

Report on the *MLA Job Information List*, 2008–09

MLA Office of Research

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Report on the MLA *Job Information List*, 2008–09

The financial crisis of 2008 made its consequences painfully evident in the 2008–09 MLA *Job Information List* (*JIL*). After trending upward between 2003–04 and 2007–08, the number of jobs advertised in the *JIL* in 2008–09 declined since 2007–08 by 446 (24.4%) in English and 453 (27.0%) in foreign languages. In the English edition 1,202 ads announced 1,380 jobs; in the foreign language edition 1,106 ads announced 1,227 jobs (ads that departments later marked “search canceled” have been excluded from these counts). In both numerical and percentage terms, this year’s declines mark the largest single-year decreases in the thirty-four-year history of the *JIL* counts.

Figure 1 shows the trend lines for the number of jobs advertised in the *JIL*’s English and foreign language editions from 1975–76 to 2008–09. Despite this year’s severe declines, departments advertised more positions in 2008–09 than in the trough year 1993–94, when 1,075 openings were advertised in the English edition (305 [22.1%] fewer than 2008–09) and 1,047 were advertised in the foreign language edition (180 [14.7%] fewer than 2008–09). Over more than three decades the number of jobs has mirrored the cycles of recession and expansion in the economy.

In the face of the sharp drops in the number of jobs advertised, the distribution of positions by tenure status, rank, and field remains close to recent norms, as measured by the way departments index their ads—although most recently somewhat higher percentages of ads have been tagged non-tenure-track or have left the tenure status of positions unspecified. Figure 2 (English edition) and figure 3 (foreign language edition) show how ads have been tagged for tenure status over the five years 2004–05 to 2008–09. The percentage of ads tagged as announcing tenure-track positions has ranged from just under 75% to just under 80% in the English edition and from just under 60% to just under 65% in the foreign language edition. As shown in figures 4 and 5, ads tagged with the two index terms tenure-track and assistant professor have consistently made up between 52% and 57% of all ads published in the English edition (fig. 4) and between 41% and 46% of all ads published in the foreign language edition (fig. 5). An additional 11% to 12% of ads in the English edition and 8% to 10% of ads in the foreign language edition are indexed as tenure-track and assistant professor along with another rank (instructor, associate professor, or professor).

In the foreign language edition, the percentage decline in ads for non-tenure-track positions (32.3%, or 186 ads) was even more severe than the decline in ads for tenure-track positions (26.2%, or 237 ads). Consequently, the percentage of ads tagged tenure-track and assistant professor was somewhat higher in the foreign language edition this year than last (45.2% as compared with 41.7%), even as the number of such ads decreased.

Figures 6 and 7 show the number of jobs advertised in the list’s English and foreign language editions, respectively, broken out for each of the five seasonal issues. As the two figures indicate, in both English and foreign languages the percentage drops from 2007–08 to 2008–09 grew larger with each issue, from October to Summer. In foreign languages, the October 2008 issue was only 5.8%, or 26 jobs, smaller than the October 2007 issue; in English, the October 2008 issue was 11.6%, or 70 jobs, smaller. The December and February issues of the English edition were 24.9% and 24.8%, or 113 and 99 jobs, smaller, respectively, than the same issues of the previous year; the April and Summer issues were 47.3% and 42.0%, or 78 and 86 jobs, smaller. In foreign languages, the December and February issues were 28.5% and 27.5%, or 122 and 100 jobs, smaller, respectively, than the

same issues of the previous year; the April and Summer issues were 52.2% and 42.2%, or 108 and 97 jobs, smaller.

As shown in figures 2 and 3, a larger share of ads was tagged non-tenure-track in 2006–07 and 2007–08, than in the two prior years. Figures 4 and 5 show that the percentage decreases through 2007–08 in ads tagged for tenure-track assistant professor were driven by increases in the number of ads tagged non-tenure-track rather than decreases in the number tagged for tenure-track assistant professor. In English, ads tagged non-tenure-track numbered 270 in 2004–05 and 354 in 2007–08; ads tagged tenure-track assistant professor numbered 850 in 2004–05 and 877 in 2007–08. In foreign languages, ads tagged non-tenure-track numbered 417 in 2004–05 and 576 in 2007–08; ads tagged tenure-track assistant professor numbered 556 in 2004–05 and 634 in 2007–08. It is not possible to know on the basis of data from the *JIL* whether the recent increases in ads for non-tenure-track positions indicate increases in departments' use of full-time non-tenure-track faculty appointments or only increased use of the *JIL* to announce and fill such positions. Data from United States Department of Education surveys presented in two 2008 MLA reports, *Demography of the Faculty* and *Education in the Balance* (Laurence; 2007 ADE Ad Hoc Committee), document how since 1995, in both four-year and two-year institutions, large increases in the full- and part-time non-tenure-track segments of the faculty dwarf the negligible growth in the tenure-track ranks.

Virtually all positions announced in the *JIL* are full time, and the *JIL* thus affords no insight into the scale of departments' hiring of part-time faculty members. The number of ads tagged as openings for full-time tenure-track assistant professors and non-tenure-track instructors does serve as a valuable source of data about opportunities for full-time entry level academic employment in four-year institutions available to new and recent graduates of PhD programs. (Few two-year colleges use the *JIL* to advertise openings on their faculties.) Ads tagged as both tenure track and assistant professor have consistently since 2004–05 made up about 55% of the year's total in English (fig. 4) and 44% in foreign languages (fig. 5). An additional 12% of ads in the English edition and 9% of ads in the foreign language edition, on average, are tagged as both tenure track and assistant professor in combination with another rank category (instructor, associate professor, or professor).

