difficulty introduced by having universities on different calendar systems. The survey closed at the end of July 2020 with a 50% response rate (n=32). A full description of the methods can be found in prior year reports, and the Appendix provides more detail regarding the survey

[1] Ganning, Joanna, "Doctoral Education and the Academic Job Market in Planning: 2018-2019" (2019). *Urban Publications*. 0 1 2 3 1623. https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/urban_facpub/1623

[2] Brinkley, C., & Hoch, C. (2018). The Ebb and Flow of Planning Specializations. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 0739456X18774119. Note: the big data/data analytics specialization, which was not included in the Brinkley and Hoch analysis, is used here due to its popularity in job advertisements.

instrument, participant identification, and participating programs. Given the high response rate and diversity of participating programs, there is little to suggest bias in the sample.

Results

By the Numbers: Graduates

Participating programs (n=32, of which 30 reported graduation numbers) reported 124 graduates between Summer 2019 and Spring 2020. Extrapolated to the full set of PhD-granting institutions, these data suggest the academy graduated approximately 265 new Planning PhDs between Summer 2019 and Spring 2020. There is a downward trend, but the annual estimates lie within the confidence intervals of other years (Figure 1).


Figure 1: Graduates per Program, Three-Year Comparison
Showing 95% confidence interval around mean
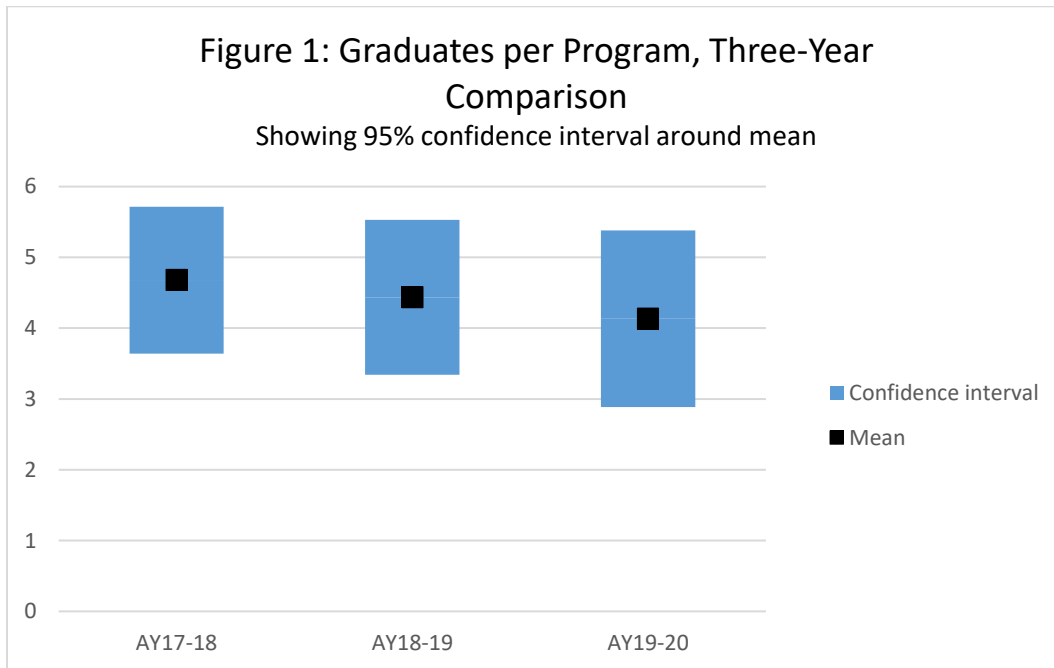
The AY18-19 survey introduced the question, "Estimate the percentage of students in your PhD program that enrolls with the intention of pursuing an academic career." Responses, in percentages, were combined into a weighted average, where the number of graduates from the responding institution serves as the weight. The AY19-20 weighted average is 64.2%. This result is strongly similar to and within the confidence interval of the AY18-19 weighted average of 66.2% of students enrolling with aspirations for an academic career. The weighted average for the pooled two-year data is 65.2%. Using the two-year data to estimate that 65.2% of PhD students in Planning desire an academic career, it follows that approximately 173 AY19-20 graduates desired academic positions.

