

Volume 6  
Number 1  
Spring 2012

# Open WORDS

*Access  
and  
English  
Studies*

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**OPEN WORDS: Access and English Studies** is dedicated to publishing articles focusing on political, professional, and pedagogical issues related to teaching composition, reading, creative writing, ESL, and literature to open-admissions and “non-mainstream” student populations. We seek critical work in areas such as instructional strategies, cultural studies, critical theory, classroom materials, technological innovation, institutional critique, student services, program development, etc., that assist educators, administrators, and student support personnel who work with students in pedagogically difficult settings. Articles should consider the particularities of these settings—issues, for example, surrounding the identifier of “open access,” intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, regional and cultural differences, and the range of competencies students bring with them to classrooms—in light of the aims of English studies to empower students’ critical and creative endeavors. We value works pertinent to specialists yet accessible to non-specialists, and we encourage submissions that take into account what interactions with students teach us about the broader, democratic goals of open-access educations and English studies.

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## *Guest Editors' Introduction:*

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# **Cross Roads, not Cross Purposes: Contingency, Vulnerability, and Alliances in the Contemporary Writing Program**

**B**ECAUSE YOU'RE READING THIS ISSUE OF *OPEN WORDS*, YOU PROBABLY already recognize—and we hope, resist—the exploitation of contingent labor in English and Writing departments and programs. Because our journal focuses on access issues, you also understand that contingent labor and access are connected in complex ways that people who struggle with only one or the other often miss. We wish you didn't already know this. We wish you didn't need to. We wish the long history of really smart people writing dozens of books, articles, position papers, reports, and manifestos had led to the changes their authors hoped for.

Just a few quick examples:

- The Modern Language Association's Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit features links to fourteen different reports, statements and surveys since 2006 arguing for more ethical and humane hiring and staffing practices. See [http://www.mla.org/advocacy\\_kit](http://www.mla.org/advocacy_kit).
- The National Council of Teachers of English endorsed a strong set of recommendations from its College Section Steering Committee in 2010, ranging from calls for adequate office space, to full shared-governance and voting rights, to long-term and, where possible, permanent appointments. See [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/contingent\\_faculty](http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/contingent_faculty).
- In November 2011, an American Association of University Professors panel issued a recommendation that contingent faculty have equal say in all aspects of shared governance.

The Association of Departments of English, Conference on College Composition and Communication, and other organizations have all issued similar calls. We don't mean to diminish the effort and quality of those projects, but to point out the limit-situation, in Freirean terms, they butt up against. Put directly, the academy's—and most often English Departments'—exploitation of contingent labor is unethical, perhaps inhumane, and undercuts the very access to quality education that so often serves as the justification for doing it.

More positively, the collective national voice of contingent faculty grows louder and increasingly organized. The New Faculty Majority ([www.newfacultymajority.info](http://www.newfacultymajority.info)) has begun

organizing events nationwide calling attention to contingent faculty exploitation. Adjunct Matters ([www.adjunctmatters.org](http://www.adjunctmatters.org)), along with public education efforts, is organizing a large-scale group insurance plan in which contingent faculty can participate. Contingent-labor activists Megan Fulwiler and Jennifer Marlowe expect to release *Con Jobs: Stories of Adjunct and Contingent Faculty* ([www.conjobdoc.com](http://www.conjobdoc.com)), a documentary that adds volume and power to the national movement for contingent labor equity, in early Summer 2012.

Still, here we are. Contingent faculty continue to cobble together (for many, at best) multiple part-time assignments that add up to full-time schedules, but at low pay and without benefits. Widening access to higher education (at least ostensibly) is diversifying student populations at many institutions, while shrinking resources and so-called education reform strategies are undercutting our ability to respond to students' needs. Contingent faculty win occasional local victories, such as the conversion of fifty-five temporary full-time positions into tenure-track positions at Delta College in Michigan (Fain) or successful unionizing efforts here and there, but writ large conditions for contingent faculty show little promise of improving on their own. National efforts to link access to efficiency—in its most insidious neoliberal sense, represented by organizations like the US Education Delivery Institute (<http://www.deliveryinstitute.org/>)—only obscure the issues, a problem that just gets worse in the specific context of Composition Studies. Composition courses, including Basic Writing, are simultaneously charged with numerous and inconsistent goals (including the teaching of invention, grammar conventions, academic discourses, information literacy, revision strategies, genre knowledge, rhetorical flexibility, and more) and assessed in often epistemologically irrelevant—if not dishonest—ways (examples include timed writing exams that ignore instruction in writing process; machine-scored exams, both objective and essay; assessments based on syllabi and other documents that have little if any direct relationship to classroom practice or student performance; and so on). And all that on the backs of contingent faculty who can't and, as Bill Thelin points out in this issue, often won't contest the situation.

As much as we'd like to promise simple solutions and clarity, we can't. However, we believe the essays in this issue contribute to our field's collective understanding of both labor exploitation and access by putting them into relation with each other. Not every piece treats both problems at equal length. Some disagree about the nature and scope of the issues and advocate very different responses. Contributors certainly represent a wide range of institutions, experiences and positions—having taught in community colleges, religious institutions, and public comprehensive regional universities; having served as graduate instructors, some as contingent faculty, some as WPAs, some in K-12. Framed very differently—from the very personal to the departmental to the disciplinary—these essays contest the easy assumption



that allies need to agree on a program of changes. “We’re all in this together” does not equal “We all want or need the same answers.” What’s more, they resist the competing urges either to cure only the symptoms or to offer hortatory calls that are impossible to act on.

In “Structuring the Color Line Through Composition,” Jason Evans describes the “contradictory practices” of community colleges: offering access to vulnerable populations while being de-funded and staffed more and more with contingent labor. Thus, despite its ostensible purpose, Composition at the community college actually maintains the educational color line, as historically disenfranchised students become frustrated by courses and instruction unattuned to their needs and contexts.

From an administrative perspective, Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, in “Me and the Adjuncts,” examines connections among retention problems, curriculum, and contingent labor at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, where she serves as Basic Writing Coordinator. She explores ways in which programs can improve writing instruction and increase retention while neither abusing their contingent workforce nor assuming that all contingent faculty have the same professional goals. She urges us to remember that “we need a better understanding that conditions are not the same everywhere, and we should avoid assuming that there is one ideal solution to the problems of contingent labor.”

Bill Thelin’s “Memos, Email, and Reports: Writing to and Being Written by Adjunct Faculty” articulates the difficulties of balancing the “administrative agenda” of programmatic quality and integrity with the complex rhetorical and ethical problem of speaking to a staff of contingent faculty whose needs and concerns vary widely. Reflecting on his work as the WPA in an open-admissions institution, he often found himself in “a situation where communication of policies and changes risks disrupting morale and teaching, as such alterations, often by necessity unilateral administrative decisions, remind the adjuncts of their status,” that is, unintentionally reinforcing the powerlessness of contingent faculty to affect their own conditions.