Table 1 (English) and table 2 (foreign languages) show in more detail how departments have tagged their ads using the four index terms for rank—instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor—across the nine years from 2000–01 to 2008–09. Tables 3 and 4 show detail for how listings have been tagged for field specialization across the nine years from 2000–01 to 2008–09. Because departments use multiple index terms to tag their ads, the number of ads tagged with the various field index terms adds to a total greater than the total number of ads published. The percentage values represent the percentage of published ads tagged using any given index term and show considerable consistency over time compared with fluctuations in the number of ads. Across the nine years roughly 30% of ads in the English edition have been tagged with the terms composition and rhetoric, British literature, and American literature (including African American literature). Tagging of ads in the foreign language edition shows somewhat more change: the percentage of ads tagged for Spanish has dropped from close to 50% to 43%, while the percentage tagged for Chinese has grown from between 2% and 4% to between 6% and 8%.

David Laurence
Director of Research

Works Cited

Laurence, David. *Demography of the Faculty: A Statistical Portrait of English and Foreign Languages*. MLA, 2008. Web. 4 Sept. 2009.

2007 ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing. *Education in the Balance: A Report on the Academic Workforce in English*. MLA, 2008. Web. 4 Sept. 2009.

Fig. 1. Total Number of Positions Advertised in the MLA *Job Information List* , 1975–76 to 2008–09

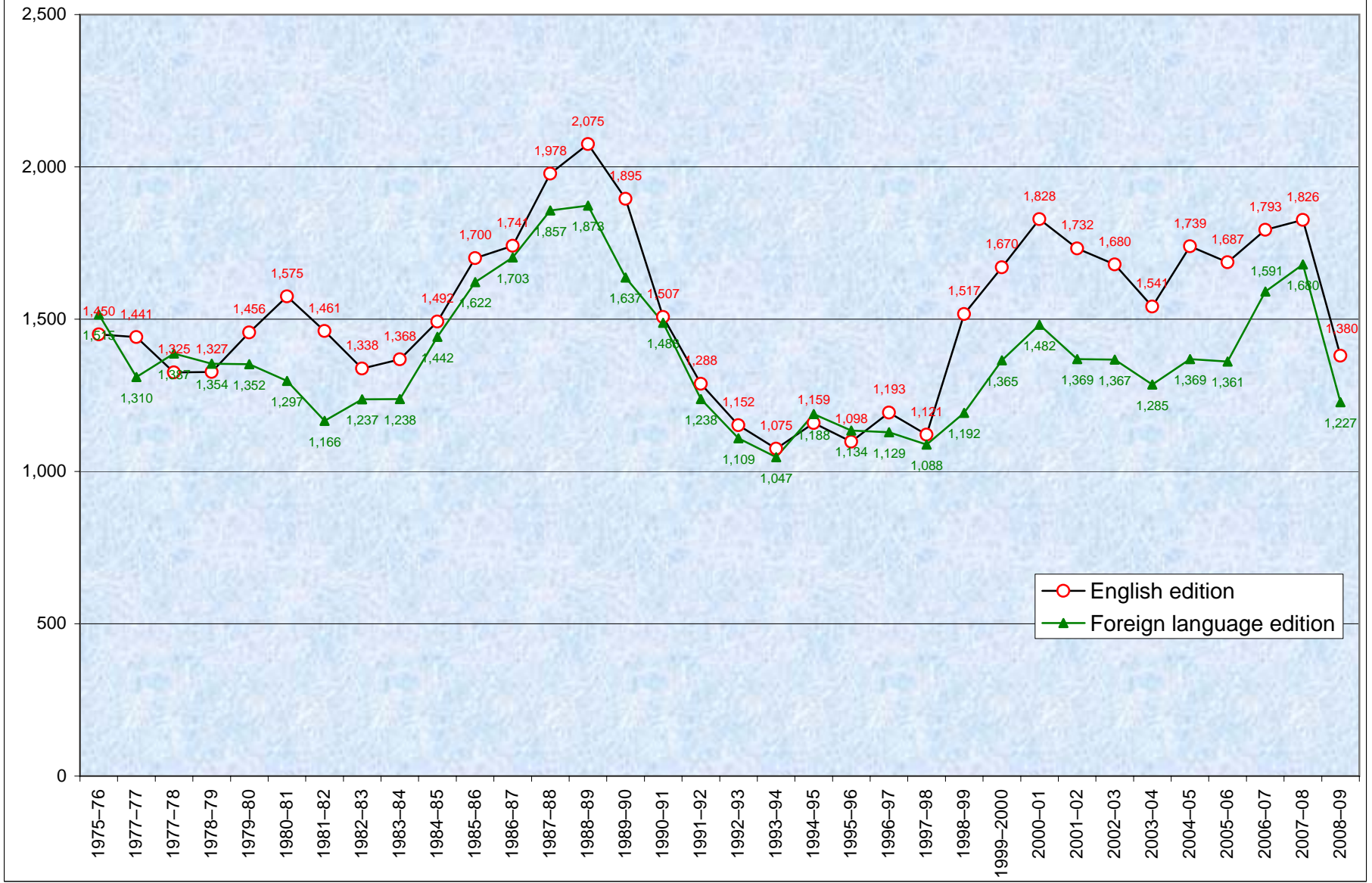


Fig. 2. Number and Percentage of Ads Indexed as Tenure-Track, Non-Tenure-Track, or with Tenure Status Not Specified in the English *JIL*, 2004–05 to 2008–09

