

Blackboard Blues

Yale Teachers on Yale Teaching

September 2003

Committee on Teaching
GESO (Graduate Employees & Students Organization)
425 College Street, New Haven, CT 06511 (203) 624-5161 • www.yaleunions.org

Introduction

Undergraduate education in the United States is at a crossroads. As major research universities become increasingly oriented toward business and profit concerns, they are reevaluating the future of undergraduate education.¹ Several leading institutions, including Yale University, Harvard University, and New York University, are currently in the process of altering their undergraduate curricula.² The Committee on Yale College Education released their report on Yale's undergraduate education in April 2003.³ Their recommendations are based on interviews with faculty and undergraduates. The report fails to accurately assess the state of undergraduate education at Yale because it does not include the input of the people who do the most teaching at Yale—graduate teachers and adjunct instructors—and a discussion of the role transient teachers play in the undergraduate educational experience.

Graduate teachers at Yale have worked to address the problems created by casualization, the use of temporary employees in the university setting, for several years. In this report, we offer an alternative picture of the reality of undergraduate education at Yale. In particular, we examine how Yale's heavy reliance on "transient" teachers⁴ bears upon undergraduate education as well as how it affects the career prospects of the teachers themselves. This report documents:

- 70% of undergraduate teaching contact hours at Yale are performed by transient teachers: graduate teachers, adjunct instructors, and other teachers not on the tenure track.
- Transient teachers' lack of institutional support compromises the quality of educational experience they are able to provide.
- To resolve the current problems, Yale must both hire more tenure track faculty, who already receive support for teaching, mentoring and research, and also improve the working conditions for transient teachers.
- A union for graduate teachers can improve working conditions and the institutional support graduate teachers receive from the university, thereby benefiting undergraduate education.

Who Teaches at Yale?

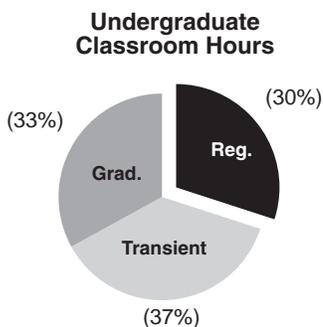
There are two kinds of teaching positions at Yale: regular faculty and transient teachers. Regular faculty are either tenured or tenure track, including the renowned scholars for which Yale is famous. They make their careers at Yale, with institutional support for teaching and mentoring, as well as research in their fields. Transient teachers include adjunct instructors, lecturers, and graduate student teachers. They usually have short-term appointments, lasting a semester or a year. They often lack basic necessities such as offices, as well as broader institutional support, such as research funding, research leaves and input on course content and curriculum.

The structure of Yale College education today is very different from a generation ago. Over the past few decades the number of transient teachers at Yale has increased dramatically. Undergraduate enrollment rose 28% between 1969 and 1976 when Yale College transitioned into a coeducational institution.⁵ Since then, the number of classes a tenure-track professor teaches each semester has dropped.⁶ In addition, the Yale curriculum includes a large number of expository writing and foreign language classes.⁷ While these classes are essential to the excellence of a Yale education, they require a large number of teachers.

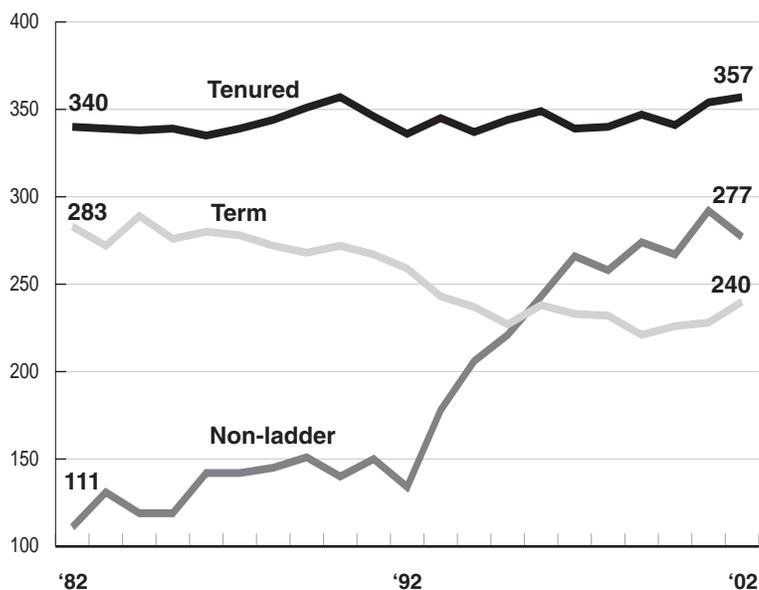
The demand for more teachers has been met by an increase in the number of graduate student teaching assistants and adjunct faculty in lieu of new tenure-track faculty. For current Yale College students, the learning experience involves significant

