Annual Report on the Academic Job Market
by Kristin Hahn

While independent presses and online magazines seem to be flourishing, and while MFA and PhD programs are still growing or are stabilizing at high numbers, the reality for many writers is that it is still very difficult to find a job. Most writers and artists have, at some point, relied on state or federal government funded programs for the arts. But in a bad economy, where people are spending less and states are collecting fewer tax revenues, there ends up being less funding for social services, including arts programs and higher education.

Yet things are getting better, if only slowly and with plenty of caution.

The Good with the Bad
In spite of recent positive trends, analysts are uncertain about the long-term effects the recession may have on higher education. In the near term, markets seem to be holding their breath as the looming “fiscal cliff”—a series of tax increases and spending cuts that may significantly impact the economy—approaches. Experts agree that the economy is at risk for a double-dip recession. Whether or not this can be avoided will depend on Congress’ ability to achieve a resolution that signals a functioning US government to markets.

Conventional measures of economic health indicate that the US may be emerging from its dark days. The most recent Federal Reserve report shows the US economy to be growing at a “measured” rate, noting a “moderate pace” of growth in consumer spending and “modest” hiring. The Commerce Department announced in November that the US gross domestic product grew 2.7% in the third quarter; annualized growth in the second quarter was 1.3%. These recent indicators are consistent within their context of longer-term recovery trends.

Between January 2009 and November 2012, the Dow Jones Industrial Average grew more than 40% and NASDAQ saw a two-fold increase. Since reaching its high point at 10% in October 2010, the unemployment rate has fallen by 21% to 7.9%. The Case-Shiller index, which measures home prices in twenty cities, reported the biggest quarter gain since July 2010, contributing to a total gain of 3% in January through September of 2012.

TABLE 1: Number of Positions Listed in the AWP Job List by Year

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Jobs</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure-Track Jobs</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure-Track Creative Writing Jobs</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonacademic Jobs</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AWP Job List Database, 2011-12
this year.\textsuperscript{6}

Despite the overall economic growth and recent presidential support, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which publishes an annual report on the economic status of the profession, found in its 2010-11 report that “although the worst recession since the Great Depression is now technically over, our analysis of faculty compensation and forecasts for state revenues indicates that the negative impact on higher education will continue for years in many states.”\textsuperscript{7} Given the history of cutbacks, flat budgets, and the impact of inflation on education, it may take a while for this sector to feel the growth, however significant.

It is not just university teachers who have felt overqualified and undervalued. In Reuters’ 2012 article, “Let’s Tackle the Right Education Crisis,” writer Zachary Tumin notes that while “nearly 75% of students graduated high school on time, the highest rate in a decade... and more are headed to college than ever before,” the K-12 teachers who catalyzed this achievement and should be celebrating, are instead, in large number, dissatisfied with their careers.\textsuperscript{8} The so-called education crisis, Tumin says, is entirely fixable, and the solution is greater job satisfaction and security for teachers. According to the twenty-eighth annual MetLife “Survey of the American Teacher,” nearly 29% of US K-12 public school teachers plan to quit within the next five years, up 12% from the previous year.\textsuperscript{9} Fed up with stringent performance measures and pedagogical differences between the faculty and many states’ education systems, even at the core of the demographic—teachers with six-to-twenty years of experience—nearly 40% have expressed a desire to leave their current positions.\textsuperscript{10}

Supply of funds may be low, but demand is high. College enrollment levels are continuing their upward trend and expected to continue rising, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, which predicts that between 2010 and 2020, enrollment among students under twenty-five years of age will rise 11%, and 20% for students twenty-five and older. In 2010, according to NCES, 30.7 million eighteen to twenty-four year-olds were enrolled in college, a growth of 12% since 2000. Among students twenty-five and older, there was a 42% growth in college attendance from 2000 to 2010.\textsuperscript{11} While demand for higher education has increased, however, so has the price of college, as well as the reliance by institutions of higher learning on part-time or adjunct faculty who receive lower wages and limited or no employee benefits. This often translates into unfavorable conditions for eager young graduates heading into the workforce who must exercise patience and perseverance, and may also have to be willing to settle for a less lofty position than they might have hoped.

