

Guide to the Economics Job Market “Scramble” for New Ph.D.s

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Abstract

The American Economic Association facilitates the secondary job market for new Ph.D.s in economics by sponsoring a “scramble”. The goal is to increase the number of full-time permanent matches by giving both job candidates and prospective employers information about who remains unmatched late in the job market season. This guide explains how the scramble works, who may participate, and answers frequently asked questions.

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Introduction and Background

In 2005, the American Economic Association Executive Committee appointed a committee to recommend ways to improve the job market for new economics Ph.D.s. members are Alvin Roth (chair), John Cawley, Phillip Levine, Muriel Niederle, and John Siegfried.

The committee considered solutions to various inefficiencies in the market for new economics Ph.D.s. One is that candidates occasionally go unhired and job positions unfilled during the primary job market, which begins with interviews at the ASSA meetings in early January, involves campus visits in January and February, and concludes with job offers in February or early March. Once the primary market clears, it is difficult for unmatched agents to determine who remains unmatched on the other side of the market. Moreover, while employers can post another advertisement in *Job Openings for Economists*, it is difficult for job candidates to signal their continuing availability. The resulting lack of information causes agents to remain unmatched.

To help reduce this problem, the AEA has started a job “scramble.” The concept is borrowed from the market matching medical residents to hospitals, in which a computer conducts matches in the primary market based on preference rankings from both hospitals and new M.D.s, but some are left unmatched. To accommodate agents remaining available after the primary market, continuing availability on each side of the market is advertised and unmatched medical school graduates “scramble” to meet and match with residency programs. The AEA attempts similarly to facilitate the secondary market in economics by establishing a website on which unmatched agents can advertise their continuing availability. The scramble began during the 2005-2006 job market season.

This guide explains how the scramble works. Its success depends on the market being “thick”, with many active participants on each side of the market. For this reason, we hope that all unmatched agents, whether job candidates or employers, will participate. The goals of this guide are to ensure that both sides are familiar and comfortable with the process, to increase participation, and ultimately to increase the number of successful matches.

How the Job Market Scramble Works

The Job Market Scramble occurs during March. In March 2009, job candidates and prospective employers who remain unmatched may log on to the American Economic Association website (<http://www.aeaweb.org/joe/scramble/>) and register their continued availability. For purposes of the scramble, “unmatched” means a job candidate who has not yet accepted a job offer or an employer who has positions still unfilled. Candidates holding a job offer they have not accepted may participate in the scramble if they so choose. (However, candidates in such a position should discuss their situation with their advisors and placement director.) Job candidates who have accepted a job offer are ineligible to participate in the scramble.

On the website, unmatched agents are asked to provide the following information:

Job candidates: name, graduate school, year Ph.D. awarded, fields, email address, URL (webpage address) of the website that contains their CV, job market papers, and list of references. CVs and job market papers are not posted directly on the scramble website, but a link is provided.

Prospective employers: name of institution/department, number of positions that remain available, JEL codes of fields sought, URL (webpage address) of the *Job Openings for Economists* listing that contains the full information about the position, and the name and email address of the person registering the position for the scramble.

Both job candidates and prospective employers may add a few sentences about their characteristics or the characteristics they seek in a match. For example, a job candidate could indicate whether they are on the market jointly with a spouse or partner, whether they have strong geographic preferences, or a desired sector of employment (e.g. private sector, government, academic-liberal arts college, academic- research university). A prospective employer can indicate how their preferences for a candidate differ from their original JOE listing.

Unmatched agents may **register for the scramble website until registration closes**. At that point, registration closes for the year; the scramble website goes online. Only agents who have registered as unmatched are given passwords to the scramble website; agents can only see who is unmatched on the other side of the market. To clarify, job market candidates who register for the scramble may only see which positions remain unfilled; they may not see which other job market candidates remain unmatched. Prospective employers are only able to see which job candidates remain available; they may not see which other jobs remain unfilled.

Thereafter, the AEA plays no further role in the scramble. It does not make or suggest matches. It falls entirely to the unmatched agents to research each other, contact each other, and if both sides agree, move forward with interviews, campus visits, or job offers. It is expected that both sides of the market will take the initiative in contacting each other.

The scramble webpage will not be updated to include new listings. The committee does not want the website to become a pernicious waste of time for job market candidates; if new listings could be posted, candidates would be tempted to log on to the site frequently in search of new jobs. To avoid this, the only information that will ever be contained on the webpage is that which is on it the first minute it goes online.

The webpage will not be updated to delete the listings of agents who have matched. It is not cost effective to assign someone the task of keeping the webpage current in real time. The scramble website will be taken down in early-to-mid April.

The committee seeks feedback on the usefulness of the scramble and how it could be improved. For this reason, those who participate in the scramble will be asked to complete a survey. Thoughtful responses will allow us to improve future scrambles.

Frequently Asked Questions

Must I participate in the scramble?

No, it is completely voluntary for both job candidates and potential employers.

What are the key dates?

Last year's key dates are listed below; 2009 dates are yet to be determined.

March 24-30, 2008: Unmatched job candidates and prospective employers may list their information to be included in the scramble webpage. The registration webpage will be accessible from the main AEA webpage. (<http://www.aeaweb.org/joe/scramble/>)

April 1, 2008: The scramble webpage goes online and is accessible by password only by those who registered as unmatched agents. Unmatched agents are only able to see who is unmatched on the other side of the market (they cannot see who else is unmatched on their side of the market). No new listings are permitted after the website goes online, nor will filled jobs or hired candidates be deleted.