contact with adjuncts and teaching assistants. Among this group are graduate and professional students who must teach outside their field of expertise. Yale's use of transient teachers prevents relationship building between faculty and students that would otherwise begin through classroom instruction.

- Last year, 47% of the faculty listed as the primary instructors for Yale College classes were transient teachers.
- Transient faculty and graduate student teachers were responsible for 70% of the undergraduate classroom hours in the Spring semester of 2003, including weekly discussion sections and labs. Yale has relied on transient teachers to this extent for at least the past five years.⁸
- The number of graduate teachers at Yale exploded between 1966 and 1997, the last year for which data is available, going from 449 to over 1000.⁹
- There were 111 adjunct instructors in autumn 1982.¹⁰ By autumn 2002, the number had increased by 150% to 277.¹¹ While the number of adjunct faculty positions increased, the number of tenured faculty positions remained steady and the number of junior faculty positions decreased by about 15%.¹²



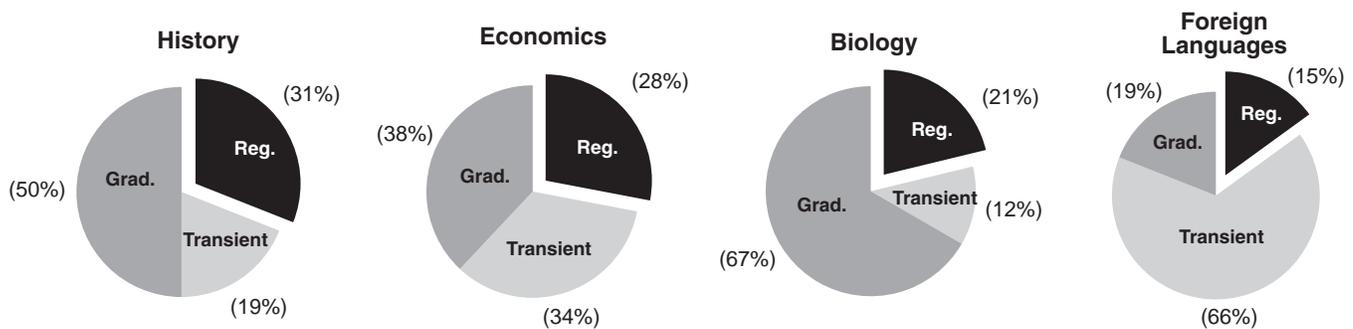
Faculty of Arts & Sciences, 1982-2002



- Yale's student-faculty ratio, based on a count of regular faculty who taught undergraduate courses last year, is 9.5:1, not the 7:1 ratio Yale reports for its *U.S. News & World Report* ranking.¹³ To achieve a 7:1 student-faculty ratio, Yale would have to hire almost 200 more tenure-track faculty members, assuming each taught a class both semesters. Many faculty teach only one semester, however, which made the ratio 13:1 in the spring 2003 term.

Specific Majors

In the three most popular undergraduate majors—history, economics, and biology—transient faculty and graduate student teachers were responsible, respectively, for 69%, 72%, and 79% of the classroom hours with undergraduates. In the foreign language departments, where every undergraduate takes two years of courses, transient teachers perform over 85% of the teaching hours.



“My first term teaching at Yale, I had two sections of 19 students. My classroom was a windowless, triangular room in the basement of a dorm in old campus — wedged between a laundry and a canteen area. No matter where I sat, I could not see all of my students. We strained to hear and see each other in an attempt to have discussions. Despite my efforts, Yale would not provide another room.

Although I was teaching 38 students I had no office space. When I held my “office hours” in the library we were often interrupted. This made the one-to-one conversations with students to help them revise their term papers very difficult.

