

Emerging Scholars Taskforce Report

Survey of Recent Graduates in Theatre and Performance Studies

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Statistical analysis by Dr. Scott Mealey

Our volunteer committee was formed in September 2019 to respond to and follow up on CATR's 2017 Emerging Scholars Task Force Report by assessing where CATR is in meeting the Report's recommendations, offering our own recommendations to the Board, and conducting research into hiring trends in Theatre and Performance Studies in Canada at primarily English-speaking institutions over the last 10 years. This report is a summary of the results of the survey of recent graduates with a terminal degree (PhD/MFA).

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A. Report Overview

In March 2020, following recommendations and feedback from the Board, the Emerging Scholars Taskforce committee distributed a survey for recent graduates and faculty hires to the Candrama Listserv and the CATR Membership. The aim of the survey was to assess the current state of the field in response to ongoing concerns about the labour prospects that outgoing graduates face, including availability of jobs, labour conditions, and hiring practices. Survey criteria included individuals who either received a terminal degree from a Canadian Theatre and/or Performance Studies (T&PS) program or was hired by a Canadian T&PS related program within the past 10 years. We also targeted all T&PS programs across the country, coordinating with graduate programs and department chairs to distribute the survey to alumni lists and recently hired faculty. We sent out an additional targeted round of listserv emails and contacted scholars in the field who we knew had recently graduated or been hired.

We received a total of 86 survey responses, 67 of whom were individuals who held a terminal degree (MFA or PhD). The remaining respondents indicated their highest degree achieved was an MA degree. Our study was meant to cover only those with a terminal degree OR faculty position, and since the majority of the MAs who responded seemed to have neither, we excluded the MA population from our analysis of the results.

We believe the results of this survey will be of interest to currently tenured/tenure-track faculty, emerging scholars/graduate students, recent graduates, contingent faculty, and T&PS departments across Canada. Since graduate students alone (not including emerging scholars who have recently graduated) make up roughly one third of the CATR membership, this report should be of great interest to the Association.

Note on Data Collection Methods: The distribution methods for the survey, which relied heavily on responses from the Candrama and CATR listservs, as well as contacting several departments directly (some of whom had alumni rosters and some of whom did not) made the data collection somewhat erratic. As a result, it's unlikely that this data represents a truly random sample of the population of recent graduates, nor do we have an accurate sense of the population size itself in order to estimate how much of it has reliably been captured. The major value of this data is largely anecdotal. The data collection methods suggest that our data likely over-represents current working scholars who actively follow these key academic listservs, who may also be more likely to be current faculty, and in particular tenured or tenure-tracked (TT) faculty.

B. Survey Context

Outside our more focused study, several other available resources might help to put together a picture of the broader state of hiring in the field. Robin Whittaker's thorough study of Tenure and Tenure-Track faculty published in *TRiC* vol 32.1 (2011) includes a more complete picture of faculty hires from the preceding years. Whittaker references a forum piece that appeared in *TRiC* in the late 1990s in which Jen Harvie, Erin Hurley, Carrie Loffree, and Shelley Scott "reflected, respectively, on the troubling ratio between graduating students and available jobs,

the problematic dialectic of ‘intellectual stimulus’ versus ‘marketability,’ the growing expectations for interdisciplinarity, and emerging graduate funding and training ‘areas of concern’ at the University of Toronto’s Graduate Centre for Study of Drama” (Whittaker 108). While the similarities between the topics explored by these emerging professionals over twenty years ago and by our study today reveal that emerging scholars have been preoccupied by these issues for quite some time, several reports also speak to the increasing urgency/relevancy of these concerns in the current academic climate.

A [2020 study by the Conference Board of Canada](#) reported that, “[f]ewer than one in five PhD graduates are employed as full-time university professors, with the majority working outside of academia (e.g., in industry, government, or not-for-profit organizations).” The report went on to further explore the notion that “PhD graduates ultimately fare well in the labour market, but often face challenging transitions to careers outside academia.”

Meanwhile, a [report on the labour market transitions of graduate students released by the Council of Canadian Academies in January 2021](#) revealed, “The number of PhD graduates in Canada is growing while the number of open tenure-track positions is stagnant or declining,” and furthermore, troublingly that, “Non-academic sectors have not significantly increased their uptake of PhD graduates.”

