

AWWP JOB LIST

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Annual Report on the Academic Job Market

by Kristin Lane

Across the nation, people are feeling the recession. In nearly every city, industry, and demographic, Americans are struggling to maintain the standard of living they enjoyed in the financial heyday of the 1990s and the early 2000s. All sectors of the economy are suffering, and higher education is no exception. University endowments have fallen about 25%, according to Kim Clark's article, "The Recession Hits College Campuses," published in *U.S. News & World Report* in January. At public institutions, these losses have been compounded by dramatic reductions in state funding. State governments, such as California's, which is facing a \$26.3 billion budget deficit for the 2009-10 fiscal year, have no choice but to drastically cut funding, which will include aid, new hires, construction, and employee pay—a perfect storm during this recession.¹ At the same time, applications to colleges and universities are reaching record highs. More disconcerting still, many states that received President Obama's federal stimulus package in 2009 will have spent the additional funds by the end of the 2010 fiscal year, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE)*. States such as Florida, Georgia, and Virginia will have no stimulus money left for 2011, and many economists remain reluctant to say whether the nationwide economic slump will improve by then.²

Incoming students aren't the only ones unnerved by the current economic crisis. Colleges are also feeling pressure to fill classrooms at increased tuition rates while

hoping that the students will be able to receive the financial aid required to attend. "It's like the dot-com bubble burst for higher ed," Vice President of Enrollment at Gettysburg College Barbara Fritze told the *New York Times* in March. "We've been in this growth mode for a period of time. Now there's a real leveling going on." The *New York Times* article, entitled, "In Shifting Era of Admissions, Colleges Sweat," also

U.S. Department of Education's study of Undergraduate Enrollment Change from 1997-2007, public four-year universities recorded a mere 19% increase for the ten-year period, while private institutions experienced a 285% growth.⁴

In December 2008, the *CHE* sent out a web-based survey regarding responses to the downturn to 874 institutions—566 private four-year colleges and 308 public

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indicated that while some public institutions have seen application increases of 30% or greater, the complications of enrollment-capping and unforeseen future budgets might create complications. At the same time, private institutions are experiencing a significant decrease in enrollment, in part due to the tendency among private colleges to take tuition cues from state budgets, which are unstable. This trend may indicate the beginning of a downward trend for private institutions, which, until recently, have experienced the greatest growth in the education sector.³ According to the

four-year colleges. About 25% responded, or 214 institutions, and the *CHE* used this information to compile data on the effects of the economy on both types of institutions. The results were disappointing. The survey reported that 43% of the total institutions experienced partial hiring freezes for faculty positions, 58% experienced hiring freezes for other staff positions, and 47% of public colleges indicated that they anticipate raising tuition for the 2010 fiscal year. By contrast, only 7% of private colleges anticipated raising tuition rates higher than the average of the past three years, and a staggering

83% of private schools said they planned to keep tuition rates stable as compared to the average of the past three years. Higher tuition rates accompanied by drastic budget cuts continue to impair the effectiveness of higher education. Although economists say the current climate is improving, even substantial upturns might not be enough to undo decades of cutbacks, flat budgets, and the impact of inflation. Additionally, because universities are compensating for reduced state funding, the tuition hikes do not necessarily translate into favorable salary adjustments for faculty members, added services for students, or investments in infrastructure or administration.

What does all this mean for eager young graduates heading into the workforce? Be patient. Jobs are scarce across most fields these days, and especially so for teaching positions in English and Creative Writing. Furthermore, the percentage of available tenured jobs is the lowest it has been in years, forcing many candidates to accept jobs they might have balked at in a different economic climate. An analysis conducted by the American Federation of Teachers

is critical to strengthening our institutions.” The report found that while all sectors of higher education had increased the number of adjunct positions within their departments, community colleges demonstrated the most dramatic increase. “What was shocking to me, even though I think about this all the time, was that the percentage of tenure and tenure-track faculty has shrunk to almost a quarter,” said Barbara Brown, president of the Professional Staff Congress, the AFT chapter at the City University of New York. “The deterioration of staffing has reached a crisis point when only a quarter [of faculty positions] are tenured or tenure track.”⁵

According to President Obama, reform is on its way. Last July, at Macomb Community College just outside of Detroit, President Obama announced his ten-year plan to invest \$12 billion into improving community colleges nationwide. Obama’s plan calls for an increased investment in colleges in order to retrain workers and otherwise bolster a faltering economy. At Macomb, President Obama elaborated, explaining, “It’s a telling example, even as this painful restructuring takes place in our auto industry, workers

06. Although the figure decreased slightly last year—down to 104 in 2008-09 as a result of temporary hiring freezes at many large programs—the progress is still substantial, having nearly doubled in the last four years. In contrast, the *MLA Job Information List* reported a significant decrease in listings, according to its 2008-09 Report, which indicates a decline in listings of nearly 25%.⁷ The *MLA Job Information List* typically caters to a member demographic that focuses more heavily on literature positions, as compared to the *AWP Job List*, which may indicate that the strength of the creative writing programs has not yet begun to wane. Overall, although the recession has greatly reduced the number of job offerings nationwide, the 2008-09 *Job List* academic year totals offer an improved view of the academic job market as compared to last year, reporting 189 tenure-track jobs, 104 tenure-track positions in creative writing, and 301 nonacademic jobs.

