

Career Information for Graduate Students and Junior Faculty Members

Prepared by the MLA Committee on Academic Freedom
and Professional Rights and Responsibilities

This document is available in a PDF version at
www.mla.org/main_jil.htm

If you are working for a PhD in English, foreign languages, or comparative literature; if you are considering enrolling in such a program; or if you are in your first years as an adjunct or tenure-track faculty member, you should be aware of the data available on trends in the academic job market, placement rates for PhDs inside and outside the academy, and levels of job satisfaction for those with doctorates. You should be familiar, as well, with the literature on developing a career in the fields of language and literature and on applying for jobs and working effectively in a college or university or in the business, government, or not-for-profit (BGN) sector. We include below samples of information available from the Modern Language Association and a bibliography of print and online publications that we recommend for planning a career in language and literature.

One important source of information is the annual count of listings from the October edition of the MLA's *Job Information List (JIL)* (figs. 1–3 and tables 1 and 2). The *JIL* is the major national venue for job listings in the field, and the count, which appears in the spring *MLA Newsletter*, serves as a barometer of the market, showing whether departments are advertising more or fewer positions and in which areas these positions occur. The count does not represent all jobs in language and literature, since listings continue to appear throughout the year and since many academic jobs in language and literature are not listed in the *JIL*.

In addition, the MLA has surveyed doctoral departments in language and literature for more than two decades to ascertain the kinds of employment their doctoral graduates find (table 3). Unlike the *JIL* count, these surveys are done only every few years, but

they record in detail what jobs new PhDs have actually obtained rather than what jobs have been advertised. The numbers and percentages represent those PhD recipients whose employment status was known by their department and cover only employment in the first year after their earning the PhD. Since the subgroups are relatively small, the percentages of people going into different types of positions often change dramatically from survey to survey. More detailed figures that cover specific fields as well as trends based on gender and race are published in the *ADE Bulletin* and *ADFL Bulletin* and are available in the online *Bulletin* archives at www.ade.org and www.adfl.org. The next MLA Placement Survey will record 2000–01 placements and be published in 2002.

The best source of long-term information on doctoral career paths is the study “PhDs Ten Years Later,” completed in 1999 by Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny of the University of California, Berkeley. Though Nerad and Cerny did not study PhDs in foreign languages and comparative literature, they did receive 814 completed surveys from those who received doctorates in English from 1982 to 1985. Employment status of the sample after ten years (fig. 4), satisfaction levels of those in the academic and BGN sectors (table 4), and advice from respondents to current doctoral students (table 5) are printed below. A full report was published in the *ADE Bulletin* (124 [2000]) and is available in the *Bulletin* archives at www.ade.org.

Publications on Doctoral Study, the Job Market, and Work in Language and Literature

If you are a graduate student, in addition to using the sources listed below, you should

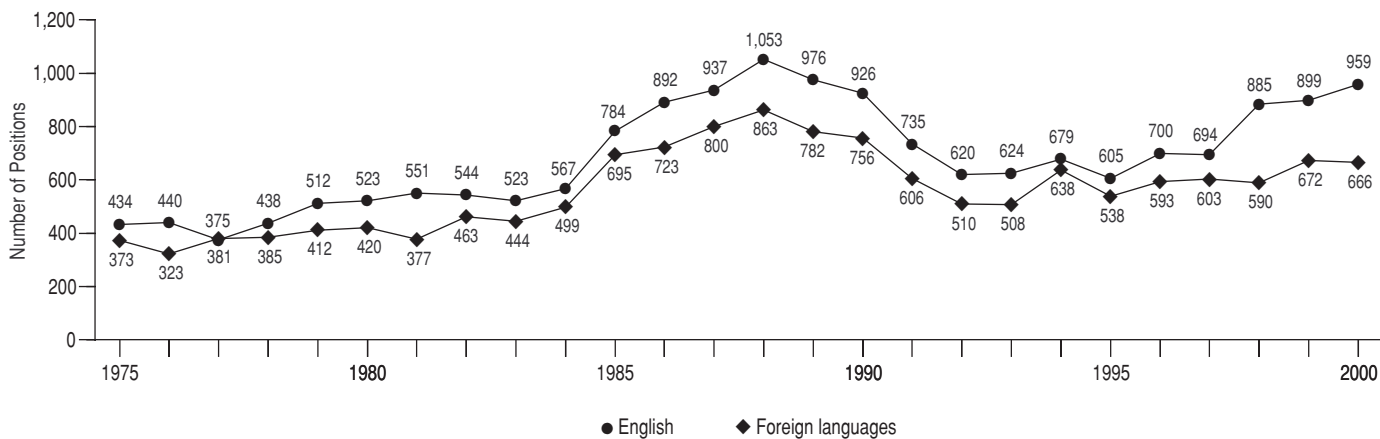
prepare yourself for the job search by seeking advice from your professors, faculty members in other types of institutions (MA-granting, BA-granting, and AA-granting), and those holding doctorates who work in other fields besides college teaching. Familiarize yourself with and try to gain experience in the full variety of teaching, research, and service duties that make up academic life. Well before the job search, begin preparing such materials as c.v., writing sample, and teaching portfolio, getting advice from professors currently involved in hiring. You should also take advantage of sessions and counseling for job seekers at the MLA convention.