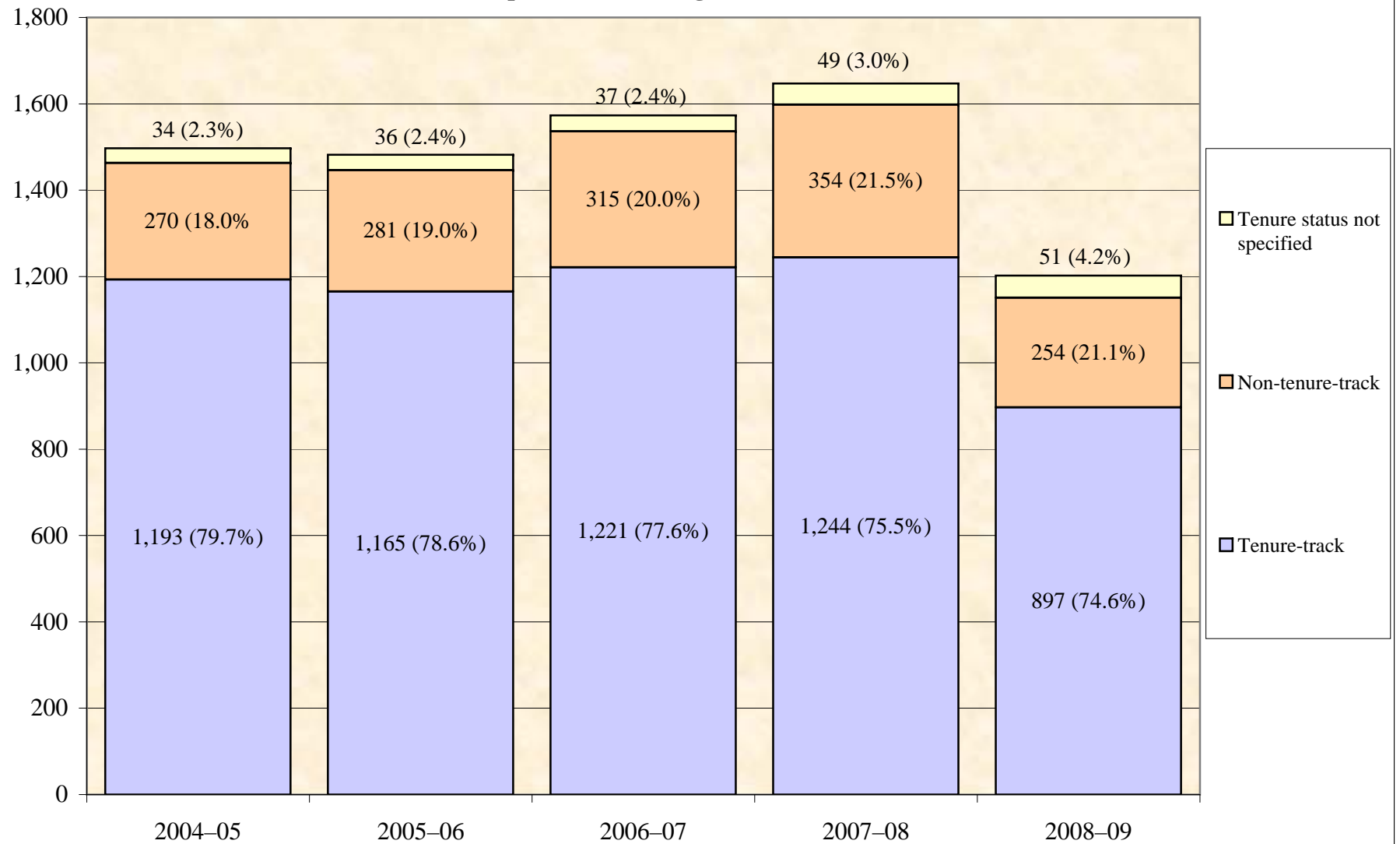
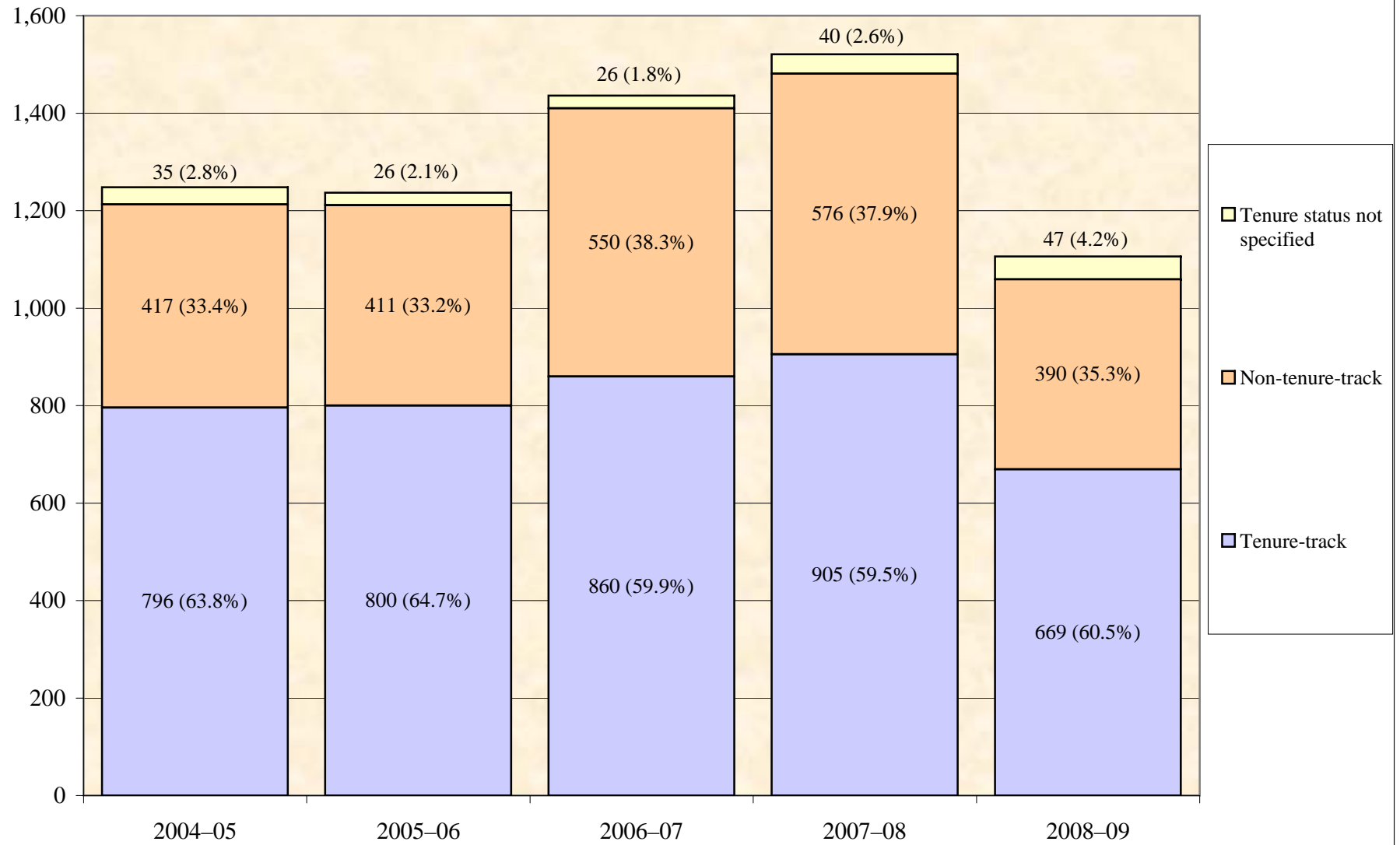