The increase in teaching positions last year suggests that vacant positions are beginning to be filled, albeit at lower ranks than previous years, and Creative Writing as an academic discipline continues to grow. The number of

Table 1: Number of Positions Listed in the AWP Job List

Year	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Total New Academic Jobs	426	586	316	474
Tenure Track Jobs	145	246	139	182
Tenure Track Creative Writing Jobs	62	89	114	98
Nonacademic Jobs	399	211	131	277

Source: AWP Job List Database, 2008-09

(AFT) indicates an unnerving trend in the number of nontenured and temporary professors. AFT President Randi Weingarten argues against the increasing reliance on contingent faculty, stating, “This is a critical moment for our country, when we should focus on investing, not disinvesting, in our public higher education institutions. Both President Obama and the Congress have recognized that higher education is essential to our country’s economic recovery, and a fully-supported higher education workforce

are seeking out training for new jobs ... community colleges are an essential part of our recovery in the present—and our prosperity in the future.”⁶

The number of faculty positions within the Creative Writing discipline has grown accordingly, as universities clamor to fill a growing interest. As indicated in Table 1: Number of Positions Listed in the *AWP Job List*, there were 114 tenure-track Creative Writing Jobs listed in the *AWP Job List* in 2007-08, up from a mere sixty-two in 2005-

programs available to students has steadily increased for the last forty years, when many of the first creative writing programs opened their doors. In 1975, there were a total of seventy-nine creative writing programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. As of October 2009, there are 146 MA, 169 MFA, and forty-one PhD AWP member programs in Creative Writing, and a total of 834 Creative Writing programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. (See Table 2: Number of Degree-Confering

Table 2: Number of Degree-Confering Programs in Creative Writing

Year	AA	BA/BS Minor	BA/BFA Major	MA	MFA	PhD	Total
2009	11	326	161	146	169	37	854
2008	11	326	161	143	156	37	834
2007	11	302	137	147	131	42	770
2004	10	318	86	154	109	42	719
1994	6	287	10	139	64	29	529
1984	4	155	10	99	31	20	315
1975	0	24	3	32	15	5	79

Source: AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs as of October 2009

Programs.) In the last fifteen years alone, the number of MFA programs in Creative Writing has grown fivefold, from thirty-one in 1984 to 169 today.

For writers, the nonacademic job market continues to be a beacon of hope, offering opportunities for candidates with creative writing degrees in varied fields, such as editing, technical and grant writing, marketing, and journalism. The Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated in its 2008-09 report that while the writing and editing sector is expected to remain significantly

competitive due to the number of interested candidates, a growing demand for qualified applicants may help balance the field.⁸

AVERAGE SALARIES FOR PROFESSORS OF ENGLISH & WRITING

The *CHE's* 2009-10 Almanac Issue features a breakdown of average salary by institution type, reporting a salary difference of more than \$14,000 between professors

of private and public institutions. On average, across all academic disciplines in 2008-09, full professors of all disciplines at public baccalaureate universities earned \$84,488, while the same professors at private institutions earned \$98,808. The average salary for a full professor of English at a four-year institution was \$79,854, earning just under \$5,000 less than his or her colleagues in other disciplines, according to The American Association of University Professors. (See Table #3: Salaries by Academic Institution.) Adjunct instructors of English, on average,

Table 4: AWP Survey of Creative Writing Salaries by Rank

Average Stipend for Adjuncts	\$9,300
Average Salary for a Creative Writing Assistant Professor	\$48,505
Average Salary for a Creative Writing Associate Professor	\$63,210
Average Salary for a Creative Writing Full Professor	\$87,277

Source: 2007-2008 Survey Results: MFA in Creative Writing Programs in the United States

