

## Contacts

**Publisher:** Ben Crowe  
**Editor:** Paul Smaglik  
**Marketing Manager:** David Bowen

### European Head Office, London

The Macmillan Building  
4 Crinan Street  
London N1 9XW, UK  
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4961  
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996  
e-mail: [naturejobs@nature.com](mailto:naturejobs@nature.com)

**Global Head of Naturejobs:**  
Nevin Bayoumi (4973)

### UK/ RoW/ Ireland:

Matt Powell (4953)  
Andy Douglas (4975)  
Frank Phelan (4944)

### Netherlands/ Italy/ Iberia/ Belgium:

Evelina Rubio Hakansson (4973)  
**Scandinavia:** Silje Opstrup (4994)

### France/ Switzerland:

Amelie Pequignot (4974)

### Natureevents:

Paul Constant (4954)

### Production Manager:

Billie Franklin  
To send materials use London  
address above.  
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4814  
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996  
e-mail: [naturejobs@nature.com](mailto:naturejobs@nature.com)

### International

#### Advertising Coordinator:

Hind Berrada (4935)

#### Naturejobs web development:

Tom Hancock

#### Naturejobs online production:

Ben Lund

### European Satellite Office

#### Germany/ Austria:

Patrick Phelan, Odo Wulffen  
Tel + 49 89 54 90 57 11/2  
Fax + 49 89 54 90 57 20  
e-mail: [p.phelan@nature.com](mailto:p.phelan@nature.com)  
[o.wulffen@nature.com](mailto:o.wulffen@nature.com)

### US Head Office, New York

345 Park Avenue South,  
10th Floor, New York, NY 10010-1707  
Tel +1 800 989 7718  
Fax +1 800 989 7103  
e-mail: [naturejobs@natureny.com](mailto:naturejobs@natureny.com)

### US Sales Manager:

Peter Bless

### US Advertising Coordinator:

Linda Adam

### Japan Head Office, Tokyo

MG Ichigaya Building (5F),  
19-1 Haraikatamachi,  
Shinjuku-ku,  
Tokyo 162-0841  
Tel +81 3 3267 8751  
Fax +81 3 3267 8746

### Asia-Pacific Sales Director:

Rinoko Asami  
e-mail: [rasami@naturejpn.com](mailto:rasami@naturejpn.com)

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## Physics temps

**A**cademic physics jobs in the United States are in transition, with a growing emphasis on part-time or temporary appointments, a continuing decrease in faculty members born in the United States and an economic crunch that could result in fewer permanent positions, according to a recently released survey by the American Institute of Physics ([www.AIP.org](http://www.AIP.org)).

Faculty at US physics departments grew by 5% from 2000 to 2002 — but much of that growth is due to an increase in temporary and part-time instructors. This reflects a softening in the academic market that has already hit the humanities and is now showing signs of spreading to all the sciences. This trend may worsen as state budgets, which fund many of the large public universities, tighten as a result of recent tough economic times, according to the AIP, which conducts the physics survey every two years.

There are still jobs, however. The number of tenure-track jobs and the number of tenured physics faculty that have retired have remained relatively unchanged since 2000. The wild card is the economy. If state budgetary shortfalls leave public universities in the lurch, which is often the case, universities may opt to let vacant positions go unfilled or use temporary help to make up the difference.

Getting those positions may become tougher — unless fewer foreign physicists flow into the United States as a result of visa restrictions. With most of the growth being in part-time positions, and with retirement levels relatively flat, there will be greater competition for tenure-track positions. It may still be possible to climb the tenure-track ladder in physics, but the starting rung will often be lower, in the form of a temporary or a part-time position.

**Paul Smaglik**  
Naturejobs editor



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