Documents To better understand doctoral education and postdoctoral employment in language and literature, we recommend “Advice for Graduate Students: From Application to Career,” an MLA brochure available at www.mla.org (click on “Reports & Documents,” then on “Reports from MLA Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities”); “Final Report: MLA Committee on Professional Employment,” also available at www.mla.org (click on “Reports & Documents,” then on “Report from MLA Committee on Professional Employment”); and “Report of the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing,” available at www.ade.org (click on “Reports and Resources”). The MLA, ADE, and ADFL publish other documents of advice on professional issues, available at their respective Web sites.

Journals The *ADE Bulletin*, *ADFL Bulletin*, *Profession*, and *MLA Newsletter* provide regular discussion of professional issues. The *JIL* is the main source of academic employment listings.

Journal issues and articles Focus on the job search for PhDs is provided in the special

Fig. 1
Number of Positions in the October MLA *JIL*, 1975–2000



sections “Confronting the Current Job Market” in *Profession 1996* and *Profession 1998* and “The Job Search in English” in the *ADE Bulletin* (111 [1995]). Professional development is covered in “Graduate Education and Undergraduate Teaching: Juncture and Disjuncture” in the *ADFL Bulletin* (27.3 [1996]). Individual source articles include “The Job Search: Observations of a Reader of 177 Letters of Application” by Eleanor Green (*ADE Bulletin* 113 [1996]: 50–52) and “The Stars and Ourselves” by James Papp (*ADE Bulletin* 120 [1998]: 2–9; *ADFL Bulletin* 30.1 [1998]: 44–51).

Web sites Among useful Web sites are those of ADE <www.ade.org>; ADFL <www.adfl.org>; ADE and ADFL online job counseling <www.mla.org>, click on “Job Information List”; the *Chronicle of Higher Education* <www.chronicle.com>; the Graduate Students Caucus <www.workplace-gsc.com>; *Linguafranca* <www.linguafranca.com>; the MLA <www.mla.org>; and the National Science Foundation’s *Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities: Summary Report 1999* <http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/studies/sed/sed1999.htm>.

Books

Batchelder, Edward, ed. *Lingua Franca’s Real Guide to Grad School*. New York: Lingua Franca, 2001. An overview of fields in the humanities and of many of the issues potential graduate students should consider.

Boufis, Christina, and Victoria C. Olsen, eds. *On the Market: Surviving the Academic Job Search*. New York: Riverhead, 1997. A collection of perspectives on and approaches to the academic job market, from job seekers and junior hires in all fields.

Byrnes, Heidi, ed. *Learning Foreign and Second Languages: Perspectives in Research and Scholarship*. New York: MLA, 1998. Recommended for those already at the graduate level and thinking about language or literature teaching.

DeNeef, Leigh, and Craufurd D. Goodwin, eds. *The Academic’s Handbook*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Deals with important issues, such as sexual harassment, from a variety of perspectives.

Gibaldi, Joseph, ed. *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*. New York: MLA, 1992. Will help graduate and advanced undergraduate students navigate scholarly methods and critical perspectives.

