

Employment News & Opportunities for Writers & Teachers

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Report on the 2005-2006 Academic Job Market

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The last academic year delivered mixed blessings for job seekers and teachers of English literature and writing. State funding of higher education increased last year, and this thawed hiring freezes in many academic departments; but the good news may not have ameliorated a trend of reduced support for higher education coupled with accelerating rates of inflation. After the recession of 2001, state legislatures had delivered many flat budgets and financial cutbacks to higher education in spite of growing populations of college-bound students. To compensate for the loss of state support, public universities raised the price of tuition while salaries for professors languished. In 2006, state expenditures on higher education finally showed signs of growth again.

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Last year, the number of tenure-track teaching positions in creative writing increased by 52% over the 2004-05 academic year, although the field remains intensely competitive. Thousands of new graduates enter the job market each year. Departments of English also continue to remain highly exploitative places to work as they continue to rely on a growing number of adjunct faculty members who receive low pay, no health insurance, poor working conditions, and little future job security.

After nearly a decade of steady decline in state funding for higher education institutions nationwide, *Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE) Almanac Issue 2006-07* reports that at the beginning of this academic year, colleges across the country experienced state spending increases that compare to the boom years of the late 1990s. According to a report by the Rockefeller Institute of Government, states in the Rocky Mountain, Southwest, and Far West regions experienced faster growth than those states in other regions, making up 50% of the job growth in the first quarter.

Another report, "Recession, Retrenchment, and Recovery: State Higher Education Funding & Student Financial Aid," shows that the recessions and budget cuts continue to impair the effectiveness of higher education. The recent upturn is not yet strong enough to undo decades of cutbacks, flat budgets, and the impact of inflation. The report notes that many political leaders now believe that education is mainly a *personal* benefit rather than a *public* benefit, and political leaders believe that students should pay a greater portion of the cost of education. Financial aid as a proportion to the cost of higher education has declined.

Many states saw double-digit percentage increases in the cost of tuition while salary adjustments for faculty remained meager, especially during the years following the recessions of 2001 and 1990-91. When senior professors retired or moved on to other universities, positions were often left unfilled, or departments filled those positions with adjunct or assistant professors. According to the College Board, the cost of higher education has increased by 35% since 2001, even after adjusting for the cost for inflation. This year, tuition at four-year public colleges rose by 6.3%, and tuition at two-year colleges rose by 4.1%. Because universities are compensating for reduced state funding, the tuition hikes do not necessarily translate into favorable salary adjustments for faculty members. At

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many institutions, too many academic needs were ignored for too long during the lean years; many institutions failed to build infrastructure for a growing student population, and now they must build capacity to meet demand. Higher tuitions and the most recent increases in state support are largely being spent on postponed projects.

The increase in teaching positions last year suggests that vacant positions were finally filled, and that creative writing as an academic discipline continued to grow by small increments. *AWP Job List* published three times as many creative writing jobs last year than it did in 2000-01. (See Tables 1 and 2.) In its 2005 Survey of Academic Positions Listed, the *AWP Job List* reported 221 tenure-track jobs, 111 tenure-track creative writing jobs, and 251 nonacademic jobs, indicating an increase in all job categories from the 2003-2004 report. Most recently, the 2005-2006 academic year totals offer an improved view of the academic job market, reporting 225 tenure-track jobs, 169 tenure-track creative writing jobs, and 556 nonacademic jobs.

For writers, the nonacademic job market continues to expand as well. The 2004 Bureau of Labor Statistics report indicates a median starting salary of \$44,350 for a professional writer outside of academia (in technical writing, broadcasting, public affairs, etc.), as compared to the median \$34,712 salary of an instructor at the university level.

The Average Salaries for Professors of English & Writing

The *Chronicle of Higher Education's* 2006 Almanac features a breakdown of average salary by institution type, reporting a salary difference of nearly \$24,000 between full-time professorships of private and public institutions. On average across all academic disciplines in 2004-05, full-time professors at public universities received a salary of \$73,913, while professors at private universities were paid \$90,108. At four-year colleges (both public and private) last year, full professors of English received an average salary of \$76,413; an associate professor of English, a salary of \$57,921; and an assistant professor of English, a salary of \$34,712.