By the Numbers: Job Openings & Placement

For positions beginning in Fall 2020, I identified 103 jobs. After revising the prior years' jobs database to ensure a standard methodology across years, it becomes apparent that job

announcements have been relatively stable over the three-year period. AY18-19 saw a modest increase, to 110 postings. Potentially, AY19-20 could have ended similarly had it not been for COVID-19, as the AY19-20 postings flatten out almost completely in March, where other years continue to see small numbers of new job postings through the spring.

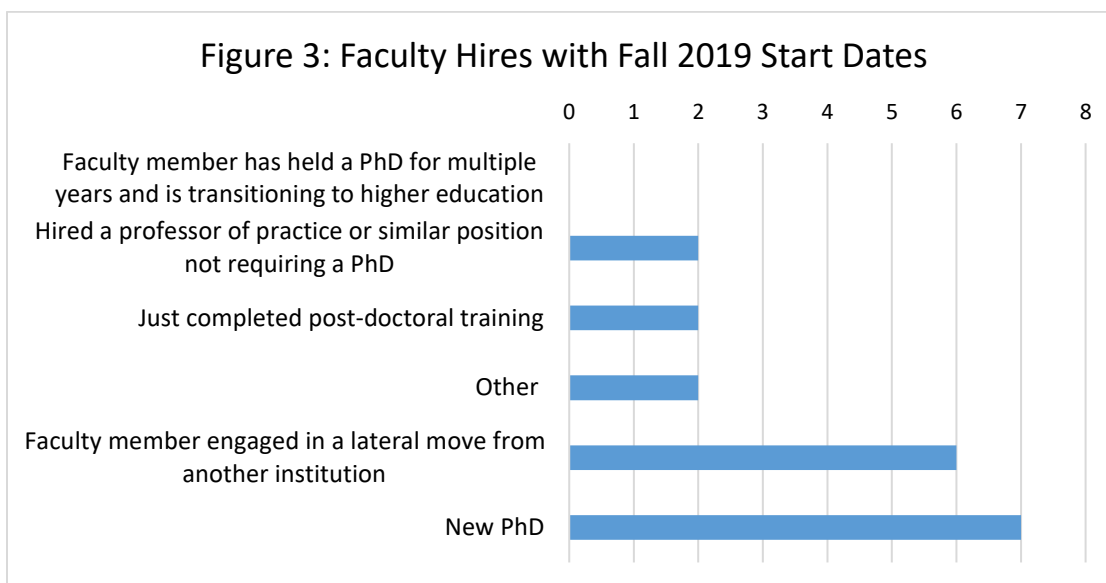Figure 2: Job Announcement by Year
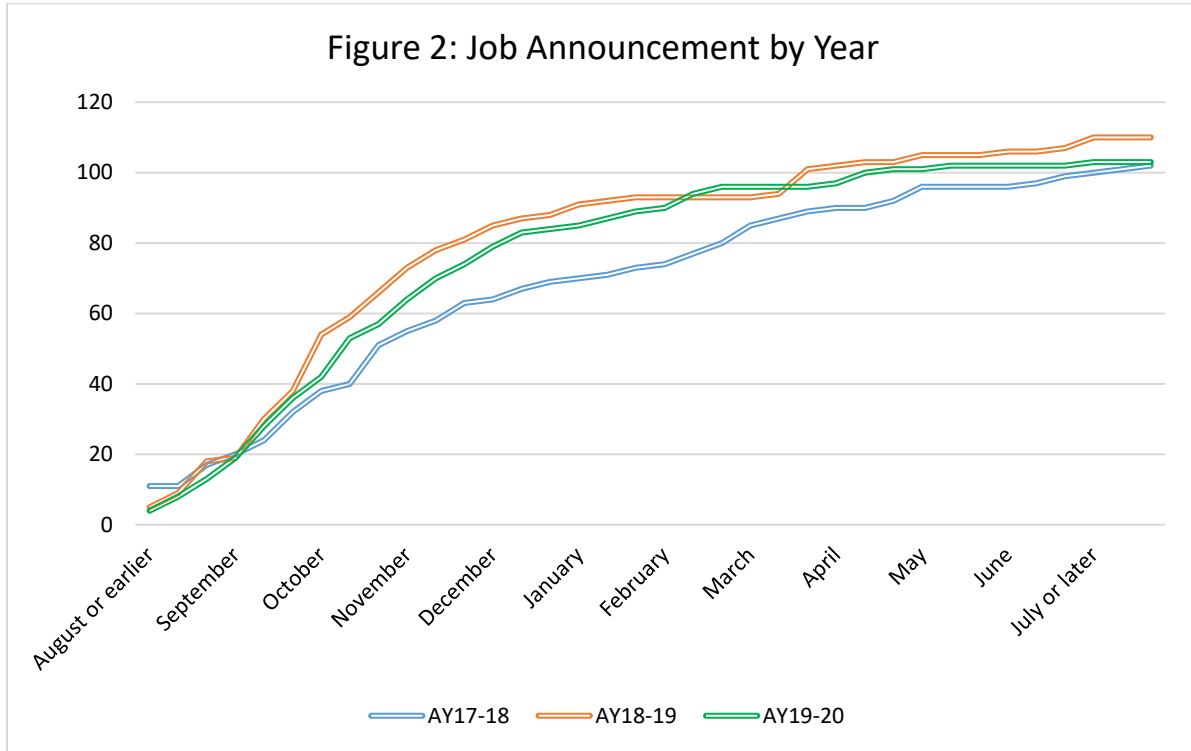
From the survey of programs, I identify a 46% placement rate of graduates into academic positions, slightly up from AY18-19 (41%) and even with the AY17-18 results[3]. Of the estimated 265 graduates during academic year 2019-2020, of which an estimated 173 preferred an academic position, an estimated 122 likely found such a position following graduation. Put another way, approximately 70% of those graduates likely seeking an academic position found one. This estimate is up slightly from the AY18-19 estimate of 62%. The pooled, three-year data suggests approximately 68% of graduates desiring an academic career find such employment.