In the U.S., Noe Montez has developed “longitudinal studies to help [...] discover how many graduates of PhD programs are getting placed, how long it is taking students to find academic positions or leave the academy, what programs can do to better position their doctoral candidates for the academic job market, and what search committees are looking for based on recent hires in the field.” He presented the research in [a “State of the Field” address for the Fourth Symposium of Doctoral Programs in Theatre and Performance Studies in 2018 and in an accompanying written report published by Howlround](#). These findings, and the concurrent conversations on twitter using the hashtag #tapsphd, might be useful for those considering job searches in the US or those interested in comparing trends in the two countries.

C. Key Trends/Highlights of the Report

Our survey revealed a number of key trends and factors, including:

- **The precarity of contingent faculty:**
 - The vast majority (86%) of contingent faculty reported doing part-time work (in many cases holding multiple positions) in order to support their current careers
 - There is a lack of job security among contingent faculty and a lack of advancement within sessional positions turning into tenure (although almost every respondent did do some sessional work beforehand)
- **Concerns about equity in hiring and labour:**
 - Beyond the ever-present concern about the lack of tenure-track positions compared to qualified graduates, the revelation that a majority of tenured/tenure-track (TT) scholars report holding contingent faculty positions before their current ones (along with the recently mentioned points about the precarity of contingent faculty work), raise questions about who can afford to

become tenured. The state of affairs as found in the report raises serious equity issues around hiring in the field.

- **Growing expectations of what's required for jobs:**
 - Of those surveyed, 65% of TT faculty reported that the postings for their current jobs indicated that artistic experience was either required or preferred. If a potential majority of tenure/tenure-track positions require both theory and practice, this raises the concern that departments may not be adequately preparing PhD students in particular for the job market.

One of the most valuable results of our survey are the comments, which revealed the qualitative experiences of recent graduates in the field. These are primarily featured at the end of the report, but have been summarized and direct quotations limited to respect the confidentiality of the individual participants.

D. Data and Analysis from the Survey for all Recent Graduates - Overview

Basic Demographics:

- Our survey yielded 45 responses from PhDs and 22 responses from MFAs who graduated over the last 10 years (all other responses recorded were non-terminal degrees)
- 18 out of 45 of PhDs reported were obtained from the University of Toronto; 6 from the University of Victoria; 4 from York University; 4 from UBC; for all other universities less than 4 responses were recorded
- 15 out of 45 PhDs surveyed completed (or are completing) a postdoctoral position; 7 respondents who completed a postdoc reported being hired in a TT job
- Of the 45 PhDs surveyed, 20 (less than 40%) reported holding a TT job after graduating; 12 reported ongoing sessional/LTA contract/part time work; 1 reported permanent non-tenure position; and 12 reported not having any faculty position at all (*Note: these numbers likely do not include many people who are currently working outside the field and thus did not receive our survey invitation*)
- Out of 22 MFA's surveyed, 4 reported holding TT positions; 2 reported working as a sessional/LTA; 2 reported being permanent and full time at an institution with no tenure; 13 reported no faculty position; 1 did not specify
- 29 out of 67 PhDs and MFAs reported that they did not hold any kind of faculty position
- The vast majority of non-TT faculty participants reported doing part time work (in most cases holding multiple positions at once)

Areas of specialization reported among graduates (PhDs only):

T&PS (Generalist), English, Political performance, Digital Performance, Documentary Theatre, Theatre for Young Audiences, Queer/Sexual Diversity, Canadian Theatre/Drama, French, Nineteenth-Century Theatre, Indigenous Performance, African American, Caribbean and/or Diaspora, Transnational, Scenography, Adaptation, Feminism, Applied Theatre, Dramaturgy, Age Studies, Audiences and Spectatorship, Dramaturgy, Play Development, Performing

Nationalism, Memory, Activist Performance, Eco-Criticism, Settler Colonial Studies, Postcolonial Studies

Areas of specialization reported among graduates (MFAs only):

