

**Information for University Reaccreditation
Reponse of the Department of Astronomy
Career Placement Services
February 2005**

1. Student use of the Center

All current graduate students in the Department were polled, and none reported ever using the Center; the vast majority do not know of its existence. We are not aware of any students or graduates using it in the past, although it is possible one or more students who had decided to leave the field may have used the Center's services.

2. Faculty interaction with the Center

All current faculty in the Department were polled, and none reported ever using the Center; most do not know of its existence.

3. Assessment of Center services

Given the foregoing, this question is not applicable to our Department.

4. Suggestions for Improvement

This section is also not applicable.

5. Departmental assistance in student job searches

In our discipline, by far the most common first job after the PhD is a postdoctoral fellowship. Application deadlines range from late October through February for jobs beginning during the following summer or fall. Students are counseled about the job search process by their PhD mentors, the DGS, the Chair, and other members of the faculty. Such discussions usually begin well before the student is contemplating graduation; discussion of various alternative career paths is part of the normal mentoring relationship.

Candidates typically require three letters of recommendation; these letters are long, detailed, and address each job specifically. Thus, a dossier service is inappropriate; faculty compose and send all letters themselves. In many cases, electronic submission is required by specific deadlines, something that would most likely challenge any centralized system. Furthermore, students often have one or two of their recommenders from outside institutions, further complicating the role of a Columbia Career Center in the process.

Over the last ten years, the Department has granted 23 PhDs. Of these 17 went to postdoctoral positions and two went directly to assistant professorships. Of the postdocs 9 are still in their first or second such position, while 7 now hold faculty positions and one went into management consulting. Of the remaining students, two returned to the financial industry from which they came to the program, two others took jobs in finance or the IT industry. Having over three-quarters of the ten-year cohort in academic positions is considered successful in our discipline.