Amy Lynch-Binieck, who has served as an adjunct faculty member, graduate instructor, WPA, Writing Center director, and faculty member at a comprehensive public university, asks the question “Who Is Teaching Composition?” Her multiple perspectives come into focus when she frames the question in disciplinary terms. The majority of writing courses are being taught by contingent faculty, most of whom do not have significant training in Composition. Therefore, higher education’s labor system hinges upon both the exploitation of flexworkers and the position that Composition studies itself is adjunct. Hiring practices suggest that disciplinary knowledge is unnecessary to teach writing, perhaps better qualifying one for administrative work, the significance of which Lynch-Binieck and Webb-Sunderhaus disagree on. While Webb-Sunderhaus contends that writing programs can only benefit from elevating

specialists into administrative ranks, Lynch-Binieck cautions that quarantining compositionists in administrative positions removes important specialized knowledge from classrooms and, as Bill Thelin echoes, devalues disciplinary expertise.

Finally, Marcia Bost provides us with the perspective of a contingent faculty teaching freshman Composition for fifteen years, many at a private Christian college serving mostly non-traditional students. Her very personal account of “Moments in the Stream” vividly depicts the difficulties of navigating the needs of her students, the demands of the institution, the attitudes of the permanent faculty, her growing family, and her own professional development. In doing so, Bost certainly finds some “psychic reward” in the work, which Bill Thelin cautions against letting override concerns about adjunct working conditions.

We sincerely believe that the disagreements among contributors to the issue—not to mention the number of topics our contributors gloss or leave unaddressed—do not simply reinforce the sense of intractability that so many academic labor activists struggle with; instead, we expect those differences to help activists and decision-makers at all ranks and levels refract our thinking in ways that wouldn't have occurred to us otherwise, expanding our sense of options rather than convincing us that none of them will work.

We believe that in the era of “We are the 99%,” teachers and students have an opportunity. Contingent teachers are the new faculty majority; students facing economic, educational and cultural barriers can no longer logically be called “nontraditional.” We are not writing about the margins anymore, but about the new mainstream: contingent workers and vulnerable students. We see a chance for alliances; the collective voices in this issue represent that hope.

Sharon Henry, Clemson University

Seth Kahn, West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Amy Lynch-Binieck, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

February, 2012

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**Amy Lynch-Binieck** is an Assistant Professor of English and Coordinator of Composition at Kutztown University where she teaches undergraduate composition and the teaching of writing, as well as graduate courses in composition, rhetoric, and literacy. She earned a Ph.D. in Composition from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her current research project is a qualitative study of the connections among employment status, disciplinary background, and Composition pedagogy.

Jason Evans

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## Structuring the Color Line through Composition

IN THE CHAPTER “OF THE DAWN OF FREEDOM” IN *THE SOULS OF Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois discusses the promises of Reconstruction as a massive and abrupt re-structuring of life in the South. Reconstruction ultimately failed to create lasting change, but as a response to racism it imparts a lasting lesson: racism is a structural problem, borne out in inequality and rooted in property and education. Reconstruction did not address racism as a matter of feeling; it sought to maintain martial law at polling places; to dream of a system of equal education; to guarantee forty acres and a mule, or self-sufficiency. That racism flared up because Reconstruction failed frames the ongoing problem of race in the U.S. as one of structure, especially of property and of education.

The civil rights gains of the 1950s and 1960s addressed some structural problems. Electoral disenfranchisement was made properly illegal, and the separate but unequal status quo in the education system was formally repealed. The forty-odd years since the Civil Rights Movement have seen various anti-racist interventions on the part of state and federal government (Affirmative Action, expansions of public funding for higher education), but a continued gap persists between whites and blacks in family wealth, household income, educational achievement, incarceration rates, and even life expectancy and infant mortality. The color line is being maintained, but how?

### **Background: The “Double-Consciousness” of the Community College**

The community college is one attempted anti-racist intervention in higher education in the U.S. in the past forty years. It provides local, affordable access to a range of vocational training and to the first two years of an undergraduate curriculum. Its “open admissions” policy gives anyone with a high school diploma or GED an opportunity to enroll in college. Even at the state level, policy boards recognize the unique role a community college can play in the redistribution of wealth and opportunity, as in this statement by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB):

Of all postsecondary sectors, community colleges enroll by far the highest proportion of low income youth, particularly from urban centers; the highest proportion of

legal immigrants seeking to develop their skills and expand their opportunities; and the highest proportion of minority groups who are under represented both at middle- and upper-income levels and in good jobs with career opportunities. Heading off the spread of poverty among these groups and reversing the growing disparity of wealth and income are among the most important tasks facing our nation. Community colleges are one of the keys to meeting these challenges. (“ICCS Information and Facts”)

M. Garrett Bauman would agree. In his essay “The Double-Consciousness of the Community College,” he traces the thinking of both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois in the mission of the community college and argues that the community college has real potential to address social inequalities. He describes the community college as an entry point to the social ladder: “Each day we help to that first rung a few who were supposed to fail” (14).

Bauman also notes that critics have argued that the real purpose of the community college is to perpetuate an American caste system. Community colleges lack prestige and are associated with “shunt[ing] [minority students] into low-status service jobs” and “dampen[ing] social dynamite” (14). This essay argues in the latter vein, though like Bauman, I ultimately believe that the community college can contribute to a more just society. A “double-consciousness” or competing ideals may be unavoidable, but colleges should detect and avoid contradictory practices, especially those practices that disadvantage minority students.

Contradictory practices are not new to Composition faculty at open-access institutions, who often face in an intimate way the tension between the college’s competing ideals of access and rigor. The students’ home language and the school’s language may differ, presenting these students with a bewildering obstacle to success in college. What’s more, the Basic Writing and First-Year Composition faculty who are most often charged with helping the most vulnerable students are themselves vulnerable, subject to low pay and contingent contracts. State governments’ support of open-access higher education has declined in the past decade, even as enrollment has increased; as a result, colleges have hired more and more contingent faculty, putting at risk the quality of students’ learning

In this essay, I examine the composition/writing requirement in the Illinois community college system to demonstrate the ways in which structural racism subverts an ostensibly anti-racist state apparatus. I have selected the Illinois system because I am most familiar with it; my conclusions, though, are applicable to policy discussions in any state. I discuss the Illinois system generally and focus specifically on one Illinois community college, which I will call County College, that serves a substantial percentage of students of color. I argue that by requiring and under-funding composition instruction for minority students in community colleges, the state maintains a color line.

## Funding the Color Line

The Illinois community college system has limited its ability to serve as an open door to higher education. A disproportionately large percentage of minority students entering Illinois community colleges need remedial education, yet the state's community college funding formula provides fewer and fewer funds for remedial instruction.