Directing [most popular area of specialization], Design (including Projection Specialization); Theatre Practice; Theatre Direction; Popular Theatre, Theatre for young Audiences; Interdisciplinary Arts, Devised theatre; Theatre Voice Pedagogy; Performance; Theatre game design; Performance, clowning, Interactive Theatre; Community-Based Theatre, Directing; Immersive Plurilingual Theatre for Young Audiences; The use of Drama in language acquisition; Production Design and Technology; Creative Practice

E. Data and Analysis from Survey Questions for Tenured/Tenure-Track (TT) Faculty Only

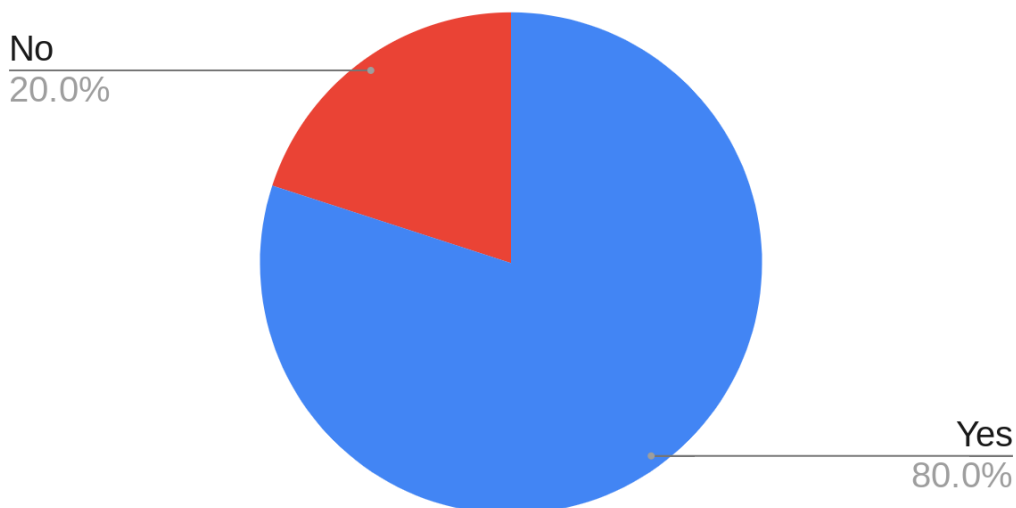
Out of 67 total respondents to the survey with terminal degrees, there are only 24 respondents currently in tenured/tenure-track positions who graduated within the last ten years (36% of respondents). These respondents are employed across 15 different universities:

- 8 hold positions strictly in Theatre/Drama/Performance Departments
- 3 hold positions in English Departments
- 3 hold positions in departments that combine Theatre/Drama and other disciplines, including English, Film, Media, and Music
- 2 are cross-appointed (1 not specified, 1 in English and School of Creative Arts)
- 2 are in Arts/Arts Management/Culture/Media
- 2 are in other fields
- 4 did not respond to this question

Question: Did you move laterally from one tenure stream position to another (at another university)?

- Of the 24 respondents in tenure or tenure track positions, 3 moved laterally from previous tenure or tenure track positions
- 1 from Acadia University, 1 from University of Victoria, 1 from University of San Diego

Did tenured/tenure track faculty hold a sessional position before being hired?



Question: What position(s), if any, did you hold before this one? (Please list the universities and dates). Did you hold other teaching/research posts?

- 17 out of 24 of the respondents (71%) who are currently tenured or tenure-track previously held contingent positions
- These included: sessionals, continuing limited-term appointments, part-time professors, instructors, CEGEP faculty, lecturers, visiting assistant professors, and adjuncts
- 5 of the TT respondents indicated that they previously held contingent positions at the same institutions where they later got TT positions (29% of TT respondents who previously held contingent positions). However, only 1 of these stated that their sessional position was converted into a TT position.

Question: Where was your current position advertised (University Affairs, listserv (specify if possible), institutional website)?

The majority of respondents found their current position advertised on institutional websites and on University Affairs. Other sources included CanDrama, CATR, ACCUTE, CAUT, and the Chronicle for Higher Education.

Question: What kinds of courses are you required to teach at your current institution (graduate, undergraduate, survey courses, studio courses, special topics, etc)?