**Average Salaries, Misconceptions**

In January 2012, when asked to pinpoint a reason for the rise in college costs, Vice President Joe Biden replied, “Salaries for college professors have escalated significantly.”\textsuperscript{12} But AAUP found, in conducting its annual report on faculty salaries, that the suggestion that rising professor salaries are partially responsible for an increase in college costs is inaccurate—the most significant factor in increased college tuition is a decline in government funding. In fact, full-time faculty salaries for the 2011-12 academic year rose an average of 1.8%, a salary “increase” undercut by a 3% rate of inflation. AAUP goes on to say, “When all of the salary data submitted in

### TABLE 2: Salaries by Type of Academic Institution & Faculty Rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Academic Institution</th>
<th>Full Professor</th>
<th>Associate Professor</th>
<th>Assistant Professor</th>
<th>Adjunct/ Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average 4-Year (English)</td>
<td>$81,537</td>
<td>$63,054</td>
<td>$53,036</td>
<td>$41,655*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Doctoral (All Disciplines)</td>
<td>$120,955</td>
<td>$82,777</td>
<td>$71,465</td>
<td>$47,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Master’s (All Disciplines)</td>
<td>$88,940</td>
<td>$71,025</td>
<td>$60,656</td>
<td>$44,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Baccalaureate (All Disciplines)</td>
<td>$84,524</td>
<td>$69,021</td>
<td>$57,348</td>
<td>$46,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 2-Year (All Disciplines)</td>
<td>$73,534</td>
<td>$61,141</td>
<td>$53,534</td>
<td>$46,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Doctoral (All Disciplines)</td>
<td>$162,561</td>
<td>$101,954</td>
<td>$89,307</td>
<td>$61,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Master’s (All Disciplines)</td>
<td>$103,094</td>
<td>$77,359</td>
<td>$65,046</td>
<td>$51,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Baccalaureate (All Disciplines)</td>
<td>$101,568</td>
<td>$75,106</td>
<td>$61,307</td>
<td>$49,901</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Association of University Professors, 2012

*Source: The College and University of Professional Association for Human Resources, 2012*
each year is adjusted to account for inflation, the overall average salary of a full-time faculty member in 2011-12 is less than 1% higher than it was five years ago.\textsuperscript{13}

Table 2: Salaries by Type of Academic Institution & Faculty Rank provides a glimpse into the average salaries for each rank, derived from studies published by the AAUP and the College and University of Professional Association for Human Resources.\textsuperscript{14} Not surprising, the average four-year English professor still makes slightly less, at $81,537, than his colleagues in other disciplines, who make an average of $84,524. Graduates who entered the academic job market as adjunct professors last year earned an average of $46,786 per year—unless of course they were teaching English, in which case they again made about $5,000 less. At the top end of the pay scale, Full Professors at private doctoral colleges made an average of $162,561, and even Associate Professors at these schools typically break six figures. Overall, salaries at the Assistant Professor rank and above surpass the national average, though the issue of college debt is increasingly problematic, as professors receive years of post-baccalaureate education to earn their positions. AAUP, in their annual survey, wrote that professors are “underpaid, particularly in terms of their education and the value of their work” and that these staff members are “among the top 10% of Americans in terms of their levels of educational attainment, but they are not in the top 10% of the income distribution of US households.”\textsuperscript{15}

Private vs. Public

Although professors at both private and public institutions have been affected by the financial crisis and the significant recovery in its wake, faculty members from private institutions have consistently earned more than their public university counterparts, a matter of fact that is based on the significant dependence that public institutions have on government funding. AAUP reported that private colleges and universities again received a greater salary increase on average than public sector faculty, and went on to say, “the difference held across baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral institutions and for both religiously affiliated and independent private institutions.”\textsuperscript{16}

As demonstrated in Table 2, AAUP’s 2012 findings reveal a disparity in pay between public and private institutions. Compare the average salary of a Full Professor at a public Master’s program, $88,940, to the salary of a Full Professor at a private Master’s institution, where the average pay is nearly $15,000 more, at $103,094. Or compare the average salary of an Associate Professor in a Public Doctoral program, at $82,777, with the average private salary, $101,854, $19,177 more every year. With many states’ funding locked in budget crises, faculty at public school institutions may find themselves forced to accept lower pay in exchange for job security in a market that, while improving, still hasn’t proven its stability.

Stable Program Growth

Creative Writing positions continue to flourish as universities seek to fill popular classrooms, a growth AWP has documented in Table 3: Number of Degree-Conferring Programs in Creative Writing. In 1975, when AWP first began recording the number of degree-conferring programs in Creative Writing, there were seventy-nine total nationwide across various degree types, including AA, BA/BS, BFA, MA, MFA, and PhD. Today, thirty-seven years later, there are 1,269 programs, 214 of which are MFA programs. The demand for creative writing hasn’t dwindled, which may account for the fifty-one

<table>
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<th>TABLE 3: Number of Creative Writing Degree-Conferring Programs</th>
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<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS Minor</td>
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<td>BA/BFA Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>MA</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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Source: AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs as of November 2012

*The new AWP website allows for more accurate record-keeping for the number of undergraduate degree programs, thus the significant increase in this year’s data.
The AWP Job List: Recent Numbers

AWP’s Job List figures continue to trend upward, as demonstrated in Figure 1: Number of Positions Listed in the AWP Job List by Year and the corresponding Table 1: Number of Positions Listed in the AWP Job List by Year. Though there were seventy-three fewer academic job listings this year, the market trend continues the upswing it has been on since its low point of 316 academic jobs in 2007-08, as the recession hit the country. 2010-11 saw the highest number of academic jobs, 963 in total, in the history of the Job List. Of the 890 academic jobs listed, 282 were tenure track, and 130 were tenure-track creative writing positions—the highest number of tenure-track creative writing positions in recent history.