Statewide over the last five years, about 20% of students entering Illinois community colleges needed some kind of writing, reading, or math remediation, while at County College, the figure is more than 90%. What explains County's higher incidence of students needing developmental coursework?<sup>1</sup>

According to the ICCB, between 2003 and 2007, about 16% of Illinois community college students were African American, 17% Latino, and 59% white (Table I-4). At County, 56% of the students are African American, 9% are Latino, and 31% are white. County has, then, about twice as many African American and Latino students as community colleges statewide—65% vs. 33%—and about half as many white students. The degree of difference suggests that minority students need remediation at a higher rate than white students. This pattern was also observed in a 1997 ICCB report on developmental education:

[M]inority students in all ethnic groups are overrepresented among remedial/developmental coursetakers... [A pattern] most pronounced for African American students who represented 13.3 percent of the total population and 23.6 percent of all remedial/developmental coursetakers in [FY] 1991, and 12.2 percent of all students and 21.2 percent of remedial/developmental coursetakers in [FY] 1996. (12)<sup>2</sup>

Thus, data show that the racial difference in student population accounts for at least some of the difference in the percentages of students requiring developmental coursework. Despite Patricia J. McAlexander and Nicole Pepinster Greene's recent statement that basic writing "programs across the nation [serve] an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population" (7), at County and in Illinois such programs serve students who are disproportionately African American. ("Diverse" may be true, but it so often obscures racial disproportions,

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1. If County does not definitively have higher standards for its students than other community colleges statewide, its higher incidence of students who need developmental coursework might be because County's district high schools perform more poorly than those in other districts statewide. This line of inquiry lies outside the scope of this paper, though it is a familiar sort of argument: plenty of statewide data show how well particular high schools prepare their students for college. And it's true, for instance, that the high schools in County's district are more poorly funded and have more minority students, lower family incomes, and lower levels of family education than the state-wide averages. Even so, it does not necessarily follow that the community college fails to address structural racism; rather, its developmental education programs could be seen as merely addressing the negative outcomes of the primary and secondary education systems.

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2. The 1997 report on developmental education is the most recent one available from ICCB.

as when a public city school is called “diverse” even when the student population is 99% African American. It’s a meaningless word if taken literally, but as a code word meaning “including blacks and browns” it points up a crucial and common racial misrecognition.)

Pointing to these racial disproportions here is not meant to essentialize nor to suggest that there is something inherent in black students that makes them test into pre-college level courses; rather, it is to point out that tracking students according to skill—remediation—also results in racial segregation.

The effects of racial segregation in schooling are well-documented and scholars have offered various explanations for a so-called “achievement gap.” Theresa Perry discusses “effort optimism” and its role in promoting African American achievement; she argues that teachers of African American students need to be aware that because African Americans have for so long been educationally disenfranchised, they are not optimistic that their efforts in school will be worthwhile. That African Americans would be disproportionately shunted into developmental coursework is evidence of an institutional practice that is not “intentionally organized to develop and sustain effort optimism” (Perry et al. 77)<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, in her discussion of John Ogbu’s cultural theories, she notes that “African Americans’ fight for equal educational opportunity has left them with a deep distrust for schools and school people” (61), a distrust that must only be exacerbated by being required to take non-credit remedial coursework. Who, after all, would feel optimistic about having to enroll in a course called “English 095: Fundamental English II”?

Taking developmental courses is often disheartening for students, but colleges prioritize transfer-level courses and neglect students enrolled in developmental courses, who so frequently fail. Contingent faculty teach a majority of credit hours across County College, but they typically teach all sections of the lowest level of remedial writing. And these faculty are the least supported institutionally, despite evidence that professional development and teacher training can make an enormous difference in the academic success of minority students.

Effective professional development for these faculty might focus on the relationships between race and remediation. Jay L. Robinson and others describe teaching practices that militate against illiteracy: “No one becomes literate who does not glimpse, and then come to feel, some possibility, no matter how tightly constrained, to shape the meanings that inevitably control one’s life” (313). This understanding of literacy gestures towards socio-linguistic awareness, a practice and teaching goal that Robinson describes elsewhere in *Conversations on the Written Word* (especially chapter 6, “Talk as Text: Students on the Margins”). Lisa Delpit argues for teachers’ socio-linguistic awareness, claiming that “liberal educational

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3. Indeed, as ICCB retention data show, only about 64% of basic skills students earn a passing grade.



movements" serving "non-white, non-middle class" communities should be aware that "[t]here are codes or rules for participating in power," and that "[i]f you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (24-25). Asa G. Hilliard III has examined the correlations between the performance of low-income African American students and the teaching of mathematics to show that, though the so-called "achievement gap" is real, "the quality of instruction is the key element in success or failure" (Perry et al. 132), arguing that cultural-specific instruction is the most effective mode for teachers of African American students. All of these explanations point to a need for more careful handling of skills curricula and more explicit engagement with the social issues surrounding schooling—in short, careful work with both tenured and contingent basic writing faculty to apprise them of the social contexts of their instruction.

As Robinson points out, "[b]ecoming literate... crucially involves a glimpse of some future... some sense that one may find habitable space in that future as a self who can speak and act meaningfully" (7). The institutional shape of remedial education suggests, though,

"'ghettoizing' of the developmental student, a limitation on the horizons of African Americans, and a truncation of optimism"

"ghettoizing" of the developmental student, a limitation on the horizons of African Americans, and a truncation of optimism. While the teaching practices in developmental courses could be (and sometimes are) progressive and aligned with the anti-racist practices described above, the structure of developmental education in the community college remains problematic, both within the college and the state.

The state's funding for higher education has been decreasing in recent years, something of which anyone connected to higher

education in Illinois is sharply aware. The community college system has not been immune to these problems; for instance, approximately one third of County's budget is supposed to be provided by the state (the other two thirds are supposed to come from local property taxes and tuition, in roughly equal proportion), but over the past nine years the state's share of the college's funding has decreased to less than 13% of the total. The state, of course, continues to boast of the good that community colleges do, as in the ICCB's claim quoted above. The state is also aware of the vital role that community colleges play in alleviating economic inequality for minorities. This tension between what the state says and does can only make observers more cynical about cuts in and freezes on funding for the community college system—law and policy-makers should be aware of the regressive effects of these budgetary decisions.



Yet the problems of state funding for Illinois community colleges are more complicated than across-the-board funding. Colleges are paid by the state in part on a credit hour basis; for each credit hour a student is enrolled, the college receives a reimbursement from the state. This arrangement sounds simple enough, but not all credit hours are equal. For a credit hour in a health-related field in 2011, such as Nursing or Dental Hygiene, the college will receive \$104.94. For a credit hour in a remedial course, the college will receive \$9.51; a general education course would net the college \$13.13 per credit hour (“FY11 Final Allocations” 3). The gap among these reimbursements has grown sharply, even between 2010-2011; in 2010, remedial courses were funded at \$14.40 and health courses at \$90.56 per credit hour by the state. In FY03, the rate for remedial courses was around \$24 per credit hour.

Why such a big gap, and why has the reimbursement rate for remedial education been declining? The reimbursement rates are determined in large part by how much each type of credit hour costs the college. Since health tech courses are taught mostly by full-time faculty and involve large costs for supplies and learning environments, such courses are costly for the college; remedial and general education courses, in contrast, are taught mostly by part-time faculty and involve very small costs for supplies.<sup>4</sup> The colleges tell the state how much they spend in each area, and the state proportions its reimbursement funding accordingly.