Table 3: Salaries by Academic Institution Type & Faculty Rank

Type of Academic Institution	Full Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Adjunct/Instructor
Average 4-Year Institution (English)	\$79,854	\$61,679	\$51,151	\$40,555
Public Doctoral Inst. (All Disciplines)	\$115,509	\$79,986	\$68,048	\$45,491
Public Master's Inst. (All Disciplines)	\$88,357	\$70,308	\$59,416	\$43,183
Public Baccalaureate Inst. (All Disciplines)	\$84,488	\$68,193	\$56,977	\$43,970
Public 2-Year Inst. (All Disciplines)	\$74,933	\$60,737	\$53,427	\$43,970
Private Doctoral Inst. (All Disciplines)	\$151,403	\$95,948	\$82,295	\$56,931
Private Master's Inst. (All Disciplines)	\$99,555	\$75,034	\$61,986	\$48,781
Private Baccalaureate Inst. (All Disciplines)	\$98,808	\$72,719	\$58,882	\$48,247

Source: 2009 by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources

are paid only half of what a full professor might be paid, at \$40,555, and of the thirty-two disciplines listed in the *CHE's* table of "Average Faculty Salaries by Field and Rank at 4-Year Colleges and Universities, 2008-09," among them every field from Biomedical Sciences to Fitness Studies, the average salary of the English instructor was the lowest recorded.

As AWP continues to extend the range of statistical data gathered on creative writing programs, salary information collected from AWP's 2007-2008 survey of 142 MFA in Creative Writing programs offers a more detailed look at the specific field. According to survey results, the highest stipend for adjuncts per semester was \$11,234, as compared to the highest salary for a Creative Writing Assistant Professor, \$50,283; the highest salary for a Creative Writing Associate Professor, \$69,419; and the highest salary for a Creative Writing Full Professor, \$100,324. The average salary for a Creative Writing Full Professor was \$87,277. (See Table 4: AWP Survey Creative Writing Salaries by Rank.)

But there is good news. The *CHE* reports

that faculty raises have exceeded inflation for the 2008-09 year, a small victory for academia, where average salary raises have been small for more than twenty years. The *CHE* posed the question, "Is the cost of college worth it?" While their answer is yes, citing greater earning power among those with advanced degrees, they are also quick to point out that currently, a third of our nation's jobs require no degree at all. In the year between Almanac issues, unemployment rates for all education levels increased, with those with "less than high-school completion" exhibiting a 1.9% increase in unemployment while "Bachelor's or higher degree" candidates experienced an unemployment increase of 0.8%, according to figures provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁹

A SURPLUS OF CANDIDATES & THE PLIGHT OF THE ADJUNCT

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 scrambles to fill the limited vacancies of the market. Nearly 10,000 graduates of the Class of 2007 were conferred with graduate degrees in English Language and Literature, and a good majority of those graduates will be looking toward academia for careers. Although the study of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing has remained steady for decades, it has not experienced the same growth as other industries, a trend due in part to the increased emphasis on technological degrees. Since the 1996-97 academic year, when 48,641 students graduated with Bachelor's Degrees in English Language and Literature/Letters, the number of graduates within this discipline has grown a mere 13%. This figure becomes even more significant when compared to the growth of other fields, such as military technologies, which has experienced a 4100% growth since 1996-97. Lack of substantial growth aside, when the 10,000 new graduates are added to the

preexisting backlog of qualified applicants who have been job-hunting for years, departments find themselves choosing one professor among hundreds of applicants.

A comparison between the 1997 and 2007 tenure distributions among faculty found a twelve point decrease from 51% tenured or tenure-track positions in 1997. The 2006 study conducted by the American Association of University Professors noted that, of the sixty large research institutions surveyed, sixteen had more than half of the faculty outside of the tenure system. At the top of the list were the University of Colorado at Boulder, where nontenured faculty make up 73.3% of the total faculty; New York University, which employs 71.9% nontenured staff members; and the University of Maryland at College Park, with 61.9% nontenured staff. The schools with the lowest percentage of nontenured faculty were the University of Pennsylvania, with 17.5% nontenured, and Stanford University, at 8.5% nontenured faculty. AWP's *Job List* statistics point toward this trend as well, as indicated by Table 1. For the 2008-09 academic year, fewer than 39% of the 483 unique academic jobs listed were tenure-track positions, down from 44% in 2007-08, and the field remains as competitive as ever. Departments of English also continue to rely on a growing number of adjunct faculty members who abide low pay, no health insurance, poor working conditions, and little future job security.

In early 2009, lawmakers in California began to consider a proposal from Governor Schwarzenegger that would allow community colleges the flexibility to hire more part-time faculty in order to trim budgets—budgets which have already been targeted to cut almost \$800 million over the next two fiscal years, according to the *Sacramento Bee*. Fred Glass, Communications Director for the California Federation of Teachers, leads one of many groups that oppose this measure, arguing that the proposal gives students “the short end of the stick.”¹⁰

Adjunct advocacy groups like Adjunct Advocate or New Faculty Majority serve as a voice for the increasing number—there are currently more than 800,000—of faculty members outside the tenure track. Members of these groups have a variety of different issues to address, but their principle demands are simple—better salaries and benefits to existing adjunct faculty and a leveling of the disparity between tenure and nontenure track positions.