The *CHE* reports that, for the second year in a row, faculty salaries have risen slower than inflation. Reporting for *CHE*, author Scott Smallwood wrote that, "Average faculty salaries are up 3.1% this academic year, but given the 3.5% inflation rate for 2005, real salary levels actually fell." A study conducted by the American Association of University Professors cited the disparity between academic salaries and those in other professions as a primary detractor from interest in academic careers as a whole. The AAUP documents that over the past twenty years, faculty salaries have risen only .25% after adjusting for inflation. In contrast, salaries within the field of medicine have increased approximately 34% in the same period, while lawyers' salaries have risen 18%.

The Surplus of Job-Seekers in Creative Writing & English

More than ever, departments are hiring primarily for part-time and temporary adjunct positions, and the competition for tenure-track positions between both seasoned professors and new graduates continues to resemble a disheartening version of musical chairs, as the surplus of qualified applicants scramble to fill the limited vacancies of

the market. As of 2003-2004, 7,956 Master's in English and 1,207 PhD degrees in English were conferred. Add these 9,000 new graduates to the preexisting backlog of qualified applicants who did not find jobs in previous years, and departments find themselves able to choose one professor among sometimes hundreds of applicants. Last October, the *MLA Job List* contained 682 jobs in English, 575 of them tenure track.

Although 169 tenure-track creative writing jobs in 2005-06 represents a big increase in job opportunities as compared to the previous year, the number of job openings remains too few for the thousands of new graduates who have just earned advanced degrees in creative writing. AWP estimates that, each year, 2,000 to 3,000 students earn advanced degrees in creative writing.

Because the surplus of professors in English, literature, and writing generally exceeds the demand, universities find they can pay new hires less and provide them with fewer benefits. As a result, the number of low-paying, part-time, temporary, and adjunct positions continues to grow in academe. The proportion of part-time faculty has doubled since 1971, from 23% of all faculty in 1971 to 46% in 2003, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

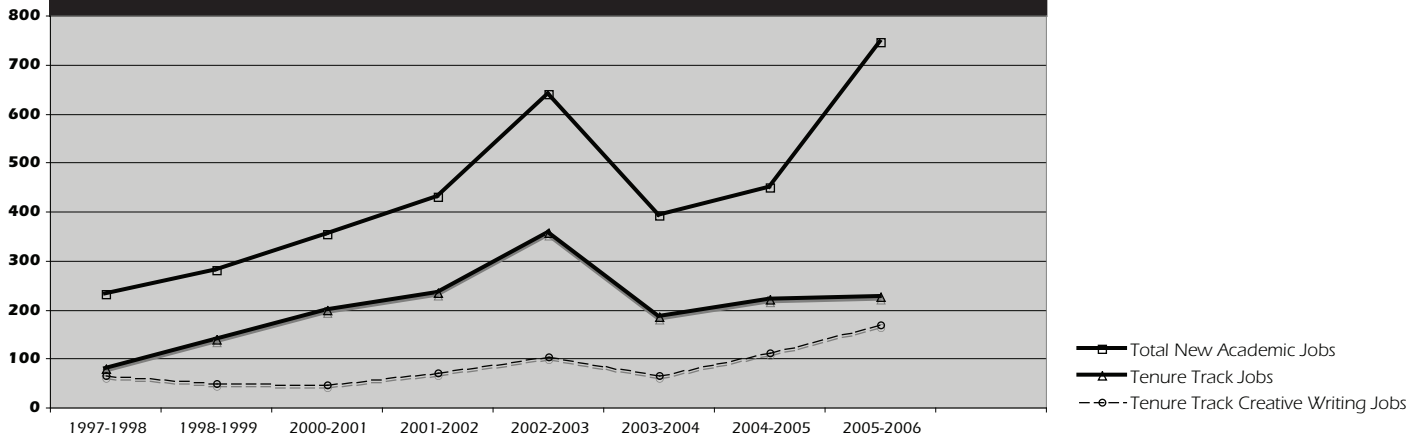
Adjuncts face a barrage of departmental woes, most notably short-term or "as-needed" contracts coupled with the difficult pursuit of

