

# Addressing the English Department Lecturer Salary Crisis

*Two years ago, after a meeting with lecturers in Ross Hall, the Dean of LAS, Dr. Michael Whiteford, commented that lecturers are "woefully underpaid for the invaluable work they perform."*

## Introduction: A problem that never went away

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Iowa State relies heavily upon English Department lecturers, professionals who serve the majority of university undergraduates. English lecturers are now, however, among the lowest-paid public teachers within the state of Iowa, including teachers in primary and secondary education.

This situation developed and continues despite lecturers' high levels of education, extensive experience teaching, professional communication experience, continuing professional development, and increases in assigned duties. Dean of LAS Michael Whiteford commented that lecturers are "woefully underpaid for the invaluable work they perform". Similarly, two separate external reviews of the English department marked the disparity in compensation for English lecturers and other

faculty, the latter report pointing to the need for lecturers to earn "a living salary."

As English lecturers continue in their expanding duties, in teaching and learning communities and professional development, they should receive an immediate and substantial pay increase. Not only will such action rectify disparities in compensation, it will also draw the most highly qualified professionals to the lecturer level, enhance ISU's reputation in education, and make this position a desirable career choice for professionals.

The following report provides the demographics of English Department Lecturer qualifications, workload, compensation, and examines their professional status with that of lecturers at peer institutes.

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## Situation: What's in a name?

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**A Widening Gap:** When comparing salaries between ISU's English Lecturers and those of other faculty, we observe a widening gap. The reasons for current disparities and the marks of separation are these.

Since the position was formed, Lecturers have received no cost-of-living salary increases. No benchmarks are used for salary adjustments. In 1985, lecturers (called Temporary Instructors or Adjunct Instructors until '91) earned an average of \$19,950, about 98% of what a Tenure-Track Assistant Professor made (\$20,411). Six years later, in 1991, a Temporary Instructor's salary at \$21,944 was within only \$139 of an Adjunct Instructor's at \$22,083, and amounted to 76% of the average Tenure-Track Assistant professor's salary at \$28,912.

In 2007, the gap widens significantly, with a lecturer's average salary at \$27,747 and an Assistant Professor's at

\$50,804, a division of nearly 50% between salaries. Further, in 2007 the \$4000 per-section salary of a Temporary Lecturer was nearly matched by the English TA's \$3800 per-section pay. Once situated close to an Assistant Professor's salary, in 2007 Lecturer salaries were far closer to those of TAs, even while the professional expectations far exceed what is expected of graduate student teachers.

If Lecturer salaries had kept pace with inflation, in 2007 they should have averaged \$40,962. Instead, the average 2007 lecturer salary was \$27,747—over \$13,000 behind the pace of inflation. Meanwhile, as shown by table xxx, all other positions except for our cohort, Continuing Adjunct Instructors, have average salaries that not only kept pace with inflation, but exceeded it. Perhaps even more important, inflation measures only the cost of

Over the last 24 years (1985-2007), the rate of inflation has averaged 3.03%. Unfortunately, it measures only the cost of fixed durable goods. It does not account for the cost of energy, insurance, healthcare, housing, or education. You can guess which measure has the higher number over the last six years.

Position Title	1985 average actual salary	1985 salary in 2007 adjusted for inflation	2007 average actual salary	Difference b/w actual and inflation adjusted
Professor	\$37,451	\$76,887	\$78,498	\$1,611
Associate Professor	\$26,092	\$53,567	\$59,297	\$5,730
Assistant Professor	\$20,411	\$41,904	\$50,804	\$8,900
Cont. Adjunct Instructor*	\$19,950	\$40,957	\$34,493	(\$6,464)
Lecturer/Senior Lect.	\$19,950	\$40,957	\$27,747	(\$13,210)