April 11, 2008: The scramble website is no longer accessible.

I'm not a member of the AEA; can I still participate in the scramble?

Yes, the scramble is open to non-members of AEA. However, we hope individual participants will join the Association. (See <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/AEA/mbr.htm>)

Is there any charge for participating in the scramble?

No, there is no charge to either job applicants or prospective employers to participate in the scramble. However, prospective employers must have previously listed a vacancy in *Job Openings for Economists* (JOE) in order to participate (see below).

Must employers list a job in *Job Openings for Economists* in order to participate?

Yes. The scramble webpage does not include full job listings, only a link to a JOE listing. This is true of all types of jobs, including postdoctoral positions, lectureships, visiting professorships, research associates, etc. A JOE listing costs \$300. Information on how to place a listing in JOE is available at: <http://www.aeaweb.org/joe/listings.html>

Can I post a new job on the scramble webpage?

Absolutely! The committee believes that the success of the secondary market depends on it being "thick" with many participants on both sides. Agents who did not participate in the primary job market may participate in the secondary job market. However, one must list the job in *Job Openings for Economists* (February, March and April listings are acceptable); the deadline for the April issue of JOE is March 15.

I was late finishing my job market paper so I didn't interview at the AEA meetings and only just decided to go on the market. Can I participate in the scramble?

Yes. Success of the secondary market depends on many participants on both sides. Agents who did not participate in the primary job market are welcome to participate in the secondary job market. *However*, the committee strongly recommends that job candidates considering this strategy, and discuss it with their advisors and placement director. If you participate, you will need to have your CV and job market paper(s)

posted on a webpage; the scramble webpage will only contain a link to your webpage, the documents themselves will not be posted on the scramble website.

Can I participate in the scramble if I've already accepted a job, but I want to find a "better" one?

Absolutely not. The acceptance of a job offer is binding; if you have accepted one then you may not participate in the scramble. You may participate if you have an offer in hand that you have not accepted (although if you seriously pursue jobs through the scramble your job offers are likely to expire, as it can take considerable time to schedule and complete campus visits). Job candidates who have an offer but are considering participating in the scramble are strongly advised to discuss their situation with their primary advisor and their placement director.

Will I, as an unmatched job candidate, be stigmatized for participating in this market? Would I be better off by not posting my information on the scramble website and hoping that something works out for me anyway?

Failing to match is not a sign of low quality. There are idiosyncratic reasons why candidates and positions fail to match. Nevertheless, the job market scramble webpage is confidential. Only agents who post their information and reveal themselves as unmatched may see who is unmatched on the other side of the market. Unmatched job candidates who participate in the scramble can only see which jobs remain unfilled; they cannot see which other job candidates are also participating. The committee encourages job candidates who remain unmatched to post their information on the scramble website.

The scramble website is already up and running but unfortunately I missed the deadline to be listed on it. Would you add me now?

No. The scramble website is not updated. The only information that will ever be posted on it is what was on it the first minute it opens online on April 1. This rule makes it unnecessary for agents to log on to the scramble website every day to see if a new position or candidate has been posted.

OK, the scramble website is online and I can see who's unmatched on the other side of the market. What do I do now? Do I contact them or do they contact me?

It is expected that both sides will initiate contact. You should contact those who remain available on the other side of the market that seem to be a good match.

Will the scramble suggest likely matches, like the dating websites eHarmony.com and Match.com?

No. All that the website does is allow agents to signal their continuing availability and link interested parties to relevant information. It falls to the agents to do their research and determine which parties on the opposite side of the market would be a good match.

I participated in the scramble and ended up getting a job! (Or: Thanks, we've hired for that position.) Would you please delete me (that position) from the scramble webpage?

The scramble webpage is not updated for either new participants or participants who have matched and are no longer active in the market. However, you needn't worry – the webpage is only visible to those on the other side of the market who have registered as unmatched, and the website is taken down in April.

What happened during previous scrambles?

2005-06 was the first year that the AEA sponsored the scramble. On the labor demand side were 70 employers, who advertised 29 tenure track positions, 12 non-tenure-track positions, and 29 nonacademic positions. On the labor supply side were 518 job applicants. The AEA Ad Hoc Committee on the Job Market surveyed these participants after the scramble; the response rate was relatively low (22% of job candidates, 40% of employers). The survey responses indicate that 80% of participating job candidates had interviewed at the AEA meetings, 46% had received at least one flyout, and 31% had received offers prior to the scramble. Slightly more than half of the responding job candidates contacted at least one employer in the scramble, and slightly more than a third of responding employers contacted at least one job candidate in the scramble. Fourteen percent of responding job candidates received interviews as a result of the scramble, and 48% of responding employers reported interviewing job candidates in the scramble. Survey results suggest that several matches (accepted job offers) occurred as a result of the scramble, but our survey was conducted too early for us to know with accuracy the number of such matches.

The scramble was run for the second time in April 2007, and 67 employers (advertising 75 positions), and 535 applicants participated.

Last year, in the 2008 scramble (following the 2007-08 job market) 100 employers and 361 applicants registered. We conducted a followup survey of employers and received 30 replies. Of those employers who responded, 22 contacted people in the scramble, 19 interviewed someone from the scramble, and 10 hired someone from the scramble (one hired two people from the scramble). 17 of the 22 respondents who contacted applicants in the scramble were academic economics departments, as were 8 of the 10 respondents who reported hiring through the scramble.