

The Ph.D. Job Market: 1978–79

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THE PH.D. JOB MARKET: 1978-79

1978-79 Ph.D. Placement Survey

HOW did the English doctorate fare in the job market of 1978-79? To provide the profession with reliable statistics, the MLA and the ADE have been surveying English departments since 1974 and reporting their findings in an annual report. As in previous years, 100% of the Ph.D.- and D.A.-granting institutions (144 departments) responded to the survey.

This year's survey has yielded some interesting and unexpected findings. The figures appear in Table 1, but the following information should be highlighted:

- The number of doctorates granted in 1978-79 was 955, the lowest total recorded by the MLA and 155 fewer than reported last year (1,110). The highest number awarded in a single year was 1,455, in 1972-73.
- The number of doctorate-granting institutions (144) decreased by 1 this year, and the number of departments that did not award any doctorates increased from 4 in 1977-78 to 7 in 1978-79.
- The numbers and percentages of Ph.D.'s in other than college teaching have been steadily increasing, from 100 graduates (9.1%) in 1976-77, to 114 graduates (10.2%) in 1977-78, to 148 graduates (15.5%) in 1978-79.
- In 1978-79, 10 departments awarded more than 15 degrees each (in 1977-78, 19 departments produced more than 15 degrees). These 10 departments (6.9% of the total number of departments) awarded 285 degrees (29.8% of the total number of doctorates). The number of departments producing more than 20 doctorates fell from 8 departments in 1977-78 to 4 in 1978-79. No department reported more than 30 graduates this year (one department awarded 37 doctorates in 1977-78).
- 46.1% of the men granted doctorates received full-time, tenure-track positions; 35.2% of the women received full-time, tenure-track positions.

As Table 1 indicates, 59.5% of the total number of graduates found full-time teaching positions, a percentage that has remained relatively stable for the last few years. In 1978-79, however, only 40.9% of these positions were tenure-track appointments; the remainder were temporary or non-tenure-track positions. Although we have no statistics on the number of tenure-track positions that eventually result in tenure, all available evidence

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indicates that the percentage is not likely to be high.

It is important to note, moreover, that while the percentage of graduates finding full-time appointments has hovered around 60%, there were 14% fewer graduates in 1978-79 than in 1977-78. It is reasonable to interpret the significant decrease in total doctorates, along with the decreased number of departments awarding more than 15 degrees and the overall drop in the average number of doctorates per department, as evidence of the beginning of a long-anticipated downward trend in Ph.D. enrollments.

Of the more than 40% of graduates who did not secure full-time college teaching positions, 11.5% accepted part-time teaching appointments or post-doctoral fellowships, 15.5% found alternative work, 4.8% were unemployed, and 8.7% were reported by their departments as "unknown or other."

The second part of the placement survey, Other Careers, has been greatly expanded this year to allow the profession to monitor more closely the alternative careers chosen by English Ph.D.'s. While in previous years the MLA has reported that a certain percentage chose some kind of employment apart from college teaching, this year we can state that 62 graduates (6.5% of the total number) have chosen to enter business or the professions; 36 (3.8%) are pursuing careers in secondary school teaching or administration; and the remainder are divided among careers in government, nonprofit organizations, and college administration.

This year we also asked departments to indicate the specific fields and employers of their graduates in alternative careers. In the category of higher education administration, positions such as director of adult education programs and associate dean at a community college were reported. In government, graduates were working in agencies ranging from the Department of the Interior to the Internal Review Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. The most unpredictable and diverse categories of employment were in business and the professions. While most English Ph.D.'s seeking additional professional training chose law school, some are study-

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Table 1. Results of MLA - ADE Survey of Ph.D. Placement

Occupation	1976-77		1977-78		1978-79	
	doctorates	% of total	doctorates	% of total	doctorates	% of total
Full-time tenure-track appointment.....	466	42.6	481	43.3	391	40.9
Full-time renewable non-tenure-track appointment.....	141	12.9	163	14.7	114	11.9
Full-time nonrenewable appointment for 1 year or less.....	62	5.7	66	5.9	64	6.7
Part-time appointment.....	114	10.4	117	10.5	102	10.7
Postdoctoral fellowship.....	9	0.8	13	1.2	8	0.8
Employment other than college teaching*.	100	9.1	114	10.2	148	15.5
Secondary school teaching or administration	--	--	--	--	36	3.8
Higher-education administration.....	--	--	--	--	24	2.5
Position in government.....	--	--	--	--	10	1.0
Position in nonprofit organization.....	--	--	--	--	16	1.7
Position in business or a profession.....	--	--	--	--	62	6.5
Unemployed, seeking academic job in a specific locale.....	31	2.8	33	3.0	20	2.1
Unemployed, seeking academic job anywhere.....	81	7.4	39	3.5	26	2.7
Unknown or other.....	90	8.2	84	7.6	82	8.7
Total doctorates.....	1,094		1,110		955	

* Pre-1978 non-college-teaching positions are not broken down by specific field.

ing toward degrees in medicine, electrical engineering, library science, and business administration. In business, editorial and research positions are popular with graduates, who have found many different kinds of jobs with commercial and academic presses. Technical writing is another frequent choice; English Ph.D.'s are writing for oil companies, forestry programs, naval research programs, and major corporations specializing in computer production. Other reported occupations include program director for a radio station, owner of a rare-book shop, advertising copyeditor, house painter, and country-music performer.

