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## Editor's Column

**S**TATISTICS TELL stories—in all senses of that term. Humanists tend to regard them with suspicion if not with outright scorn and to resist, in vain, the institutional pressures to quantify every phase of our professional lives. We greet surveys that convert our daily activities into percentage points with the same contempt that we reserve for telephone polls of our breakfast habits. As teachers of living students we frown on being classified as line-item FTEs that have contact hours. Yet the stories that statistics tell do fascinate us if they touch directly on our affairs. When our children score in the ninety-eighth percentile on the SAT exam or when our salaries fall 12% below those of our colleagues at peer institutions, the numbers produce corresponding joy or despair. Association members' inquiries into trends at *PMLA* suggest to me that, even if the data are unlikely to incite such powerful emotional responses, the journal's numerical profile carries interest for what it may reveal about the state of scholarly publication in our fields and about the evolving face of *PMLA* itself.

Reports on submissions and acceptances have appeared periodically in the journal and the *MLA Newsletter*. The last major accounting, which covered the years 1973–82, was English Showalter's editor's column entitled "Who Writes for *PMLA*?" (99 [1984]: 147–49). That period witnessed significant changes in policy and procedures, including the transition to anonymous submissions. We might now pause to look at the following half-dozen years for which statistics are available, 1983–88, to check who has been sending in manuscripts and whose essays have been published and to ask whether any fresh trends are discernible.

Annual submissions to *PMLA* during these six years fell from 382 manuscripts in 1983 and 370 in 1984 to 310 in 1985, then began to rise again to 320 in 1986 and 331 in 1987, after which they took a substantial upturn to 421 in 1988. In the fifties the acceptance rate was as high as 25% of the submissions, but for many years it has hovered consistently around 5 or 6%, except for 1987, when it jumped to 10%. Table 1 provides an overview of submissions and acceptances for each rank (figures are based on authors' ranks when the articles were submitted). As the total number of manuscripts sent to *PMLA* seesawed, the percentage of submissions by rank held comparatively steady over the years except for an increase by assistant professors, who in 1987 submitted 31% of all manuscripts—the highest proportion of any group during this entire period. In each of

the six years, assistant professors sent in a larger amount and a larger proportion of work than either of the higher ranks, but only in the last two years did the prevailing balance of submissions tip materially in their favor. The broader perspective shows that assistant professors' submissions dropped from a high of approximately 40% in the early seventies to about 33% in the rest of the seventies to 25% in the mid-eighties until

Table 1

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	Totals	Percent of Total Acceptances†
<b>Professor</b>								
<b>Submissions</b>								
Number	84	79	72	58	53	88	434	
Percent	22	21	23	18	16	21	20	
<b>Acceptances</b>								
Number	2	4	2	5	5	5	23	17
Rate*	2	5	3	9	9	6	5	
<b>Associate Professor</b>								
<b>Submissions</b>								
Number	69	84	66	57	73	73	422	
Percent	18	23	21	18	22	17	20	
<b>Acceptances</b>								
Number	3	5	4	6	5	1	24	18
Rate*	4	6	6	11	7	1	6	
<b>Assistant Professor</b>								
<b>Submissions</b>								
Number	100	91	79	82	102	122	576	
Percent	26	25	26	26	31	29	27	
<b>Acceptances</b>								
Number	7	8	7	6	18	13	59	44
Rate*	7	9	9	7	18	11	10	
<b>Graduate Student</b>								
<b>Submissions</b>								
Number	48	37	37	41	50	67	280	
Percent	13	10	12	13	15	16	13	
<b>Acceptances</b>								
Number	2	0	3	2	2	7	16	12
Rate*	4	0	8	5	4	10	6	
<b>Other/Unknown</b>								
<b>Submissions</b>								
Number	81	79	56	82	53	71	422	
Percent	21	21	18	26	16	17	20	
<b>Acceptances</b>								
Number	5	5	0	1	1	1	13	10
Rate*	6	6	0	1	2	1	3	

†Total percentage does not add up because figures are rounded.

\*Percentage rate is derived by dividing the number of acceptances by the number of submissions.

they again began to rise in recent years. Market conditions may have a bearing on these curves. Submissions by full professors, contrary to expectations, did not decline after the institution of the anonymous evaluation procedures, at least not in proportion to the total number, which did take a downward turn as of 1980. Full professors accounted for 17% of the submissions in the seven years before that change and for 20% since then.

The percentage rate of articles accepted relative to the number submitted varied widely within each rank, from 2% to 9% for professors, from 1% to 11% for associate professors, and from 7% to a record 18% for assistant professors. With the exception of one year where they did better than the average, professors and associate professors stood at or below the overall acceptance rate. Assistant professors enjoyed acceptance rates higher than the annual averages and substantially better than those of their senior colleagues in every year but one. For the whole period they garnered 44% of the acceptances (with 27% of the submissions), while professors stood at 17% and associate professors at 18%. It is statistically significant that in the seven years before anonymous evaluations the two upper ranks each had captured one-fourth of the accepted articles and assistant professors slightly over a third. Graduate students sent a respectable and consistent flow of essays to the journal, increasingly so between 1986 and 1988. When one takes into account their fresh status in the field, their margin of success in *PMLA* is impressive. Though in 1984 all their submissions were declined, in two of the last four years their acceptance rate was higher than the average, and in three of the six years it exceeded that of the full professors. A sizable number of manuscripts—between 16% and 26%—came from colleagues who were lecturers or instructors, who held no academic affiliation, or whose title was unknown. Submissions from the nontenured ranks account for approximately 60% of the manuscripts received and 65% of those accepted.