These conditions prevented me from offering the kind of education I wanted to provide to my students.”

Jennifer Maclean, Graduate Teacher, History



“Last Fall, I taught an Immunobiology course for undergraduate and graduate students. The course was “co-taught” by several different professors, with a different lecturer every week. The two other graduate teachers and I were the only consistent presence in the course. We prepared and graded weekly problem sets, taught discussion sections, and helped write and grade exams.

In my experience, science departments prioritize research over teaching and provide little support for graduate teachers. Despite my personal goal of teaching at a liberal arts college after I graduate, I often felt torn between strong pressures to focus on lab work and my own desire to provide high quality education.”

Robin Herlands, Graduate Teacher, Immunobiology



“One semester, I taught Religion in Modern America 1865-present even though my research is in Judaism from 300 BC to 600 AD. The Religious Studies Department needed TAs for this course and was not offering a course in my specialty.

I did my best to provide the students a good educational experience, but I had not taken a course in American History since high school. Although I developed the important skill of teaching something as I learned it, I know that the pedagogical experience for both my students and myself would have been stronger if I had been teaching in my area of expertise or they were learning from a scholar in American religious history.”

Ben Begleiter, Graduate Teacher, Religious Studies

Implications for Undergraduates

In 1993 the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) studied the impact of transient teachers on undergraduate education.

The increase in non-tenure-track appointments affects the quality of education as a whole and the stability of the profession in particular... The quality of education is at risk when the curriculum, advising, and instruction are not in the control of faculty to whom the institution has made the kinds of commitments that ensure scholarly development and recognition of performance.¹⁴

Transient teachers who do not have institutional support cannot provide the full academic experience when they are teaching a course. Without job security that ensures they will remain at Yale until their students graduate, transient teachers cannot form long-term mentoring relationships with their students. Undergraduates who do not meet regular faculty members through coursework have less informal access to these renowned scholars.

- Many transient teachers earn so little per course that they must teach more courses per semester than regular faculty, or work other non-teaching jobs in order to earn a living wage. This means they have less time and attention to focus on the needs of individual students.
- Transient teachers who have no institutional voice have no control over the number of students in their classes and cannot prevent a course or a section from being too big to facilitate sufficient interaction with their students.
- Graduate teachers are sometimes required to teach outside of their fields. Many of them learn the material only a week before they lead discussions of it. Regular faculty and graduate teachers who are teaching in their own specialties are more qualified to do the job.
- Undergraduates who do not have access to regular faculty resort to asking TAs and adjunct instructors (if they are still at Yale) to write letters of recommendation, letters that do not carry the same weight as recommendations from regular faculty.
- A key piece of university instruction is learning from those who are engaged in scholarly development, doing research in their fields of expertise. Teachers' research affects undergraduate education by raising new questions in their disciplines.



“I study world music, and Yale has only one professor on the faculty in that field. It’s not clear whether he’ll get tenure. If he goes on leave there will be no one to advise me on my senior essay. I rely constantly on graduate students and visiting faculty for academic support.”

Alek Felstiner, JE ‘04



“Last fall, one of my former students approached me requesting a letter of recommendation for her Fulbright fellowship application. I suggested that her application would be stronger with a letter from a faculty member. She said that none of the faculty in the History Department knew her well enough to write the letter. She hoped the two letters from faculty in another department would be enough.

Ultimately, I convinced the professor who lectured the course that I was teaching to co-sign a letter with me.”

Anita Seth, Graduate Teacher, History

“At the end of last year, I hoped that a lecturer from one of the two courses I had taken in my intended major—Political Science—could serve as my sophomore advisor.



I was disappointed to discover that both professors were non-ladder faculty who were leaving at the end of the year.”

Joshua Eidelson, JE '06

In limited circumstances, there are sound pedagogical reasons to employ graduate teachers and adjunct instructors. For example, an expert in an academic field who works outside the university setting is occasionally available to teach a course. Additionally, undergraduates can benefit from learning from a graduate student who is doing advanced research on the course topic. Graduate teachers are often closer to the undergraduate experience than senior faculty and can offer a different perspective that undergraduates can more easily understand. However, these examples are not the typical reason for Yale's overreliance on transient teachers. Furthermore, even in these cases graduate teachers and adjunct instructors should receive full institutional support for teaching undergraduates.

