

CHAPTER 4

REAL FACULTY BUT NOT: THE FULL-TIME, NON- TENURE-TRACK POSITION AS CONTINGENT LABOR

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Threads: Organizing Within and Across Ranks; Professionalizing and
Developing in Complex Contexts

Composition has long been familiar with the exploitation of adjunct labor. The labor-intensive cost of teaching the undergraduate population of first-year writing has often meant a “piecemeal” (Ritter 388) approach to teaching: the majority of courses are often taught by part-time adjuncts hired at the last minute to ensure that all the sections are staffed. As a result, part-time faculty make up about 60 percent of faculty in English departments within four-year institutions and 80 percent of English faculty in two-year colleges (Laurence, “Demography” 252). Numerous *Forum: Issues about Part-time and Contingent Faculty* articles have recounted the abuses of adjunct labor: wages that are at or are only slightly above minimum wage, which force instructors to teach at several different institutions, while often juggling over four courses a term (Griggs A4). For example, in a 2008 *Forum*, Evelyn Beck stated that her institution only paid \$1,100 for a three-credit-hour writing course (A1). Even the most recent report from the Coalition on the Academic Workforce found a median of \$2,700 per course (12). Within the 2013 AAUP Annual Report on the Status of the Profession, John Curtis and Saranna Thornton reveal that there was little or no wage adjustment for inflation reported for jobs that fall under contingent labor, and only 18.8 percent of respondents reported receiving any pay raises (9). Teaching at many different institutions means that, for adjuncts, the paper load is often crushing and isn’t made any easier by the fact that many adjuncts receive minimal, if any, teaching support other than a prescribed syllabus or textbook (Heller A8; Behm A7). Not to mention that many adjuncts do not receive medical benefits or any type of sick leave (Beck A1).

Despite these well-documented abuses of adjunct labor within composition, the numbers of adjuncts teaching within higher education are only increasing and show no sign of stopping. The 2008 MLA report “Education in the Balance” indicated a clear trend that “increases in student enrollments are being accommodated by increases in the non-tenure-track faculty” (3). The most recent AAUP report shows that contingent labor accounts for the largest increase in employment within higher education, making up 75 percent of the workforce, while tenure-track professors only make up 25 percent (Curtis and Thornton 5).

There are several ways that departments and programs have responded to exploitation of adjunct labor. Specifically, the MLA “Education in the Balance” report makes six recommendations for improving working conditions and the education of students by adjunct labor, which were reiterated again in 2011’s “Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members.” These recommendations include such changes as: offering long-term contracts and benefits, integration into departments, teaching and research resources, mentoring and professional development, and annual review.

Writing and composition programs such as those at Duke, Stanford, and the University of Denver have responded to the realities of increased contingent labor within higher education by enacting the MLA recommendations through adding or shifting faculty to fixed contracts or full-time, non-tenure-track positions (FTNTT). The growth in these positions has outpaced part-time and full-time positions. The 2008 MLA report shows that while tenure-track faculty employment has increased 5 percent between 1995 and 2005, FTNTT positions have shown a 40 percent increase and adjunct faculty a 38 percent increase during that same time (21), which the AAUP reports is also true across departments. As indicated by the MLA data, even though the total percentage of FTNTT faculty in English departments (22.2%) is lower than adjunct (39.5%) and tenure-track (TT) faculty (38.3%), many programs and departments are increasingly acknowledging at least a few of the recommendations proposed by the MLA by adding more FTNTT positions with acceptable pay and benefits, as well as reviews of teaching and resources.

However, these new FTNTT positions carry with them a number of potential problems.

