Comparative Literature Graduate Association

In Lieu of the General Meeting – Panel

“The Job Market: Challenges and Opportunities”

Wednesday, October 21, 2015

3:30 p.m.

Business Education Complex 1720

Start Time: 3:33 p.m.

Attendees: No formal attendance was taken. An informal survey, however, found that the following individuals were present: Dr. Benjamin Kahan, Dr. Sunny Yang, Ms. Ashley Stevens, Dr. Adelaide Russo, Dr. Solimar Otero, Dr. Gundela Hachmann, Guillermo Severiche, Mason Hess, José Rojas (Nano), Lázara Bolton, Vida Owusu-Boateng, Agnès Dengreville, Pengyi Huang, Amy Catania, Jingyuan Liu, Anna Ciamparella, Gabriela Puscama, Marianna Olivares, Kristina Gibby, Thana Mohammed Al-Shakhs, Gina Breen, Tara Smithson

Old Business: None

New Business:

1. Dr. Sunny Yang, who currently holds a PhD in English and whose interests include race, law, and literature, began the panel.

2. The first item that she emphasized was gathering the appropriate materials, including the cover letter, a CV, a project description, a teaching statement, and a writing sample. This should be done the summer prior to beginning the job search.

3. Dr. Yang suggested that students create a group consisting of people not currently in their fields. Three to four people is ideal. The group should be comprised of compelling and intelligent people who can critique each other’s work effectively. When interviewing for a job, the people conducting the interview often have little to no knowledge of the interviewee’s field, so providing information in an comprehensive manner for outsiders is really important, and thus having individuals in the group who are outside of one’s field is very important. The group should meet about once a week and work on a different item every week. For example, in week 1, the group might work on the cover letter. On week 2, the group would work on the CV, and so forth. The cover letter and the teaching statement should be tailored to each institution, so modifications are necessary, but the base product stays the same. The writing sample should be compelling and something on which the candidate is willing to do a job talk. It is especially important to have three different versions of the writing sample, including a 12-15 page version, a 20-25 page version, and a 25-30 page version.

4. Dr. Yang’s second part of the presentation concerned getting organized, especially considering the sheer number of jobs to which a candidate applies. Dr. Yang suggests using an Excel spreadsheet organized by the due date for the materials. She emphasized that the MLA job list comes out in mid-September. Dr. Yang also suggested Chronicle Vitae and the Academic Jobs Wiki. The latter has to be refreshed often, but is an especially good source of information, as some universities do not refresh their job listings as often as the website does.

5. The final part of Dr. Yang’s talk involved what she humorously termed, “Random Important Parts.” Dr. Yang emphasized saving about $300 or so for documents and application fees. She also emphasized being very real with oneself. Ask yourself what you are willing to do and where you are willing to go. Finally, Dr. Yang explained the importance of taking time for one’s self. The process of applying for jobs can be very stressful, so taking time to pamper one’s self is very important for keeping sane.

6. Dr. Benjamin Kahan is a professor in both the English Department and in the Women’s and Gender Studies program. He explained that the English department runs a workshop on job market skills every year and that Comparative Literature students are welcome to attend these workshops.

7. Like Dr. Yang, Dr. Kahan emphasized getting organized. He reminded students that they need to ask their committee members far in advance for letters of recommendation. He also discussed the importance of getting letters from people outside of one’s committee, as this helps a candidate stand out. One letter that you might consider procuring is one from an individual met at a conference, which demonstrates the stature of one’s work in the field.

8. Dr. Kahan briefly mentioned a service called Interfolio. It is important for candidates to subscribe to this service.

9. In addition to the job sites that Dr. Yang discussed, Dr. Kahan also suggested the National Women’s Studies Association and the American Studies website. He reiterated the importance of the Academic Jobs Wiki.

