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## An industrial revolution

Earning a prestigious graduate research fellowship from the US National Science Foundation (NSF) was once considered to be a ticket to an academic career. But a recent NSF report shows that the recipients are increasingly having second thoughts about capitalizing on their perceived advantage.

Almost all of the students surveyed thought when they received the award that they would pursue tenure-track positions at universities. But almost a quarter of the fellows who answered an open-ended question about career aspirations said they had changed their mind.

Even though the respondents came from a variety of disciplines — including engineering, economics and chemistry — they consistently gave three reasons for this switch. First, academia offers too few jobs. One reported initially being “behind a veil of ignorance” about how competitive the academic market was. Others complained about the low pay. “I’d be lying if I said that money wasn’t an issue” for considering industry, one respondent said. And several remarked that when they started their studies they were unaware of opportunities in government or business.

The fellowship’s biggest problem — that the stipend of \$15,000 is too low — is perhaps the most easily rectified, if the US government has the money and the will to spend it. But the overriding issue of the ‘best and the brightest’ being siphoned out of the academic pipeline as a result of disillusionment is tougher.

As one professor interviewed as part of a follow-up to the survey said, students are more open to options outside academia. If universities want to attract the top talent, they will have to stop taking them for granted.

**Paul Smaglik**  
*Naturejobs* editor



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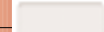
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