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promotion. In an article by Keith Hoeller that appeared in the *CHE*, Hoeller claims "...it has been well documented that adjunct faculty members do not receive equal pay for equal work...this means more experienced adjuncts are paid at the same rate as beginners, and are denied annual raises that are routinely awarded to full-timers." AAUP has published a disturbing report "The Devaluing Of Higher Education: The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2005-06," which is available from the organization's Web site <www.aaup.org>. The report examines the plight of part-time faculty and the reasons for weakening compensation for faculty. The reasons include growing costs for health care, an accelerating rate of inflation, and the fluctuations in the financial markets that diminish the earnings of university endowments. The report also reveals another sad aspect of the market-model university. Just as those in corporate boardrooms value themselves exponentially more than their workers, university administrators take care of themselves better than their faculty members. Increases in median salaries for administrators have surpassed the rate of inflation for nine consecutive years while salary increases for the faculty have lagged behind.

"The academic job market has broken thousands of hearts since the 1970s," said AWP Executive Director David Fenza. "It's important for recent graduates to have some teaching experience if they expect to

Table 2 Academic Positions listed in AWP Job List from 1997–2006



compete in this job market, but what will really earn you a tenure-track job is the publication of an excellent book or two. It's important to be the best possible steward of your talents, so you should keep in mind that teaching as an adjunct may not be the best way to support yourself while you write and publish your creative work. Either way, in academe or outside academe, you'll need to be persistent and make sacrifices to succeed as an artist. It's very hard to balance an artistic vocation with a bread-winner's vocation. Working as an adjunct may not be the best way to establish that balance. The university can be more exploitative than any big corporation."

According to a 2003 report by the U.S. Department of Education, only half of all full-time professors had tenure. Professors at public institutions tended to have higher tenure rates (53%) as compared with those at private institutions (44.7%). Of those professors tenured across all disciplines, 56% were male. In Departments of English at four-year institutions in 2004, 55.1% of tenure-track hires were women, and 65% of the full-time nontenure-track hires were women. Since 1985-86, women have earned 58% of the PhDs conferred in English. In 2003-04, women earned twice as many Master's degrees in English than did men.

Michael Collier, Director of the Breadloaf Writer's Conference and Acting Director of Creative Writing at the University of Maryland, highlights the difficulty often present in hiring new faculty. "If we are hiring for a tenure-track position, quite often it's the result of someone retiring or taking a job at another institution...but when either of those two things happen, it's not automatic that we're able to hire a replacement. Often, we need to wait, sometimes even a few years, in order to hire. For very few places, I think, is it an automatic replacement." Typically, state financial trends and departmental politics play a large role in this necessary waiting period. When full-time positions do become available, however, applicants rush *en masse* to fill in the gaps. "Though we hire at the full-time level so infrequently, I think the last time we hired someone, for a fiction position, we had over 100 applicants," says Collier.

Although academic job vacancies are few and far between at all levels, part-time employment offers the most difficulties, including a lack of job security and the absence of benefits, most notably health insurance or retirement plan options. Collier cites both time-sensitivity and budget issues as set-

backs in this hiring procedure. "When we find, because of enrollment numbers, that we need to fill another class, we find someone for the part-time position, but we don't advertise for those jobs. One of the things that happens is you don't know what your needs are until very close to the starting date and you don't have time to advertise the position. Also, the salary associated with these jobs doesn't justify a great search for applicants."

Nonacademic Job Market for Writers Grows

The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) claims that, as online publications grow, the demand for writers and editors, especially those with Web experience, will increase. The BLS states that in 2004, Writers and Editors held about 320,000 jobs, one-third of those self-employed. Approximately half of the jobs for writers were within the information sector, including newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers; radio and television broadcasting; and software publishers. The BLS writes that while a substantial number of writers work in education and related services, thousands of those who work as freelance writers derive both primary and supplemental incomes from other sources.