One might imagine that this funding formula influences a college’s structure and priorities. The formula does put a norming pressure on colleges, and rewards those that are able to do more with less, but the real problem the formula poses for colleges that serve minority students is that it does not recognize the added costs of helping minority students succeed both inside and beyond the classroom.<sup>5</sup> The state formula takes into account instructional costs—which is one kind of unfortunate feedback loop—but it does not take into account the extra counseling hours and academic support services that a student with “academic deficiencies” needs to make good use of those instructional costs, nor does the formula capture the extra hours that are required for faculty to do a decent job. Thus there is another aspect of the formula, more subtle and more destructive, which shapes the chances for success of minority students. The state pays the least for those courses which more minority students take first, and it does not recognize the greater cost of helping minority students succeed, reinforcing a structural disenfranchisement of African American students.

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4. At County, the highest paid adjunct faculty make about \$650 per credit hour with no benefits, while the lowest-paid full-time faculty make the equivalent of \$1,350 per credit hour, not including benefits. The highest paid full-time faculty can make around the equivalent of \$3,350 per credit hour, not including benefits.

5. Regina Deil-Amin and James E. Rosenbaum have written extensively about the kinds of academic support that most help minority students. See, for instance, their work with Ann E. Person, *After Admission: From College Access to College Success*.

These are not the same kinds of funding inequalities commonly discussed in U.S. primary and secondary education, whether focused on inequalities between states' wealth or on those resulting from property tax funding within states. In the case of this formula, instruction benefiting minority students, especially African Americans, receives less funding than instruction benefiting the population more generally, and support for that kind of instruction—tutoring, academic advising, counseling—is not factored in at all. Indeed, that this structural inequality occurs within schools suggests that what George Lipsitz calls our “possessive investment in whiteness” sustains racism *within* an anti-racist apparatus, “increas[ing] the absolute value of being white” (or talking white, or writing white) by under-funding courses “required” of African Americans (16). These funding discrepancies undermine the good that faculty can accomplish within classrooms. I can teach towards anti-racism in my own classroom and encourage others to do the same, but the structures of racism have affected and will affect my students more profoundly and more permanently than in the sixteen or thirty-two weeks I will see them. One such structure is the composition requirement itself.

## **What, to the State, Is Composition?**

To colleges and the state, Composition is a foundational skill for college and the working world. This is not framed as political (or, importantly to this essay, as anti-racist) by either colleges or the state, but the definitions often offered recognize and misrecognize links between the educational and economic systems. The recognitions are limited in scope; the misrecognitions make invisible the color line but point to its structured-ness.

In terms of higher education in Illinois, it seems that no justification for the Composition requirement is needed, for none is offered on the web sites of the ICCB, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), or generally on the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI). Were it not for individual college catalogs, students might be under the impression that requirements (and, really, higher education) are just a matter of checking boxes (in the case of transfer worksheets) or tallying up credits. In the case of the County Catalog:

The purpose of courses in writing and speaking is to foster the ability to communicate effectively with others, whether in speech or writing. The complexities of the modern world require the ability to think independently and express ideas clearly. Because these courses provide such important foundation skills, students should complete them early in the degree program so what they learn can improve their performance in other courses.

While this justification provides a general sense of the importance of writing, there is no reference to specific instances of how writing will be useful in or beyond college. The final sentence points to how writing courses provide “foundation skills” that students need for

other courses, a skill-set that will make students—and people navigating the “modern world”—more successful.

Writing in the “modern world”—imagined as a place that’s meritocratic and individualized—springs from what James A. Berlin would call the “current-traditional” and “transcendental” rhetorics, terms which many Composition scholars use to describe approaches to teaching composition that treat writing as a set of discrete skills. To “express ideas clearly,” for instance, implies that there is something like a clear idea separate from language (Berlin 8), while “communicating effectively *with* others” (emphasis mine) implies that rhetoric is “a social construct involving the interaction of interlocutor and audience” (Berlin 15). To restate the justification, County students are being hailed into a world in which they will be expected both to “think independently,” as autonomous individuals, and “to communicate effectively with others,” as social beings navigating “the complexities of the modern world.” (Why not the postmodern world?)

Such a justification posits an individual and thus misrecognizes the role(s) of communication in class and race structures. As Berlin points out, every rhetoric “embod[ies] the ideology of a powerful group or class” (5); when the college misrecognizes, or does not recognize, the ideologies in its understanding of communication, it obscures the relationships between groups and power. Positing an individual hides group power structures in language and deprives the college of an analytic for anti-racism.

The Illinois secondary education system recognizes more clearly than County the relationships between communication and power. Reading the state standards, though, it quickly becomes clear that misrecognition is only one structuring factor of systemic inequality; an explicit articulation of the alleged relationship between language competence and employment possibilities is no less indicative of the “foundational” relationship between the educational and economic systems. Goal 3 of Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts emphasizes a purpose for literacy in obvious terms:

Clear writing is critical to employment and production in today’s world. Individuals must be capable of writing for a variety of audiences in differing styles, including standard rhetoric themes, business letters and reports, financial proposals and technical and professional communications. Students should be able to use word processors and computers to enhance their writing proficiency and improve their career opportunities...

[Students will w]rite for real or potentially real situations in academic, professional and civic contexts (e.g., applications, job applications, business letters, resume, petitions). (“State Goal 3”)

This document guides the state’s high school curricula and clearly upholds the

notion that schools prepare workers; the schools appear eager to reproduce capitalist social formations. Louis Althusser would call this emphasis on writing “know-how,” but he would not miss the ways in which the very forms that deliver the emphasis (both bureaucratic and pedagogical) also interpellate subjects into the dominant social formation: “the school... teaches ‘know-how,’ but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its ‘practice’” (133). That is, the forms of writing such as those in the last cited paragraph of Goal 3 constitute “know-how”—the means of production in the so-called “service economy” of late capitalism.

This know-how is taught in a process heavily influenced by capitalism, noted below in four ways:

1. The Goal is given to schools and teachers by a state agency, suggesting Fordist capital formations. David Harvey discusses how “state interventionism... rested on notions of a mass economic democracy welded together through a balance of special-interest forces” (*Postmodernism* 136), in this case the schools, the state, and the corporation.
2. It expressly ties the students’ learning to the students’ eventual incorporation into the economy as workers.
3. It is broken down into a tiered system of expectations, “rationalized,” as Lukács and others would point out, “a break with the organic, irrational and qualitatively determined unity of the product” (88), and itself is part of a rationalized, systematic, and bureaucratic approach to building effective subject-worker-graduates.
4. The subtle plural “career opportunities” suggests a prescient awareness of what Harvey describes as the rise of “flexible specialization,” which “emphasizes personal responsibility” and subjects workers further to transnational movements/flights of capital. (*Neoliberalism* 76)

The only gesture towards the place of writing outside business are the words “academic,” “civic,” and “petitions,” though this last is ambiguous and students might wonder if “academic” means anything other than preparation for the workforce. If County’s justification misrecognizes the structural character of communication, its students may have already been shaped by a rationale far more blatant.