In 1986, the AAUP addressed the then relatively new trend of replacing tenure-track lines or hiring new lines with FTNTT. They write in “On Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Appointments” that “these non-tenure-track appointments do considerable damage both to principles of academic freedom and tenure and to the quality of our academic institutions—not to mention the adverse consequences for the individuals serving in such appointments” (85). The adverse

consequences they warn of are inferior status and exclusion from shared governance, “the erosion of the quality” of education (89), faculty anxiety, and a brain drain as the best and brightest graduates turn to private industry rather than higher education. They have since written reports in 2006 and 2010 further supporting this position. In our experiences in talking to faculty in such positions and in our FTNTT positions at the University of Denver, these consequences are not widespread. Many FTNTT positions provide faculty opportunities to sit on faculty senates, participate in advising students, direct programs, or share in the governance of the writing programs to which they belong, and, most importantly, to provide comparable if not better instruction to students than TT faculty. As for whether graduates turn increasingly to work outside universities, the most recent MLA data indicate that this is just a fact that we cannot do much about, except for adding more TT positions since there are more Ph.D.s awarded than there are positions, TT or FTNTT, available (Laurence “Our PhD Employment”). Although in some circumstances these adverse consequences are realized, there is little doubt that shifting part-time, piecemeal faculty into FTNTT positions can improve the lives of the majority of faculty teaching writing and the education of their students, at least if these positions replace part-time, adjunct positions.

The MLA recommendations in “Education in the Balance” focus on benefits to faculty; but what of the effect of these changes on composition-rhetoric as a discipline? We do not believe the adverse consequences to individuals from these FTNTT positions is widespread, but we contend that the overall effect of these positions on composition as a field is the erosion of the gains from and application of research in this field. Simply put, for research within composition to continue, research and the teaching of first-year writing need to go hand in hand. Those who actually teach first-year writing should also be doing research within it because, as teachers, they know firsthand the problems and issues involved within first-year writing that need further research. However, as we detail later, because these positions often fail to incentivize scholarship for FTNTT faculty, the increase in FTNTT positions could lead to fewer first-year writing teachers actually conducting pedagogical research that could improve writing, rhetoric, and its teaching.

As two of the nineteen founding faculty of the University of Denver Writing Program who are all FTNTT, we detail some advantages to the FTNTT position and outline some of the significant disadvantages such as the lack of job security and the lack of incentives to publish research. Finally, we offer program administrators and faculty recommendations for protecting both the research interests of first-year writing and the continued professionalization of those engaged in this research.

THE ADVANTAGES OF THE FTNTT POSITION

In 2006, the University of Denver, a private university of about 11,600 students, inaugurated a writing program that would serve as both the home of first-year writing courses and a campus resource on writing. The program was put under the directorship of Douglas Hesse, who holds tenure within the English department, but the writing program itself is free-standing, employing twenty-five FTNTT faculty members and a FTNTT writing center director as of this writing. The positions were originally offered with nine-month, yearly renewable contracts. Consequently, we are guaranteed employment for a year, but contract renewal is still contingent upon program needs and the university's budget.

The University of Denver FTNTT positions manifest the MLA recommendations in a number of positive ways. First of all, these positions can provide faculty with oftentimes more manageable teaching loads, which lead to higher quality teaching. For instance, within our program, we have a 0/3/3 teaching load. We teach three classes of fifteen students each in the winter and spring quarters. During the fall quarter, faculty can devote their time to programmatic research, writing center work, or may teach a first-year seminar based on a research interest. The decreased teaching loads mean that teachers can give more individualized attention to student writing. It also means that teachers have the time to innovate teaching pedagogy. As a result, faculty in our program teach a diverse array of first-year writing courses. Some focus on genre theory and ask students to investigate the writing of their majors; others focus on service learning, even earning special recognition from our campus's Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning. We ourselves have created a course that uses the computer game *World of Warcraft* as a space for research and writing across the curriculum.

In order to help us continue to innovate pedagogy and pursue other research interests, we have ample research and travel funds. We receive \$1,000 a year for conference expenses; and for large conferences in rhetoric and composition like the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), 80 percent of expenses are paid for those who are not presenting. In addition, we receive \$500 each year for professional development, which can go toward any research costs such as books or paying research participants.