Within the bounds of this study, we found that a majority (68%) of tenured/tenure-track positions required the ability to teach *both* theory and practice courses. This may be useful information for terminal degree-granting programs wishing to adequately prepare their graduate students for the academic job market.

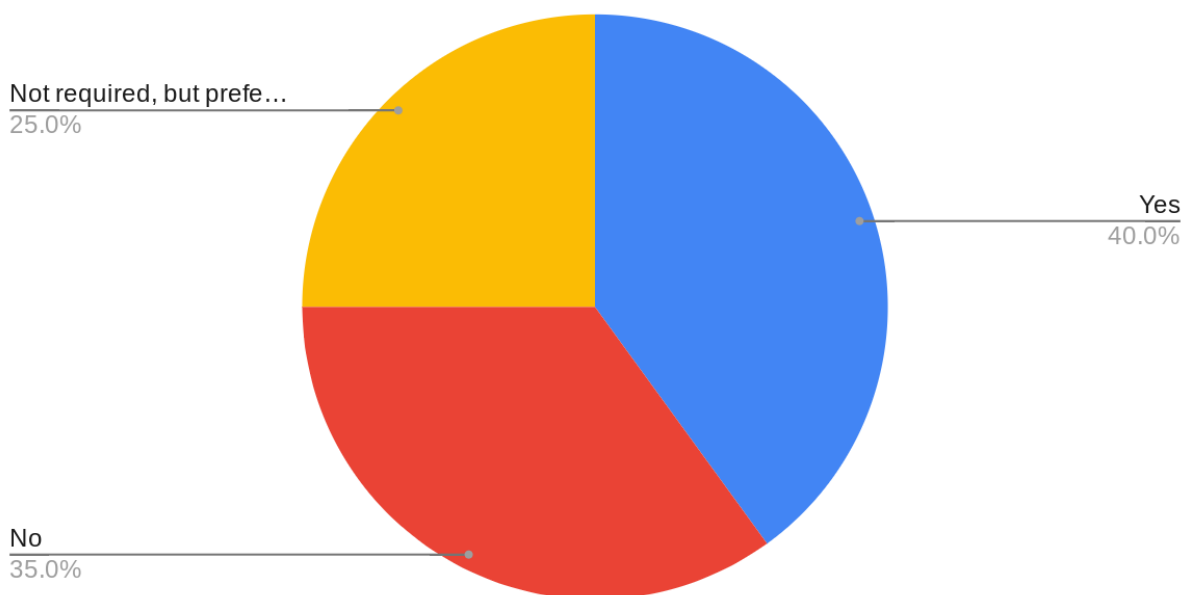
- Half of MFA respondents and more than half of PhD respondents are required to teach both studio and studies (survey/seminar/special topics) courses

- Half of the MFA respondents only teach studio courses, while under half (40%) of PhD respondents only teach studies courses

Question: What academic specializations were advertised in the position when you applied (queer studies, Indigenous studies, 19th century, etc)?

Academic specializations advertised include: Technology and Media; Set Design; Costume Design; Live Performance/Events; Modern Dance; Contemporary Dance; Dance Improvisation; Dance Composition; Intercultural Theatre; Devising; Directing; Arts and Cultural Management; Indigenous Studies/Equity Access; Contemporary Canadian Theatre; Minority (French-Canadian) Studies; Theatre History; Canadian Theatre; Gender, Sexuality, and Culture; Critical Race Studies; Performance; Applied Theatre; Dramatic Literature; Performance and Pedagogy.

For Tenured/TT PhDs Only: Did your current posting require artistic experience?



Question: Did your current posting require artistic experience? If so, what kind (directing, dramaturgy, etc.)?

Within the bounds of this study, we found that 67% of postings currently held by respondents either required or preferred artistic experience. Only 29% of postings reported here did not require or prefer artistic experience. As expected, all the postings held by MFAs required artistic experience. For postings currently held by PhDs, 12 required or preferred artistic experience, while only 7 did not.

F. Data and Analysis from Survey Questions for Contingent Faculty (Sessional or LTA Appointment) Only

The survey indicated that 14 respondents (PhDs and MFAs) are contingent faculty.

Question: At which institution(s) do you work and in which departments?

