

Physics Job Market a Little Tighter as Economy Wanes

Reports gathered by PHYSICS TODAY from industrial and government laboratories indicate that jobs for physicists, while still far more numerous than the supply of applicants, are becoming less so. At the same time, academic sources report that the shortage of college physics teachers continues to grow in severity, especially in small four-year institutions.

Analysts of the technical employment situation say that the tightened job market reflects a slowdown in the nation's economy as well as the leveling off of federal research funds. One indicator, the Deutsch & Shea technical-manpower index, reported a drop of 10.5% in demand from last year. Leading industrial laboratories generally reported a stable demand for physicists coupled with an increasing number of applicants. IBM, for example, said, "In all our divisions that hire physicists, no new research facilities are being planned. But the supply of physicists is so much greater that a tight job situation has resulted." Bell Laboratories indicated that while they have no surplus of physics applicants, the hiring is easier for Bell this year than in the past.

Meanwhile the American Institute of Physics placement service reported handling more applicants and fewer employers at this year's Washington meeting of the American Physical Society than last year. In addition, recruitment advertising in PHYSICS TODAY is currently running about 25% below last year. Personnel agencies specializing in physicists said that while the number of applicants has increased about 25% this year, the number of positions available has dropped a little more than 25%. "There are definitely fewer jobs around for the physicists who are looking," noted one agency. "The cutback is most pronounced at the high salary levels. Companies tend to replace older men with younger physicists who have lower salary demands."

Government laboratories reported

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Graduate students are not covered by minimum wage and overtime provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act, announced the Labor Department. The department said, "Where a graduate student is engaged in original, professional-level research which is primarily for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements for an advanced degree, even though he may be performing such research under a grant . . . we will not assert that an employer-employee relationship exists."

The California State College faculty, object of recent intense recruitment drives by organized labor, have voted not to have any exclusive outside bargaining agent. Participating in the poll were more than 5700 college teachers, 52.3% of whom voted no. The teachers thus appeared to prefer continued representation by the academic senate of the California State College system.

Egyptian President Nasser's voice was identified by physicist Lawrence Kersta from Israeli tapes of a purported plan to save face discussed by Nasser and Jordan King Hussein. Kersta told PHYSICS TODAY he made identification by comparing the tapes with prior recordings of Nasser's voice, using voiceprint identification methods.

that though the number of physics applicants tended to grow over last year, the number of openings averaged slightly less because of budgetary restrictions. Oak Ridge National Laboratory, for example, said, "We have had a very sparse hiring season up till now because we had no money left in our budget. But we expect the Atomic Energy Commission to increase our funds very soon so that we will probably hire as many physicists as we did last year." Brookhaven National Laboratory reported a decrease of about 15% in the number of positions available together with a somewhat higher supply of applicants. And a BNL spokesman noted that this situation probably obtained in the other national laboratories. "Jobs in high-energy physics are quite numerous," he said, "but this is not quite true for nuclear and low-energy physics." Argonne National Laboratory, however, reported that because of their new reactor facility, their demand for physicists had risen some 100%. "Otherwise," said an ANL spokesman, "our demand would be the same as last year. But there are many more applicants."

Academic community and government sources, however, reported that the critical shortage of physics teachers continues unabated. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in a soon-to-be-published report, notes a "particular demand for physicists with advanced degrees to teach in colleges and universities Many schools have had difficulty recruiting sufficient numbers of well qualified teachers and this problem may continue in the future." At the same time, the National Education Association reports that 406 colleges and universities reported critical shortages of physics teachers for the current academic year. Only mathematics was more frequently mentioned (by 597 schools). "The shortage of physics teachers has always been chronic and is expected to be so in the future," said an NEA spokesman. AIP education and manpower director Arnold Strassenburg also reported more jobs for physicists in the academic community than people to fill them. "The small liberal arts schools are particularly having more trouble seeking faculty than last year," he noted,