The Department of Labor's *Job Outlook Handbook* states that "employment of writers and editors is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all other occupations through the year 2014," though "employment of salaried writers and editors for newspapers, periodicals, book publishers, and nonprofit organizations is expected to increase as demand grows for these publications." Opportunities will be best,

Table 1 Number of Positions Listed in AWP Job List

	1997-1998	1998-1999	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Total New Academic Jobs	232	280	354	429	640	393	450	745
Tenure-track Jobs	80	138	198	233	357	186	221	225
Tenure-track Creative Writing Jobs	66	50	47	72	103	65	111	169
Non-academic Jobs	345	421	225	264	182	215	251	556

Table 3 Number of Degree-Confering Programs in Creative Writing
1975–2004

Year	AA	BA/BS Minor	BA/BFA Major	MA	MFA	PHD	DA	TOTAL
2004	10	318	86	154	109	42	1	720
2002	8	283	70	151	99	41	1	653
1998	8	318	12	143	83	29	1	586
1996	6	298	12	134	74	28	2	548
1994	6	287	10	139	64	29	3	532
1992	6	274	9	137	55	27	3	505
1984	4	155	10	99	31	20	5	320
1975	0	24	3	32	15	5	1	80

reminds the BLS, for writers with technical training.

The median annual salary for writers and authors in May of 2004 was \$44,350, though the lowest 10% earned less than \$23,000. Conversely, the highest 10% earned over \$91,000. Writers in advertising fields earned a higher median income of \$54,400, and the median salary for technical writers was \$44,000. Publication is becoming increasingly Web based, and applicants are expected to have a mix of traditional and technological skills.

Comments from the Field

Boston College professor Ted Youn discusses the changes he has observed within academia in his article, “The Academic Job Market Is Bad for All of Us,” published in the November/December 2005 issue of *Academe* magazine. Youn argues that looking at changes in the higher education job market since the mid-20th century helps one understand how it has become increasingly fractured and differentiated by a hierarchy of institutional categories and ever-narrowing disciplinary specialties—which makes for different professional networks among different categories of faculty, different tasks and conditions of work and reward, and very different career paths. Navigating a career in academe has become more complicated as its pathways have become more Byzantine. Youn outlines the “different rules” to which the world of academia abides, offering that “...the number of contingent positions, or part and full-time non-tenure-track appointments, has risen dramatically over the past two decades.”

As all facets of the economy are wont to do, it's likely that the pendulum-swing toward increasing public support for higher education will reverse course at a moment's notice, leaving departmental gaps and depressed salaries. Qualified applicants will compete for limited academic positions or make a transition to nonacademic jobs. Until the situation changes, advises University of Maryland Director, Michael Collier, unemployed or underemployed writers should focus on their art. “The academic job market was brutal when I graduated in 1979, and it's brutal now...a graduate of an MFA program in Creative Writing should try to structure their life in such a way that they can put as much effort into their writing as possible.”

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Notes

1. “Colleges Enjoy More State Money, but Some Fight Spending Caps.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue 2006-2007*. (August 25, 2006): 3. <<http://chronicle.com/weekly/almanac/2006/nation/nation.htm>>.

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5. Andrea Quarracino, “Annual Report on the Academic Job Market,” *AWP Job List* (2005): 1.

6. U. S. D. of Labor, Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook (2006-2007)*.

7. “The Nation” and “Average Faculty Salaries by Field,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue 2005-2006*. (August 26, 2005): 8 and 27.

8. “Inflation Beats Faculty Salaries Again,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue 2006-2007*, (April 28, 2006). <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i34/34a04102.htm#men_and_women.htm>.

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i34/34a04102.htm#men_and_women.htm>.

9. Ibid.

10. “Earned Degrees Conferred, 2003-4,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education: The Almanac Issue* (August 25, 2004): 22.

11. Hoeller, Keith. “Equal Pay Means Equal Raises, Too.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 16, 2005). <<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2005/08/2005081601c.htm>>.

12. “Tenure Status of Full-Time Faculty Members by Type of Institution, 2003-4.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue 2006-2007* (August 25, 2004): 27.

13. Association of Departments of English (ADE), “Report on the MLA's 2004 Survey of Hiring Departments.” <www.ade.org/reports/hiring_survey2004.htm>.

14. Michael Collier, interview via telephone (October 16, 2006).

15. Ibid.

16. U. S. D. o. Labor, Department of Labor. *Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (2006-2007)*.

17. Ibid.

18. T. I. K. Youn, “The Academic Job Market Is Bad for All of Us.” *Academe* (2005). <www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/2005/05nd/05ndyoun.htm>.

19. Michael Collier, interview via telephone (October 16, 2006).