Fig. 3. Number and Percentage of Ads Indexed as Tenure-Track, Non-Tenure-Track, or with Tenure Status Not Specified in the Foreign Language *JIL* , 2004–05 to 2008–09



**Fig. 4. Number and Percentage of Ads Indexed for Tenure Status and Rank
in the English *JIL* , 2004–05 to 2008–09**

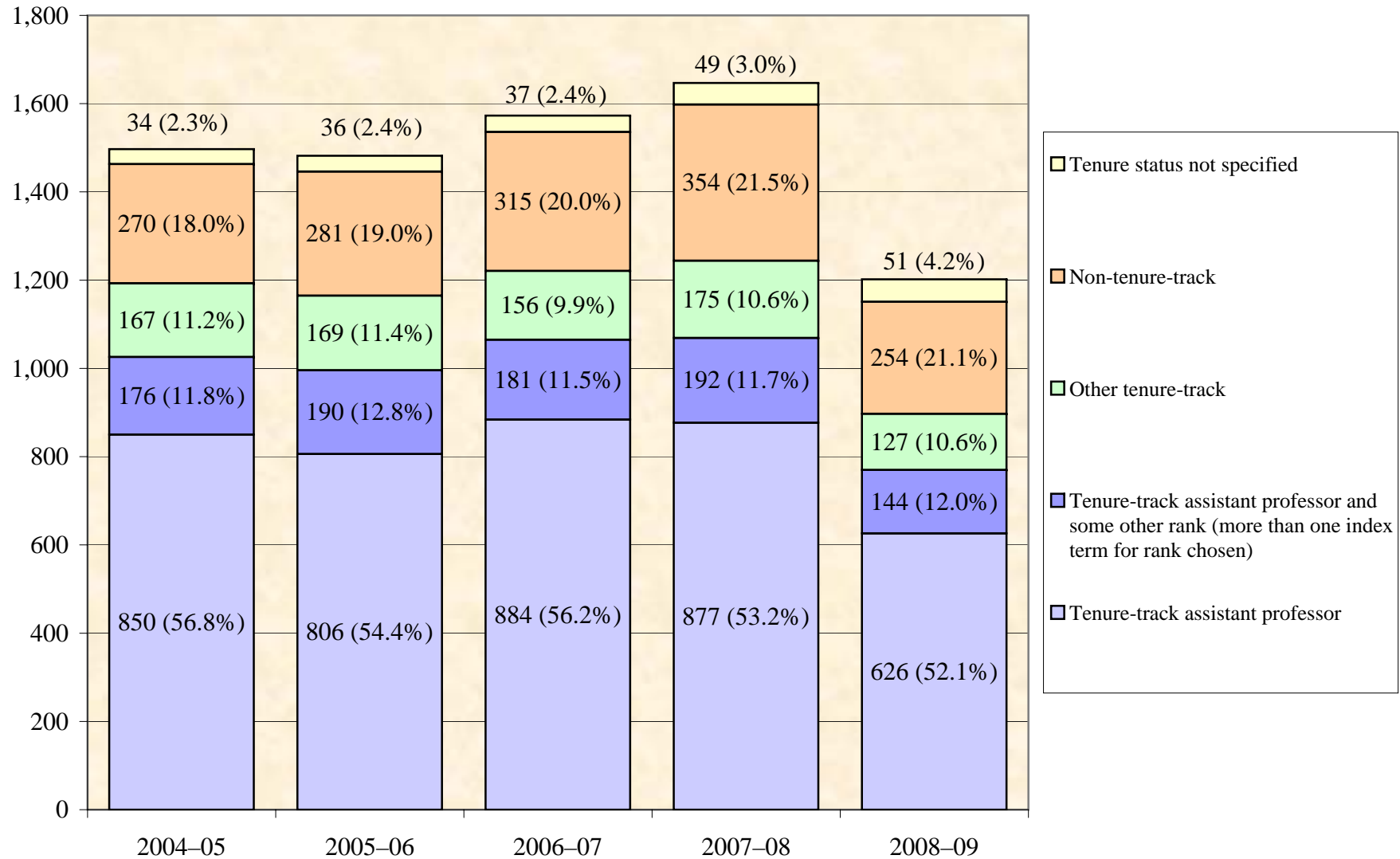


Fig. 5. Number and Percentage of Ads Indexed for Tenure Status and Rank in the Foreign Language *JIL* , 2004–05 to 2008–09