The Common Core State Standards do not make any clearer the social implications of learning how to write. The Common Core State Standards Initiative proclaims in its website banner that it is “Preparing America’s Students for College & Career.” The phrase “college and career,” or variations of it, appears repeatedly throughout the Common Core materials, and its repetition reveals the lack of imagination generally in current conversations about

the meaning of education. The Common Core offers neither democratic nor humanistic reasons for teaching students to write; a “career” is presented as an end-in-itself, not as a vital aspect of community life nor as a contributor to happiness. The Common Core also frames learning as if students must simply accede to the demands of college and the workplace, as if writing in college and the workplace were uncontested and fixed. The Common Core tells students “This is how it’s going to be someday,” but it has no component that helps students see “But this isn’t how it has to be” or even “This is why it’s this way now.”

“frames learning as if students must simply accede to the demands of college and the workplace”

Composition scholarship can offer helpful vocabulary to explain the perniciousness of these misrecognitions or misapplications and to connect writing instruction to social equality. Robinson is helpful in critiquing both County’s misrecognition and Goal 3:

[R]estrictive definitions of literacy, fascination with the codes and forms of written communication, and failure to see reading and writing as interactive processes involving individuals and texts in context have all led to educational practices that have disadvantaged many students and left many ill-equipped as users of written language in academic and workaday settings. (137)

Robinson uses some language that suggests the job-directedness of Goal 3—“workaday settings,” “texts in context,” “interactive processes”—and the notion of disadvantaging students is implicit in Goal 3 and in County’s justification. In the context of Robinson’s argument, though, he emphasizes the social and group power dynamics involved in literacy: “fully functional literacy... correlates with economic and social success in our culture.... [T]he terms *literate* and *illiterate* are reflective of how our society views and values people and how people in our society value themselves” (137, emphasis in original). Literacy might correspond with success in either the County Catalog or Goal 3, but Robinson’s language allows for the contingency wherein lies power. That is, literacy “reflects” our society’s values, which points to a factor structurally constitutive of power. Robinson’s verbiage admits that the social value of literacy is part of a larger and contingent social structure. When schools limit and misrecognize the anti-racist possibilities of Composition, they serve to maintain the pernicious status quo connecting the educational and economic systems.

## The Spirit of 1866

If the problem of the twentieth century was the color line, it appears that the twenty-first offers more of the same, unless we intervene structurally and intentionally in a sustained way. First, advocates for basic education—students, faculty, administrators, and policy-makers who believe in open access to higher education and in the student support that makes open access possible—should be aware of how public funding works in their state, how scarce resources are distributed, and how that scarcity influences teaching and learning. This awareness should be coupled with conversation and action: explaining to one’s colleagues and fellow citizens why funding matters and how it should be structured will help to sharpen advocates’ rhetoric and lead to more effective action. I have offered here a model for inquiring into state funding and urge readers to familiarize themselves with funding mechanisms in their own states. Dependence on property tax funding is one well-known source of educational inequality and should remain under scrutiny, but how are other types of revenue distributed, and who benefits from the distribution?

Second, I would suggest that advocates look at how remediation affects minority groups. The language of “racism” and “anti-racism” can be powerful and, if used carefully, can create allies. While no one wants to be called “racist,” being “anti-racist” is positive and sounds progressive, automatically carving out space for solidarity. Likewise, the language of “structural racism” works to create allies rather than opponents. In my assessment of the structural racism in funding mechanisms in Illinois higher education, I don’t suggest that any person or group is particularly guilty; if there were a particular person or group to blame, fixing the problem would be much easier.

Rather, the problems are diffuse. There is the conflict between the ICCB’s desire to allocate state resources adequately and fairly and community colleges’ desires to help students reach academic standards. There are the standards themselves, with their class and racial histories. Employment practices in community colleges put part-time faculty—many of whom are excellent teachers, but severely underpaid—in charge of the students with the greatest academic needs. A host of factors determine the K-12 system’s preparation of students for college. And then there are the politics of financial aid, child care, and health care—all so critical for so many community college students’ academic success and persistence.

It’s complicated, and one path to simplify the complication truthfully and forcefully is through the language of structural racism or structural anti-racism. Education, even and especially higher education, is the great hope for meritocratic capitalist democracy, and focusing on structures will help us achieve our dreams of equality.

Reading an earlier draft of this essay, Gerald Graff thought that my argument might “fatalistically [imply] that there’s nothing teachers can do to counteract inequality until the

structures of inequality are first changed.” Of course both teaching and systemic structures matter, and it oughtn’t be hard to say so; yet, pointing to structural problems sounds to neoliberal ears like making excuses for bad teachers or poor children. It’s tempting, in response, to overreact and argue that to fix our Big Educational Problems we should focus only on fixing the structures of inequality, as if our teachers are just fine for the most part. It’s much more interesting to show, as I try to do here, how the bigger picture of inequality makes too many of our schools into places that devalue teachers and foster inhumane approaches to learning. As I discuss here, community colleges rely on underpaid, overworked contingent faculty to teach the most vulnerable students, so trying to improve teaching practices—or, as the Teach for America model would have it in K-12 education, to look for ambitious young new teachers to replace the old ones—can be to look for ways to make these underpaid, overworked teachers better without paying them more. We can and should have both better teaching practices and better pay. We shouldn’t be reluctant to argue for more resources nor should we overlook the importance of pedagogy.

Third, and related to our dreams for equality, I encourage advocates to sharpen their understandings of how basic education contributes to our national public health, both political and economic. The Common Core goals do not offer compelling rationales for learning, but they do present an opportunity to engage in national conversation about the purposes and content of our education. Advocates for basic education can carefully co-opt the language of preparation for college and the workplace and argue that open-access higher education offers a dynamic site for realizing our national hopes. In the midst of our reaching for higher college completion rates and better economic competitiveness, we would do well to recall that earlier attempt at changing a social landscape, Reconstruction, and gird ourselves this time for a sustained national effort towards our cherished national goals.

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Sara Webb-Sunderhaus

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## **“It’s Me and the Adjuncts”: Writing Program Administration and Marginalized Students/Teachers**

**AT THE MOST RECENT MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE** Composition and Communication, I met with the editors of this special issue and brainstormed with them some ideas for submission. As I introduced myself, I discussed my university's problems with student retention and persistence, which have led me into a new line of research focusing on the need to couple access to a four-year institution with support structures that will enable marginalized students—including my Basic Writing students—to succeed in attaining a four-year degree. As we talked, the editors asked who taught Basic Writing at my university. “Well,” I said, “it’s me and the adjuncts.” And thus an article was born.

I am an Assistant Professor of English and the Basic Writing coordinator at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW), a regional, open-admission, comprehensive university of about 14,000 students; the university offers associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees. For full-time, undergraduate students who entered IPFW in the fall of 2003 (the most recent available data), the four-year graduation rate was 6%; the six-year graduation rate was 23%. Although open-admission institutions such as IPFW typically have graduation rates below those of more selective institutions, some of my other work (Webb-Sunderhaus and Amidon “Kairoic Moment”) has addressed how IPFW’s graduation rates are significantly lower than those of its peer institutions. As I have also illustrated in previous work, the students enrolled in the basic writing courses I teach and supervise are about eight percentage points less likely than their first-year writing peers to return for their sophomore year (Webb-Sunderhaus “When Access Is Not Enough”). Clearly, we have a problem with retention and persistence at IPFW.