We also have a hand in the self-governance and curriculum development of our Writing Program, even though self-governance is not absolute within our program structure; that is to say, our director is solely responsible for communicating with the provost about our program. However, the founding faculty of our Writing Program (who are, again, all FTNTT) collaboratively developed our curriculum, including the course goals and objectives. Every year, all program

faculty contribute to reviewing and revising these course goals and objectives, and the director often operates as a colleague in these conversations rather than arbiter. When our Writing Program was founded, faculty who were interested in writing assessment formed a committee that developed an annual assessment of student writing, which includes a portfolio and a reflective cover letter. Our assessment process is also reviewed annually by the entire program faculty, and faculty can be involved in the assessment process each year. Most importantly, a steering committee of four elected FTNTT faculty help the director make larger administrative decisions which impact the Writing Program. However, the steering committee's role is largely advisory, as the director still makes all final decisions.

Last but not least, we enjoy health and retirement benefits and decent pay. We receive full medical coverage, dental coverage, and paid twelve-week maternity leave. We also enjoy a salary close to the national median yearly income for FTNTT positions that the AAUP reports: \$47,500 (Curtis and Thornton 10). Finally, in the past, we have received small pay raises each year, which are determined annually by merit review. However, because of the slowed economy, these pay raises have largely ceased across our university for tenured and non-tenured faculty alike, and we have no idea if they will continue in the future.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF THE FTNTT POSITION AND THE FUTURE OF COMPOSITION

We have indicated a number of advantages of our positions for the faculty who teach in them. For some faculty, moving off the tenure track into these positions may provide increased quality of life with ample time to focus on teaching or individual interests such as writing, or time to raise families, without the pressures of publishing and acquiring tenure. For those who have worked as adjuncts, the FTNTT position can offer security of employment, benefits, a living wage, and time to develop professionally and pedagogically. Furthermore, as an academic couple with newly minted Ph.D.s, we counted ourselves lucky to have found positions where one or both of us did not have to commute for hours to work as adjuncts at multiple institutions.

Yet, these FTNTT positions are not without problems.

A problem with many FTNTT positions, ours in particular, is that we are still very much contingent labor. Our director reports solely to the provost; while our director has control over our Writing Program budget, an FTNTT position does not carry the longer-term budgetary status of a tenure-track line and thus has minimal job security, as the provost is ultimately responsible for

securing our FTNTT positions and can add or cut positions as demanded by university or budgetary needs. While we trust that our current director is savvy enough to secure our positions with the provost even in tough economic times, we still worry about what would happen to our positions if another director were to replace our current one. In actuality, even though we only receive yearly contracts, so far all faculty have been renewed. However, the added job security of a tenure-track line is still needed during insecure economic times or a replacement of the director. We say this knowing full well that even TT positions are susceptible to financial realities, and some universities have lost entire departments or fired tenured faculty because of budget cuts—yet tenured faculty still have greater protection in these circumstances, as demonstrated by many examples where non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty positions are not renewed, while TT faculty positions are saved, reinstated, or reassigned (see Etchison; Schmidt).

Furthermore, even if our FTNTT positions remain secure and faculty are rehired from year to year, many FTNTT positions are not tiered in the same way the tenured positions are, so that pay increases that come with promotion from assistant to associate professor, for example, are largely absent in FTNTT positions, including our own. This also means that pay increases within FTNTT lecture positions are often based solely on the Writing Program director's discretion. Consequently, if there is not a transparent set of recommendations in place for awarding merit-based pay raises, raises may seem arbitrary.

However, we contend that the most noteworthy problem with FTNTT positions is that they can negatively impact both the amount and quality of scholarship conducted within the field of composition as a whole. Continued pedagogical scholarship within first-year writing is important to good teaching. It is essential that we maintain our practice as writers and researchers. As teachers of first-year writing, we are uniquely positioned to understand its problems, both with composing and teaching, and can thus address these problems by conducting research about both composing and pedagogy. Additionally, this continued scholarship makes us more innovative and reflective teachers.

