

## **Report on the *MLA Job Information List***

MLA Office of Research

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## Report on the MLA *Job Information List*, September 2008

In 2007–08 the number of jobs advertised in the MLA *Job Information List* (*JIL*) continued its recent upward trend, increasing by 33 (1.8%) in English and 89 (5.6%) in foreign languages since 2006–07 (fig. 1). In the *JIL*'s English edition, a total of 1,646 listings announced 1,826 jobs; in the foreign language edition, 1,522 listings announced 1,680 jobs. Since the recent low in 2003–04 the number of jobs announced in the *JIL* has increased by 285 (18.5%) in the English edition and 395 (30.7%) in the foreign language edition. Figure 1 shows the trend lines for the numbers of jobs advertised in the *JIL*'s English and foreign language editions over the thirty-three-year span 1975–76 to 2007–08. Over more than three decades, the trend lines have followed closely those of the wider United States economy and state tax revenues.

Several recent developments merit comment. First, larger numbers of jobs are being advertised in issues of the *JIL* after October. (The October print issue matches the database initially available for searching in mid-September.) The trend is clearly visible in figures 2 and 3, which show the number of jobs advertised in each of the *JIL*'s five seasonal issues since 1975–76. When the *JIL* was a mailed print publication, ads that missed the deadline for the October lists did not reach job seekers until they received the December issue in late November. With the shift from print to online format in 1997, making or missing the deadline for the October print list has become less critical to departments' job searches, since newly received ads become searchable online within one week. (Print versions of the *JIL* continue to be mailed to all ADE- and ADFL-member departments, primarily for documentary purposes; they are no longer available to individual job seekers.)

The shift in the distribution across the seasonal issues is also apparent in the number of ads (as distinguished from the number of jobs ads announce). In 2000–01, the October issue claimed 52.3% of the year's total of ads published in the English edition and 44.9% of the total in the foreign language edition. This past year, 2007–08, the percentage of ads published in the October issues dropped to 35.1% of the year's total for the English edition and 27.9% of the year's total for the foreign language edition.

Along with the pronounced shift in the distribution of ads across the seasonal issues, a somewhat larger number of listings are being tagged as non-tenure-track. Tables 1a and 1b (for English) and tables 2a and 2b (for foreign languages) show the number of ads that appeared in the *JIL*'s English and foreign language editions in 2004–05 and 2007–08, broken down by seasonal issue and tenure status. In 2004–05, when departments were first given the opportunity to index their ads by tenure status, ads tagged as tenure-track accounted for 79.7% of the year's total of 1,497 listings in the English edition and 63.8% of the year's total of 1,248 listings in the foreign language edition. Between 2004–05 and 2007–08, the percentage of ads tagged as tenure-track dropped about four percentage points in both editions, to 75.6% of the year's total of 1,646 listings in English and to 59.5% of the year's total of 1,522 listings in foreign languages. The lion's share of ads tagged as tenure-track appears in the October and December issues: in both the English and foreign language lists, the October and December issues together claimed about 70% of all tenure-track ads in both 2004–05 and 2007–08.

Virtually all positions announced in the *JIL* are full-time, and the *JIL* thus affords no insight into the scale of departments' hiring of part-time faculty members. However, the number of ads tagged as openings for full-time tenure-track assistant professors and non-tenure-track instructors serves as a valuable source of data about opportunities for full-time entry-level academic employment in four-year institutions available to new and recent graduates of PhD programs. (Only a very few two-year colleges use the *JIL* to advertise openings.) Since 2004–05, ads tagged as tenure-track assistant professor have consistently made up about 55% of the year's total in English and about 44% of the year's total in foreign languages. In both English and foreign languages, compared with prior years the percentages of ads tagged tenure-track assistant professor were lower in 2007–08 and the percentages tagged as non-tenure-track higher, as shown in figures 4 and 5.

The percentage decreases in ads tagged for tenure-track assistant professor were driven by increases in the number of ads tagged non-tenure-track instructor rather than decreases in the number tagged for tenure-track assistant professor. In English, ads tagged non-tenure-track instructor numbered 96 in 2004–05 and 142 in 2007–08; ads tagged tenure-track assistant professor numbered 850 in 2004–05 and 877 in 2007–08. In foreign languages, ads tagged non-tenure-track instructor numbered 185 in 2004–05 and 288 in 2007–08; ads tagged tenure-track assistant professor numbered 556 in 2004–05 and 634 in 2007–08. Figure 4 (for English) and figure 5 (for foreign language) show how the share of ads tagged non-tenure-track has grown, while the share of those tagged tenure-track assistant professor has remained relatively constant. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine from the *JIL* data whether the recent increases in ads for non-tenure-track positions indicate increases in departments' use of full-time non-tenure-track faculty appointments or only increased use of the *JIL* to announce and fill such positions. Table 3 (English) and table 4 (foreign languages) show in more detail how departments have tagged their ads using the four index terms for rank—instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor—across the eight years 2000–01 to 2007–08.

The great majority of ads are tagged for assistant professor, either singly or in combination with tags for other ranks. Of the ads tagged only for assistant professor, 88% in English and 82% in foreign languages have consistently also been tagged tenure-track.

Tables 5 and 6 show how listings have been tagged for field specializations across the eight years 2000–01 to 2007–08. Because departments use multiple index terms to tag their ads, the number of ads tagged with the various field index terms adds to a total far greater than the total number of ads published. The percentage values represent the percentage of published ads tagged using any given index term and show considerable consistency through time compared with the fluctuations in the number of ads. Across the eight years, roughly 30% of ads in the English edition have been tagged with the terms rhetoric and composition, British literature, and American literature (including African American literature). Tagging of ads in the foreign language edition shows somewhat more change: the percentage of ads tagged for Spanish has dropped from over 46% to just over 41%, whereas the percentage tagged for Chinese has grown from about 2.5% to around 6%.

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