Of the 32 responding programs, 17 reported having hired faculty members with Fall 2019 start dates. Collectively these departments hired 19 new colleagues. These sample data account for approximately 17% of all positions filled in AY19-20 that had been advertised through the ACSP Career Center. Consistent with data from AY18-19, lateral moves appear equally or almost equally with hiring new PhDs. Undoubtedly, some of these lateral moves were for tenured positions, but the idea remains that new PhDs should expect competition for faculty positions from lateral moves.

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[3] Ganning, Joanna, "Doctoral Education and the Academic Job Market in Planning: 2017-2018" (2018). *Urban Publications*. 0 1 2 3 1550. https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/urban_facpub/1550

Figure 3: Faculty Hires with Fall 2019 Start Dates

Category	Value
Faculty member has held a PhD for multiple years and is transitioning to higher education	0
Hired a professor of practice or similar position not requiring a PhD	2
Just completed post-doctoral training	2
Other	2
Faculty member engaged in a lateral move from another institution	6
New PhD	7

As with prior years, the survey data show that graduates accept positions beyond those identified in the job bank data represented in Figure 2. Many of the hiring institutions listed by survey respondents do not appear in the job bank data, such as full-time research positions at the home institution, academic institutions in foreign countries that might not advertise with ACSP, and other opportunities. Yet, ACSP is a vital resource in the academic job market in Planning. Perhaps as many as two-thirds of academic job seekers identified their eventual position through the ACSP Career Center.

Of the 103 jobs identified with Fall 2020 start dates, 76 were open to new PhDs, and of those, 61 were tenure-track. Table 1 provides further detail by academic rank and a comparison to AY18-19. AY19-20 offered fewer opportunities overall for new PhDs compared to the previous year. However, the change in tenure-track opportunities is small. Conversely, AY19-20 offered many more options for tenured faculty considering a move.