A comparison of contributions to *PMLA* by sex of author also proves interesting. The figures in table 2 show the number and percentage of manuscripts submitted by men and women each year as well as the number and percentage of manuscripts accepted and the acceptance rate. (The percentages do not always add up to 100 and the tables do not fully coincide because first names—which are used in coding the sex—aren't always gender-specific.) Although women are sending more of their work to *PMLA* than in earlier periods, the submission rate has remained surprisingly constant in the past six years, with men outnumbering women 3 to 2, most likely because more men are still employed at institutions that stress publication. With the exception of one year (1986) when they fell behind the men, women have equaled (1985) or surpassed (1983, 1984, 1987, 1988) men in the acceptance rate of their articles. For that reason the percentage of their articles accepted is higher than the percentage of their articles submitted. That women have been finding better representation in *PMLA* is clear. In 1963 (to recall English Showalter's statistics), 14% of the authors were women. Between 1973 and 1982 that figure rose to 29%, still below the women's submission rate. In the past six years women

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authored an average of 43% of the accepted articles although they had submitted only 40% of the total. Women's representation in the journal is thus approaching their present level in the association, which is one-half of the membership.

A comparison of men's and women's submissions by rank reveals that in all but one of the past six years full professors outnumbered assistant professors among the male authors. By contrast, female assistant professors outnumbered full professors by an average of over 3 to 1. Women associate professors, unlike their male counterparts, also overwhelmed the number of professors; and among the women authors there were almost twice as many assistant professors as associate professors every year, whereas with the men the two ranks were almost in balance. These figures confirm that women do not yet occupy senior positions in proportion to their representation in the profession, but it may be a portent of the future that in the last three years of this period *PMLA* received a total of 158 articles from female assistant professors and 147 from males at the same rank. The approximately equal number of submissions from female and male graduate students each year means that the proportion of female graduate students' submissions relative to the total number of women authors is considerably higher than the proportion for men. The percentage of women is also higher among the nonprofessorial ranks and unaffiliated groups.

In the pages of *PMLA* that correspond to the six volumes under scrutiny there is a broader representation of schools than in earlier periods. Several institutions make multiple appearances (affiliation at time of sub-

Table 2

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	Totals
<b>Submissions</b>							
<b>Men</b>							
Number	227	230	190	177	198	263	1,285
Percent	59	60	61	55	60	62	60
<b>Women</b>							
Number	152	140	120	142	133	158	845
Percent	39	37	39	45	40	38	40
<b>Acceptances</b>							
<b>Men</b>							
Number	9	12	10	14	17	15	77
Percent	47	54	62	70	53	56	57
Rate*	4	5	5	8	9	6	6
<b>Women</b>							
Number	10	10	6	6	15	12	59
Percent	53	46	38	30	47	44	43
Rate*	7	7	5	4	11	8	7

\*Percentage rate is derived by dividing the number of acceptances by the number of submissions.

mission): Yale University (8); Princeton University and State University of New York, Stony Brook (6); Cornell University (5); Stanford University (4); University of California, Santa Barbara; University of Colorado, Boulder; Rutgers University, New Brunswick; and University of Virginia (3); University of California, Irvine; University of Toronto; University of Indiana, Bloomington; Long Island University; Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; University of Maryland, College Park; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; New Mexico State University; University of Pennsylvania; University of Rochester; University of Southern California; University of Texas, Austin; Vassar College; Williams College; and University of Wisconsin, Madison (2). The total of 129 essays accepted during this period came from 81 colleges and universities.

A glance at the distribution of the fields in which work was submitted to *PMLA* from 1983 to 1988 reveals that the British area handily won first place with 758 entries, American topics came in second with 456, and French (138), Spanish (103), and German (81) were at a numerical distance. Italian (39), Slavic (30), and other foreign literatures (57) made respectable showings. The total contributions in foreign literatures reached 448, while comparative, theoretical, and general topics accounted for another 318 essays. Twentieth-century American literature was by far the most popular area of concentration (279 submissions), while scholarship on British topics favored the twentieth century (168), the Victorian period (138), and Shakespeare (136). Acceptance rates were below average in the American field and for general and comparative essays, close to average for British and French topics, better than average for the other foreign literatures, and highest (10.2%) in the area of critical theory.

Some of these statistics clearly signal trends and bear close scrutiny; others may be the products of chance or they may involve too small a pool to have any import at all. Numerical dominance by some groups over others is a fact of life in our association, but shifts do occur, and rumors of hegemony are perilous, as we learn from the 1989 volume, in which more than half of the authors were assistant professors, half of the contributors women, and half of the topics in the foreign literatures. Whatever the messages that the numbers may send, it will be instructive to track them in this new and final decade of the century.

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