



Editors' Introduction: Shaping Academic Futures

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This issue of *Academic Labor: Research & Artistry* considers the future(s) of academic labor and the shifting working conditions in which we find ourselves. From union efforts in Texas to the effects of USAID cancelation on higher education in Egypt, the scholarship collected in this issue considers questions like, who are universities for? What can we do to make universities more equitable, humane, diverse, and inclusive—to reduce their harms? This issue argues that there are many beginnings which lie in wait, and we can plant the seeds of new futures now, futures based on compassion, care, and justice rather than greed, self-interest, and exploitation. We hope this issue offers paths forward for research, reflection, and action.

We begin this issue with the impact of online education on faculty working conditions. **Ann Marie Francis** outlines the increasing demands for online course offerings in the wake of COVID-19, noting that despite a return to face-to-face instruction, online course enrollment has continued to grow. With such growth—and with research suggesting that online instruction

is more time-consuming—Francis offers a course release as a model of administrative support for online instruction.

The following collection of articles addresses contingent faculty, graduate workers, and the role of third spaces to disrupt so-called “standard” notions of academic productivity and labor. **Christine Sharp, Beatriz Ramirez, and Nicole Kenley** describe their efforts to establish writing circles that foreground connection and community over atomized labor. They posit that a broader “we”—not just faculty or graduate students but staff members as well—can disrupt academic hierarchies and foster spaces of solidarity. **Sarah Ceja, Beatriz Ramirez, and Christine Sharp** continue to explore writing center programming but focus on the emotional, intellectual, and infrastructural labor of graduate writing consultants. They detail a variety of innovative graduate writing consultant initiatives that do important relational work often overlooked by administrative demands for quantified productivity. **Suman Dey** continues this focus on graduate workers—this time examining how AI tools and large language models like ChatGPT are reshaping the working conditions of graduate teaching assistants. Through several interviews, Dey describes how AI leads to expanded workload, increased surveillance, and emotional strain. Dey argues for ethical and humane policies regarding AI use—including the right to decline AI use in classrooms.

Then, **Maria Novotny** asks us to reconsider the value of community-engaged projects and provides myriad ways to argue for shifts in the way we talk about what “counts” and how we value community-engaged scholarship. By surfacing the often-invisible labor of community-engaged projects, Novotny argues for the importance of recognizing such labor in our citational practices as well as our review, tenure, and promotion materials.

These considerations around value continue with an account of the impact of USAID suspension on students, faculty, and staff across Egypt. **Ghada Al-Akhdar, Laila ElSerty, Aliaa N. Hamad, and Joseph Robertshaw** explore the sudden cancellation of USAID on students, faculty, and staff. Their interviews demonstrate the immense disruption to higher education in Egypt as well as how affected stakeholders managed to stand in solidarity with one another.

Two texts then document the struggles of unionizing in Texas, pointing both to affordances and constraints of working within restrictive legal frameworks and the Texas State Employees Union and how different campus cultures may inform how people respond to union activity. **Brian McShane and Rachel McShane** share firsthand accounts of their union activism and offer concrete advice for new organizers, such as “DIY is Your Best Friend” and “Know Your Worth.” **Jack Christian** asks, “Are the arduous steps necessary for robust organizing ultimately worth it in a place like Texas? If so, what might those steps be, and what would make such organizing meaningful when the prospect of collective bargaining remains mostly a pipedream?” Christian considers these questions in light of reporting on his attendance of the 2024 Labor Notes conferences and interviews of union organizers.

We conclude with a script from **Joel Smith**. Taking inspiration from works like Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Eugène Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*, Smith offers an account of late capitalist adjunctification and its attendant absurdities. The story of Odessa and Ulric serve as a mirror to our current working conditions and offers a closing statement to this issue: “let us take comfort in each other.” We are delighted to share Issue 9 with you.