Unfortunately, FTNTT positions have the potential to separate faculty into tenure-track researchers, on the one hand, and non-tenure-track teachers on the other, as these latter positions often do not offer significant enough incentives to research and publish in the field. Without tenure and publishing requirements, as onerous and stressful as they might appear, or even department or program expectations to research, there is no obligation and little incentive to do such work. If, increasingly, more writing faculty are placed in situations where they are expected only to teach, the motivations to research their teaching, students' writing, or the application and functions of writing beyond the classroom become less important. This separation of researching and teaching also draws so-

called “research” faculty away from what we do in our discipline: teaching students about writing. If “research” faculty are not teaching writing, then they are not as well positioned to study writing or the teaching of writing. They will not be aware of issues or problems that come up when teaching writing that could then generate research questions for further study. In this way, this separation could potentially de-emphasize scholarship on writing pedagogy, creating an arbitrary binary between teaching and research and relegating teaching to merely service—a service which, within this separation, becomes mindless, as teaching then becomes separated from the knowledge construction of research. Ultimately, a lack of pedagogical research hurts composition as a field because it relegates any teaching of writing to being divorced from the knowledge construction of theory building and, as Brad Hammer writes, “further reinforce[s] the utility structure and non-disciplinary nature of writing instruction” (A4).

We understand there are some potential problems in this argument that without tenure there is little motivation for those in FTNTT positions to publish. Tenure or extrinsic rewards are, in fact, not the only motivations to publish. And we are not contending that this is the case. However, the data here is varied, and none exists that we are aware of in composition specifically. Two studies looking at motivations to publish have found that tenure and promotion are powerful incentives for scholarship. A study on increases in international submissions to the journal *Science* found that “[c]areer incentives are positively correlated not only with submissions but also with publications, which suggests that they encourage faculty to submit their best work” (Franzoni et al. 703). When considering additional motivation factors in a study of faculty, Flora F. Tien found that “after controlling for the impact of demographic, educational, and institutional variables, the multivariate analyses show that faculty publish articles both to gain promotion and to satisfy their intellectual curiosity” (744). We are aware that full professors, those who have, in theory, attained the highest promotional rank, continue to publish as well. Intellectual curiosity does play a significant role in publishing productivity, especially for tenured faculty, as some studies have shown that full professors produce the most scholarship (Tien and Blackburn 17). However, Hesli and Lee explain this phenomenon with selection theory: “only the most productive faculty members are promoted, eliminating low producers before they reach higher ranks and thus creating a situation in which higher ranking faculty produce more” (395). Although intellectual curiosity is a powerful intrinsic motivator for those who have decided to devote their lives to a field of study, there exist still the extrinsic rewards of promotion and tenure that cannot be overlooked.

In fact, the importance of extrinsic motivation to publish is evident within our program of twenty-five faculty, in which only about half of the faculty con-

sistently work to publish in rhetoric and composition, despite having decreased teaching loads and ample time to do so. Moreover, the faculty who do publish are not solidifying their positions within our university as securely as they would if they could receive tenure. While faculty might be compensated for publishing with a positive merit review, in our program this is not guaranteed, as merit review is judged more on teaching and service, with scholarship comprising only 10 percent of the review. For these reasons, those who do such research, while surely satisfying their intellectual curiosity, are most likely also doing so for the potential of a TT job at another university. After all, tenure confers a type of status. It matters as a measure of prestige. It matters to the university bylaws about mentoring, serving on dissertations, having a voice on certain types of committees, and promotion. And, as we saw in 2004, it matters for political office when some questioned Barack Obama's claim that he was a professor even though he was not on the tenure track (Sweet).

Even more problematic though, changes in the economy at large and within academe suggest that universities will continue the trend of not increasing tenure-track (TT) lines while increasing FTNTT positions, all with the expectation that universities can expect more for less, enacting more and more of what Kelly Ritter characterizes as a "pay for product status" (388). That is, without the possibility of a TT job, if all that is left is intellectual curiosity, universities can still expect some scholarship from those faculty still interested in pursuing their intellectual curiosity and a high level of teaching from most faculty, while paying them significantly less and denying them security of employment or academic freedom. The quality of labor still remains fairly high but it becomes cheaper and conveniently disposable. The AAUP writes that while FTNTT positions superficially resemble those of "junior faculty," but with "fixed term appointments, limited participation in the full range of faculty work, and insufficient support from their institutions, these full-time non-tenure-track colleagues constitute a second tier of the academic labor structure" (Curtis and Thornton 15), while part-time adjuncts become even more marginalized.