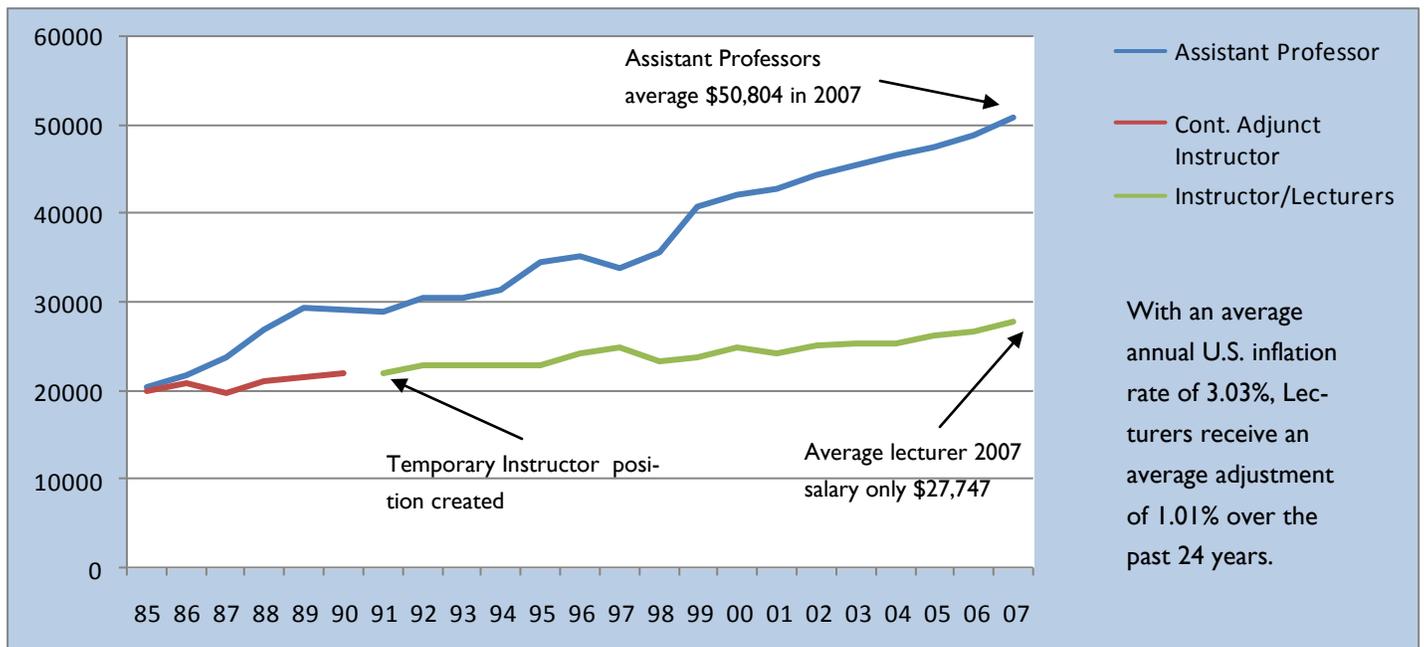
\*There are currently only 3 Continuing Adjunct Instructors

fixed durable goods. It does not account for the cost of energy, insurance, healthcare, housing, or education—all segments with costs that have far exceeded the rate of inflation over the last six years. Consequently, the fiscal math exercised by the administration is not only putting us behind, it is burying us and providing firm evidence that lecturers do not receive a living wage.

Studying these figures, it's logical to conclude that the gradual renaming of the position from Adjunct Instructor to Temporary Lecturer has allowed an atti-

tude where it is possible to allow a large group of faculty to fall through the cracks when the time rolls around to consider compensation adjustments. Further, the creation of the Senior Lecturer position has done little, if anything, to change this attitude. And if one is not a senior lecturer, the only choice is to “live in limbo,” from semester to semester for six years, doing extra uncompensated work so you might make the jump to senior when the turn comes.

Figure 1: Comparison of actual average annual salaries between Assistant tenure-track professors and Instructor/Lecturers



## Increasing Expectations

As the university has changed, modernized, and adapted, more and greater expectations are heaped in the lap of lecturers with no associated compensation. We serve on committees, we adapt to the changing electronic environment, we make educational initiatives work, and we accommodate growing class sizes. Even though our job descriptions expect only teaching, we routinely engage in uncompensated activities because we are deeply committed to the betterment of this university and its students.

On average, English Department lecturers spend 60 to 80 hours per semester engaged in these activities that support the department, the university, the students, and the public. Such activities include the following:

- ◆ *Learning communities—we are involved with more than half of the 70 learning communities*
- ◆ *Advanced communication learning communities*
- ◆ *Student advising and recommendation letters*

- ◆ *English club advisor*
- ◆ *Developing on-line course*
- ◆ *Professional conference presentations*
- ◆ *Assessment of learning community courses*
- ◆ *Support of ISU Comm research and workshops*
- ◆ *Serving on committees including: Lecturer Promotion committee, Graduate admissions and TA selection Committee, First Year Composition Committee, Advanced Communication Textbook Committee, and numerous other committees.*

Though this is a far from complete list, it offers a glimpse of how seriously we view ourselves as professionals among professionals.