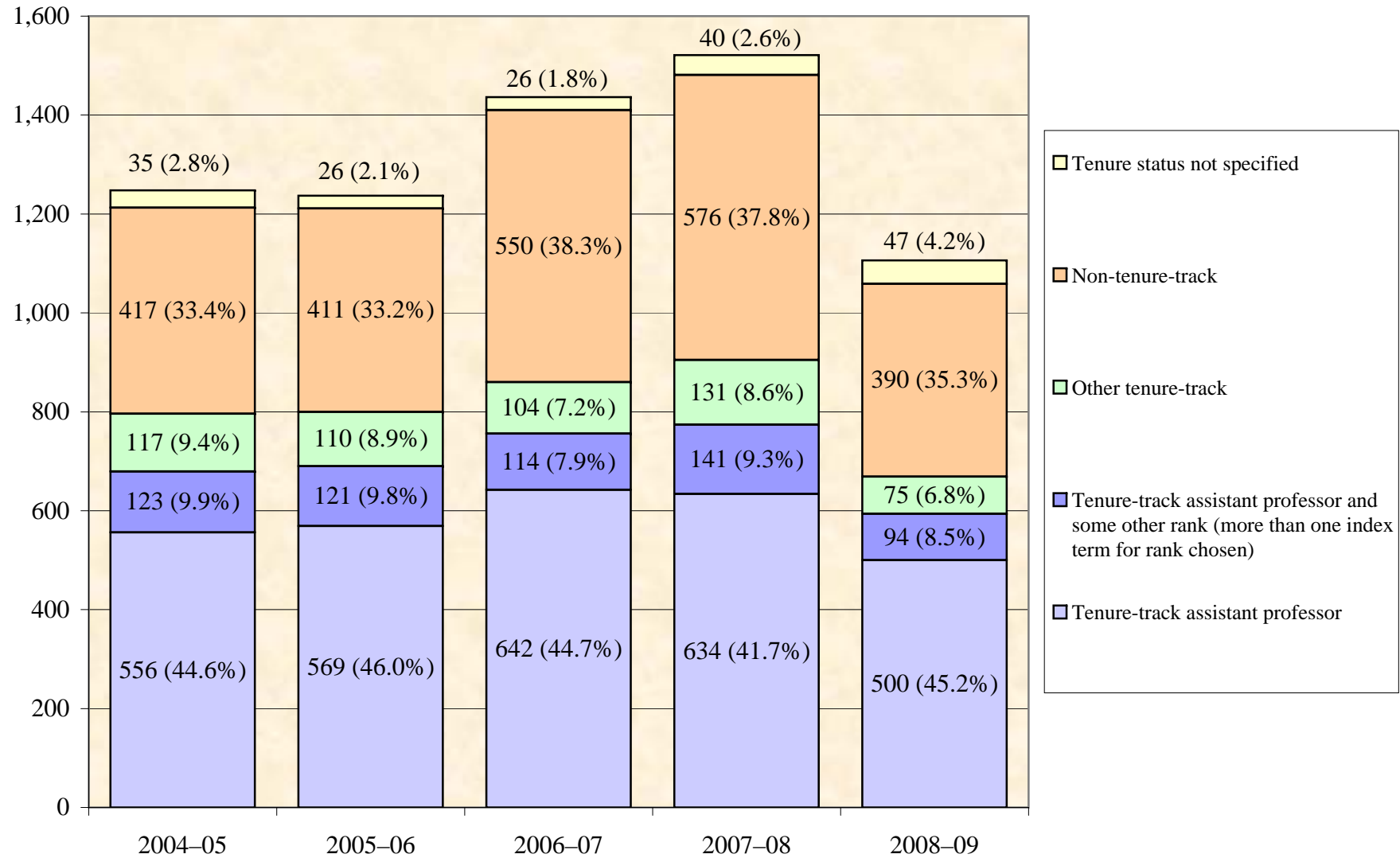


Fig. 6. Trends in the Number of Positions Advertised in the Five Seasonal Issues of the English *JIL*, 1975–76 to 2008–09