Greenblatt, Stephen, and Giles Gunn. *Rereading the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. New

Fig. 2
Percentage of Listings in the English Edition of the October *JIL*, by Specialty Field, 1985–2000

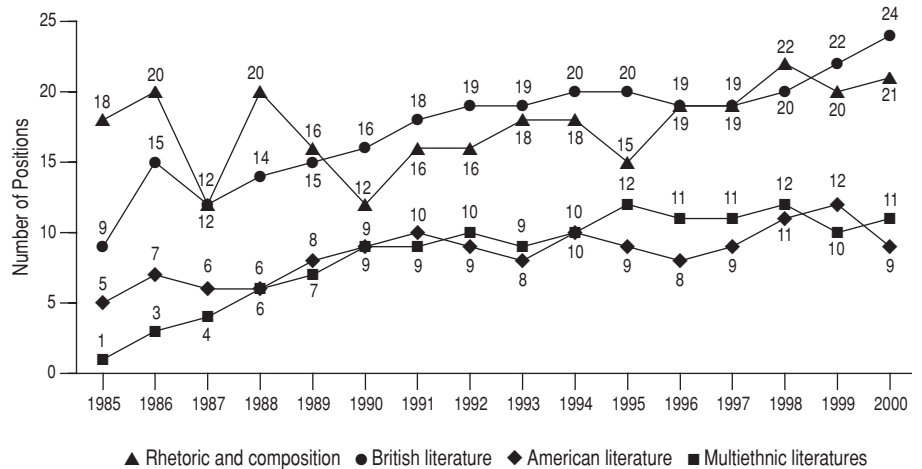
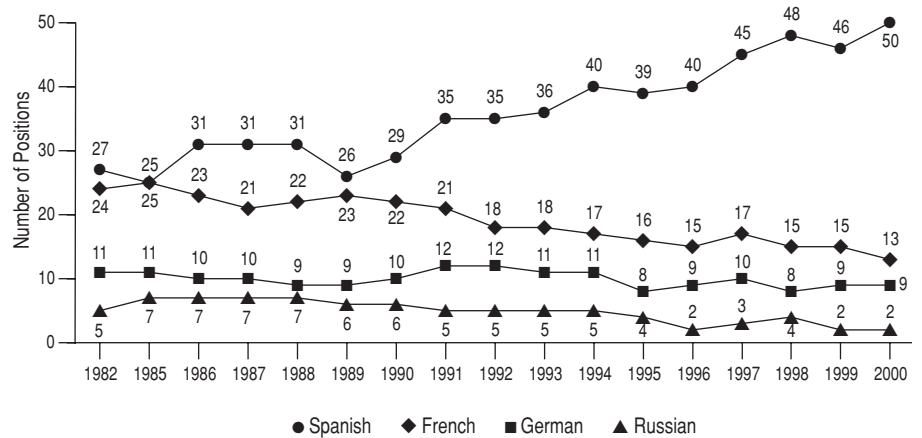


Fig. 3
Percentage of Listings in the Foreign Language Edition of the October *JIL* by Language Field, 1982–2000



York: MLA, 1992. A useful expansion on Gibaldi’s *Introduction to Scholarship*.

Nelson, Cary, ed. *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labor in Crisis*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. Makes readers aware of working conditions for graduate students in many universities.

Scholes, Robert. *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998. A humane study of the field, of interest to both graduate students and advanced undergraduates.

Showalter, English, et al. *The MLA Guide to the Job Search*. New York: MLA, 1996. An overview of good and effective practice in the academic job market for both job seekers and hiring departments.

Toth, Emily. *Ms. Mentor’s Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997. Useful for anyone in the academy, whether female or male.

