

## INTRODUCTION

# PATHS TOWARD SOLIDARITY

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When Richard Rorty juxtaposed the terms *contingency*, *irony*, and *solidarity* in the title of his 1989 book, he wasn't talking about labor conditions in twenty-first century university English departments or writing programs, but we wish he had been. He got the contingency and irony parts right. Solidarity is much harder to come by.

At the 2012 Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, Seth, Bill, Amy, and our friend and colleague Karen Fitts conducted a roundtable session called "Taming the Intractable, Finding Justice for All in Composition's Labor Relations." The session emerged from a complicated labor situation in the university system where we work. Our collective bargaining agreement includes a contract provision that allows departments to convert long-term, full-time adjunct faculty into tenure-track status by majority vote of the tenured/tenure-track faculty and subsequent approval of the administration. Instead of offering the shining beacon of hope that we thought might be an answer to contingent faculty exploitation, our respective departments, on two separate campuses, debated the wisdom of these conversions, revealing some festering resentments and some disagreements among generally like-minded people about the best courses of action for addressing contingent faculty exploitation wisely. Even the four of us, committed to labor reform and social justice, found we had differences.

Obviously conversions are not the only, or even the best, solution to adjunct labor exploitation; no single policy solution is best for every contingent faculty member or every department. As Maria Maisto (contributor to the collection) contends regularly, what contingent faculty want most is simply to be compensated fairly for whatever work they do. Those who want to teach an occasional course for supplementary income or for fun deserve the same equity as those

who teach full-time with a long-term stake in the profession. Contingent faculty are contingent for many reasons, sometimes willingly and sometimes not, and in survey after survey they reveal a wide variety of ambitions in terms of employment security and status. Some want full-time work; some don't. Some ideally would like tenure-track appointments; some not. And so on.

In the last few years, the data describing contingent labor conditions and contingent faculty perceptions have developed significantly. Since 2010, survey results have come forth from the Coalition on the Academic Workforce; the Delphi Project; the Modern Language Association; the Adjunct Project; and the New Faculty Majority, all of which are largely mutually reinforcing. We've been documenting the exploitative conditions of adjunct faculty for a long time, and while trends and specifics matter, continued surveying and data-collecting all too often preclude movement towards equitable treatment in the name of ignorance. We *know*. We know *enough*, anyway, and as the New Faculty Majority and the Adjunct Project, among other efforts, have shown, it's possible to make concrete progress based on what we know *right now*. When the *Chronicle of Higher Education* announced that it would house and support the continued work of the Adjunct Project early in 2013, prominent adjunct-equity activist "[Margaret] Hanzimanolis, who holds a Ph.D. in English, [said] the ability to see the 'big-picture terrain' about pay on the Adjunct Project site will make it easier for adjuncts to maximize their own pay" (qtd. in June and Newman), and founder Josh Boldt contends:

When I first made the spreadsheet, I had one intention: that people who were thinking about getting a job somewhere could look and see what the job paid. . . . The ability to compare institutions allows adjuncts to make choices about where to work based on pay and others' reviews. In the past adjuncts essentially had no power to do something like that . . . but now they do. (qtd. in June and Newman)

Likewise, we've seen increasing calls for contingent faculty equity (or at least humaneness) in our professional discourse: former MLA president Michael Berube's "From the President" blog, on which he devoted significant space to articulating what he sees as minimally acceptable compensation and working conditions; a series of research reports from the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education laying out specifics about the harm that inequitable treatment does to our students and our institutions (see, for example, "Who Is Professor 'Staff' and How Can This Person Teach So Many Classes?"); and organizing efforts like the New Faculty Majority, the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL), PrecariCorps, and Adjunct Action.

Contingent faculty exploitation has even begun to see coverage from non-academic press outlets, where the plight of temporary faculty is often connected to the plight of other temporary workers. Writers are noting that increased college tuition and expenses aren't winding up in the pockets of faculty. The 2013 death of Margaret Mary Vojtko, a long-time adjunct professor at Duquesne University who died destitute from health problems that she might have addressed with insurance benefits, underscored this point, and was covered by the mainstream press in outlets including *The Huffington Post*, National Public Radio and *USA Today*. In January of 2014, the *New York Times* finally considered the scope of labor problems in higher education in "Crowded Out of the Ivory Tower, Adjuncts See a Life Less Lofty." Even the popular lifestyle magazine *Elle* has addressed contingency, in December 2014's "Hypereducated and on Welfare."