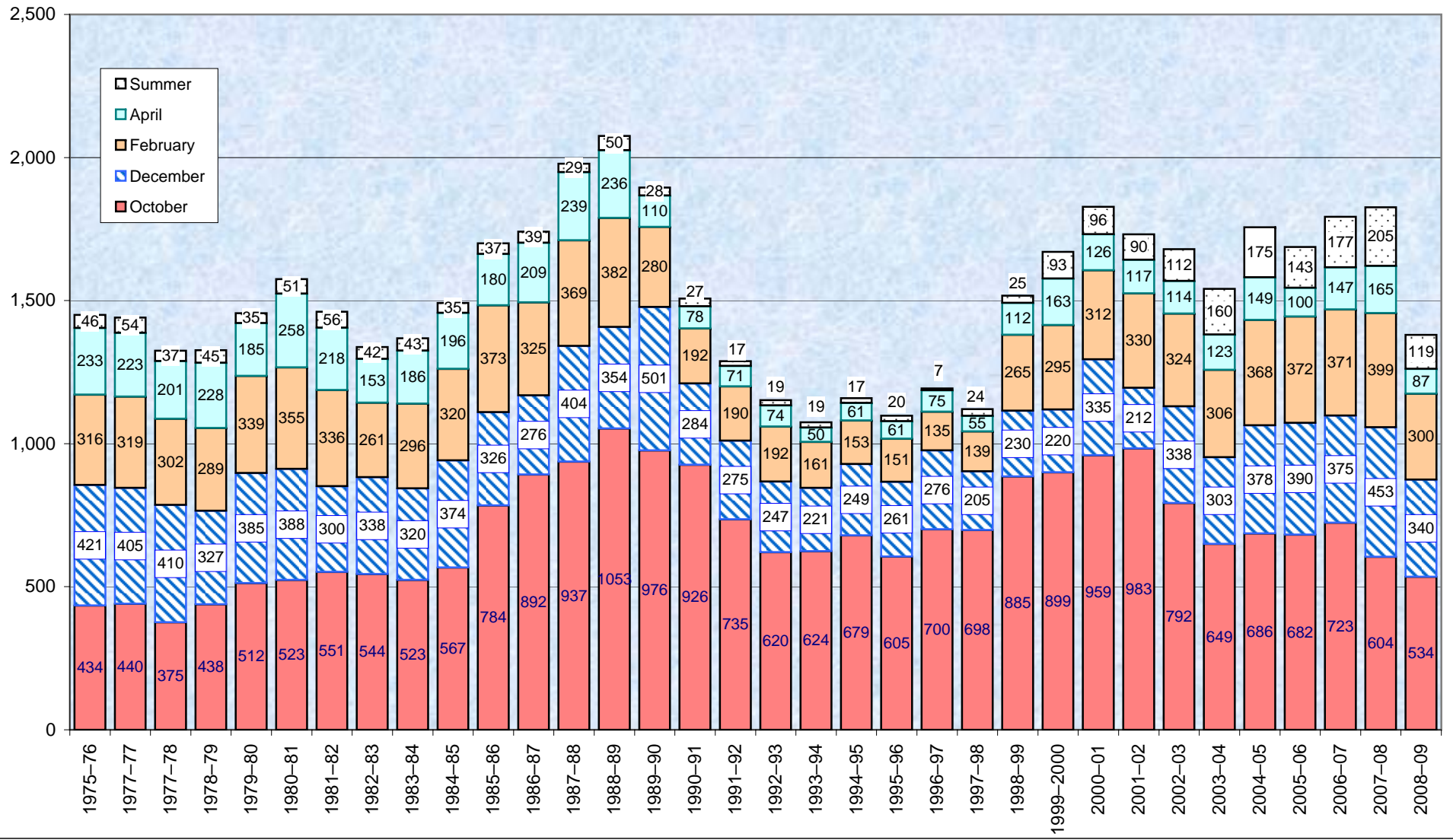


Fig. 7. Trends in the Number of Positions Advertised in the Five Seasonal Issues of the Foreign Language *JIL*, 1975–76 to 2008–09

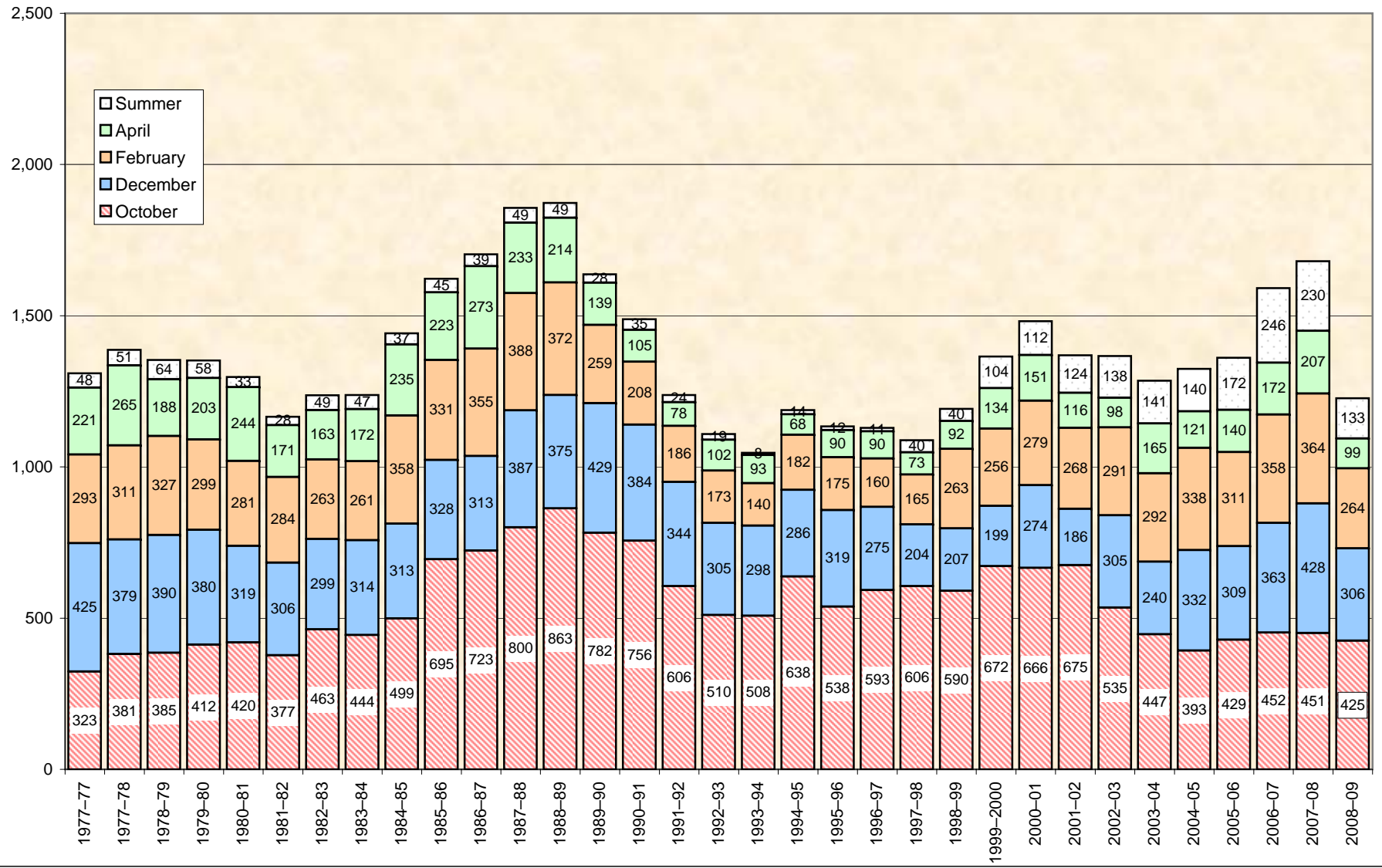


Table 3. Field Specializations Called for in Ads Published in the English *JIL*, 2000–01 to 2008–09, as Indicated by the Index Terms Departments Select to Classify Their Ads