Before offering recommendations for programs and faculty interested in maintaining the importance of research in FTNTT positions, we want to acknowledge an apparent contradiction. While we believe that the FTNTT position can be improved, our intention is not to encourage faculty to stay in them. As we have established, the move to increase contingent labor is a strategic decision made by many universities. These FTNTT positions are not postdocs, an intermediary position for faculty as they look for tenure-track jobs elsewhere. Most postdoc positions, in fact, encourage research. However, with the exception of Duke's writing program where faculty are expected to publish and are only given three-year contracts with the expectation that they will then move

on to TT (or other FTNTT) jobs, many FTNTT positions in composition are teaching positions, and as such, can bewitch faculty into spending all of their time teaching. Although there is something to be said for experience in teaching, there is also the potential for burnout and intellectual stagnation if these positions offer no other opportunities (Mamiseishvili and Rosser 122). In addition, a well-committed faculty with a consistent roster can wield considerable power, even if they are NTT, but if there is high turnover or a lack of consistency, such solidarity and agency can be diminished.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To ameliorate these problems with FTNTT positions, we propose several recommendations. Foremost among them, to support composition as a discipline, we propose that such positions should offer promotion with merit pay and designate a minimal (10 to 20 percent) expectation of research in order to merit these incentives. Within our program, research is worth ten percent of our annual merit review. This research expectation does make an impact on merit pay (in addition to improvements in teaching and faculty development), but with only about half of faculty seeking publication, the results are mixed, so we believe that research should be valued more highly. Faculty are encouraged to do scholarship; however, if faculty are serious about pursuing scholarship, with no tenure-track status, there is little left but intellectual curiosity and the potential to be exploited at lower pay than TT faculty if scholarship is only valued at ten percent for merit review. For administrators who see composition purely as a service in teaching, research expectations in these positions might be the most difficult to negotiate. After all, our roles are still seen by many as readers of student texts, *cancellare* of errors. We do not mean to paint all administrators in such a negative light because, after all, a desire to improve education of students rather than only gather research monies is an enviable goal, but we also must fight for our continued status as a discipline whose interest is in improving student education through our own scholarship.

Second, there should be at least some security of employment with multiyear contracts of at least three years, but preferably five years, based on comprehensive and transparent review. Such modest, multi-year contracts allow the faculty who work in such positions to feel secure and therefore to experiment with teaching or engage in multi-year research projects at their universities, while also offering a compromise to TT faculty who might be wary that their own positions or the position of faculty in general are weakened by FTNTT positions that offer the same security as TT contracts.

At our university, the faculty senate, on which two of our program faculty

serve, proposed and enacted a shift to multiyear contracts for non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty across the university. Our current annual instructor review for contract renewal is transparent, and it goes well beyond only student evaluations, two criteria established in the 2011 MLA "Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members" guidelines. Such a faculty review for contract renewal, annually or multi-year, consists of multiple ways of reviewing teaching: student evaluations, teaching observations, a portfolio with course syllabi, assignments and other teaching materials, student papers that showcase written comments, and a teaching reflection.

Mentoring is also imperative. As in our Writing Program, the Writing Program director should meet with the faculty member to review his or her teaching but also offer advice and feedback as a mentor in areas where the faculty member either seemed to be experiencing difficulty in teaching, or indicated in his or her reflection a request for feedback. Thus, this teaching review would be more in line with a teaching review for tenure-track faculty, with pedagogical mentoring in place as needed, as Janet Ruth Heller suggests. We would also like to see such reviews cover the faculty member's scholarly contributions. Although only vaguely suggested in the MLA Guidelines, encouragement, recognition, or even feedback and mentoring of scholarly endeavors can be a small but positive incentive.