Pedagogically, the overreliance on transient teachers not only has a negative effect on undergraduate education but also on transient teachers—especially on graduate teachers.

Implications for Graduate Students

Many graduate students come to Yale to do research in their chosen fields with the expectation of becoming professors upon graduation. The time it takes to earn a doctoral degree exceeds the amount of time for which Yale provides funding. Furthermore, the trends over the past three decades have created a situation in which the teaching that graduate students do while earning their degrees allows universities to avoid hiring new faculty — the jobs graduate students hope to get upon graduation. For many graduate students, the completion of the Ph.D. marks the end, not the beginning, of a teaching career.

Despite an average time to degree in most departments of 5.5 to 8.5 years,¹⁵ Yale graduate students have guaranteed funding for only five years.¹⁶ Although normally workers' salaries increase with experience, at Yale, graduate students in the humanities and social sciences who teach after their fifth year actually receive less compensation than their less experienced colleagues.¹⁷ Yale's estimated cost of living for a single person in New Haven is over \$18,500 in 2003.¹⁸ Graduate teachers with families to support have an even higher cost of living. Meanwhile, graduate students and teachers in the humanities will earn \$16,000 this year if they are in their first five years of study including Yale's supplement to the teaching salary. Graduate students generally support themselves after their fifth year by teaching. As more experienced teachers, they can earn a maximum of only \$14,520.¹⁹ The gap between the salaries and the cost of living prevents graduate teachers from devoting their full efforts to completing their degrees during the months when they are not teaching.



“As a graduate teacher in a language department, I am the only instructor my students see during the course. I prepare, teach class and grade homework daily. I meet with them individually during “office” hours, though my “office” hours rotate from coffee shop to coffee shop depending on which one is least crowded. My dissertation research has virtually stopped in order to fulfill my teaching responsibilities.

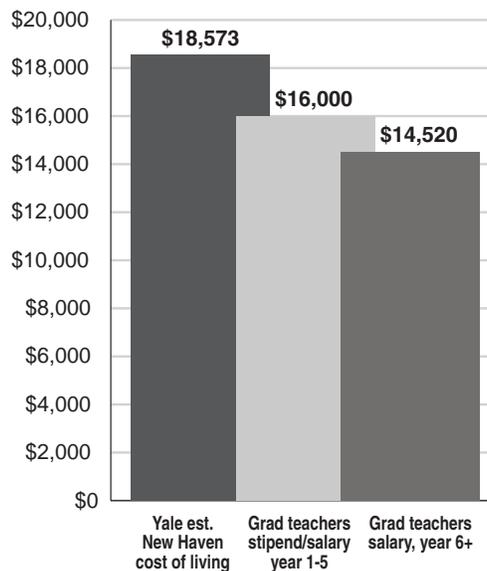
After four semesters of teaching beginning and intermediate French, Yale pays me less this semester than my colleagues who are teaching for the first time.”

Jeffrey Boyd, Graduate Teacher, French

In many departments at Yale, registration is limited to seven years. Graduate students who must finish their dissertations while no longer registered lose their health-care and library privileges and are required to begin repaying student loans.

After an extended term of teaching and dissertation research, many graduate students face bleak job prospects. The increased reliance on graduate teachers and adjunct instructors has meant that fewer professors need to be hired and, as a result, it is harder to find a tenure-track job after graduation. By 1997, there were 200,000 graduate teachers nationally, but only 114,000 junior faculty members.²⁰ In December 2002, the MLA reported a 19% decrease in new job openings in English and a 21% decrease in new job openings in foreign languages.²¹ The number of mathematics PhDs hired into tenure track jobs decreased by 19% from 2001 to 2002. A further drop is expected this year.²² Without tenure track jobs available, PhDs dedicated to teaching are forced into adjunct instructor positions.

Salaries and cost of living, 2003



The problems with this scenario are readily apparent, as are the solutions: hire more tenure-track faculty and improve the working conditions for transient teachers.

