Academic Jobs for Recent Anthropology PhDs, 2016–18

Anthropology education leads to a diverse range of professional applications. Prior Association research has investigated career outcomes among AAA members (Ginsberg 2016) and anthropology master's graduates (Fiske et al. 2010), and we have presented case studies as part of our public outreach efforts (Wang et al. 2019). In this report, we focus more specifically on a type of employment that tends to be of particular interest to our members: academic positions for recent PhD graduates. We believe that a greater awareness of career diversity for anthropology PhDs is vital to the future of the discipline, especially given the growing precarity of academic employment; nevertheless, we also recognize the centrality of academic labor to the reproduction of the discipline as well as to the professional lives of a majority of our members, and for these reasons, the academic job market is deserving of particular attention.

To collect data on the academic job market, we turned to our online career portal, Anthropology Careers and Employment (ACE; http://careercenter.americananthro.org), which is open to employers of any sector seeking to fill vacancies. This report considers jobs posted on ACE during the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 hiring cycles, with each hiring cycle defined to include jobs posted from April 1 of one year to March 31 of the following year. In this two-year period, ACE accumulated 767 unique advertisements for open positions, nearly 85% of which we have identified as *early-career academic* vacancies, jobs in higher education for candidates who have recently received their terminal degree or have reached ABD status. This report will focus on the nature of early-career academic appointments, including academic rank and tenure availability, and the institutional characteristics of the employers that hire them.

To supplement the information available from ACE postings, we also surveyed ACE job posters after the hiring cycles had closed. The survey asked respondents about the number of applicants, results of the job search, and in the cases when a candidate had been hired, the importance of certain criteria on the selection process. Where possible, we use survey responses to extend job bank data by incorporating information about the results of job postings.

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AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
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Key Findings

In preparing this report, our goal was to provide useful perspective to candidates for early-career academic positions. Here are some key takeaways for this audience:

- Among academic employers who post jobs with the AAA, only about half are anthropology departments.
- While tenure-track assistant professorships are the most common early-career academic posting, we also receive many announcements for postdoctoral fellows. Recent PhD graduates are often competitive applicants for open-rank advertisements as well.
- Opportunities are mainly available at research universities, but they are geographically widespread.
- While AAA job listings are holding steady at just under 80% of PhD completions, this does not mean that there is an "overproduction" of PhDs; keep in mind that the unemployment rate of anthropology PhDs is 2.5%, well below the national average.

Identifying the Population

As Ruediger (2018) details, there are limitations to tracking positions and job market trends through an association-run job board. For example, consider the IPEDS and ACE data comparison in Figure 1, the classic line graph used to illustrate the supposed "overproduction" of PhDs: for the past eight years, the number of jobs posted on ACE has consistently fallen about 20% short of the number of PhDs granted in anthropology. According to the NSF's 2017 Survey of Doctorate Recipients, however, the unemployment rate of anthropology PhDs is only 2.5%, and over 80% of employed anthropology PhDs work full time (National Science Foundation 2017). Therefore, anthropologists are finding full-time employment in many positions not captured by ACE. While our analysis can point towards some trends, these elements of the academic and non-academic market will remain as areas of focus for future research.
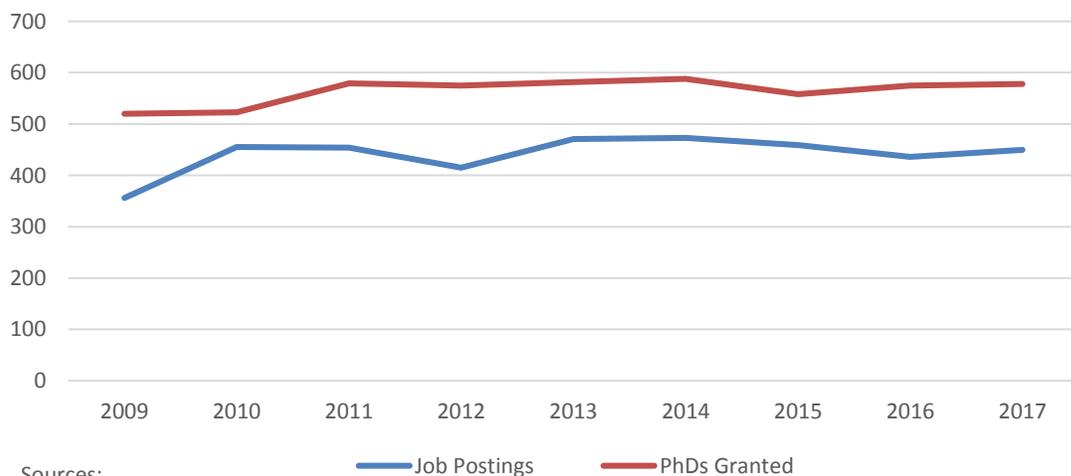
Sources:
Job postings: AAA
Degrees: NCES, IPEDS collection, Completion survey component, 2009-2016 (final) and 2017 (provisional)