September through November consistently receive the greatest volume of listings posted for academic positions—especially for the coveted full-time and creative writing teaching jobs. In fact, between September 2011 and the end of December 2011, the Job List published 199 of the 282 tenure-track positions. Job listings posted in fall usually have deadlines that reach into winter, while late spring and summer are the slowest periods for job listings.

The jobs per region were understandably inconsistent, with the Northeast region boasting the most job opportunities, at 371, and the Pacific Northwest bringing up the rear with eighty-five listings. The Midwest offered the second most job opportunities, with 346 listings, and the Southeast, Southwest, and West all featured a similar number of jobs, at 168, 123, and 157, respectively.

AWP published forty-six international job listings in 2011-12, a segment of the market that continues to grow as AWP’s global presence expands via international member programs and awareness of international grants and awards opportunities. The varied international jobs the Job List featured ranged from positions in English-speaking countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to positions in Kuwait, China, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Oman, Nigeria, and elsewhere. AWP has also seen the demand for international positions grow slightly over the past few years.

The MLA figures are consistent with AWP’s findings, according to its annual Report on the MLA Job Information List, 2011-12. After an almost 40% decline in the number of jobs advertised in the MLA Job Information List (JIL) from 2008-2010, MLA has reported its second year trending upward. For 2011-12, the JIL’s English edition announced 1,235 positions, as compared to 1,100 in 2009-10. The number of tenure-track positions also increased this academic year, when 541 positions, which account for nearly 50% of its total advertised positions, were tagged as “tenure track” and “assistant professor.” An additional 109 were designated as tenure-track positions in this or another rank.

The nonacademic job market mirrored the uptick seen in the academic job listings. Although down slightly from last year’s 794 nonacademic job listings, the Job List posted 662 nonacademic jobs in 2011-12, the second greatest number of listings for the nonacademic sector in JIL history.

Writers Finding Their Own Way in the Economy

The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) 2010 data reveals a median pay of $55,420 for the 145,900 “writers and authors” in America, which is greater than the national average salary of $45,230. The forecast for the market looks fairly grim, though, as BLS predicts that jobs in this field will grow at a rate of only 6% between 2010 and 2020, which they rate as “slower than average.” Writers in the nonacademic sector hold a variety of positions, including developing content for advertising, writing books or magazine content, editing, copywriting, proposal...
and other business writing, and a variety of positions working for online publications. Often, these positions are part-time or freelance jobs, and flexibility is a major perk of the nonacademic writing market. “It’s been noted all through the media that American communication is at its worst ever,” writes Sarah Gorham, President and Editor-in-Chief of Sarabande Books in Louisville, KY. “I think there will be an increasing need for people who know how to write, period. I began my career as a freelancer, writing speeches for corporate executives, employee newsletters, grant narratives, articles for alumni magazines, etc.”

Since the health of the economy has become increasingly dependent on government funding, more and more writers and authors find themselves employed in writing positions with federal and state governments or as government contractors, especially in urban areas of the country, where their writing skills are needed to maintain documentation, write winning contract proposals, and create meaningful corporate literature. Further, as online publications grow, the demand for those who are able to effectively write and edit in web environments will increase. The BLS predicts that these positions will become more competitive in the future, as more graduates are attracted to this kind of work.

Independent nonprofit organizations, like Sarabande Books, are options to keep in mind as well. And writing and editing jobs don’t have to be the only fit for MFA graduates. Like in Sara Gorham’s case, it may not always be possible to leap immediately from an MFA to a mid- or high-level position, but the opportunities to hold reliable and writer-friendly jobs at businesses and presses are out there. “Independents are generally small operations with relatively little turnover,” writes Gorham. “Everyone wants to start at the top, in acquisitions or editing; that’s unlikely for a writer just graduating with an MFA. But marketing and publicity are excellent places to begin a publishing career, especially at a small press.”

The BLS study also finds 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.

Gorham suggests that writers not forget to look for jobs in development: “you’re raising money for a cause dear to your heart: literature. Most of the people you talk to will also love literature. And [you won’t be a mere] assistant to an assistant to the editorial assistant. [You’ll be a vital member of the organization.”

Kristin Hahn, who received her MFA in Nonfiction from George Mason University in 2010, is a former Assistant and Associate Editor for AWP (2006-2010). She currently writes and manages proposals for a government contracting firm outside of Washington, DC.

Notes
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
18. Sarah Gorham, e-mail message to Daniel D’Angelo, Associate Editor at AWP, December 4, 2012.
20. Ibid.
22. Ibid.