We also have a problem with contingent labor, particularly in my department. The Department of English and Linguistics is one of the largest departments at IPFW, in terms of both the numbers of majors (nearly 300) and faculty. The department employs 24 tenure line faculty; nine are writing specialists, ten are literature specialists, four are linguists, and one is a folklorist. The contingent faculty includes six full-time, non-tenure track faculty; approximately 45 part-time, non-tenure track faculty; and roughly ten graduate teaching associates.

All but one of the contingent faculty teach in the writing program,<sup>1</sup> which is part of the Department of English and Linguistics and is overseen by the Composition Committee and the Director of Writing, who reports to the department chair. The Director of Writing is assisted in the administration of the program by two Associate Directors of Writing and the W129 (Basic Writing) Course Coordinator, the position I currently hold.

Our reliance on adjuncts is troubling for those of us in writing program administration at IPFW, as we are well aware of the ethical challenges and the all-too-often exploitative practices and institutionalized sexism of contingent labor. Contingent faculty are overworked and underpaid, and this type of labor is disproportionately performed by women, who make up the majority of contingent faculty not only at IPFW, but also in the academy writ large (Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola; Marshall; Miller; Schell; Schell and Stock). In *Textual Carnivals*, Susan Miller writes of the “sad women in the basement” who “by and large fill the temporary jobs teaching composition that are the residue from declines in ‘regular’ appointments” (124). At IPFW, working conditions are far from ideal, but our contingent faculty aren’t quite “sad women in the basement,” either. Unlike adjuncts at some institutions, many of our part-time instructors are only supplementing their income by adjuncting. These instructors hold full-time jobs elsewhere or are retired; they usually teach not because they need the money, but because they enjoy the work of teaching college writing and earning some extra spending cash or retirement savings. Their full-time jobs or retirement plans pay their bills and offer them health insurance.

However, we do have a significant number of contingent faculty whose main source of income is the meager wages they receive for teaching writing at IPFW. They do their best to eke out a living by securing other employment, such as teaching at other local universities; teaching for-profit institutions’ online courses; substitute teaching in the local public schools; scoring essays for ETS and other testing services; and working service jobs at local restaurants or the mall. This description of the lives of this group of contingent faculty will undoubtedly sound familiar to many readers, as this is the story of contingent faculty everywhere. It is a painful story, one that illustrates the inconsistencies and fractures of our field—but it is an incredibly, depressingly common story, which is why it still needs to be told.

None of us involved in administering the writing program at IPFW wants to be part of this story, and we have attempted to improve working conditions in various ways. Four of the seven members of the Composition Committee are non-tenure track, giving contingent laborers significant input into the administration of the writing program. Full-time faculty salaries were frozen for 2.5 years, but the Director of Writing secured small raises for the part-

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1. This instructor—a Visiting Assistant Professor of English—is a literature specialist and teaches general education literature courses, as well as classes in African-American literature and drama

time writing faculty during this time. While most of our part-time faculty have to share desks in a large office, over the past two years more office space has been secured to alleviate overcrowding, and TAs now have their own desks in an extra-large office set aside for their use. Four of the six full-time, non-tenure track writing faculty members have their own offices; of the two instructors who share an office, one teaches exclusively online and does not hold face-to-face office hours. In fact, during my first year at IPFW, the other three new tenure-line hires and I shared offices, while the four full-time, non-tenure track instructors maintained their individual offices. I do not wish to unduly praise my program, as these have been admittedly small steps towards more equitable treatment of contingent faculty. Nonetheless, I feel compelled to note our efforts since few universities make even this small effort. In short, the IPFW writing program administration is attempting to do right by its contingent faculty while working within institutional and programmatic constraints that limit our options for doing so.

## **What We Can (and Can't) Do: Marginalized Faculty and Programmatic Constraints**

Many factors inhibit decisions IPFW writing program administrators can make in regards to our marginalized faculty. One such factor is demand for our English W131, the first-year writing course all university students are required to take. As may be inferred from the preceding sentence, a full year of writing instruction is not required of first-year students at IPFW, unless they choose to take English W129, a Basic Writing course. Because only one semester of writing instruction is required, most of our first-year students want to take English W131 during their first semester of college—which is, in most cases, fall semester. It is not only students who wish to take the course in the fall. We in the writing program know that well-meaning parents, advisors, and faculty members in other departments strongly encourage their students to do so, and upper administration at the university also wants students to take the course as quickly as possible. This is because they believe English W131 is critical for student success and should be taken immediately upon entrance into college—a difficult idea to argue with, particularly when the writing program has received additional funding and support from these proponents.

The writing program administrators are of course glad that students, parents, advisors, colleagues, and administration view our writing course in a positive light, but their good intentions have significant repercussions for the writing program when it comes to enrollment and the use of contingent faculty. We offer approximately 25 sections of English W129 (the BW course) and 80 sections of English W131 (FYC) each fall semester; W129 is capped at 18 students, while W131 is capped at 22. In the spring we only offer 15 sections of W129 and 55 sections of W131, due to lower demand for these courses. The Director of Writing has pro-

posed converting some of our part-time positions into full-time, non-tenure track lines, and some of the full-time, non-tenure track lines to tenure track positions. However, the fact of the matter is that even if funding for these new lines is eventually secured, which will be no easy task in the current budgetary climate, it will be difficult for the writing program to meet the fluctuations in demand without the use of part-time instructors. While our reliance on part-time labor would be reduced, the difference in enrollment from semester to semester is simply too great to navigate to eliminate the use of these adjuncts—and even if the use of contingent labor could be eliminated, it is an open question as to whether it *should* be, a point I will address in the conclusion.

Another potential solution may be found in collaboration with other disciplinary units. The Director of Writing has had preliminary conversations with the Communication Department about requiring students to sequence English and communication courses in ways that would be beneficial to both departments. A public speaking course is also required of all students at IPFW, and the Communication Department faces issues similar, though not as dire, to our own in staffing sections of this course: approximately 60 sections of the course are offered in the fall while roughly 50 are offered in the spring, leading to a reliance on contingent laborers whose work for the spring semester is reduced or eliminated.

Our departments are currently discussing the possibilities of requiring students to take this communication course, which includes a good deal of instruction in rhetoric, and first-year writing in separate semesters: one group of incoming students would take English W131 in the fall and Communication 114 in the spring, while another group would enroll in COM 114 in the fall and ENG W131 in the spring. Students would benefit by having their rhetorical education reinforced over multiple semesters, and the departments would have more consistency in their staffing needs from the fall to spring semester, which would offer our contingent faculty some financial stability. However, such a strategy would require the approval not only of our two departments, but also the Dean of the College and the Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs. Since the university administration has typically moved to eliminate or reduce students' course requirements and restrictions over the past several years, obtaining this approval will be no easy task.