Figure 1: Comparison of PhDs granted and jobs posted on ACE

Employers recruiting on ACE provide key information about their institution and the advertised position, such as the length of appointment, duties, and the required degrees and experience needed to qualify for the position. To identify early-career academic (ECA) vacancies, we examined each position's minimum education and experience requirements alongside the position title. Using these qualifiers, ECA vacancies were sorted into the seven sub-categories seen in Table 1.

Roughly 85% of the postings on ACE were early-career positions in academia. The remainder either required more experience than is attainable for entry-level candidates, were non-academic or miscellaneous advertisements. As illustrated in Table 1, the Other category includes senior faculty and academic leadership positions, business / government / nonprofit (BGN) appointments, and opportunities for candidates who were already employed, such as fellowships and journal editorships.

Table 1: Distribution of categories across hiring cycles

Category	2016–2017	2017–2018
Early-Career Academic	**325**	**326**
Faculty: Pre-Tenure / Tenure-Track	135	150
Faculty: Open Rank	76	62
Faculty: Non-Tenure Line	58	58
Postdoc: Research	21	24
Postdoc: Teaching	18	23
Faculty: Tenure Status Unknown	13	7
Support Staff	4	2
Other	**68**	**48**
Academic Leadership	36	28
Business / Government / Nonprofit	15	7
Miscellaneous (Journal editorship, etc.)	9	7
Faculty: Senior Rank	8	6
Total	**393**	**374**

Early-Career Academic Job Postings

Within the ECA sub-categories listed in Table 1, we gave particular attention to three different segments of the anthropology job market for emerging academics: the distribution of rank and tenure status, the nature of open rank postings, and postdoctoral fellowship opportunities. In this section we analyze the number of vacancies within each subcategory alongside the institutional characteristics and geographic location of employers.

Table 2: Academic ranks within tenure status categories

Categories	Frequency	Percentage of Total
Pre-Tenure/ Tenure-Track	**285**	
Instructor	1	<1%
Lecturer	1	<1%
Assistant Professor	283	99%
Non-Tenure Line Faculty	**116**	
Visiting Assistant Professor	52	45%
Lecturer	38	33%
Visiting Instructor	10	9%
Instructor	6	5%
Assistant Professor	6	5%
Clinical Faculty	3	3%
Temporary Pool	1	1%

Pre-Tenure and Non-Tenure Line Faculty

In Table 2, the Pre-Tenure / Tenure-Track and Non-Tenure Line Faculty categories from Table 1 are further broken down according to academic rank within each tenure status. Unsurprisingly, 99% of pre-tenure / tenure-track postings are assistant professorships. In comparison, visiting assistant professorships, the most common rank of non-tenure line faculty, only account for 45% of the total. Note that we received postings for both pre-tenure / tenure-track and non-tenure line positions at the instructor and lecturer ranks. Not shown in Table 2 are an additional 20 assistant professor vacancies that did not specify tenure status.