Fig. 4
Employment Status at the End of 1995 (N = 814)

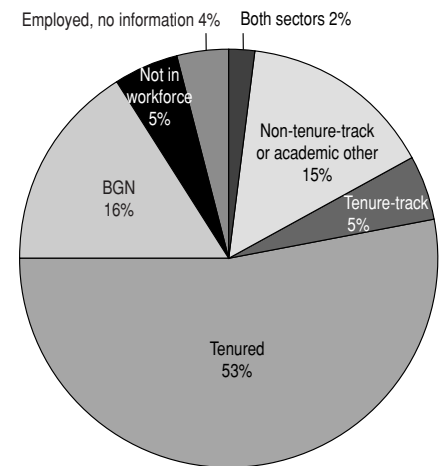


Table 1
Positions in the English Edition of the October 2000 *JIL*, by Specialty Field

	Number	Percentage
British literature	226	23.9
American literature	85	9.0
Multiethnic literatures by people of color	102	10.8
Comparative literature	35	3.7
Rhetoric and composition	197	20.8
Technical and professional writing	54	5.7
Creative writing	80	8.4
English education	30	3.2
Media and communications	61	6.4
Linguistics	18	1.9
Other	59	6.1

Table 2
Positions in the Foreign Language Edition of the October 2000 *JIL*, by Language Group

	Number	Percentage
Spanish	335	50.3
French	88	13.2
Italian	24	3.6
Germanic	58	8.7
Slavic	20	3.2
East Asian	25	3.8
Near Eastern	6	1.0
Open or unspecified	90	13.5
Other	20	3.0

Table 3
Summary of Job Placement for New PhDs with Known Employment Status, from the MLA Censuses of PhD Placement

Placement of PhDs	English						Comparative Literature					
	1991-92		1993-94		1996-97		1991-92		1993-94		1996-97	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tenure-track	491	51.1	408	45.6	400	35.0	57	44.2	55	43.5	41	43.2
Full-time non-tenure-track	207	21.5	182	20.3	282	24.7	28	21.7	27	21.7	18	19.0
Part-time	99	10.3	112	12.5	149	13.0	10	7.8	10	8.1	8	7.4
Outside higher education	68	7.1	69	7.7	134	11.7	18	14.0	17	13.6	4	5.3
Academic administration	27	2.8	13	1.5	31	2.7	3	2.3	2	1.6	3	3.2
Postdoctoral fellowships	7	0.9	16	1.8	39	3.4	4	3.1	3	2.4	6	6.3
Seeking employment	61	6.3	95	10.6	85	7.4	9	7.0	11	8.8	13	13.7
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	24	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	2.1
Basis for percentages	961		895		1,144		129		125		95	

Placement of PhDs	Spanish						French and Italian						German					
	1991-92		1993-94		1996-97		1991-92		1993-94		1996-97		1991-92		1993-94		1996-97	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tenure-track	109	65.1	106	61.3	136	57.9	76	56.7	53	41.7	40	28.4	38	36.2	26	36.6	18	23.4
Full-time non-tenure-track	28	16.9	38	21.9	51	21.7	24	17.9	29	22.9	49	34.7	30	28.5	13	18.3	24	31.2
Part-time	12	7.2	12	6.9	12	5.1	14	10.4	11	8.7	20	14.2	8	7.6	4	5.6	5	6.5
Outside higher education	12	7.2	10	5.8	18	7.7	10	7.5	15	11.8	13	9.2	15	14.3	12	16.9	10	13.0
Academic administration	2	1.2	0	0.0	1	0.4	2	1.5	0	0.0	2	1.4	2	1.9	0	0.0	1	1.3
Postdoctoral fellowships	0	0.0	1	0.6	3	1.3	1	0.7	1	0.8	0	0.0	2	1.9	4	5.6	3	3.9
Seeking employment	3	1.8	6	3.5	5	2.1	7	5.2	16	12.6	11	7.8	10	9.5	12	16.9	13	16.9
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	3.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	4.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	3.9
Basis for percentages	166		173		235		134		127		141		105		71		77	

Table 4
Satisfaction Dimensions of Current Job, by Sector (Percentage), "PhDs Ten Years Later"

	BGN	Academic
Autonomy of work	92	90
Spouse's job	91	75
Content of work	87	89
Prestige of organization	83	68
Work environment	83	73
Flexible work situation	82	84
Career growth	78	67

Table 5
Most Cited Recommendations for Doctoral Students, "PhDs Ten Years Later"

	Ranking Order	
	BGN (N = 79)	Academic (N = 366)
Love it or leave it	1	1
Focus, define your goals	2	4
Consider BGN careers	3	10
Publish	4	3
Be aware of poor job market	5	5
Learn how to teach	-	2