Table 1: Positions Advertised by Rank or Title

	AY18-19		AY19-20	
	Positions Advertised	Tenure Track	Positions Advertised	Tenure Track
Open to New PhDs				
Assistant	43	42	38	37
Assistant/Associate	18	18	14	13
Open rank	10	10	12	11
Post-Doc	6	0	6	0
Research	5	0*	2	0
Visiting Assistant	6	0	2	0
Fellowship	1	0	1	0
Lecturer	11	0	1	0
Academic Professional	1	0	0	0
Total - Open to New PhDs	*101*	*70*	*76*	*61*
Other Positions Advertised				
Associate/Full	3	3	13	13
Chair/Dean	5	5	9	9
Full (Other than Chair/Dean)	0	0	3	3
Associate	1	1	1	1
Advanced Assistant	0	0	1	1
Total - Higher Rank	*9*	*9*	*27*	*27*
Grand Total	*110*	*79*	*103*	*88*
* one job advertisement was too vague regarding tenure to be confidently coded				

Specializations: Program Offerings versus the Job Market

Figure 4 shows reported program specializations for Year 3. As anticipated, reported program specializations do not change remarkably from year to year. The AY19-20 data show fewer "other" responses, and there does appear to have been a proliferation of Urban Policy concentrations—unsurprising given the relative popularity of this specialization in job postings. The "Other" category is comprised of three distinct variations on Urban Design and a range of one-off responses, such as Construction Management, Architectural History, and "Built Environment and Health." Notably, not all PhD programs have specializations, or have them only informally.

Figure 4: Program Specializations, 2019-2020

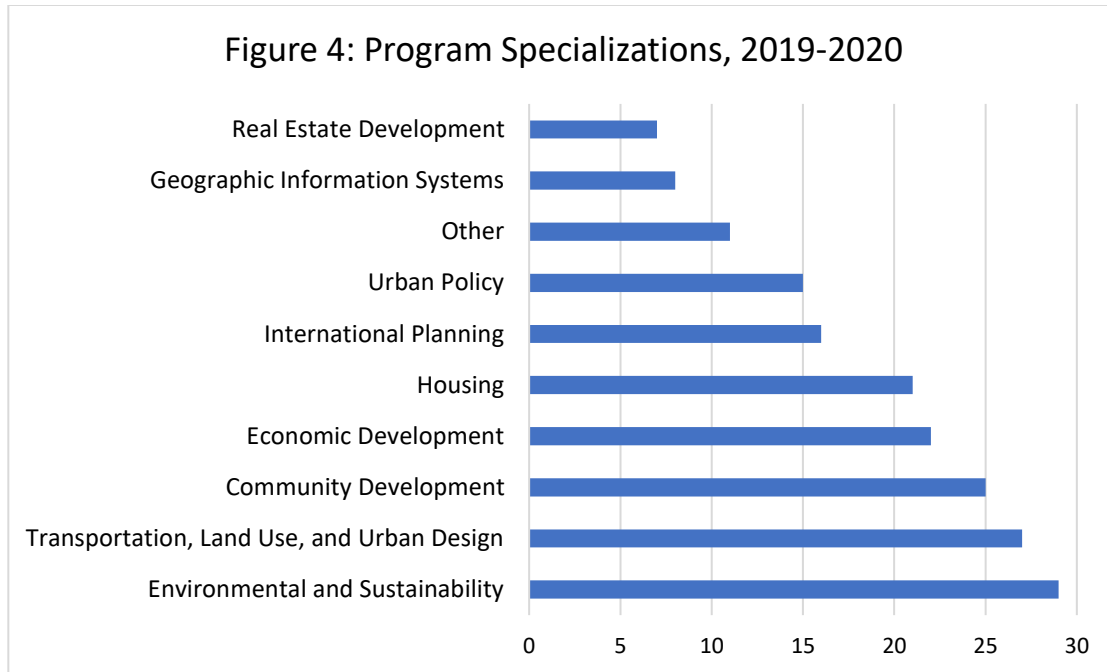| Specialization	Value
Real Estate Development	7
Geographic Information Systems	8
Other	11
Urban Policy	15
International Planning	16
Housing	21
Economic Development	22
Community Development	25
Transportation, Land Use, and Urban Design	27
Environmental and Sustainability	29

