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Job search and selection by academic accountants: new and relocating faculty

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Abstract

This study examines the factors accounting faculty consider most important in accepting a certain academic position and their level of satisfaction that they selected the correct school. Also, information is obtained on how interviews with universities were obtained and conducted. A questionnaire was sent to two groups of faculty: new PhDs accepting their first academic employment and also faculty moving to a new school. Differences were found in importance of factors in job selection between new and relocating faculty, those accepting positions at doctoral vs. non-doctoral granting schools, and males and females. The extent of job search and methods of obtaining interviews differed between those relocating voluntarily and those leaving involuntarily. This research has implications both for new and mobile faculty and institutions interested in attracting the best faculty. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction and motivation

The primary purpose of this study is to empirically examine which factors are important in the selection of academic positions by accounting faculty. Although other studies have explored this question, several factors provide motivation for the current study. First, the limited amount of research performed in this area has used different methodologies, and thus the results obtained and conclusions reached vary considerably. Second, the academic accounting market has changed dramatically over the last 10 years. Decreasing enrollments, budget cuts and an increase in doctoral

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programs have increased tenure requirements and put a greater premium on academic accounting positions. Third, the demographics of our profession have changed as well. Increasing numbers of women and minorities are entering the academic accounting profession. Additionally, the number of new PhDs entering the job market has dropped dramatically. As recently as the late 1980s over 200 new graduates were joining the profession yearly. This number dropped to 152 in 1996 (Hasselback, 2000–2001) and continues to fall. Another dimension affecting the job market is greater involuntary faculty turnover. As tenure requirements increase, more faculty may not receive tenure and may even fail third year reviews. This could lead to more experienced faculty competing with new PhDs for Assistant Professor positions. Thus, previous research may no longer reflect current conditions. Fourth, we also empirically examine gender differences in the selection of new academic positions. Other studies have not investigated these differences. Fifth, we use multiple forms of analysis using both quantitative and qualitative data based on actual decisions. A secondary purpose is to obtain quantitative and qualitative data about the interviewing process, which has received little attention in previous research.

We believe that this study provides additional evidence in the literature investigating academic accounting employment. An increasing percentage of females is entering the market. Previous research, with small percentages of females in their samples, did not investigate gender differences. We find evidence of gender differences for factors important in job selection. Additionally, we simultaneously study both relocaters and new PhDs using actual rather than the hypothetical decision used in many previous studies. Major differences emerge between academic relocaters and those seeking their first position. We also examine the extent of job search, in terms of number of schools contacted by an applicant. This study is the first to divide relocaters into those leaving voluntarily and those leaving involuntarily. The extent of job search also differs among types of applicants.

In addition to these contributions to the academic literature, we believe our findings should be of practical interest to new PhDs seeking positions, relocating faculty, and recruiting universities. By studying factors of importance as well as satisfaction we identify issues that new faculty, in particular, may need to consider in selecting their first academic position. This study should help academic job seekers focus on factors which are important to others in the same group (based on new or relocating faculty, type of school, and gender). University administrators should be interested in the importance of factors in selecting a position as well as leaving a institution, in order to attract and retain desired faculty members. Also, awareness of the gender differences found in this study may help those institutions that are trying to increase the diversity of their faculty. Finally, we provide data on means of obtaining and conducting interviews that should be of interest to new hires, relocaters, and university administrators. Both groups of faculty may benefit by knowing techniques that others have successfully used to obtain interviews. Understanding factors leading to applicant dissatisfaction with the interviewing process may help prospective faculty know what to expect and may provide universities with information on how to improve the process and better attract good faculty. This research views job search and selection as a process involving reasons for leaving previous employment,

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