Solution 1: Hire more faculty

In May 2003, a joint committee of the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association endorsed for undergraduate education in History:

“That the following standards be recognized as the appropriate proportion for courses taught by part-time/adjunct faculty (including graduate students):

- Community Colleges: 30 percent; 40 percent maximum
- Four-Year Institutions: 10 percent; 20 percent maximum
- Research Institutions: 20 percent; 30 percent maximum”²³

In contrast to these standards, Yale’s History Department depends on transient teachers for 69% of its teaching.

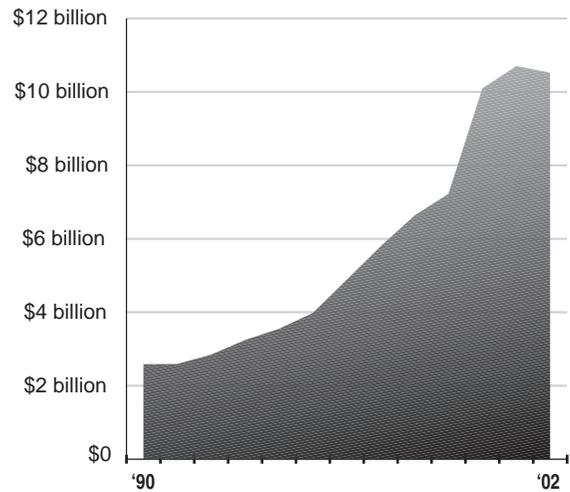
To meet these standards in the History department or other departments, Yale needs to hire more tenure and tenure track faculty. GESO has been calling upon Yale to hire more faculty since 1998 in its report on the shift in teaching at Yale, *Casual in Blue*. During Yale’s Tercentennial Celebration, GESO called on Yale to hire 100 new faculty. Yale’s 2003 Report on Yale College Education calls for a 10% increase in the number of faculty. While this amounts to about 60 new teaching positions, the report does not specify how many of the new hires would be regular faculty.²⁴ For the sake of undergraduate education, it is essential that the new positions are for tenure track faculty with job security and institutional support.

Yale can afford the cost of hiring new faculty. The university endowment has increased far beyond anyone’s expectations, growing from \$2.6 billion in 1990 to over \$11.0 billion in 2003.²⁵ (See graph on following page.) In addition, Yale tradi-

tionally has been successful at finding donors for many of its teaching programs, such as the Bass intensive writing program.²⁶

Even if Yale hires adequate numbers of new faculty, transient teachers—especially graduate teachers—will still fill an important role in undergraduate education. Therefore, the second solution requires turning transient teaching positions into good jobs, both for the sake of the teachers and for the undergraduates they educate.

Growth of Yale Endowment, 1990-2002



Solution 2: Improve Transient Teacher Working Conditions

In order to improve the education that transient teachers are able to provide, the university must address their working conditions and the institutional support they receive.

Key issues include:

- A year-round living wage that allows transient teachers to work only one job and to do research over the summer, as faculty do, either for graduate teachers to work towards their degrees, or for adjuncts to further their scholarly development and keep abreast of new insights in their fields;
- Limiting class sizes to allow real discussions in sections and to give teachers the opportunity to work one on one with each of their students;
- Office space where teachers can prepare for class, meet with students individually, and hold office hours, rather than meeting students ad hoc in noisy coffee shops;
- Pedagogical support for newer graduate teachers to help them master the art of teaching, and a voice in the curriculum for more experienced graduate students and adjunct instructors, allowing them to make full use of their talents when teaching undergraduates;
- Ensuring that teachers teach their subject of expertise. Students benefit from the experience and knowledge of an instructor or teaching assistant who is not only familiar with the course material, but is also invested in the field and is familiar with its most recent advances.
- A rational pay scale that compensates teachers who teach more students or more hours per week and rewards experience rather than penalizing experienced graduate teachers who have completed their fifth year of study;
- Affordable, comprehensive, health care for transient teachers and their families;
- Adequate English language training for international graduate students to help them more effectively communicate with their undergraduate students;
- Allocate teaching positions equitably to graduate teachers using equitable allocation of teaching positions;
- Job security that creates permanent jobs for adjunct instructors, allowing them greater academic freedom without fear of losing their jobs;
- A clear path for adjunct instructors to become full-time tenured faculty that does not penalize them for having been hired into adjunct positions.



Despite graduate students' consistent requests, the Yale administration has not, up to this point, adequately addressed the issues facing transient teachers. The best way to resolve the problems facing teaching assistants is through union representation and a binding contract with the university.

