COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY TEACHING

UW undergraduate English majors who are thinking about teaching English at the college or university level should speak with an academic counselor or faculty adviser as soon as possible. Please see, also, our section on Preparing for Graduate School in English.

In general, candidates for college or university teaching need, at minimum, a master's degree in the field or discipline in which they plan to teach (e.g., English, biology, Arabic, American history, etc.). To be most competitive, those who are planning to teach at the college level typically earn their PhD degrees. While it is possible to be hired with a master's degree alone (more frequently at two-year colleges than at four-year institutions), the job market is highly competitive. Those with PhDs will be given much stronger consideration for any full-time or tenure-track teaching positions.

Many candidates with master's degrees alone have succeeded in securing college-level teaching positions; however, the majority of these positions are part time, do not offer much in the way of benefits, are contracted on a quarter-to-quarter basis, and cannot lead to tenure (are not "tenure track" positions), even if a teacher perseveres for years in a part-time position.

The "PhD rule" is less true for those aspiring to teach Creative Writing: many creative writing faculty members across the country do not have PhD degrees; however, they typically have at least one book published, and more often two or more books. They have also received many types of recognition for their work in the form of grants, prizes, awards, fellowships, and the like. However, creative writing teaching positions are even scarcer than English teaching positions in other areas.

On a national scale, the job market for academic jobs for PhDs in the Humanities has not been good. Each opening attracts dozens, sometimes hundreds, of well-qualified applicants. Thus, your reasons for pursuing a PhD in English should be scholarly or academic in nature as well as vocational. For more information, visit our pages, Why Go to Graduate School?, Preparing for Graduate School, and Career Information for English Majors.

Another area of English teaching that does not typically require a PhD degree is the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The UW does offer a terminal master's program in TESOL (called the MATESOL degree). Graduates of the MATESOL program are prepared to teach ESOL (a.k.a. ELL, EFL, ESL) at the college level in the United States, and, as this is a growing field, job prospects are brighter than for those with master's degrees in other disciplines. Applicants to the MATESOL program generally have some classroom (teaching or volunteer) experience with TESOL, have lived or taught abroad, are conversant in at least one language other than English, and have a commitment to TESOL. For more information, visit the MATESOL Program information in the English Graduate Studies web site.

For those who hope to teach English abroad, no specific training has been standardized. For more information about teaching English abroad, click here.