Index Term Selected to Classify Ad	2000–01		2001–02		2002–03		2003–04		2004–05		2005–06		2006–07		2007–08		2008–09	
	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads
Composition and rhetoric	499	30.8	492	32.0	417	29.0	400	29.4	484	32.3	438	29.6	458	29.1	529	32.1	374	31.1
Technical and business writing	187	11.5	154	10.0	142	9.9	116	8.5	155	10.4	146	9.9	129	8.2	135	8.2	92	7.7
Creative writing	230	14.2	250	16.3	205	14.3	206	15.1	206	13.8	220	14.8	236	15.0	241	14.6	190	15.8
British literature	499	30.8	453	29.5	411	28.6	381	28.0	363	24.2	364	24.6	443	28.2	473	28.7	362	30.1
American literature	438	27.0	365	23.7	344	24.0	332	24.4	312	20.8	311	21.0	377	24.0	364	22.1	277	23.0
Literature in English other than British or American	221	13.6	199	12.9	181	12.6	174	12.8		0.0		0.0	186	11.8	122	7.4	118	9.8
African American literature	204	12.6	160	10.4	157	10.9	149	10.9	131	8.8	139	9.4	162	10.3	131	8.0	103	8.6
Other minority literatures	230	14.2	182	11.8	176	12.3	159	11.7	123	8.2	146	9.9	176	11.2	127	7.7	106	8.8
Postcolonial literature									117	7.8	122	8.2	138	8.8	109	6.6	113	9.4
World literature									126	8.4	130	8.8	155	9.9	121	7.3	113	9.4
Comparative literature	223	13.7	229	14.9	258	18.0	234	17.2	173	11.6	189	12.8	222	14.1	257	15.6	198	16.5
Generalist	249	15.4	211	13.7	164	11.4	170	12.5	182	12.2	175	11.8	172	10.9	232	14.1	120	10.0
Criticism, theory									94	6.3	85	5.7	105	6.7	113	6.9	88	7.3
Cultural studies									148	9.9	178	12.0	174	11.1	194	11.8	146	12.1
Film									73	4.9	95	6.4	105	6.7	107	6.5	80	6.7
Technology and digital media							105	7.7	98	6.5	126	8.5	154	9.8	174	10.6	108	9.0
Interdisciplinary									156	10.4	163	11.0	165	10.5	180	10.9	128	10.6
English education	128	7.9	134	8.7	109	7.6	101	7.4	100	6.7	93	6.3	116	7.4	129	7.8	110	9.2
Linguistics and ESL	179	11.0	176	11.4	155	10.8	134	9.8	184	12.3	165	11.1	143	9.1	220	13.4	147	12.2
Other fields of specialization	269	16.6	307	20.0	340	23.7	329	24.2	90	6.0	218	14.7	311	19.8	352	21.4	271	22.5
Department chair	53	3.3	54	3.5	36	2.5	56	4.1	40	2.7	58	3.9	130	8.3	147	8.9	109	9.1
Other administrative	93	5.7	92	6.0	68	4.7	79	5.8	156	10.4	150	10.1						
Nonacademic	29	1.8	24	1.6	17	1.2	14	1.0	19	1.3	9	0.6	22	1.4	23	1.4	3	0.2
Spanish	29	1.8	35	2.3	29	2.0	18	1.3	27	1.8	16	1.1	22	1.4	35	2.1	31	2.6
Latin America	16	1.0	21	1.4	25	1.7	18	1.3	13	0.9	11	0.7	16	1.0	15	0.9	12	1.0
Portuguese	6	0.4	8	0.5	4	0.3	5	0.4	6	0.4	1	0.1	6	0.4	6	0.4	3	0.2
French	16	1.0	18	1.2	17	1.2	13	1.0	16	1.1	10	0.7	11	0.7	29	1.8	29	2.4
Francophone studies	5	0.3	6	0.4	10	0.7	9	0.7	3	0.2	5	0.3	8	0.5	6	0.4	6	0.5
Italian	7	0.4	2	0.1	6	0.4	6	0.4	6	0.4	1	0.1	6	0.4	6	0.4	6	0.5
Germanic and Scandinavian	11	0.7	18	1.2	11	0.8	9	0.7	12	0.8	11	0.7	16	1.0	26	1.6	24	2.0
Russian and Slavic	2	0.1	19	1.2	4	0.3	4	0.3	6	0.4	2	0.1	3	0.2	6	0.4	8	0.7
Arabic	2	0.1	10	0.7	5	0.3	3	0.2	6	0.4	9	0.6	16	1.0	13	0.8	10	0.8
Hebrew	3	0.2	9	0.6	5	0.3	2	0.1	5	0.3	7	0.5	9	0.6	11	0.7	6	0.5
Classical	5	0.3	12	0.8	9	0.6	5	0.4	4	0.3	8	0.5	6	0.4	8	0.5	6	0.5
Chinese	5	0.3	14	0.9	13	0.9	7	0.5	5	0.3	10	0.7	16	1.0	6	0.4	9	0.7
Japanese	6	0.4	6	0.4	8	0.6	7	0.5	7	0.5	10	0.7	13	0.8	4	0.2	3	0.2
Other languages	19	1.2	19	1.2	13	0.9	27	2.0	25	1.7	26	1.8	27	1.7	19	1.2	19	1.6
Total number of ads	1,622		1,538		1,436		1,362		1,497		1,482		1,573		1,647		1,202	

Notes

Departments may use multiple index terms to classify their ads; therefore the number of ads indexed for various field specialties adds up to a total greater than the number of ads published.

The list of terms available for departments to index their ads has varied from year to year; blank cells indicate years when a given term was not available.