“Before coming to Yale, I was a teaching assistant for two semesters at an Australian university. I was able to join a union of university teachers and researchers. The union fostered structured dialogue between teachers and the administration thereby, facilitating two-way feedback and improving the quality of education. I am confident that the same would be true at Yale.”

Daniel Mulino, Graduate Teacher, Economics

Transient teachers at other research universities have come to the same conclusion. State university graduate student employee unions date back to the 1970s, and in 2001 NYU became the first private university to negotiate a contract with its graduate employees. Graduate teachers at Brown University, Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania have active unions seeking recognition. Unions of graduate teachers and adjunct instructors at public and private institutions have begun to address the issues facing transient teachers in their contracts.

Some of the issues graduate student employee unions have resolved include:

- Limits on workload;²⁷
- Written job descriptions in advance of starting a position;²⁸
- Class size maximums set by department committees of administration and union members/representatives;²⁹
- Pay increases for experience or advanced level of study;³⁰
- Paid teacher training;³¹
- For international graduate students: ESL fellowships covering room and board;³² a day off to go to the nearest consulate to vote in home country elections;³³
- Free or subsidized, low-cost health and dental care for dependents including spouses, domestic partners and children;³⁴
- Enforceable non-discrimination clauses.³⁵

The Future of Undergraduate Education

As Yale, Harvard, NYU and other universities look to reform undergraduate education, it is imperative they include in their discussions and plans the voices of all teachers at their institutions. Formalizing a multi-tiered system in which the teachers who have the most contact with undergraduates have the least institutional support undermines the values of a university education.

As dedicated teachers and scholars, we call upon Yale in particular and upon other leaders in the academy to make undergraduate education a priority and to respect the teachers who provide it. Through recognized unions and negotiated contracts, teachers can gain control over their working conditions and make it possible to provide the highest-quality education. Yale can lead the way by working with GESO to create a fair process for determining support for a union and by negotiating a contract to address the issues facing transient teachers.

Notes

1 NYT "The Academic Industrial Complex" by Felicia R. Lee, September 6, 2003 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/06/arts/06UNIV.html>

2 NYT "N.Y.U. President Says Teaching Isn't Such a Novel Idea" by Karen W. Arenson September 3, 2003 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/03/education/03NYU.html>

3 Report from the Committee on Yale College Education. <http://www.yale.edu/cyce/>

4 "Transient" faculty was coined by the American Association of University Professors. Linda Ray Pratt, "Disposable Faculty" cited in *Will Teach for Food*, ed. Cary Nelson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) p 265.

5 "A Yale Book of Numbers: Historical Statistics of the College and University 1701 - 1976", George W. Pierson, 1983 http://www.yale.edu/oir/book_numbers_original/a.pdf p11

6 Yale Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching in Yale College, "Prown Report" 1989, p6. "A number of departments have reduced the number of courses expected of full-time ladder faculty...This has also contributed to an increase in the amount of teaching done by graduate students."

7 Prown Report, p 6.

8 Casual in Blue, 1998, Graduate Employees and Students Organization. http://www.yaleunions.org/geso/pubs/Casual_in_Blue.PDF

9 The last year for which data is available is 1997. Prown Report, Appendix B.

10 Yale book of number update table I-1. Yale labels adjuncts "Non-ladder Faculty". The numbers include only the Faculty of Arts and Sciences which comprise the faculty that staffs Yale College.

11 Yale Fact Sheet online. Yale labels adjuncts "Non-ladder Faculty". The numbers include only the Faculty of Arts and Sciences which comprise the faculty that staffs Yale College. <http://www.yale.edu/oir/factsheet.html>

12 "A Yale Book of Numbers: 1976 - 2000" Edited by Beverly Waters, Yale Office of Institutional Research: October, 2001, Table I-1 http://www.yale.edu/oir/pierson_update.htm and Yale Fact Sheet.