Table 2 illustrates the specializations sought in job posts. As in previous years, the supply (by program) and demand (by job advertisement) only partially align. Again, the program specialization data indicates what is offered, but not the enrollment in each specialization.

For the third year, job advertisements seeking candidates with expertise in Environmental and Sustainability Planning outnumber those for any other specialization. A few relatively larger changes in the job market merit mentioning. Housing, GIS/Spatial Analysis, Community Development, and Urban Design all saw greater than 50% increases in job advertisements year-over-year (although the numbers are small). Data Analytics and the Open category saw the largest decreases. Readers are reminded that jobs typically advertise for multiple specializations, which is why the columns in Table 2 sum to more jobs than were identified.

Table 2: Specializations in Job Advertisements

Specialization	AY18-19	AY19-20	Difference
Environment and Sustainability	35	41	17%
Housing	15	23	53%
GIS/Spatial analysis	14	22	57%
Transportation	15	20	33%
Community Development	11	18	64%
Economic Development	19	17	-11%
Urban Design	11	17	55%
Social Equity	16	15	-6%
Land Use	15	15	0%
International Planning	1	11	1000%

Urban Policy	13	11	-15%
Data Analytics/Big Data/Data Science	18	10	-44%
Open	15	9	-40%
Real estate	6	8	33%
Landscape Architecture	4	7	75%
Health	10	7	-30%
Disaster Management	0	4	--

Graduate Education: Teaching and Research Experience of Graduates

Consistent with prior years, nearly three-quarters of programs report that all or most PhD students have the opportunity to gain teaching experience (Figure 5). It remains relatively uncommon that PhD students rarely or never have teaching opportunities. In fact, this response was not recorded for any program in AY19-20.

Figure 5: Teaching Opportunities

I don't know (3%)

Some PhD students have teaching responsibilities during at least one semester 25%

All PhD students have teaching responsibilities during at least one semester 25%

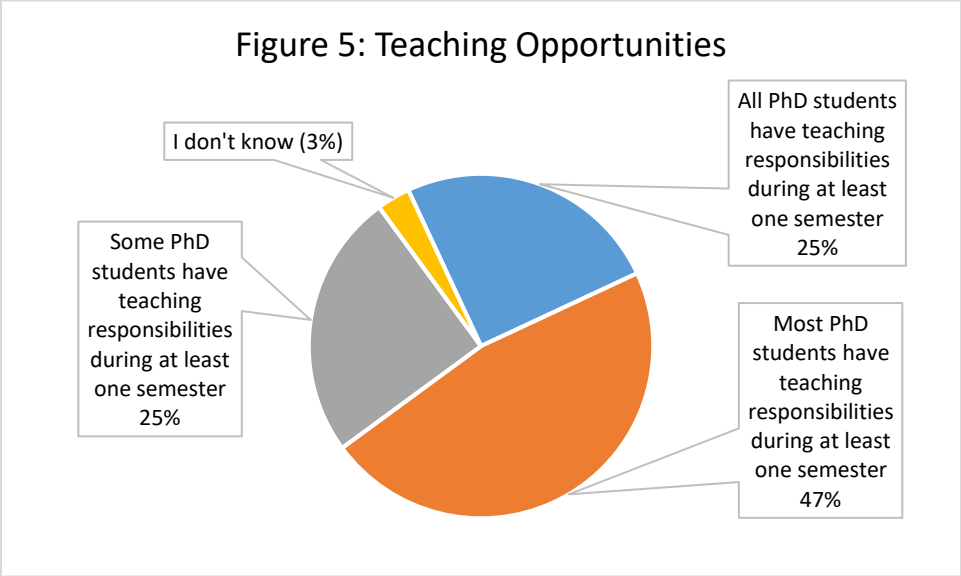Most PhD students have teaching responsibilities during at least one semester 47%

Table 3 compares detailed teaching opportunities available for doctoral students across the study period. As anticipated, the results show stability over time, especially for teaching tasks such as proctoring and grading, acting as instructor of record, and leading discussion sections. More fluctuation is seen in the frequency of securing TA positions in other departments, and having students engage in curriculum design; the latter appears to be on the rise.