Organized action is on the rise, too. A petition to David Weil at the Department of Labor, co-authored by a group of loosely connected adjunct activists (including Seth), and calling for government investigations into wage-theft, teaching load reduction and other unethical/illegal labor practices, garnered nearly 10,000 signatures in summer/fall 2014. An anonymous adjunct used social media to plan National Adjunct Walkout Day in February 2015, encouraging a nationwide work-stoppage to demonstrate the overwhelming reliance of higher education on contingent workers. The MLA Democracy Campaign nearly elected a slate of adjuncts to executive positions, and succeeded in raising the discourse and the stakes around that organization's treatment of contingent members. At CCCC in 2015, members of the Labor Caucus shared and opened for public comment and revision a draft of the Indianapolis Resolution, a reworking of the Wyoming Resolution, calling for our professional organizations to revise and redouble their efforts in working for adjunct equity; in April 2016, the CCCC membership approved a motion calling on the leadership to enact three major provisions of the resolution. Also in April 2016, CCCC published a new Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure-Track Writing Faculty. The groundswell is growing.

Claire Goldstone writes in *Dissent* (and it's worth quoting at length because it was one of the first times this much important information appeared in a non-academic source):

Most teachers in higher education across the country lack long-term job stability. Presently, close to 70 percent of all faculty appointments in degree-granting institutions are off the tenure track, a number that includes over one million people. The label "contingent academic labor" encompasses an array of arrangements, among them adjuncts paid on a per-course basis,

one- or multi-year contract faculty, visiting professors, and post-docs. In general, these positions are characterized by low pay, no-to-little job security, and, frequently, no health or retirement benefits. According to the Adjunct Project, the national average remuneration for adjuncts is \$2,987 for a 15-week, three-credit course, usually with a high student enrollment, and some teachers are paid as little as \$1,000 per class. Currently, nearly 34,000 Ph.D. recipients receive food stamps to supplement their earnings. In an effort to cobble together a living, many adjuncts teach at multiple institutions, taking on a course load of six or more classes per semester and spending significant time traveling among campuses. Most recently, numerous university systems have reduced the number of courses adjuncts can teach in a single year to avoid the thirty-hour per week threshold established by the 2010 Affordable Care Act that would trigger access to employer healthcare benefits. (n.p.)

Among the contingent-faculty-activist community, there is clear frustration over looming implications for employment possibilities resulting from the Affordable Care Act: we're seeing institutions limit teaching loads in order to get out of the provision requiring them to offer healthcare to employees who average thirty hours per week. We are alarmed by routine dismissals of contingent faculty whose work clearly should be covered by any meaningful definition of academic freedom (à la James Kilgore at the University of Illinois). We are angered by races to the bottom, typified by an administrative proposal, during a recent round of negotiations with the faculty union, that we slash our adjunct faculty pay by 35 percent because they are paying over "market value."

As Seth argued in a presentation at the 2013 CCCC, and which we believe is just as true (if not more so) a few years later, there are success stories, and they are newsworthy; at the same time, frustration and the sense of intractability are unsurprising ("Refracting"). Our response to these conditions, therefore, is two-fold. First, this book clarifies and specifies the means and effects of exploitation across institutional contexts. We recognize that the discourses around contingency tend toward one of three sorts: hollow (but certainly well-intentioned) exhortations; dramatic (often justifiably so) depictions of abusive exploitation; or a combined anger and despair. Each of those discourses is important and has its place, but obviously they have not worked in any curative sense. Second, then, this collection addresses the situation by highlighting alternatives to the hollow and horrific, to the anger and despair; we compile and present efforts that have led concretely and effectively toward improved adjunct faculty working condi-

tions. In the years we've been thinking about labor issues, and more recently contingent labor issues in the field, we have in fact seen a shift towards more proactive stances against poor labor practices. This shift increasingly includes faculty across ranks; administrators willing to be ethical in their treatment of faculty; and, in short, anybody willing to make common cause to fight exploitation.

To call ourselves *hopeful* is perhaps imprecise. *Resolute* is better. Our project is less about envisioning a utopia toward which we strive—particularly because we don't all agree on what that utopia looks like—and more about taking concrete steps to fight both exploitation of contingent faculty and the denigration of composition studies as a worthy field of study. Those two goals are intimately related, of course. It's no accident: departments that exploit contingent faculty the worst are almost always the ones that respect the intellectual value of composition the least. The department in which Bill and Seth work seemed to have established a healthy relationship between the literature and composition faculty, until the dispute over adjunct faculty hiring and conversion to tenure-track status exposed unhealed wounds, which our chapters will elaborate.