10. Dr. Kahan suggested looking at sample materials so that candidates know what to imitate. He then went into details about the cover letter, which he described as, “generically strict.” The first paragraph describes who you are, what job you are applying for, where you found the job listing, and when you are going to defend your dissertation. You want to pick a defense time that is strategic for going on the job market. The second paragraph is a tight, clear dissertation paragraph that is light on jargon and describes the importance of the project for your field. Dr. Kahan emphasized the “They say, I say” model. The third paragraph should articulate a second book project. This could be a collection of essays, rather than necessarily a whole book. The fourth paragraph is the teaching paragraph, including how you teach, the atmosphere of the classroom, and a brief example of an assignment. The fifth paragraph is the service paragraph. If you are an officer of an organization, hold an elected position in a national organization, etc., this information goes in the fifth paragraph. The sixth paragraph is the concluding paragraph and is as robotic as the introductory paragraph.

10. With regard to the CV, Dr. Kahan described how you should highlight those items that set you apart and attempt to hide your weaknesses.

11. Dr. Kahan also explain that the abstract of your dissertation should be a maximum of two pages. He described this document as a kind of fictional document in that you want to make your dissertation sound good. He compared it to a movie trailer. You want the committee to buy a ticket and maybe some popcorn, too.

12. After you send off your materials, if you have made the cut, you are going to get either a phone call or an e-mail. Generally you will be invited to a Skype interview or an MLA interview. These generally occur between December 3 and December 24. The MLA sometimes calls as late as January 3 or 4.

13. Dr. Kahan described preparing for the MLA interview. The first piece of advice is making a lot of syllabi, proving that you can teach a variety of classes. Often one of the questions asked is about what you can teach. The answer to a, “Can you teach x?” question should always be, “Yes.” The syllabi do not need to be complete, but provide an overview, the names of a couple of texts, and the conceptual framework. Each one should be a mini syllabus, in essence. When asked about a specific project, the job talk spiel should be about two minutes in length, rehearsed, and memorized to the point that it does not sound rehearsed.

14. Another piece of advice is about not alienating friends who are trying to get the same job. The field is large and you are not the only two people applying for the job. In addition, friendly competition is not necessarily bad.

15. Dr. Russo, in order to illustrate the point about not alienating friends, told an anecdote about her and a friend interviewing for jobs at the same thirteen universities. They were able to compare notes and keep each other sharp.

16. Dr. Kahan went on to describe one of the experiences you might encounter when going to a university for an interview. Sometimes the mock class that you will teach consists of half undergraduates and half faculty members. Sometimes it is faculty members pretending to be undergraduates, which can be quite weird, so be prepared.

17. Once you get an offer, Dr. Kahan explained that this means you are the consensus candidate, and you have a lot of leverage in such a position. Do not agree to the terms right away. Try to negotiate for the things that you want. Ask for whatever you need to be happy.

18. Dr. Kahan also provided tips about campus visits. These can be very grueling, lasting from one to three days. Make sure to bring something to eat and watch your caffeine and liquid intake.

19. The third presenter was Ms. Ashley Stevens. She currently holds a MA in Political Administration and works at the LSU Career Center. She applied to over one hundred jobs when she was on the market. Her BA was in classical piano, and her passion was ethnography through music. She emphasized the any work in experiential education can transfer to any number of skilled positions.

20. One element that she highlighted was applying for academic positions abroad. She also urged students to consider fellowships and non-academic positions abroad. She provided a number of websites where you can search for such jobs, including: Going Global, Global Academy Jobs, Higher Ed. Jobs, Times Higher Education, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and UniJobs. She provided examples of countries that have jobs from the Higher Ed Jobs website, including countries like Abu Dabi, China, Turkey, and many others.

21. For non-academic jobs, Ms. Sevens suggested websites like the following: Moser International, Jobs.TheGuardian.com, Institute of International Education, and WorldLearning.Org. She also suggested looking at some of the top companies around the world and applying to positions through their foreign affairs branches. The State Department also provides some opportunities. Another site that Ms. Stevens mentioned was Open Society, which includes jobs in places like London, New York, and Washington D.C. Another site considered was Philanthropy News Digest, which features jobs in places like Kenya, Bolivia, Thailand, and Mexico.