Beyond these roles, our teaching workload has increased substantially over time. Twenty years ago, the maximum class size for a writing course was 19. Today, that number has increased to 26—a 37% increase in work for the group that forms the frontline in the communication education of undergraduates.

“We accomplish our mission through. . . Collaboration and continuous improvement. . . We also accomplish our mission . . . With honesty, integrity, and professional ethics.”—excerpt from the “Forward Thinking” section of the Strategic Plan 2005-2010.

## Consistency with stated goals

Inaction regarding lecturers is contrary to stated goals of the Strategic Plan 2005-2010. One expressed tenet of those goals (see note above right) is *collaboration*. However, it cannot be considered collaboration when there is a largely unrecognized and poorly compensated group who has no mechanism to account for professional parity through compensation.

This same document goes on to establish 5 priorities for accomplishing its mission, and one of those priorities is “Education” with 9 stated goals. Of these 9 goals, English Dept. Lecturers are essential in accomplishing 2 of them and are ignored when it comes to the third.

**#2--“Strengthen students’ critical thinking, creative abilities, and communication skills.”** This goal is entirely consistent with the goal of the ISU Comm initiative. Since the ISU COMM is carried out through the

foundation and advanced communication courses, and since continuity will only increase ISU COMM’s effectiveness, English lecturers are indispensable in order to achieve this goal.

**#5—“Increase interdisciplinary and experiential learning opportunities, such as learning communities.”** If there is a single group upon which this university depends to make learning communities work, it is the English lecturers.

**#9—“Develop, recognize, and reward excellent teaching.”** The lecturer’s focus is teaching, sometimes even excellently, but there is little or no reward for doing so beyond the satisfaction of a job well done. In fact, the pay is so poor that for some of us, the job is tantamount to charity work in that we love to help even when we are not rewarded for doing so.

According to a recent poll of Iowa State University lecturers, over 57% reported a need to routinely moonlight in order to supplement their income.

## Comparing ourselves to other professionals

The base pay for a full-time temporary lecturer in ISU's English Department is \$24,000 per year—more than \$19,000 lower than the average salary of a public school teacher in Iowa.

By any measure we could find, the lecturers of Iowa State's English Department are the poorest paid full-time public teachers in Iowa. As things stand, the base pay for a full-time temporary lecturer is \$24,000; further, this is assuming that lecturer receives a one-year appointment, which some do not. After at least six years of hard work and surviving numerous reviews, a senior lecturer receives an average salary of \$28,688—about the same as a custodian at Iowa State with six years of experience.

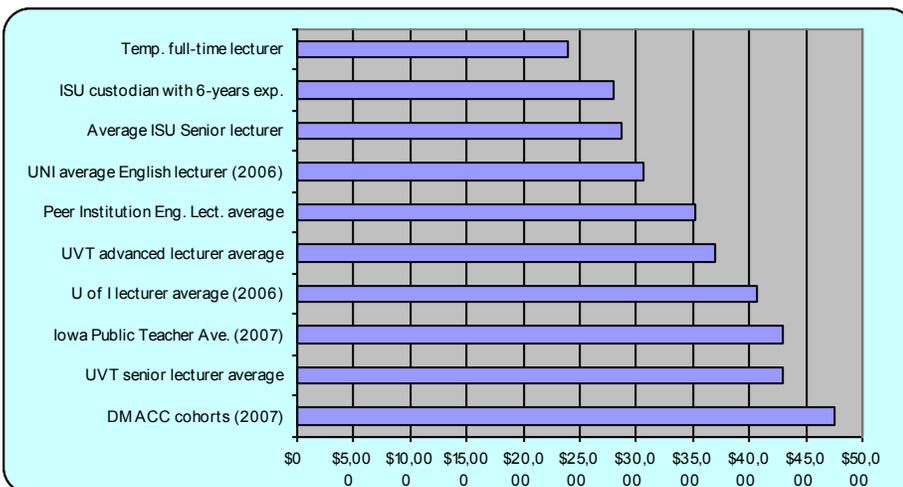
One English department lecturer holds an average of over 350 student meetings every semester to accomplish the necessary one on one interaction writing instruction requires.

To make our comparisons, we looked both inside and outside our university, as well as at the general area of public education as it pertains to Iowa's K thru 12 teachers. The results of these comparisons can be seen in the graph below. Since English departments at U of I and UNI appear to be less dependent upon lecturers than Iowa State, and since we have no information about the level of dependence of our peer institutions, we draw some comparisons between a similarly situated institution—Virginia Tech University—and ourselves. Like Iowa State, VTU is a technological/agriculturally focused university, is similarly sized, and has historically demon-

strated a heavy dependence on lecturers. As of the writing of this document, VTU's English Department chair, Carolyn Rude, reported that VTU currently employs 40 lecturers at three levels, compared to ISU's use of 33 lecturers during the Spring '08.