Not everybody in the book holds our twin goals of fighting both adjunct exploitation and the denigration of composition studies to be equally important; in fact, many chapters don't even try to address both goals. We do, however, expect that the interplay between them will be evident throughout; and to highlight it further, in the next section we will provide a series of *threads* to tie together arguments among chapters, providing readers alternative ways to navigate through the text according to their needs and interests.

A note on terminology: Names matter. And many names exist for non-tenure-track faculty, including lecturer, adjunct, temporary faculty, contingent faculty, and visiting professor. As editors, we didn't want to force a particular nomenclature on the contributors to this collection, as the social, economic, professional, and political associations with each term are often local and contextual. Further, we sometimes use these terms interchangeably, when in fact many may see each as distinct. Our intention is neither to insult non-tenure-track faculty, nor to impress our own associations with the terms upon readers. We should call faculty what they wish to be called, yet we can't anticipate the preferences of every reader. Therefore, the authors in this collection simply used their preferred or local terminology because that terminology itself may help identify local conditions and contexts. Rather than being interpreted as inconsistent, we hope readers will see in it our recognition of the wide array of differences.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The chapters raise a complex array of issues, ideas, strategies, tactics, and cau-

tions, often within the same pieces. For those working with the complete book, we have arranged the chapters so that similar emphases or locations are near each other. We begin with Carol Lind and Joan Mullin's "Silent Subversion, Quiet Competence, and Patient Persistence," in which they describe efforts to create a NTT course reassignment award, framing it as "a story of subversion, competence and persistence, and a commitment to ethical action." In "Despair is Not a Strategy," Barbara Heifferon and Anna K. Nardo recount how the tenured faculty at LSU advocated for secure positions and improved compensation for their contingent colleagues by forming alliances with an activist group on their campus, even in the face of budget crises and threats of termination. Mark McBeth and Tim McCormack offer "An Apologia and a Way Forward: In Defense of the Lecturer Line in Writing Programs." They propose that it acts as "a workable resolution that lies between necessary accommodation and affirmative writing program labor practices." In "Real Faculty But Not: The Full-Time, Non-Tenure-Track Position as Contingent Labor," Richard Colby and Rebekah Schultz Colby, full-time non-tenure-track faculty themselves, contend that such positions dis-incentivize scholarship on teaching and recommend strategies for continuing to support it.

In "Head to Head with edX," Michael Murphy explores the changing identity of adjunct composition faculty in the age of the MOOC, juxtaposing the mechanizing and casualizing of academic labor with a Sophistic approach as a possibility for expanded professional development that improves NTT faculty's work as writing instructors and their labor situation. Considering professionalism and credentialing from a different direction, Amy Lynch-Binieck and William B. Lalicker describe in "Contingency, Solidarity, and Community Building: Principles for Converting Contingent to Tenure Track" the differing ways their two English departments within the same state system respond to a contractual policy that allows for the conversion of temporary faculty to the tenure track, and induce from those experiences a set of principles that help departments to build both equitable labor conditions and programmatic soundness. Dani Neir-Weber's "The Other Invisible Hand: Adjunct Labor and Economies of the Writing Center" turns the lens of professional development towards her contingent writing center staff, focusing especially on the ways TT faculty attitudes were challenged as she fought for professional development funding for her staff. In "The Risks of Contingent Writing Center Directorships," Dawn Fels takes on the problems not only of contingent writing center staff, but of the larger trend towards making directorships precarious, a growing trend that may harm both "quality and integrity" of these units.

The next two chapters, Rolf Norgaard's "The Uncertain Future of Past Success: Memory, Narrative, and the Dynamics of Institutional Change" and

Chris Blankenship and Justin M. Jory's "Non-Tenure-Track Activism: Genre Appropriation in Program Reporting" take up two parallel sets of issues in very different ways: involving contingent faculty in shared governance, and protecting against backsliding after initial successes. Jacob Babb and Courtney Adams Wooten, in "Traveling on the Assessment Loop: The Role of Contingent Labor in Program Development," offer contingent faculty participation and responsibility in program assessment as another route into enhanced professional status and recognition.