THE ADVANTAGES OF A NONACADEMIC JOB MARKET

The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics continues to claim that, as online publications grow, the demand for writers and editors, especially those with web experience, will increase. According to the BLS, writers and editors held about 306,000 jobs in 2006, one-third of which were self-employed. Approximately half of these positions were within the information sector, including newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers; radio and television broadcasting; and software publishers. The BLS study shows 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 income from other sources.¹¹

The field of writing and editing in the nonacademic sector is expected to see an anticipated 10% growth by 2016, which is in line with other competitive job markets, with technical writing and writing involving specialized training continuing to be the most lucrative positions. However, freelance and web-based employment is an increasingly popular venture for candidates with graduate degrees in Creative Writing, and the BLS confirms that blogging and general writing for interactive medias could also see a surge in job opportunities. David Wojahn, Professor of English and Creative Writing at Virginia Commonwealth University, believes that nonacademic job opportunities are a good route for those struggling to break into the industry. “For those entering the job market, all that can really be done is for the candidate to wait until the economy turns around, and to accept adjunct positions in the meantime, as universities are less apt to make cuts in adjunct budgets; in times of crises, they tend to rely even more on adjunct teaching. Seeking work in arts administration is another option, although nonprofits tend to suffer even more greatly than other fields during an economic downturn. A willingness to go into technical writing for a time is also an option.”¹²

The median annual salary for writers and authors in May of 2006 was \$48,640, though the lowest 10% earned less than \$26,000. Conversely, the highest 10% earned more than \$97,000. Salaried editors earned a slightly lower median income in 2006, at \$46,990, and the median salary

for technical writers was \$58,050. In years past, writers in the advertising sector could earn up to \$10,000 more than their peers, but the most recent report by BLS suggests that, with advertising revenues down, those positions aren't as lucrative as they once were. Publication is becoming increasingly web-based, and as a result, applicants are expected to have a mix of traditional and technological skills.

COMMENTS FROM THE FIELD

In the October 30, 2009 *CHE* article entitled, “In Time of Uncertainty, Colleges Hold Fast to Status Quo,” author Goldie Blumenstyk reports on the responses garnered from a survey conducted in September of 166 colleges and universities. In response to the question, “Do you think the worst of the financial pressures on your institution caused by the recession have passed?” 62% of those surveyed indicated that they did not believe the worst was over. Twenty-two percent said they did not know, and only 16% answered yes.¹³

Despite the less than favorable reports on the academic job market, professors and program directors remain hopeful, even as they candidly warn potential candidates of the current financial limitations of colleges and universities across the nation. In light of the economic downturn, the general concerns among faculty members have shifted slightly from five years ago, according to David Wojahn, who writes, “I would expect that the greatest concern among faculty at public university MFA programs is how to survive budget cuts while at the same time not losing teaching and fellowship support for graduate students. Even if this support can remain relatively uncut, it generally means needing to make other cuts in program budgets—advertising, student travel funding, honoraria for readings. Full-time faculty are also understandably concerned when budget cuts mean that pay raises have to be frozen.” Terry Kennedy, Associate Director of the MFA Writing Program at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, refers to similar concerns, explaining that while “the economic downturn seems to have increased the numbers of students who are seeking graduate degrees, there has been a decrease in the available funding for students.” The downturn has forced many programs to cut or decrease funding to programs such as literary journals and visiting writers series, which Kennedy claims

“diminishes the opportunities that students have to gain professional experience while enrolled in school.”¹⁴

Another by-product of the recession is the increasing importance of funding to a candidate’s decision on whether or not to enroll in a program. While highly-regarded programs with higher than average tuition rates were able to compete in recent years based primarily on reputation, the necessity of funding for students today has made the affordability of lesser-known programs more attractive to potential candidates. As more applicants make their decisions based primarily on the availability of funding, professors like Kennedy advise students to consider the full picture. “Many of these students will agree to take on large amounts of student loan debt to pay for a graduate degree that will not repay those loans in the same manner of other professional degrees—say in law, nursing, or business...Instead of accepting a spot in an MFA program without funding, currently, we advise these students to think of the application process as a two-year undertaking.”

Kennedy isn’t alone in his cautionary message. For qualified applicants for whom positions simply are not available, Wojahn advises, “I would not advise anyone to attend a program that does not offer funding, at least not if one is applying to a traditional program as a traditional student. Older students with careers—who tend to be the ones attracted to low-residency programs—would be an exception to this in many cases.”

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Notes

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