VTU began to address the inequities dealt their English department lecturers a few years ago because they faced problems nearly identical to ones ISU must now consider. As a result, the position now receives more professional regard with clearly defined paths for professional development. At VTU, the average senior lecturer earns almost \$43,000 while advanced lecturers earn an average of \$37,000. Though VTU still has a larger workload than Iowa State (a 4/4 load with a max. class size of 22), Carolyn Rude reports that the department is working hard to reduce those numbers.

The National Education Association recommends a class size of no more than 20 for a college writing class due to the one on one interaction necessary for effective instruction. Amongst the 12 peer institutions we looked at, only one, Michigan State at 27, has a higher maximum enrollment than ISU at 26 (see appendix XXX for comparisons). Even though only two institutions, U of W in Madison at 19 and Purdue University at 20, meet or exceed the NEA recommendations, the average of the 12 institutions is a class size of 21.4, with a 3/3 load. This growth in class size, from 19 twenty years ago to the present 26, has affected lecturers and teaching assistants more than any other group, especially given that student conferences are vital to effective instruction.



# Setting benchmarks

In order to better understand our place in the department, we surveyed our group (results can be seen in appendix XXX) not only to get a sense of our qualifications, but also to examine the diversity of the roles we fill at Iowa State. What we discovered surprised more than a few people. The average lecturer in Iowa State’s English department has:

- ◆ 16.6 years of teaching experience
- ◆ Almost 8 years experience as an ISU lecturer
- ◆ Almost 9 years of professional communication experience outside the classroom
- ◆ A 43% chance of holding a Phd or being ABD
- ◆ A 39% chance of being published within the last few years

These results were surprising because not only because they are fairly close to many tenure-track faculty, but the lecturers bring a wealth of valuable private sector communi-

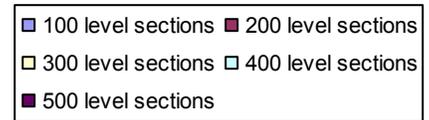
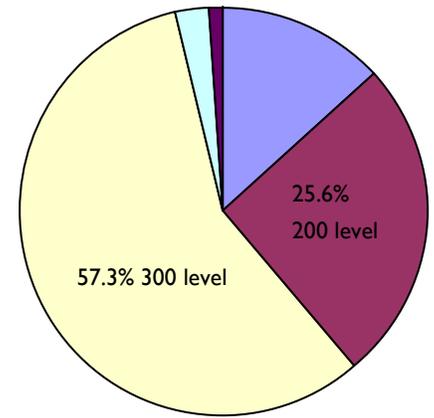
Learning community coordinator
Computer lab supervisor
Learning community instructor
Journal of Business Communication editor
Teaching assistant mentors
EDE Eng 314 Correspondence course
Large lecture instruction
Student advising
Writing center coordinator
180 Speak/Teach program
Supervision of student teaching
Graduate student team teaching

**Table 1:** Additional roles filled by Eng. Dept. Lecturers

cation experience to the advanced communication classes (302, 309, 314). Student evaluations in these courses frequently reflect how much they value this experience since many are at a point where they are concerned about securing internships, making the transition to the private sector, or moving on to grad school.

Because of this professionalism and diversity of experience, lecturers fill a variety of professional roles (as seen in the Table 1 below left) essential to the university’s mission. Among these diverse roles, none is more important than our contribution to the success of the Iowa State learning communities—an oft-cited jewel in the crown of Iowa State’s recent successes. Among the 70 learning communities, English lecturers are involved with more than half of them, making us by far the single largest group involved in their success.

According to the figures posted on March 13, 2007, titled “Estimates of Additional Tuition (and Fees) Revenue Attributable to Increased Retention From Participation in Learning Communities,” some interesting figures show a part of the positive fiscal impact we have on ISU. According to these figures, from 1999 to 2006-07, the additional revenue amounts to \$16,799,466. For 2006-07, that number was \$1,632,394—an amount that far exceeds the cost of all English lecturer salaries and the associated benefits.