Job Information Lists

The information in Table 2 was taken from the four regular issues of the *MLA Job Information List*. Only definite tenure-accruing positions were counted; jobs for associate or full professors, temporary appointments, and "possible but not yet authorized" positions were disregarded.

This listing has several limitations. Not only is it

restricted to definite jobs advertised in the *MLA Job Information List* but it excludes jobs that materialized late in the academic year. Moreover, when departments stated that two or more areas of specialization were acceptable for a single position, only the first specialty was counted.

The total number of jobs advertised in 1978-79 was considerably higher than in the year before. Positions in composition/rhetoric, linguistics, and creative writing continued to increase, and there were also substantially more openings for specialists in Old and Middle English literature, American literature, and English as a second language.

The overall state of the job market has not radically changed this year, but the decreased number of graduates suggests that graduate enrollments are beginning to respond to the discouraging employment prospects. As far as the traditional job market is concerned, the numbers speak—somewhat harshly—for themselves. "Dismal, isn't it," commented one chairperson, whose placement statistics were indeed depressing. Still, many candidates do find full-time, tenure-track positions, and some de-

Table 2. Tenure-Accruing Assistant Professorships
Listed in the JL, 1971-78*

Field	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74	1974-75	1974-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79
Old & Mid. Eng.	21	14	16	13	10	15	4	9
Renaissance	24	20	11	19	12	13	5	6
Rest. & 18th-cent.	27	12	16	11	9	14	9	9
19th-cent. Brit.	33	22	24	31	23	15	6	7
Amer. gen.	30	14	24	21	20	18	6	16
Colon. Amer.	3	3	5	4	4	7	5	0
19th-cent. Amer.	3	5	6	8	3	8	7	7
Mod. Brit. &/or Amer.	25	20	24	22	21	19	11	12
Literary crit.	9	3	7	4	5	7	4	0
Drama	10	9	13	13	7	8	7	10
Linguistics	34	34	20	42	41	53	29	31
Rhet. & comp.	12	12	23	30	27	56	57	59
Creative writing	13	12	14	12	6	29	15	13
Comp. lit.	13	10	13	12	14	14	6	8
Black studies	21	13	16	12	7	18	8	11
Folklore	3	7	1	5	6	7	3	0
Eng. ed.	11	7	3	6	2	13	6	8
Journalism	8	7	9	8	12	3	16	13
Tech. writing	4	2	4	8	5	7	8	9
Children's lit.	7	7	2	7	1	6	3	0
Canadian	4	1	2	1	2	3	2	0
ESL/TESL	1	2	3	4	3	11	7	11
Communications	2	4	0	5	2	8	12	7
Amer. studies	0	0	0	3	3	15	3	1
Generalist	16	14	14	12	12	17	20	32
Reading	3	1	1	2	3	0	1	0
Devel. Eng.	--	--	--	--	--	7	3	1
Women's studies	--	--	--	--	--	3	0	0
Film	--	--	--	--	--	5	6	5
Other ⁺	2	1	3	12	3	6	1	10
Total	339	256	274	327	263	405	270	295

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⁺ Before 1976-77, the "Other" category included listings in developmental English, women's studies, and film.

partments continue to place all their graduates year after year. One member of a department that had placed six out of seven graduates in tenure-track positions commented, "We have continued to find jobs for our graduates, including A.B.D.'s. Our success is due to a formula that I am not at liberty to divulge." (Many placement officers would bid eagerly, I'm sure, for this secret recipe.) An encouraging aspect of the placement survey is that the percentage of unemployed graduates has decreased, while the percentage of graduates who find non-academic employment has increased. The smaller percentage of graduates with alternative jobs who

expect to continue seeking college teaching positions this year (27.7% in 1978-79; 33.3% in 1977-78) may indicate that more nonacademically employed graduates are satisfied with their careers. Given the discouraging trends predicted by major studies of higher education, such as the recent report of the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, alternative careers in literature and language are likely to be the most promising area in which the profession can realistically hope to improve employment prospects for English Ph.D.'s and D.A.'s.