ECA vacancies were also coded for Carnegie type (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education n.d.) and regional location. As shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, more than half of advertised vacancies came from doctoral universities. Previous AAA research (Ginsberg 2016) has shown a similar distribution among AAA members with academic affiliations, so this seems to reflect a consistent status quo in academic anthropology.
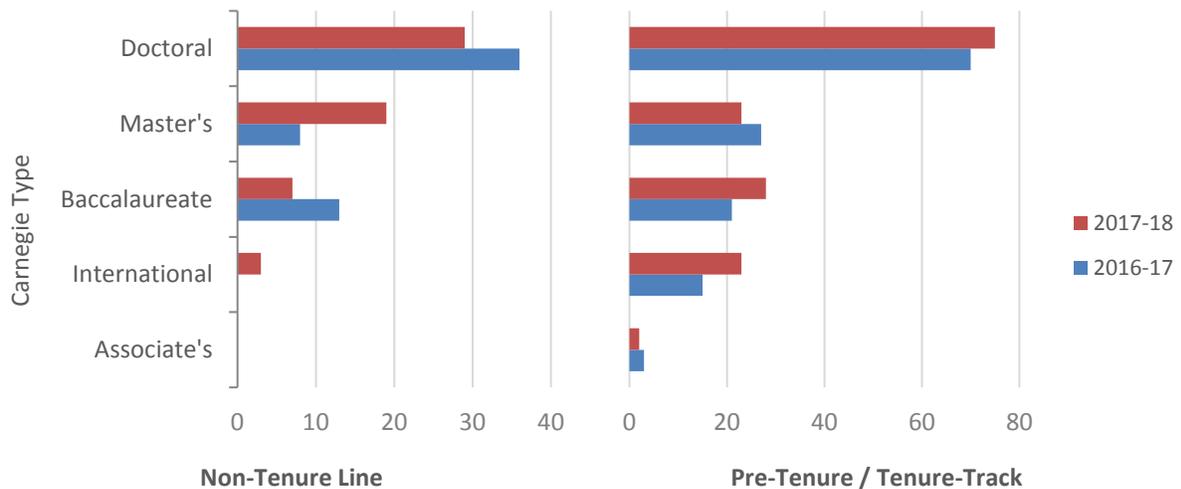

Figure 2: ECA vacancies by institution type

The highest concentration of pre-tenure / tenure-track vacancies posted in the first hiring cycle were split between the Far West (n=31) and Mid-East (n=29) regions of the US; however, by the second cycle they were amassed in the Far West (n=43). Non-tenure line positions were consistently located in the Mid-East region in both cycles. Regional distributions are shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**.
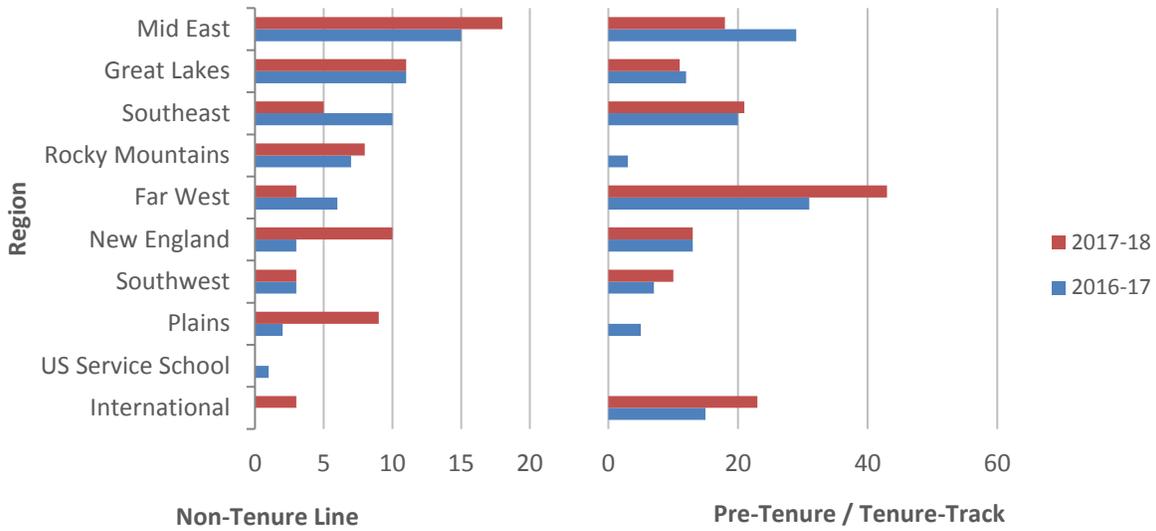
Figure 3: Regional distribution of ECA vacancies

Faculty: Open Rank

Unlike other ECA positions, open rank vacancies are academic appointments whose rank is determined after a candidate's qualifications have been assessed, leaving the employer open to hire either an ECA or senior faculty member. Because they are in principle open to senior applicants, it was not clear whether we should include open rank advertisements as ECA opportunities. To answer this question, we compared the title of original advertised rank(s) to the hired rank reported by the employer on the follow-up survey. Of the 119 open rank vacancies posted to ACE, we received 14 responses to the follow-up survey. 13 of the 14 hired at the assistant professor level (including one cluster hire of two faculty members) and only one employer hired two candidates at the associate and full professor ranks. With such a small sample size, we cannot definitively say that open rank vacancies are truly open rank based on reported hiring practices, but we can assert that early-career candidates are often competitive applicants for open rank advertisements.