In any given year some 200 to 300 ads call for specializations in both English and foreign languages and appear in both the English and foreign language editions; both English and foreign language index terms are available to classify these ads.

Table 4. Field Specializations Called for in Ads Published in the Foreign Language *JIL*, 2000–01 to 2008–09, as Indicated by the Index Terms Departments Select to Classify Their Ads

Index Term Selected to Classify Ad	2000–01		2001–02		2002–03		2003–04		2004–05		2005–06		2006–07		2007–08		2008–09	
	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads	Number of Ads	Percentage of Ads
Spanish	667	48.4	623	49.7	575	45.8	537	45.7	581	46.6	562	45.4	614	42.8	664	43.7	476	43.0
Latin America	185	13.4	166	13.2	169	13.5	147	12.5	174	13.9	159	12.9	166	11.6	179	11.8	134	12.1
Portuguese	28	2.0	40	3.2	32	2.5	36	3.1	36	2.9	34	2.7	47	3.3	48	3.2	33	3.0
French	259	18.8	222	17.7	224	17.8	192	16.3	244	19.6	208	16.8	255	17.8	251	16.5	182	16.5
Francophone studies	52	3.8	49	3.9	57	4.5	47	4.0	63	5.0	49	4.0	75	5.2	73	4.8	64	5.8
Italian	100	7.3	73	5.8	84	6.7	76	6.5	89	7.1	72	5.8	106	7.4	100	6.6	75	6.8
Germanic and Scandinavian	157	11.4	159	12.7	121	9.6	138	11.7	137	11.0	136	11.0	157	10.9	179	11.8	127	11.5
Russian and Slavic	46	3.3	59	4.7	52	4.1	44	3.7	37	3.0	47	3.8	30	2.1	36	2.4	49	4.4
Arabic	17	1.2	21	1.7	24	1.9	30	2.6	41	3.3	57	4.6	72	5.0	60	3.9	60	5.4
Chinese	40	2.9	54	4.3	59	4.7	30	2.6	32	2.6	53	4.3	108	7.5	91	6.0	80	7.2
Japanese	41	3.0	49	3.9	38	3.0	30	2.6	40	3.2	49	4.0	55	3.8	39	2.6	34	3.1
Hebrew	14	1.0	18	1.4	14	1.1	12	1.0	12	1.0	15	1.2	16	1.1	19	1.2	15	1.4
Classical	18	1.3	19	1.5	25	2.0	11	0.9	10	0.8	11	0.9	9	0.6	16	1.1	11	1.0
Other languages	46	3.3	55	4.4	45	3.6	55	4.7	52	4.2	70	5.7	69	4.8	75	4.9	64	5.8
Linguistics and ESL	227	16.5	206	16.4	201	16.0	158	13.4	217	17.4	196	15.8	177	12.3	234	15.4	153	13.8
Comparative literature	189	13.7	191	15.2	248	19.7	216	18.4	155	12.4	196	15.8	193	13.4	251	16.5	188	17.0
World literature									33	2.6	39	3.2	47	3.3	44	2.9	39	3.5
Cultural studies									75	6.0	68	5.5	63	4.4	89	5.9	63	5.7
Postcolonial literature									15	1.2	18	1.5	22	1.5	24	1.6	24	2.2
Criticism, theory									35	2.8	22	1.8	26	1.8	41	2.7	40	3.6
Film									21	1.7	20	1.6	22	1.5	49	3.2	31	2.8
Technology and digital media							69	5.9	57	4.6	55	4.4	70	4.9	87	5.7	45	4.1
Interdisciplinary									68	5.4	61	4.9	80	5.6	96	6.3	66	6.0
Generalist	274	19.9	258	20.6	228	18.2	154	13.1	139	11.1	135	10.9	102	7.1	91	6.0	74	6.7
Department chair	46	3.3	45	3.6	50	4.0	61	5.2	57	4.6	64	5.2	107	7.5	116	7.6	78	7.1
Other administrative	30	2.2	26	2.1	14	1.1	30	2.6	73	5.8	49	4.0		0.0				
American literature	36	2.6	44	3.5	39	3.1	31	2.6	33	2.6	24	1.9	29	2.0	38	2.5	47	4.2
African American literature	33	2.4	14	1.1	30	2.4	21	1.8	18	1.4	12	1.0	12	0.8	15	1.0	17	1.5
Other minority literatures	40	2.9	43	3.4	58	4.6	44	3.7	39	3.1	33	2.7	42	2.9	33	2.2	26	2.4
British literature	28	2.0	35	2.8	25	2.0	21	1.8	28	2.2	18	1.5	18	1.3	39	2.6	44	4.0
Literature in English other than British or American	27	2.0	41	3.3	45	3.6	39	3.3		0.0		0.0	19	1.3	24	1.6	23	2.1
Composition and rhetoric	18	1.3	12	1.0	10	0.8	12	1.0	12	1.0	13	1.1	10	0.7	17	1.1	7	0.6
Technical and business writing	4	0.3	1	0.1	3	0.2	1	0.1	2	0.2	1	0.1	2	0.1	2	0.1	1	0.1
Creative writing	8	0.6	16	1.3	10	0.8	12	1.0	4	0.3	4	0.3	10	0.7	6	0.4	5	0.5
English education	14	1.0	12	1.0	4	0.3	7	0.6	2	0.2	6	0.5	12	0.8	13	0.9	11	1.0
Other fields of specialization	157	11.4	203	16.2	236	18.8	242	20.6	107	8.6	184	14.9	257	17.9	287	18.9	212	19.2
Nonacademic	31	2.2	26	2.1	19	1.5	15	1.3	14	1.1	10	0.8	17	1.2	16	1.1	3	0.3
Total number of ads	1,379		1,253		1,256		1,176		1,248		1,237		1,436		1,521		1,106	

Notes

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