Chapters Twelve through Fifteen address both the importance and complexities of what we refer to as "self-advocacy" (but might also be called *internal organizing within contingent ranks*). In "Adjuncts Foster Change: Improving Adjunct Working Conditions by Forming an Associate Faculty Coalition (AFC)," Tracy Donhardt and Sarah Layden narrate the process by which they organized in an environment where unionizing is legally and politically difficult; along the way, they also highlight the importance of what may seem like incremental wins. Lacey Wootton and Glenn Moomau's "Building Our Own Bridges: A Case-Study in Contingent Faculty Self-Advocacy" describes how lasting change was achieved at American University by emphasizing "faculty reputation, alliances with tenure-line faculty, and participation in unit and university governance." From a less local and more theoretical/historical perspective, Maria Maisto, Sue Doe, and Janelle Adsit, in "What Works and What Counts: Valuing the Affective in Non-Tenure-Track Advocacy," ask us to reflect on the meanings of "action" and "activism," arguing for the important role of affect in any lasting change. In "Hitting the Wall: Identity and Engagement at a Two-Year College," Desirée Holter, Amanda Martin, and Jeff Klausman caution activists to remember that even well-intentioned changes in employment status can negatively affect adjunct faculty's personal and professional identities, and to proceed with care.

The final three chapters take on very different questions and problems that connect ethics, individual/collective agency, and institutional spaces. Seth Kahn's "The Problem of Speaking for Adjuncts" proposes "strategies for avoiding colonization of contingent faculty, offering non-contingent faculty ways of understanding contingent faculty advocacy beyond pity and paternalistic good will." Allison Laubach Wright, in "The Rhetoric of Excellence and the Erasure of Graduate Labor," considers graduate students' labor-identity, rejecting the conventional model of graduate assistants as mere "apprentices." Finally, Michelle LaFrance and Anicca Cox juxtapose stories from the 2003 University of Massachusetts Dartmouth contingent faculty strike with photos documenting adjunct work spaces, presenting "a story of possibility, collaboration, and resistance. . . ."

Because we expect many readers to be downloading individual chapters rather than reading the entire book in order, we opted out of *sections* that inevitably



tried and failed to categorize these multifaceted arguments, and decided instead to articulate *threads* that we believe connect arguments across chapters. Readers will find in each chapter a note just below the by-line that tags the threads, connecting it to other chapters so you can find other helpful resources, positions, and responses.

**Thread 1: Self advocacy.** Chapters in this thread feature contingent faculty-led efforts on their own behalf. The stories they tell present mixed levels of success and help establish contingent-faculty driven frameworks for collaborating with tenure-track and/or tenured (TT/T) faculty.

Layden/Donhardt; Wootton/Moomau; Blankenship/Jory; Maisto/Doe/Adsit

**Thread 2: Organizing within and across ranks.** These chapters describe linkages across faculty (and in some cases even managerial) ranks or status; taken together, they present allies with both options for advocacy or alliance-building and a sense of the ethical considerations of doing so.

Lind/Mullin; Kahn; Maisto/Doe/Adsit; Blankenship/Jory; Colby/Colby; Holter/Martin/Klausmann; Wootton/Moomau; McBeth/McCormick; Heifferon/Nardo; Nier-Weber; Norgaard

**Thread 3: Professionalizing and Developing in Complex Contexts.** These chapters respond in various ways to the problem of un/under-professionalized or non-specialized writing faculty and their access to professionalizing opportunities (conference attendance, research support, job security, access to position conversions, further graduate education/training).

Murphy; Blankenship/Jory; Colby/Colby; Babb/Adams-Wooten; Holter/Martin/Klausmann; LaFrance/Cox; Laubach-Wright; McBeth/McCormick; Lynch-Binieck/Lalicker

**Thread 4: Local Changes to Workload, Pay, and Material Conditions.** These chapters focus on the most concrete changes in the most specific, local settings—individual campuses/programs.

Lynch-Binieck/Lalicker; Wright; Fels; Nier-Weber; Norgaard; LaFrance/Cox; Murphy; McBeth/McCormick; Heifferon/Nardo

**Thread 5. Protecting Gains, Telling Cautionary Tales.** In these chapters, contributors acknowledge the often-provisional nature of success and the complexities, even risks, of engaging in the struggle for equity.

Lind/Mullin; Heifferon/Nardo; Blankenship/Jory; Norgaard; Holter/Martin/Klausmann; Fels; Laubach-Wright

This collection, then, seeks to address contingency, exploitation, and solidarity in activist terms deriving from institutional realities and cases. The resulting conversation illustrates the present crisis, but ultimately focuses on multiple, creative, constructive responses that can both enact labor justice and champion the disciplinary energies of all members of our collegial community.



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