22. Another position that Ms. Stevens urged students to consider was that of editor. Ms. Stevens emphasized editorial opportunities at publishing houses such as HarperCollins Global, Bertelsman Media, Simon & Schuster, and Macmillan.

23. Ms. Stevens also presented opportunities through LSU centers, such as International Services, the International Cultural Center, and student organizations.

24. One caveat in applying for non-academic positions is distilling the CV down into a short resume.

25. Ms. Stevens provided a list of fellowships opportunities, as well. These included: UC Berkeley’s list of humanities post-doctoral fellowships, the American Council on Learned Societies, and Mellon Foundation fellowships, which are quite extensive.

26. Ms. Stevens emphasized strategic planning for job hunting, reinforcing both Dr. Kahan and Dr. Yang’s comments on this topic.

27. Dr. Gundala Hachmann added that you should have done your research before applying and have at least submitted one article for publication. Just having an article under review is important, as often publications are how committees narrow down the lists of candidates. Having a substantial article makes you stand out. Dr. Hachmann preferred that the publication not be a book review, but an article.

28. Dr. Kahan did mention that having more than one publication does make a candidate stand out. He considered a book review to be a good first submission. He explained that a book review should be substantial, 8-10 pages in length. If the review is unsolicited, you should ask the journal to which you intend to submit it whether or not they would be interested in the review. Saying an article is, “under review,” for publication is good, too.

29. Dr. Russo clarified that you should think of your advisory committee as a source of information. Dr. Russo shared information about Robert Green from the State University of New York at Albany, who emphasized the faculty’s responsibility to help students get their first jobs. Dr. Russo explained that your first three jobs will most likely be one year positions, as your first job will most likely not be a tenure track job. Dr. Russo did agree with Dr. Kahan on the mechanical nature of the cover letter. She did suggest that for the third paragraph, instead of a book, you might write about your research agenda.

30. Mason Hess emphasized opportunities outside of LSU, including positions in public administration where an advanced degree is invaluable. He also emphasized using the website Indeed.com for non-academic job searches.

31. Amy Catania asked about when to provide transcripts. Dr. Kahan explained that generally speaking, you put your transcripts in Interfolio, and then once you have a position, you provide the full array of transcripts.

32. Dr. Kahan mentioned a list of 400 fellowships that he has compiled and offered to send that to Comparative Literature students.

33. Dr. Yang clarified that for overseas positions, you need to have your PhD in hand. Such universities want people who can teach a broad range of classes.

34. Dr. Otero emphasized keeping the job search in perspective and not let it take over your life. Do not forget your friends, family, or spirituality.

35. Guillermo Severiche mentioned a talk that he attended previously. At this talk, Dr. Rallo discussed how tenure track jobs appear to be diminishing.

36. Dr. Kahan clarified this statement. He agreed that tenure track jobs in the US seem to be diminishing, but globally the amount of tenure track positions is growing. He emphasized that people have considered the job marker to be dire for decades now, so Dr. Rallo’s remarks were not really presenting new information.

37. Dr. Russo explained that it was okay to have a non-tenure track job, as this helps to build your network.

38. Dr. Yang emphasized being cognizant of what you can handle. If you cannot deal with the precarious position of not having a tenure track job after five years, be honest with yourself. She also suggested that you apply broadly and apply with entitlement.

39. Ms. Stevens also cautioned that you should watch out for states that have less funding.

40. Dr. Russo mentioned a future panel on the job market which will feature Dr. Hachmann and Dr. Leichman.

**Proceedings:**

Future Business:

1. Plan and come up with a date for the end of the semester final general meeting.

2. Decide on the next Executive Board meeting.

3. Approve the CLGA website.

**Announcements: N/A**

Minutes submitted by: Amy Catania

Signature of secretary: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of president: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

End time: 4:42 p.m.

A signed version of this document will be included in the official binder for CLGO.