Of 14 contingent faculty, 7 respondents (50%) work at more than one institution

- 2 respondents work at 4 different institutions
- 1 respondent works at 3 different institutions
- 4 respondents work at 2 different institutions
- 2 respondents work in multiple departments at one institution
- One respondent noted that they were not currently working as they were only appointed on a by-invitation basis per semester.

Question: How long have you been working in this/these position(s)?

We found that time spent in these contingent positions ranged from 3 months to 20 years:

- 8 of the 14 respondents have worked over 5 years in these contingent positions (57%)

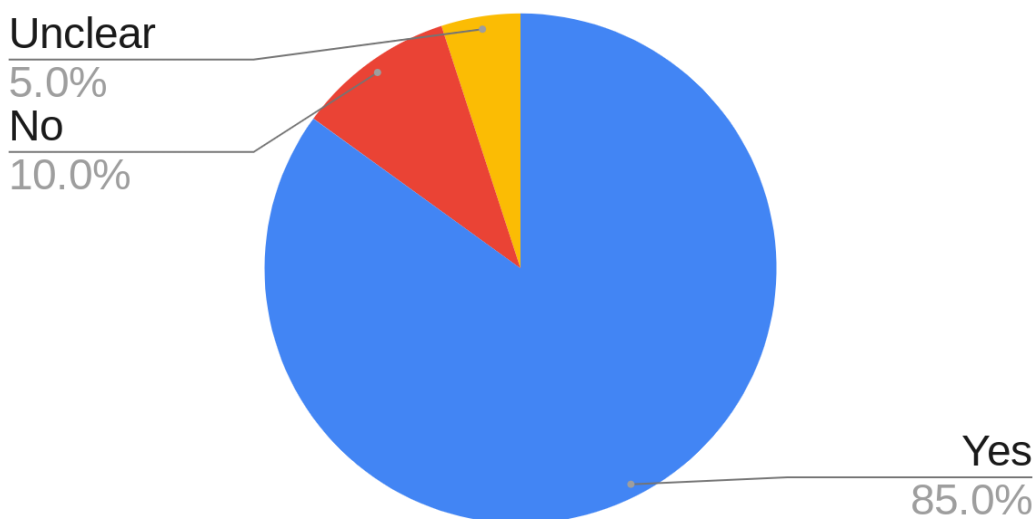
Question: What kinds of courses are you required to teach (graduate, undergraduate, survey courses, studio courses, special topics, etc)?

Here we found that of 11 PhDs working as contingent faculty, 7 (over 60%) only teach studies courses, while only 4 teach both studies and studio courses. Of 3 MFAs working as contingent faculty, 1 teaches both studies and studio courses, 1 teaches only studies courses, and 1 response was unclear.

Question: Do you take on alternate sources of income to supplement your work as a faculty member? If so, what are these?

We found that an overwhelming majority of contingent faculty take on alternate sources of income. Of 14 respondents, 12 respondents (86%) take on alternate sources of income to supplement their work as contingent faculty. Only 2 (14%) do not.

For Contingent Faculty: Do you take on alternate sources of income to supplement your work as a faculty member?



Summary of General Comments from Contingent Faculty on Alternate Sources of Income:

A number of survey participants left additional comments to clarify what other kinds of work they do and other qualitative comments. A number reported working at (including running) theatres and other arts administration and producing work, doing occasional theatre workshops and various forms of editing work; freelance performance, playwriting, design, and directing work, property and projector management, curriculum design contracts. Some respondents who had recently been working as sessionals reported unemployment. Responses from the survey illustrate that sessional contracts alone are inadequate, with only a single respondent noting that they did not take on additional work, but rather taught a significant course load in a semester. Responses indicate an unquestionable need to take on other work or a postdoc to supplement their incomes as contract faculty, which still might not be sufficient to carry one's living expenses or support a family.

G. Statistical Analysis (by Dr. Scott Mealey)

Key Findings:

(Note: The sample taken was likely both not large enough nor random enough to result in particularly accurate statistics.)

- Graduates, with both PhDs and MFAs, are likely to wait about two years before receiving a faculty position of any kind.
- PhDs average between two years to four years before receiving a full time faculty position and their overall employment stability generally increases moderately with time.
- Full time, non-tenured positions are held by people who graduated no later than 2011. This appears to be particularly bad news for MFAs, who were more likely to hold these positions and who generally fare worse in securing a faculty position compared to PhDs.