Table 3: Teaching Tasks

Teaching Task or Responsibility	AY17-18	AY18-19	AY19-20
Proctor and grade	26 *(93%)*	21 *(91%)*	29 *(91%)*
Act as instructor of record	22 *(79%)*	19 *(82%)*	27 *(84%)*
Lead discussion sections	20 *(71%)*	20 *(87%)*	29 *(91%)*
Secure TA positions in other departments	16 *(57%)*	15 *(68%)*	16 *(50%)*
Engage in curriculum design	9 *(32%)*	13 *(57%)*	20 *(63%)*
Total # of Programs Responding	28	23	32

Also similar to previous results, the AY19-20 survey shows the importance of publishing in doctoral education. Nearly half (15/32) of the AY19-20 respondents reported that students are required to produce publishable research but are not required to publish. Half of the respondents (16/32) reported that students are encouraged to publish, although producing publishable research is not a degree requirement. One program reported that publishing is not a focal point of the program, and zero programs reported that publishing is required. One respondent pointed out that some doctoral committee chairs may require that work be publishable to pass, even if this criteria is not codified at the program level.

Limitations

As quoted from the Year 1 report, "the seeming mismatch between program specializations and job market demands may not be as stark as the data suggest. Cross-training between specializations overcomes a portion of the apparent mismatch. Perhaps more significantly, though, the data represent what programs offer, not what students pursue. As such, the data on program specializations does not directly capture the skillsets of recent graduates.[1]" This challenge continues to pose a potential limitation.

While not a limitation of the current report, this report also presents slight revisions to previously reported figures. The origins of these revisions are two-fold. First, I had previously reported that Year 1 results were not directly comparable to Year 2 results. In AY19-20, I identified and executed a method to recode Year 1 data for all but a very few cases. This effort has enabled more longitudinal comparisons than anticipated. Second, I conducted an additional round of code review on Year 2 data to ensure methodological consistency across time. This process identified a number of job postings that were removed from the database for failing to meet project requirements of year-round, full-time work in Planning. For this reason, some figures reported here are slightly revised from previous reporting.

Finally, reiterating the limitation articulated in the Year 2 report, while this project makes significant strides toward estimating the supply side of the academic job market in Planning, there remain unavoidable sources of error. First, some graduates may be open to multiple career paths without a strong preference between academic and non-academic. Second, some graduates may focus their job searches in allied fields such as the environmental humanities. Third, some graduates do take adjunct positions. A survey of graduates themselves could address some of these unknowns.

Conclusion

This third report of doctoral education and the academic job market in Planning offers strong support for prior year findings. COVID-19 notwithstanding, our job market has several relatively stable features: the number of graduates, the number of job postings, the timing of the job postings, the teaching opportunities and specializations offered to students, and the focus on publishing within doctoral programs. The ACSP Career Center is an important source of information for job seekers, but still, many find opportunities through other channels. While the popularity of specializations fluctuates from year to year, Environmental and Sustainability Planning positions remains the most popular, while Disaster Management advertisements remain the least common. Pooled, three-year data suggest that approximately 68% of students desiring academic employment secure such a position. Given the disruption of COVID-19 to so many facets of higher education and the economy, I plan to continue tracking and reporting job opportunities past the end of this three-year project.

