

Applying for Teaching Jobs while ABD

by *William Christopher Brown* (Ph.D., Indiana University, Fall 2013)

Lecturer of Composition, University of Minnesota Crookston (2012- present)

The employment options for ABDs are limited compared to graduates with doctorates. Many advice articles on the job search focus on cover letters, personal statements, CVs, and interviews. Few articles focus on the pragmatics of how to determine which jobs to apply for while ABD.

As is well-documented, doctorates in the Humanities often take a decade to complete. Because of the intense competition for jobs, many ABDs who run out of teaching opportunities at their doctoral programs must apply for jobs *sans* diploma. Unless ABDs have stellar records of publishing, literature jobs will most likely be unattainable.

Jobs are still available, but they will most likely be teaching-oriented positions at two-year colleges or non-tenure track yearly renewable lecturer positions at universities. These types of positions offer lower salaries than tenure track positions at universities.

My presentation at the 2014 MLA Convention in Chicago focused on resources to help ABD graduate students make the best decisions. The remainder of this summary advises ABDs on the job market how to make the best economic decisions when selecting job opportunities to pursue.

Before Going on the Market ...

Six months before going on the market, start looking at job descriptions in places like *ChronicleOfHigherEd.com*, *HigherEdJobs.com*, and *InsideHigherEd.com*. This early research helped me to make the best decisions about recommenders. I realized that I needed to have Composition administrators visit my class so that they could attest to my teaching in their letters of recommendations.

Research Location

Location and demographics can be found in open access sources like *Wikipedia* and *CityData.com*. The former has a map and demographic information for almost every town/city in the US. The latter provides in depth information about any aspect of a community. *CityData.com* also has useful forums that provide questions and answers about many locations.

Research Approximate Salaries

If the job description omits the salary, resources are available to gain a rough estimation of remuneration. The first place to consult is the *ChronicleOfHigherEd.com*'s salary table, listed under "Facts & Figures." A fuller list of approximate salaries can be found at *AmericanSchoolSearch.com*.

Research the Cost of Living

Because two-year college and non-tenure track yearly renewable positions have lower salaries than tenure track jobs, cost of living should be investigated before applying. I rely on "*Sperling's Cost of Living Comparison*" because of its efficiency and thoroughness. I recommend that graduate students begin with what they know: the cost of living in their current communities. Determine the minimum cost of living required and then compare that salary to the position's location, using Sperling's website.

Post-application: *Academic Wiki*

After applying for a job comes the waiting. The *Academic Wiki* provides updates on the job market. Job descriptions are posted at the wiki and job seekers update their status for the benefit of others. The wiki does not have the same reliability as communication directly from the school, but it may be the only news available to job seekers until the school initiates contact through requests for interviews or rejections.

Depersonalize the Job Search

Don't take rejection personally. So many qualified candidates compete for jobs that it is an employer's market. Employers can cherry-pick candidates to suit their specific needs. After determining the parameters of geography, cost of living, and salary, continue to revise your materials and keep applying.

Private v. Public Selves: On Tweeting, Teaching, and Being a Graduate Student

by *Teresa M. Pershing* (PhD candidate, West Virginia University)

Last spring, after finally deciding to integrate Twitter into my British literature survey, I focused on making Twitter work for my students. I drafted a handout detailing why we were using Twitter and how it benefited the course. I explained to students that they could use their current handles or create new ones, and I made clear that if they chose to use pre-existing handles, I wasn't interested in their other activity, only what they tweeted using our course hashtag. I was desperately trying to avoid what Jason Jones calls "the creepy treehouse problem": "the requirement, enforced by someone in authority, that others interact socially with them...; and the affect that th[is] [practice] give[s] off." [i] Then, in the midst of establishing practices to protect my students' privacy and enhance their comfort with Twitter, a moment of panic: How would I negotiate my own Twitter identity in this simultaneously material/immaterial, classroom/digital space? The Twitter handle I'd utilized in the past, @TeresaMP, was a private account, blocked from students unless I approved them. It burst with all things academic, political, and personal. I did not filter my opinions or self-presentation to reflect my teaching persona; making the already-existing content public wasn't ideal. I imagined students dropping the class because of organizations I'd followed, articles I'd linked to, or personal opinions I'd shared. Worse yet, I feared that if students were curious and reviewed my tweets, they'd estimate that my feedback reflected a personal or political response rather than a scholarly one. It was clear that I needed to create another Twitter identity.

My new Twitter handle, @TMPershing, was meant to reflect my professional identity with my

students as intended audience. Part of the work of being a graduate student is defining and refining our professional identities, especially in the classroom as we work to carve out our most comfortable and suitable teaching personas. Negotiating the sometimes liminal space of graduate student identity can be challenging; we meander between professional and novice, teacher and student, colleague and mentee in unique ways. I decided that the content shared on my new Twitter handle would reflect my life as *both* a teacher and graduate student. As the semester continued, I maintained two Twitter accounts, but eventually I stopped using my personal account almost entirely. Having two accounts became redundant. Like in the physical classroom where my teaching persona is rooted in authentic parts of who I am outside of the classroom, the content I shared via my professional Twitter identity revealed a great deal about me personally. While the topics were professional, the interactions were personal. 140 characters at a time, conversations developed with a wide range of people—students, colleagues, and friends—about current readings from my literature course, the humanities, and academia in general. The exchange of ideas that Twitter invites leads to engaging conversations amongst groups of people who might not otherwise interact. In particular, it opens up the classroom space in ways that other technologies, like Facebook groups or learning platforms, do not. The validation that my students received from their peers and people outside of our physical classroom was only possible because of Twitter. Using Twitter in my classroom helped to break down some of the power structures that define and separate teacher from student and personal from private, divisions that graduate students regularly negotiate.

[1] Jones, Jason B. “The Creepy Treehouse Problem.” *ProfHacker. The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 9 March 2010. Web. 7 January 2014.