Postdoctoral: Research and Teaching

Postdoctoral fellowships were nearly evenly distributed amongst research (52%) and teaching (47%) engagements. Overall, postdoctoral appointments were predominately at doctoral universities in the Mid-East (2016-2017 hiring cycle) and Great Lakes regions (2017-2018).
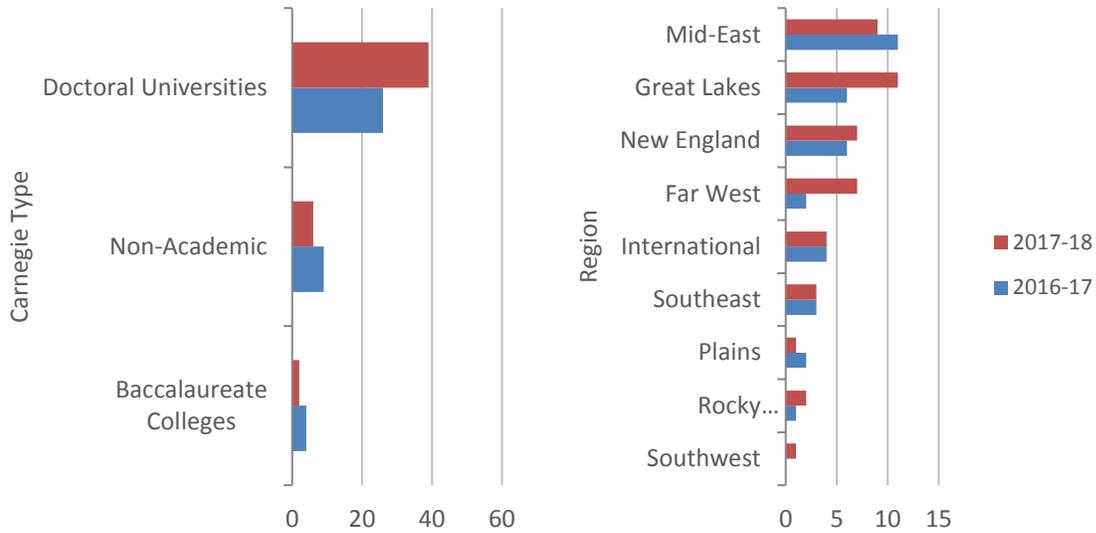
Figure 4: Carnegie type and region of postdoctoral fellowships

