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A Plea to Graduate Departments

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ABSTRACT *The competitive job market—now facing prospective college teachers of foreign languages—calls for both better preparation in teaching and for improved documentation of pedagogical qualifications in the placement file.*

These comments were prompted, in part, by my recent experience on a faculty search committee, and in part by two recent articles by Elaine Showalter and Phyllis Franklin. Their studies confirmed my own subjective impressions arising from the scrutinization of twenty-seven applications for a nontenure track lecturer position in German—the replacement for a retiring tenured faculty member. Five informal phone calls to other departments with recent hires also corroborated my concern over the high number of applicants: They had received between sixty and eighty applications per tenure-track vacancy. In other words: Too many job seekers for too few openings.

The aforementioned article by Franklin (1998) discusses two reports that address the same situation. One is a statement by a coalition of ten organizations in the humanities, available on request from the MLA. The other is the *Final Report by the MLA Committee on Professional Employment*, forthcoming from the MLA. "Both reports," Franklin emphasizes, "also argue that significant numbers of the graduate students currently enrolled in Ph.D. programs will be unable to find satisfactory academic employment in the years ahead" (5). The reduced employment prospects are closely related to the increased hiring of part-time and adjunct teachers in higher education. As Franklin points out, with this shift in hiring practices, many university administrators avoid long-term commitment to new fac-

ulty and gain flexibility in dismissing personnel (4). In addition to similar observations, Showalter offers several suggestions to counter these problems, one of them being formal training in teaching in every graduate program (3). We will return to that point shortly.

One is hard-pressed to find precise statistics on the numbers of academic vacancies and job seekers. Both the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *MLA Job Information List (JIL)* contain primarily advertisements from universities and four-year colleges, but very few from community colleges and extremely few for part-time positions. Many of the announcements are only tentative and may not materialize—and the majority of the positions call for nontenure track or short-term personnel. Both the statistical data published by Laurence and Welles (1998, 33) and the *JIL* confirm this. For example, in the October 1997 issue, the *JIL* advertised a total of 603 positions in all foreign languages, and of these only 261 were tenure-track. In October 1996 the respective numbers were 593 and 239 or 43 percent. In 1996, American universities conferred about six hundred Ph.D.'s in foreign languages while the advertised positions in the *JIL* for 1995-96 amounted to 1,122 and for 1996-97 1,118 (Laurence and Welles 1998, 32). That may look encouraging at first glance until one realizes that not all of these openings are tenure-track or continuing and that the new Ph.D.'s apply in competition with ABDs and older Ph.D.'s for these positions. The ratio between job seekers and positions in higher education may, of course, vary among language areas ("Special Supplement"). In Ger-

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