13 US News & World Report counts part-time and adjunct instructors as 1/3 of a regular full-time faculty member when generating the faculty student ratio. See the Common Data Set. <http://www.commondataset.org/> also <http://www.commondataset.org/cds0203/cds2002.pdf>

14 The Status of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty, 1993, AAUP.

15 Most recent data available is 1997. Yale Book of Numbers: 1976-2000. Table F-5

16 http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/financial/general_info.html

17 "Graduate School of Arts and Sciences: Programs and Policies 2003-2004" Bulletin of Yale University, Series 99, No. 10, August 20, 2003, pp 420-421. and <http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/financial/index.html> Stipend support academic year 2003-2004 is \$16,000, for all graduate students in their first through fifth year, including graduate teachers. During the semesters that graduate students teach, they receive part of the money in salary and part as a stipend, to reach a total of \$16,000. Teaching salaries vary. Part-time acting instructors can make \$7260 per term as the sole teacher for the course. More commonly, graduate students teach two sections for a TF 4.0, which pays \$7160 per term for leading two discussion sections and doing all grading and providing student interactions.

18 Cost of living for one year, according to the Yale Graduate School Financial Aid office fact sheet is \$18,573. Yale's estimate of housing costs is below market rate, based on an informal survey of rents paid by graduate students.

19 Yale GSAS "Blue Book".

20 Ernst Benjamin, "Some Implications of Tenure for the Profession and Society," *Perspectives* (April 1997): 16.

21 Gabriela Montell, "A Dismal Market in English and Foreign Languages." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 20, 2002) <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2002/12/2002122002c.htm>

22 "Who's Hiring in Mathematics?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, By Jennifer Jacobson, July 24, 2003 <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2003/07/2003072401c.htm>

23 At their respective semiannual meetings, the OAH Executive Board (3-6 April 2003) and the AHA Council (3-4 May 2003) endorsed the "Joint Committee Standards for Part-time and Adjunct Faculty" <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2003aug/ptstandards.html>

24 Report from the Committee on Yale College Education. [http://www.yale.edu/cyce/ pp 58-62](http://www.yale.edu/cyce/pp58-62). Number of Faculty of Arts & Sciences Fall 2002 is 597 in tenured or term positions. <http://www.yale.edu/oir/factsheet.html>

25 The Yale Endowment, published by Yale University, FY 1990. "Yale Endowment valued at \$11 billion," Yale Press Release, 9/24/03, <http://www.yale.edu/opa/newsr/03-09-24-03.all.html>

26 In 1976, Yale received a grant from the Pew Memorial Trust, which was applied to the improvement and expansion of the freshman writing curriculum. Before that time, the college offered non-English majors only basic writing courses that doubled as introduction to literature; the grant money enabled the committee to design a program featuring courses that contain varying proportions of reading and writing. Five years later, under grants from the Bass family, the Newhouse Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation, Yale set up a new program to provide undergraduates with systematic instruction in expository writing. <http://www.yale.edu/bass/bwp.html>

27 Workload is usually specified by average hours per week or maximum hours per term per employee.

University of Kansas, Graduate Teaching Assistants' Coalition / KAPE / AFT Local 4565 <http://www.kugtac.org/contract.htm>,

University of Wisconsin, Teaching Assistants' Association / AFT Local 3220 <http://www.taa-madison.org/contract99-01.html>

University of Michigan, Graduate Employees Organization / AFT Local 3550, <http://www.umgeo.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=UpDownload&file=index&req=getit&lid=17>

University of California, UAW Local 2865, <http://www.uaw2865.org/contracts.html>

Oregon State University, Coalition of Graduate Employees / AFT Local 6069, <http://www.peak.org/~cge/docs/cgecontract1.pdf>

University of Iowa, UE Local 896/COGS, <http://www.cogs.org/contractsettlement.htm>

28 Kansas/KAPE, Wisconsin/TAA, Michigan/GEO, UC system/AGSE, Oregon State/CGE and Iowa/COGS

29 Michigan/GEO

30 Kansas/KAPE and Wisconsin/TAA. Examples of experience are third term teaching or ABD status.

31 sometimes required by the university, sometimes required by the contract (Michigan/GEO, UC system/AGSE)

32 Michigan/GEO

33 Oregon State/CGE

34 Michigan/GEO and Iowa/COGS

35 Kansas/KAPE, Wisconsin/TAA, Michigan/GEO, UC system/AGSE, Oregon State/CGE and Iowa/COGS. Non-discrimination clause enforcements include grievances or arbitration, without giving up legal recourse.