Acknowledgements

Author Biosketch and Contact Information

Dr. Joanna Ganning is the Associate Dean of Faculty Research, Development, and Administration in the Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University. Her research uses quantitative methodologies to study contemporary U.S. communities marginalized by geography, decline, or economic status in order to promote development that raises the standard of living for everyone. Dr. Ganning serves as Program Director for Cleveland State's Master of Urban Planning and Development program, as co-chair of the Economic Development track of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, and on the City Planning Commission for the City of Shaker Heights, OH.

Contact Information

For questions regarding this report, please contact Joanna Ganning at j.ganning@csuohio.edu.

Appendix

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument used for this project contains 15 substantive questions, 2 related to informed consent, and 1 that serves as a check on the role of the person supplying responses. The Institutional Review Board at Cleveland State University reviewed and approved the survey instrument. Informed consent was necessary because by publishing the respondent identification strategy, anonymity could not be guaranteed. Respondents were informed that survey data would be reported in aggregated versions but that university-level responses might also be shared. Respondents were asked to report data for programs from which graduates might pursue careers in the Planning academy.

A more detailed review of survey questions can be found in the Year 1 report, but the instrument is briefly summarized here. The survey asks questions covering the following topics:
- Number of graduates
- Job placement for those graduates
- PhD program specializations offered
- Teaching experience available to PhD students
- Publication expectations/experience for PhD students

Questions pertaining to specializations, teaching experience, and publishing expectations are all used to assess the alignment of job advertisements to programs and the competitiveness of graduates in aggregate. These questions are all multiple choice.

Participant Identification

For Year 1 data collection, PhD programs were identified by a review of departmental websites for all Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) accredited Master's degree programs. This list was supplemented and cross-referenced with the ACSP Guide to Undergraduate and Graduate Education in Urban and Regional Planning, 2014 Edition (the most recent edition available online[4] at the time). For Year 2 data collection, the Year 1 list was edited to reflect feedback from programs requesting to be removed due to a misalignment between program curriculum and the goals of this project. The Year 2 program list was also edited to reflect feedback identifying two programs previously overlooked.

With this list of relevant PhD programs (given in Appendix Table A1), program websites were reviewed to identify program directors or, if one could not be identified, a department chair. In many cases, multiple people per department were contacted. As in Year 1, the distribution list was revised according to feedback after each email solicitation went out.

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[4] https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.acsp.org/resource/collection/6CFCF359-2FDA-4EA0-AEFA-D7901C55E19C/2014_20th_Edition_ACSP_Guide.pdf

Table A1: List of Contacted and Participating Institutions and Programs

Arizona State University (2 programs)	University of California Los Angeles
Auburn University	University of Cincinnati[2]
Clemson University[2]	University of Colorado Denver
Cleveland State University[2]	University of Delaware
Columbia University	University of Florida[2]
Cornell University[2]	University of Georgia[1]
Florida Atlantic University[1]	University of Hawaii
Florida State University[2]	University of Idaho
Georgia State University	University of Illinois Chicago[2]
Georgia Tech University[2]	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign[2]
Harvard University[2]	University of Louisville
Indiana University	University of Manitoba[2]
Jackson State University[2]	University of Maryland
Kansas State University[1]	University of Massachusetts Amherst[2]
Massachusetts Institute of Technology[2]	University of Michigan[2]
Michigan State University[2]	University of Minnesota[2]
New School	University of New Orleans
New York University	University of North Carolina
Northeastern	University of Oklahoma[2]
Ohio State University[2]	University of Pennsylvania[2]
Portland State University[2]	University of South Florida
Queens University	University of Southern California[2]
Rutgers University[2]	University of Texas Arlington[2]
Texas A&M University	University of Texas Austin[2]
Texas Southern University	University of Toronto
University College London[2]	University of Utah[2]
University of Alabama	University of Virginia[2]
University of Alberta	University of Washington
University of British Columbia	University of Waterloo[2]
University of Buffalo[2]	University of Wisconsin
University of California Berkeley[2]	Virginia Commonwealth University
University of California Irvine	Virginia Tech[2]

1: Program director indicated inclusion is inappropriate at the current time

2: Participating program