

A Comparative Report of Writing Center Director Ads in Rhetmap JIL, Sept 2014 - Dec 2016

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<http://rhetmap.org/>

This report analyzes the Writing Center Director advertisements published on Rhetmap within the last three years. It specifically focuses on how the requirements and the workload associated with this position have changed to reflect the deeper shifts in existing educational systems, values about learning and learners, and particularly conceptions of composition and writing.

In the 2014-2015 Rhetmap job information list (JIL), there were 13 positions listed for the Writing Center Director; in 2015-2016, this amount was reduced to 9 positions, and in 2016-2017, it was further reduced to 8. However, when compared with the overall pool of MLA listings posted each year, the percentage of offers for Writing Center Director remains approximately the same: between 3.3% and 5.0%. With a single exception in 2015-2016, all the positions combined the responsibilities of Assistant Professor and Director of the Writing Center. The percentage of tenure positions has gradually increased throughout the years: from 46% in 2014-2015 to 55% in 2015-2016 to 75% in 2016-2017. However, the things that have changed the most within the last three years have to do with the requirements for the position and the negotiated workload.

Previously, many universities would consider a Master's degree in Composition and Rhetoric as an appropriate qualification (though specifying that PhD candidates will be preferred); the 2016-2017 JIL shows that a Ph.D. in Rhetoric/Composition, Applied Linguistics, or a related field has become the minimum requirement for a position of Writing Center Director. Many advertisements from this time also require scholarly expertise in Writing Center Studies (65% of this year's advertisements as compared with 20% in 2014-2015 and 25% in 2015-2016) and an ability to work with multilingual students in a multicultural/ multiethnic environment (37% of this year advertisements as compared with 22% and 23% in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, respectively). Furthermore, 25% of the current advertisements specify having an MFA in Creative writing as a valuable asset.

The general scope of application has also changed considerably: in 2014-2016, the applicant had to submit between 4 and 5 documents to prove his level of expertise; in 2016-2017, this amount has been increased to 5-6 documents on average. The core of the required documents remained the same: cover letter, curriculum vitae, and three letters of recommendation. However, additional documents vary from university to university and from year to year. In 2014-2015, the most commonly requested additional documents were a writing sample of 10 to 15 pages (in some cases specifically research-based), syllabi for 1-2 courses, and a one-page statement of teaching philosophy. In 2015-2016, the most commonly requested additional documents were

official transcripts and a statement of teaching philosophy. In 2016-2017, a writing sample of no more than 25 pages and a statement of writing center philosophy or teaching philosophy were required.

Finally, the most astounding shift occurred in the teaching workload of the Writing Center Director. While earlier advertisements specified teaching load and the exact courses that the Writing Center Director is expected to teach, current advertisements have become much vaguer. For instance, compare the following advertisements: “the candidate is expected to teach entry-level and advanced writing courses” (San Jose State University, 2016-2017) vs. “Teaching schedule is 2-1-2, and will include a first-year Seminar in Critical Thinking and Writing, Intermediate Writing, and upper-level courses” (Birmingham Southern College, 2014-2015). In fact, the amount of unspecified descriptions of teaching workload has increased from 23% in 2014-2015 to 55% in 2015-2016 to 75% in 2016-2017.

Thus, the findings of this job market report reflect the overall tendencies in academia: universities’ attempts to cut back on spending result in fewer new positions each year and increased workload for those who are hired. Specifically, the changes found in teaching workload echo the conclusion of the recent book *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Director*: the biggest challenge that Writing Center Directors currently face is a necessity to “manage [the administrative responsibilities] while also teaching and maintaining a research agenda.”¹

¹ McKinney, Jackie Grutsch, Nicole I. Caswell, and Becky Jackson. *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2016.