- There is no solid evidence that a postdoc improves the likelihood of securing a faculty appointment or a tenure-track position.
- About 3/4 of PhDs who have tenure-track positions have been employed in some prior type of limited-contract faculty work. There is, however, not enough evidence to assert this is a causal relationship (i.e. contract work helps secure a tenure-track position), though it does suggest that it is much more likely for PhD to secure a short-term faculty contract before they secure a full-time position.
- Though half of all full-time positions are held by U of T graduates they also represent the highest percentage of PhDs (45%) and are therefore no more likely than other PhDs to secure full-time faculty employment.
- In the case of full time contracts (but not for limited contracts), more recent graduates are less likely to be employed than those who have graduated further in the past. Keeping in mind that the vast majority of those who took the survey graduated in the past decade, this is less likely to be caused by significant shifts in hiring practices or economic standing. I would suggest this time factor may be a product of (1) the reality that unsuccessful graduates may simply leave academia after five years and therefore not register as unemployed and/or (2) more time may allow applicants the opportunity to bolster their CV and standing within the professional community.

H. Summary of Comments from Respondents

We have organized our summary of survey comments into the following four themes based on the focus of responses:

1) Precarity of Job Market/Hiring Processes:

After reading through the comments regarding the precarity of the job market and hiring processes, the Task Force recognizes an overwhelming amount of fear, dejection, and hopelessness in the state of being contingent faculty across our country. There is profound concern for the future of the field. Respondents noted reduced opportunities for full-time/TT academic positions as well as dwindling contract jobs and a general scarcity of stable employment resulting in high rates of job insecurity for emerging and mid-career scholars. Some respondents are considering leaving the field entirely. The pandemic (though this survey was open just within the first few months), was noted as a great destabilizing force compounding the precarious nature of theatre and academic work, impacting even those in the middle phase of their careers. In addition, the task force has read about the impacts of the amount of unpaid, speculative labour required of applicants by institutions in the hiring process, with requests that academic programs reconsider the amount of work that is required.

Other comments observed that certain perceived trends in hiring made securing employment difficult: committees seemed more likely to short-list American candidates over Canadian ones; they appeared to prefer hiring candidates who had received postdocs or SSHRC funding; and they favour candidates who had graduated from certain institutions over others. It was remarked that smaller programs are looking for generalists with both academic and practical experience while suggesting that it is only a handful of larger institutions that carry the luxury of academic

specializations. Two respondents noted that they felt their success in securing jobs was largely due to luck with timing, securing a postdoc, and having a mix of practical and academic experience, as well as publishing.

2) Contingent Labour:

Comments from respondents emphasized unpaid and underpaid labour and lack of job security or predictability in contingent positions. Noted among these was the constant need to prep new courses (as opposed to consistently getting hired to teach the same course), the uncertainty between appointments, as well as the last-minute nature of many appointments (which leaves less time for often unpaid prep work). Also discussed was the often gendered expectation that contract faculty perform unpaid service work within their department. It was noted that contingent faculty are overworked and underpaid while rarely receiving vacation time or benefits. These untenable conditions were cited as prompting some to consider leaving academia entirely.

3) Equity Issues:

Comments from the survey represented concern about a lack of diversity and equity both in hiring practices and within academic institutions as a whole. Comments were made about the tendency for new hires to be white and American, and the disconnect between universities' professed valuation of decolonizing practices and Indigenization while participating in 'archaic hierarchies.' These comments point to the presence of systemic equity issues that are not just a question of who can afford to become tenured, but speak to oppressive values and practices embedded in the whole academic system which (re)produce numerous barriers of entry to scholars and artists from equity-seeking groups.

4) Graduate Training:

Comments about graduate training suggested that the current training found in MFA and PhD programs may not be enough to make students competitive on the job market, particularly in climates where some candidates may be hired without obtaining terminal degrees. Various comments noted the importance of professional work outside the academy and lack of clarity on the application and hiring process within the university, and a desire for their department to better include senior graduate students in the department's hiring processes. It was suggested that the future that anticipates graduate students after obtaining PhDs is not rewarding.