Teaching loads—specifically, the types of courses contingent and tenure-line faculty can teach—are another decision shaped by institutional constraints. The Department of English and Linguistics has a small graduate program, enrolling approximately 35 M.A. and M.A.T. students per year;<sup>2</sup> some of these students are done with coursework but are studying for comprehensive exams or writing a thesis. Due to the program's small size, four grad-

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2. Almost all of the students seeking a M.A.T. (Master of Arts for Teachers) are currently teaching in the local K-12 school systems.

uate-only seminars—capped at 15 students—are typically offered each semester, and almost all upper-level courses for majors are cross-listed as graduate courses, meaning that undergraduate and graduate students enroll in these courses. For example, my literacy studies course is listed as W460 (for undergrads) and B505 (for grad students); the last time I taught the course, five of the students were undergraduates, and five were graduate students. Enrollment in these courses is restricted to anywhere from 22-35 students, and ten students must enroll in order for a course to make.

The size of our graduate program impacts our contingent faculty because IPFW, like almost all universities, stipulates that only faculty members with the terminal degree can teach graduate students. Since almost all of our contingent faculty do not hold MFAs or Ph.D.s,<sup>3</sup> they are ineligible to teach the four graduate seminars and the cross-listed undergraduate/graduate courses, of which there were 17 during the Fall 2011 semester. The department does offer 200 and 300-level courses for majors that are not cross-listed at the graduate level; writing courses at this level are capped at either 15 or 22 students, and literature courses are capped at 22 or 30. Contingent faculty can and do teach these courses every semester. Again, using Fall 2011 as an example, 21 sections of these courses were offered, and ten were taught by contingent faculty.

The graduate course policy also shapes the teaching assignments of the tenure-line faculty. While only three tenure-line faculty members regularly teach basic or first-year writing,<sup>4</sup> it is not because the majority of the faculty think this work is unimportant or somehow not worthy of their efforts. It is because they are part of the group of faculty who has the terminal degree; therefore, they are among the only instructors who can teach these cross-listed upper-division/graduate courses. The demand for these courses is so great that every available faculty member is needed to teach them.

These courses are in such high demand because our major has grown dramatically over the past few years, for reasons that are not completely clear and could not necessarily be anticipated. In 2006, there were roughly 160 majors in the English and Linguistics department; as of Fall 2011, that number has nearly doubled, to approximately 300 majors. As a department, we aren't exactly sure to what we can attribute this significant increase. Like many universities, IPFW's first-time enrollment and transfer rates surged in the wake of the economic crash of 2008; students who in the past would have gone to West Lafayette (Purdue) or Bloomington (Indiana) are now opting to save money by enrolling at our regional campus,

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3. One part-time instructor has a Ph.D., and one has a MFA; two of our full-time, non-tenure track faculty members are enrolled in Ph.D. programs.

4. Three other tenure-line writing faculty teach our 100-level creative writing courses, meaning that six of the nine tenure-line faculty in writing regularly teach general education courses populated by first-year students and non-majors.

which has lower tuition and allows these local students to commute from home. However, the university's enrollment has not doubled over the past five years, as our major has. We simply do not know many of the reasons why the growth of our major has significantly outpaced the growth of our university.

One factor in our growth of which we are aware is the Indiana Department of Education's decision to change teacher licensure requirements. As of Fall 2010, students who wish to teach high school English are required to take 51 credit hours in English; previously, 39 hours were required. Additionally, for current public school teachers, a state law passed last year that implemented a merit-pay system; these educators would no longer automatically receive an increase in pay for a graduate degree. However, the law also stated "that teachers enrolled in a graduate program before July 1 and on pace to complete it by 2014 will eventually be entitled to the raise that teachers with a master's degree received in years past" (Wiehe). This provision pushed many teachers to hurriedly begin a graduate program before the deadline so that they could be compensated for that degree, and some of these teachers have enrolled in our graduate courses. In a recent departmental survey of our graduate students, nearly 30 percent stated that they were pursuing an advanced degree now so that they would be eligible for the traditional pay raise. Thus, the state's changes to teacher preparation and compensation—changes that many did not expect to happen as quickly as they did—have increased demand for upper-level and graduate courses in English at IPFW.

Decisions made within the department and the writing program in particular also shape our labor practices. Many years ago, the department chair and writing program administrator at the time decided that only faculty with advanced training in the teaching of writing would teach writing courses at IPFW. In other words, the literature faculty do not teach

"In other words, the literature faculty do not teach composition."

composition. This decision grew out of concerns that some literature faculty at that time were turning first-year writing courses into a writing about literature course, a common and much-written about phenomenon (Crowley; Lindemann; Tate).<sup>5</sup> Today, the writing program continues to require that anyone not currently enrolled in our

MA program who wishes to teach one of our courses must have a master's degree that includes a significant amount of coursework in the teaching of writing; there have been cases in which the WPA has required potential instructors to take a course in the teaching of com-

5. My literature-specialist colleagues are routinely assigned 100-level literature courses, however, so they are required to teach first-year students and non-majors.

position, the same course our new TAs take, before they can pursue employment at IPFW.

The department and the writing program in particular are satisfied with this policy, as we strongly believe that it helps to ensure our students receive writing instruction that is theoretically sound and aligned with the best practices of our field. However, this policy has a significant trade-off: it increases our reliance on contingent labor. Since literature faculty do not teach writing courses, that further reduces the number of tenure-line faculty members who are available to teach these courses and intensifies the writing program's need for adjuncts. We have nine tenure-line faculty in the writing program, five of whom have been hired over the past six years; three of these positions were new lines, indicating that we do receive significant support from upper administration for our hiring needs. Nevertheless, we still face the conundrum of having only nine faculty while offering approximately 105 sections of basic and first-year writing each fall. Between our small number and our duties in teaching the previously discussed upper-level/graduate courses, the tenure-line writing faculty simply cannot meet the demand for writing instruction. That is why "it's me and the adjuncts" teaching Basic Writing at IPFW.

## **What We Can Do: Improving Conditions for Marginalized Teachers and Students**

Our field has been discussing the inequitable treatment of contingent faculty for at least forty years, as CCC published Ray Kytile's "Slaves, Serfs, or Colleagues—Who Shall Teach College Composition?" in 1971. Similarly, access for marginalized students has dominated Basic Writing scholarship for some time. I do not dispute the need for student access, as most of my career from before graduate school until now has been spent at open-admission institutions. However, my five years as a professor at IPFW have taught me that our attention to equity for faculty and access for students has been too limited; student equity is an important part of this conversation as well. Access without success is meaningless for my Basic Writing students—the very same students who are the most likely to be taught by contingent faculty. Yes, these students have access to a four-year institution, thanks to open-admissions, but they are unlikely to be retained, as IPFW's dismal graduation rates illustrate.

