

A New Brain Drain

The British are coming—along with the Aussies and other refugees from professorial penury

When budget cutters slashed his ration of paper clips and removed every other light bulb in the office, world-renowned British psychologist Steven Duck got the message. He left England's University of Lancaster for the University of Iowa—and a salary of \$62,000 instead of \$26,000. Just up the street in Iowa City from Duck's office, famed econometrician Gene Savin is adjusting to his arrival from Cambridge. He's also adjusting to the \$40,000 pay hike that helped Iowa beat out suitors from five other U.S. schools. "The problem in Britain has grown acute," says Richard Remington, the Iowa faculty dean who, like his shrewd peers at other institutions, now keeps one lustful eye trained across the Atlantic. "In tough economic times, top-notch professors look to the international marketplace. That's where we get involved."

And how. U.S. universities are raiding foreign institutions as never before—and luring goodly numbers of the best European minds. Financially troubled institutions in Germany and Scandinavia have also sustained losses, but the chief focus falls on Britain, where faculty salaries (adjusted for inflation) have plunged by one-fourth since 1979. "The British system has been mercilessly pruned back by the Thatcher administration," says Neil J. Smelser, a Berkeley sociologist who tracks higher education worldwide. From the British side, Sir David Phillips, an Oxford

biophysicist and government adviser, agrees ruefully that "as it's seen here, the grass in the States is much greener."

Brain drains have happened before, to be sure, particularly in science and technology. But although hard numbers are still scarce, some U.S. administrators foresee the greatest sustained academic immigration since Jewish scholars fled Europe before World War II. Smelser says the hungriest recruiters are schools such as Iowa—already solid institutions eager to pierce the front rank.

Happy hunting ground: Duke, for instance, reached the first rank in part by landing top-flight professors from France, England, Scotland and even Australia, which has become another happy hunting ground. "It's common knowledge that many of these overseas schools are hurting," says Richard A. White, Duke's dean of arts and sciences. "Schools such as ours are anxious to take advantage of this." Few recruiters are explicitly playing pirate at Europe's expense, White hastily adds. "But in cases where the top job candidate happens to be abroad, competition among good U.S. schools has grown very, very tight."

The European universities' chief problem seems similar to one that threatened U.S. institutions a decade ago. Faculties were increased significantly to handle an enrollment surge in the 1950s, but with funding and student populations now in decline, young professors in Europe face

miserable prospects for advancement. According to Berkeley's Smelser, ambitious Europeans now look to this country, where, unlike Europe, college enrollments are expected to rise again in the early 1990s.

Duke's White says that luring these talented young professors provides both short- and long-term benefits: immediate cachet and a solid transfusion of future faculty stars. But it is, of course, a zero-sum game—and some of the world's oldest and most famous universities suffer. Says Iowa's Savin: "Europe faces the good-orange problem. Just as the best oranges always travel farthest from the grove, U.S. schools only want to recruit the best European professors." Michael Parkins, one of eight British, Australian and New Zealand refugees teaching economics at Canada's University of Western Ontario, says the losers' plight will only worsen. "The wage differential between North America and Western Europe is growing wider," says Parkins. "There's no point in hiring their average people when we can beat them on salary for the very best."

The strain in Britain has created a defeatist mind-set that unwittingly aids U.S. recruiters. Cambridge faculty members didn't seriously pursue a vaunted West German mathematician because they knew they couldn't match any offer from their chief competition—Princeton—where the German now teaches. Psychologist Duck arrived at Iowa with a list of disaffected Brits ripe for the plucking—and headed back to England at Christmas to do more recruiting. But U.S. schools without that kind of pipeline may be too late to score the biggest catches. "Many good British scholars already have left," warns Savin. "When someone raids the cupboard, you're less likely to find it still stocked with attractive items."

JOHN MCCORMICK in Chicago



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