Departments

Tracking academic jobs for anthropologists beyond ACE is difficult due to the number of anthropologists hired outside of anthropology departments; a search for *professors of anthropology* would leave out the large proportion of anthropologists teaching in other humanities and social science departments, as well as life and health sciences departments and professional schools. To quantify the range of disciplines reflected in our data set, we categorized the employers' department title using a version of the Classification of Institutional Programs used in federal statistical reports (National Center for Education Statistics 2010), which we have modified by separating anthropology from the other social sciences. The codes identified in the outer rings of Figure 6 are organized by the overarching disciplines of the inner rings.
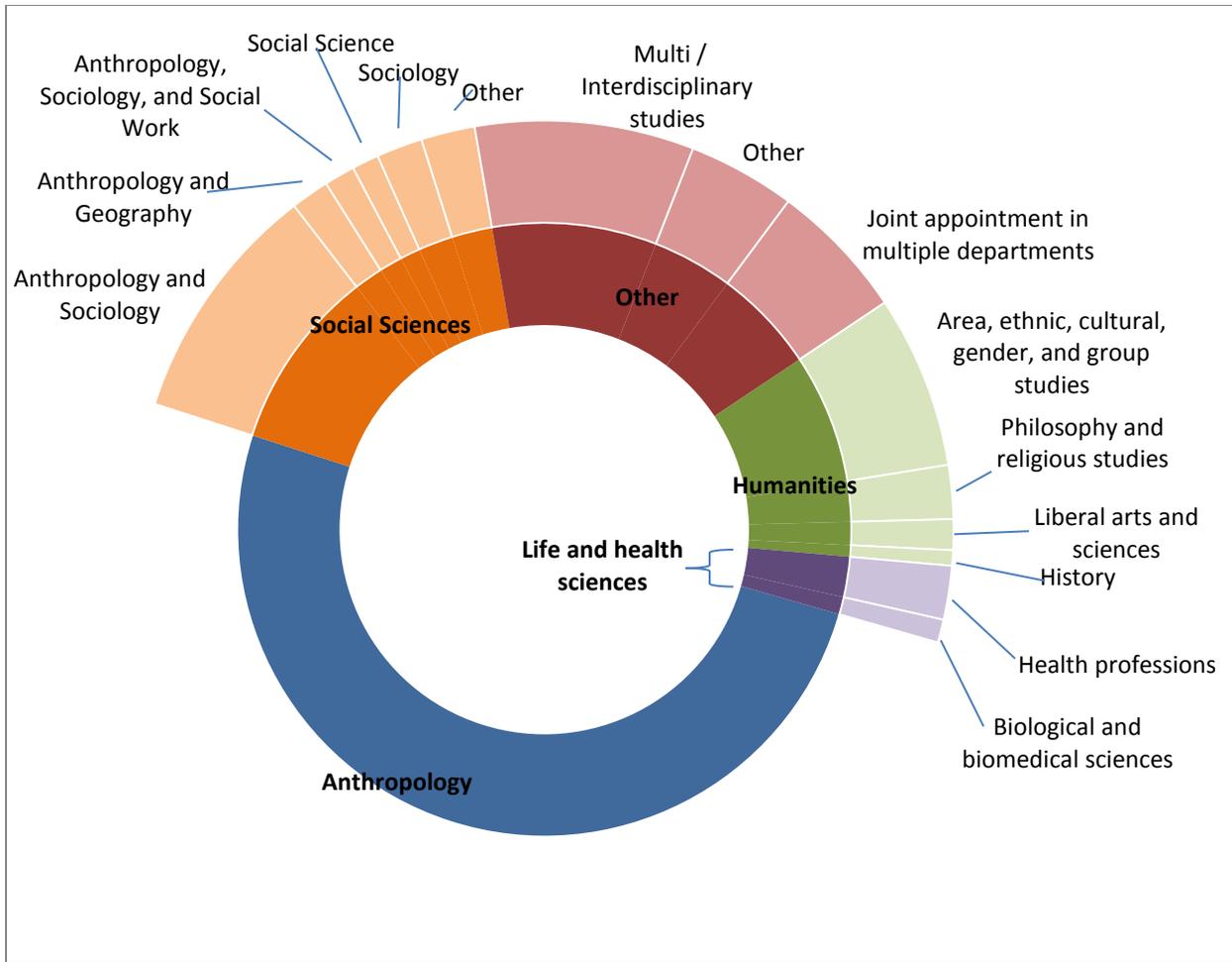
Figure 5: Distribution of hiring departments

Since this process relied on information provided by the employers, institutions that did not provide this information were excluded from this analysis. These departments were typically from international institutions, sought faculty with general social science expertise to teach core curriculum courses, or were postdoctoral appointments in academic centers or with individual faculty members.

Hiring Preferences

The follow-up survey included a module asking employers to rate the criteria considered in their hiring decision. In many cases, the respondent who completed the survey may have been administrative staff or for some other reason not part of the hiring committee, making them unable to complete this section. For this reason, we did not have sufficient data to disaggregate hiring criteria among different classes of ECA positions; instead, we have compiled aggregated numbers for all ECA positions in Table 3 and non-ECA positions in Table 4.

Both types of employer were most likely to rate *Fit with position*, *Demonstrated scholarship,* and *Demonstrated teaching ability* as having high importance. A candidate's standing in their subspecialty and field were more moderately ranked. For the ECA positions this possibly reflects an understanding of

the emerging academic population's limited work experience and budding research projects. Through anecdotal interviews with some hiring departments we learned that the criteria *to improve racial/ethnic and gender diversity* does not influence the selection of a final candidate as much as the other criteria when departments already meet university standards for equal opportunity.

Table 3: Selection criteria rated *High importance*

Selection Criteria	Early-career academics (N=70)		Other jobs (N=14)	
	N	%	%	%
Fit with position as advertised	60	86%	12	86%
Demonstrated scholarship	45	64%	10	71%
Demonstrated teaching ability	40	57%	6	43%
To improve racial/ethnic diversity	22	31%	4	29%
Standing in subspecialty	20	29%	4	29%
To improve gender diversity	16	23%	2	14%
Standing in field	11	16%	5	36%

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