PATTERNS OF INSTITUTIONAL SELF-RECRUITMENT OF YOUNG PH.D.s: Effects of Academic Markets on Career Mobility

Ted I. K. Youn

In social science research on academic careers and mobility, a persistent finding is the substantial effect of doctoral origin on the prestige of the first institution at which one works. There also seems to be a substantial tendency among academic institutions to follow institutional self-recruitment. That is, an academic is more likely to be recruited by an institution in the same prestige category as that which produced him or her. From the period of large expansion to the slowdown of growth in higher education, how have patterns of institutional self-recruitment changed? While elite institutions tend to recruit Ph.D.s from a similar group of institutions, as we go down the line of institutional prestige hierarchy there is a diminishing trend of self-recruitment among similar institutions. This study suggests that there is a general downward mobility in prestige for newly recruited Ph.D.s in a period of a tighter market. While Ph.D.s from elite research universities have continued to increase their chances for being employed at lesser institutions, Ph.D.s from less prestigious graduate institutions have trickled down in the prestige hierarchy. The data used for our analysis are from the National Research Council's Doctorate Records File covering the period from 1969 to 1981, which is marked by significant changes in higher education. The techniques applied are developed by Leo Goodman's loglinear models.

How does a hierarchy of organizations affect career mobility? Does the effect of career origins shape subsequent career outcomes? How does the effect change over time?

Studies of stratification systems have long contended that a class of organizations within any particular social system form a distinct stratification system. For example, there are hierarchies of law firms (Carlin, 1966; Laumann and Heinz, 1977), business corporations (Boorman and Levitt, 1979; Kanter,
medical schools (Finland, 1964), and employment agencies (Klatzky, 1975). The American system of higher education, with a great diversity among institutions in their roots and social standing, constitutes a stratification system, and that point has been well demonstrated (Caplow and McGee, 1958; Crane, 1965; Jencks and Riesman, 1968; Ashby, 1971; Ben-David, 1972; Clark, 1983). Colleges and universities range from elite research universities to two-year colleges with varying degrees of functions in research, teaching, or some mix of the two.

Between research and teaching roles, institutions are ordered hierarchically in terms of their prestige; research holds higher standing (Fulton and Trow, 1974; Clark, 1983; Parsons and Platt, 1973; Youn, 1981, Blau, 1973). At the top of the hierarchy, leading research universities command prestige, while on the lower academic status ladder two-year and junior colleges place a greater emphasis on successful undergraduate teaching.

Organizations in a stratified system systematically differ in defining opportunities and reward systems in recruiting their members (Baron, 1984). Differentiated academic organizations in the academic stratification system impose discretely different structural rewards on employees, thus resulting in differentiated mobility and career outcomes. The relative emphasis on either advancing knowledge through research or educating students differs widely among academic organizations.

One of the dominant conclusions in the recent social science literature on academic careers has been the substantial effect of doctoral origins on the prestige of the first job institution (Caplow and McGee, 1958; Berelson, 1960; Crane, 1965; Hargens and Hagstrom, 1967; Hagstrom and Hargens, 1968). Some recent articles even furthered this argument (Long, Allison, and McGinnis, 1979; Reskin, 1979) by concluding that the prestige of an academic's first job is most influenced by doctoral prestige and the effect of doctoral prestige on the first job is a stronger predictor of future success.

The argument substantiating the effect of doctoral origins on the prestige of the first job institution is followed by several other studies concluding that there is a substantial tendency among academic institutions to follow institutional "self-recruitment." That is, academics are more likely recruited by the same category of institutions that produced them (Cartter, 1976; Smelser and Content, 1980; Finkelstein, 1984; Clark, 1987).

To the extent that there is a substantial degree of institutional self-recruitment, does the extent of institutional self-recruitment change over time? Moving from the period of vigorous growth in the 1960s to a slow or no-growth period in the early 1980s, what changes might one anticipate?

Previous studies of Ph.D. mobility have concluded that, in a period of tighter market, lower-prestige institutions tend to have a disproportionately higher share of new Ph.D.s (Cartter, 1976; Niland, 1973). Cartter hypothesized a