

# naturejobs

**JOBS OF  
THE WEEK**

**T**he demographics of academia in the United States are due for an overturn in the next decade. With the 'greying' of the universities — a third of US university faculty are aged 55 or older, and 14% are between 60 and 69 — institutions are preparing for a crew change, according to an article in the London *Times Higher Education Supplement* (14 September 2007).

The types of job — and the pay packets — the new crew are likely to get may, however, be very different from those commanded by the old guard. Many universities are anticipating replacing high-paying, full-time, tenure-track positions with lower-paying, part-time, adjunct ones. And the jobs will probably come as a trickle over the next decade, rather than a deluge, as the United States does not have a mandatory retirement age.

Nevertheless, it is good news for young scientists looking to enter US academia in the next few years, and not only for Americans. The United States has produced disproportionately fewer home-grown PhDs in the sciences — an area with one of the higher potential retirement rates — compared with other disciplines, and there is likely to be a demand for overseas scientists as well to fill the empty teaching positions.

The most coveted jobs released by retiring academics will undoubtedly be those at the nation's most prestigious institutions, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University and Columbia University, where a high proportion of faculty is older than 70. These universities are less likely than others to convert tenured posts into adjunct positions, as they have the endowments to fund professorships and reputations that would be eroded by replacing stars with part-timers.

Some universities are concerned that with the influx of young faculty, they won't have enough experienced people to manage departments and organize programmes. But young scientists who have done multiple postdocs and had the bar for advancement repeatedly raised are unlikely to be sympathetic. It's time to give them their chance.

**Paul Smaglik was editor of Naturejobs from 2001 to 2007.**

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