These FTNTT positions should allow faculty the possibility to apply for research grants and at least partial sabbaticals, as the 2011 MLA guidelines suggest. Our own program provides a healthy professional development and travel fund, and our university provides opportunities for NTT faculty to apply for additional research money. We recommend programs provide not only such professional development funds but also additional travel or research grants or awards based on scholarship on a competitive basis as an incentive to do additional research. Furthermore, faculty and program directors or administrators should negotiate with the university so that faculty in these programs are eligible for university research grants when they are offered. We are lucky that all of these funding opportunities are available to us in our program and at our university, but even in cases at other universities with strict policies that prevent funding for NTT faculty or highly competitive circumstances, directors or administrators who happen to be tenure-track might apply for such grants as co-researchers with FTNTT faculty members.

Incentivizing talented faculty to stay fulfilled in FTNTT positions leads to the last recommendation. Although we agree with the MLA "Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members" that, when possible, FTNTT faculty should be eligible for TT lines as they open up within their home institutions, we understand that these can be rare instances. So, we

recommend that FTNTT positions should be open for at least some form of tenure. Some universities have instituted alternative types of tenure including the University of California system that offers lecturers “security of employment” after a number of years, and other state universities that leverage collective bargaining agreements through unions (AAUP “Tenure and Teaching”). In our program, teaching gets top priority, comprising 60 percent of our annual merit review. This focus on teaching does seem to lead to innovative teaching which is cutting edge in our field, and hence continues to energize our program. However, receiving at least a type of teaching tenure would ensure that faculty continued to focus their efforts on taking chances in their teaching since there would be a mechanism in place that rewarded teaching innovation. More importantly, teaching tenure would add an extra mechanism by which faculty would be rewarded for any scholarly research on teaching, thereby ensuring that our teaching remained cutting edge. It would also ensure that teachers of first-year writing continued to pursue research on writing and the teaching of writing. Teaching tenure would also create at least some additional status and greater job security than three or five year contracts alone. Criteria for such teaching tenure could be modeled after programs that want to maintain a teaching focus but provide additional rewards for extraordinary research or service. For example, when St. John’s University converted its FTNTT positions to tenure-track lines, they instituted promotion criteria that “require that faculty, in addition to documenting successful teaching, document accomplishments in two of these three areas: publishing, conference presentations, and service” (AAUP “Tenure and Teaching”). Such criteria continue to emphasize teaching but provide an incentive to write and research. With this recommendation, we also want to acknowledge that converting positions can create problems of shifting faculty who may have specifically sought out a particular program or department based on one set of expectations. Establishing early on in a new program’s development options for promotion and status is our primary point here.

CONCLUSION

The FTNTT position is, in many of the ways we have covered, a positive response to the exploitation of adjunct, part-time faculty; however, such positions are still contingent labor, often reliant on a director or administrator and strategic decisions from upper-level university administrations. That said, we do see the FTNTT position as a viable track for many faculty with concerns about the workload of a tenure-track position or with other interests that more demanding positions might preclude. But we want to stress that the FTNTT positions should also provide opportunities for scholarship and research not only as a means of improving

faculty's teaching but also in enriching understanding of writing and pedagogy for faculty at large. Furthermore, research opportunities, incentives, and support in these positions will provide a type of professional development for faculty who might want to seek tenure-track jobs later in their careers.

These FTNTT positions are often enacted with many good intentions, most noble of which is a desire for a committed teaching faculty who are adequately compensated and supported. But we also want to contend that as representatives of the discipline of composition, a field that still is so often considered merely service, we are in fact scholars of practice with research agendas that improve our teaching and understanding of writing and rhetoric. And even though the 2008 MLA report shows much greater increases in percentages of faculty off the tenure track, tenure-track positions still exist and are valued—in “The 2013 Insider Higher Ed Survey of College and University Chief Academic Officers” (CAOs), 70 percent of CAOs “strongly agree or agree that tenure remains important and viable at their institution” (Gallup 17). The conflict here is that in that same survey, 64 percent of CAOs stated they favored “a system of long-term contracts over the existing tenure system” (Gallup 19). If FTNTT positions continue as a strategic trend with long-term contracts replacing tenure, we should push to also maintain a place for research even as we recognize that doing so holds the possibility that administrations might see ways to exploit such faculty by paying them less but benefiting the university the same as the tenure-track faculty.

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