*During Spr.'08, the English Dept. lecturers are teaching an estimated 2134 students. This number represents over 10% of the entire undergraduate student population for a single semester.*

## Addressing the English Department Lecturer

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*Substantial numbers of students turn to Lecturers as unofficial communication advisors, asking for help with job applications, resumes, personal statements for grad or medical school, contests with written components, and recommendation letters.*

According to the 2007-2008 fact book, 24% of the expenditures by function go to student services, academic support, and public service. This amounts to \$215 million for the current fiscal year. The English Department lecturers fulfill key uncompensated functions for many undergrads in all of these areas.

Because we play a large role in the teaching of 300 level courses, we encounter many non-English major juniors and seniors at a point where they are concerned about securing internships, making the transition to the private sector, or moving on to grad school. In fact, it's fair to say that we are responsible for over 1000 of these transitioning students per semester.

Given the hands-on nature of effective communication instruction,

it's reasonable to claim that, in general, Lecturers get to know our students better than most other teachers. Further, students know we have been and are going to be around rather than graduating and moving on in the next year or two. The result is that substantial numbers of students turn to us as unofficial communication advisors, asking for help with job applications, resumes, personal statements for grad or medical school, contests with written components, and recommendation letters.

This is work that is not part of our job, but is a function in which most of us gladly participate because we know how important it is to our students. Supporting students as they make these transitions is the very essence of "Excellent teaching."

*According to recent figures, Learning Communities, which are largely administered by English Department Lecturers, have a substantial fiscal impact on ISU. According to these figures, from 1999 to 2006-07, the additional revenue amounts to \$16,799,466. For 2006-07, that number was \$1,632,394.*

## Providing consistency

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Iowa State, the LAS College and the Department of English become consistently more dependent upon this group to carry out key programs such as learning communities and ISU Comm. As stated previously, the average English Department lecturer has been here for 8 years. However, it should be noted that this number is probably low since, during the data gathering, some respondents only counted their lecturer years as those years they were actually called lecturers. In fact, one Adjunct, a lecturer cohort, has worked in the English Department for 23 years.

Collectively, all of this means that we constitute a consistent presence for a large segment of the undergraduate student population. Interestingly, many of us are beginning to teach the siblings of former students because those students have recommended us. While it's difficult to quantify this phenomena of "legacy students," it can cer-

tainly do nothing but help with the keys goals of recruitment and retention. Further, one can conclude that our presence "down-sizes" this enormous university for many students.

This "downsizing" characteristic is, some have speculated, one of the reasons that learning communities work as well as they do. As the single largest body (though unpaid) engaged with the learning communities, is it not fair to claim that the English Department lecturers deserve at least some measure of the credit for its success? Would these communities, or even other communication initiatives, work as well without the continuity and consistency offered by English Department Lecturers?

## Setting benchmarks

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In the April 2006 external review report, the reviewers state:

The Provost should set a minimum salary level for the rank of Lecturer that provides these university employees a living wage. The current salary for this rank in the Department of English does no credit to the university or the state of Iowa.

This comment was delivered to the university over two years ago and yet, until now, nothing has been done to address the situation.

The English Department Lecturers are asking for the following:

1. Establish a \$43,000 baseline salary for the position of Senior Lecturer.
2. Establish a \$37,000 baseline salary for the position of Lecturer.
3. Tie the salaries to a benchmark, such as the rate of inflation.
4. Institute the changes by the beginning of the Fall 2008 semester.

The \$43,000 baseline for Senior Lecturers has several comparisons that suggest its appropriateness. It is about the average salary of a full-time public school teacher in the state of Iowa, and Lecturers are full-time public school teachers in the state of Iowa. It is equivalent to the average salary of a Senior Lecturer at a sister institution—Virginia Tech. Finally, it is only slightly higher (and the average of all Lecturers would be lower) than the average salary would be if the position was receiving annual cost of living adjustments.

Also, the significant difference between the Lecturer and Senior Lecturer salary would provide an incentive for Lecturers to endure the ordeal necessary to become Senior Lecturers.

Finally, establishing a benchmark against which salaries can be adjusted would prevent similar problems in the future. The need to address such problems was the genesis of the current Towers Perrin report for Iowa State's P & S faculty and administration positions.

*“We wanted to make sure employees at the university were put in positions that were competitive based on performance, length of time and type of market.”—Elizabeth Hoffman’s (ISU Provost and Executive Vice President) response when asked why the Towers Perrin report was commissioned.*

## The benefits for the university

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- Increased desire for professional development.
- Increased willingness for service
- Increased retention of experienced lecturers (two in two years lost to DMACC)
- Greater contentment springing from financial recognition
- Better focus due to decreased need for moonlighting