All too often, contingent faculty become the scapegoats in conversations about student retention and persistence; when a recent study by Audrey Jaeger and M. Kevin Eagan showed a correlation between low graduation rates and a reliance on contingent labor, some participants on online discussion boards were quick to target adjuncts for their alleged failings. And when contingent faculty are not being blamed for students' performance, they are often exhorted by university administrators to take on the role of the self-sacrificing mother that Miller, Schell, and so many others have described—to nurture their students and to give



more of themselves and their time, without any additional compensation or accommodation. I recall the story of a colleague at another institution who was required—like all full- and part-time faculty—to wear a special button at all times while on campus so that students could instantly recognize faculty, ask questions, and receive answers, no matter if they were in class, the gym, or the restroom. The university administration promoted these buttons as a “retention strategy”—as if faculty were employees at an office supply store who can be summoned by pushing the “easy” button. It is “strategies” such as these that position contingent faculty as the straw man in arguments about student success: if only they would know more, do more, give more, sacrifice more, then more students would graduate. What these arguments do not acknowledge is the fact that it is not adjuncts’ alleged lack of knowledge or caring that hinders student success. It is the lack of resources and support made available to these instructors and students that causes student inequity. Reliance on contingent labor is the symptom of a much larger problem: states’ abdication of their role in supporting higher education.

While we as Compositionists may not be able to change our state legislatures’ funding decisions, we can engage in more substantive efforts to develop student equity; furthermore, we can do so without adding significantly to the workload of contingent faculty, who are already overburdened. Program administrators have decisions available to them which can positively impact student learning, retention, and persistence, as well as the lives of the contingent faculty who teach these students. As part of a wider overhaul of the Basic Writing program at my institution, the Director of Writing successfully lobbied the university administration to eliminate Accuplacer as our placement method for writing courses and implemented guided self-placement. Since Fall 2008, we have utilized an online placement instrument that asks incoming students about their high school performance, SAT scores, and writing experiences. Specifically, students’ class standing and SAT math scores (yes, math) are used in making a placement recommendation, as they are commonly available and, according to IPFW’s Office of Institutional Research, have statistically significant correlations to success in our writing classes; the SAT verbal score has no such correlation. As part of the online placement process, students also take the Daly-Miller test of writing apprehension, as we have found that high levels of writing anxiety correlate with poor performance in our courses; similarly, students with low levels of writing anxiety and weak high school records also fail our courses at higher rates. The student’s class’ standing, math SAT score, and Daly-Miller results are combined to generate a recommendation that the student takes either our basic or first-year writing course. The student has the final word on the course he/she will take, however.

In addition to the changes in the placement process, the two Basic Writing courses



that existed before 2008 were scuttled, with a new course taking their place. The former courses included a two-hour studio course which was unsuccessful in assisting students to meet the demands of first-year writing and a non-credit bearing, Basic Writing course that did not have any defined outcomes or philosophy of instruction. We eliminated these courses and created a new, three-hour, credit-bearing Basic Writing course that has the same outcomes as our first-year writing course, with the understanding that the time our students have to meet those outcomes has been stretched over two semesters.<sup>6</sup>

In the first two years since these changes have been implemented in the Basic Writing program, the DWF (drop, withdraw, fail) rate has ranged from 30.6% to 31.5%, for an average of 31.05%. Although that number is still quite large, in the six years prior to the writing program's changes, the DWF average was 46.98%. Thus, our average DWF rate has dropped almost sixteen percentage points. The writing program does not yet have persistence data, since the new placement process, course, and curriculum have only been in place for three years, but we do know that our programmatic retention has also improved over the past three years. Before 2008, fewer than 60% of Basic Writing students successfully completed Basic Writing and First-Year Composition during their first two semesters. Now, nearly 70% of these students do so. While these data can only establish correlation, not causation, it is my contention that guided-self placement is an important first step towards developing self-efficacy in students, which we know is an important trait in predicting student success (Hidi and Boscolo, Lavelle, Pajares and Valiante, Reynolds). By giving students more ownership of, and responsibility for, an important decision in the initial stages of their education, we are encouraging them to take more ownership of their education and thus develop a trait essential to their intellectual development.

Furthermore, these changes cost our contingent faculty very little. While the new course did initially require additional preparation for some, thanks to a curriculum that was revised to ensure all instructors utilized the best practices of the field, there was support for these changes. Until 2008, there had never been a coordinator for the Basic Writing course; upon assuming the coordinatorship, I quickly set about devising more instructor support systems. Along with the Director of Writing, I held workshops to introduce the new curriculum and placement process, and I created and

“these changes cost  
our contingent faculty  
very little”

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6. For more information about the changes to the Basic Writing placement process and curriculum, please see “The Kairotic Moment: Pragmatic Revision of Basic Writing Instruction at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne,” co-written with my colleague Stevens Amidon.

maintain an active listserv for Basic Writing instructors, where we continue to collaborate on assignments and texts and share the joys and challenges of working with our student population. Before the start of classes each academic year, I design a shared course syllabus and assignments that all instructors are encouraged to adapt as little or as much as they would like for use in their classrooms.

These changes have been popular with the program's cadre of instructors and, more significantly, have not made their professional lives more difficult. In fact, in some cases the changes have resulted in a reduced, and/or more pleasant, workload. Because students now choose to take the Basic Writing course, their resistance to being in the course has been virtually eliminated, making for a less onerous teaching experience. Almost all sections<sup>7</sup> of the Basic Writing course now use the same texts and similar—if not identical—assignments, and as a result, collaboration and support among instructors have increased greatly. Additionally, instructors can—and do—turn to me in my role as course coordinator for administrative and pedagogical resources, input, and assistance. As the semester progresses, I mentor, consult with, and serve as a general resource for both new and experienced instructors as needed, and I devise and lead other workshops on topics of interest to the instructors, such as conducting online peer review, preventing plagiarism, and using technology in ways that benefit our students and us (reducing the paper load, utilizing online conferences, etc.). My fellow WPAs also design and facilitate workshops, including sessions on grade norming and assignment design, for instructors who teach our first-year and second-level writing courses.

This is a marked change for our writing program, as for many years, we were reluctant to offer these workshops, and some still have lingering doubts. We do not want to exploit our instructors even further, and there is little, if any, funding to compensate those who participate in these voluntary workshops. However, many of us have begun to see how professional development affects working conditions, as Ed Nagelhout argues (A14-15), and we have focused our faculty development efforts on strategies that address issues of workload and time management, as these are the most pressing issues our contingent faculty face. We have realized that if we do not offer our instructors the opportunity for professional development—even if our reasoning is grounded in concerns about equity—we are missing out on opportunities to improve the lives of our faculty and the instruction our students receive (Naghelout 15).

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7. Some sections are part of a learning community in which Basic Writing courses are linked with a course in another discipline. Depending on the nature of the linked course and the needs of the learning community, different materials are sometimes used.

## Conclusion

Some may argue we at IPFW are attempting to do the best we can to treat our instructors justly and humanely while working within an unjust, inhumane system—an endeavor doomed to failure. On this point, over ten years ago James Sledd wrote the following of writing program administrators such as myself and my colleagues:

With clear consciences and the best of good intentions, they have bought into an educational system that mirrors the encompassing society of greed. [. . .] People who mistakenly buy into a problematic system make themselves part of the problem. They can offer no hope of a good solution. (147)

More recently, I listened as a job candidate discussed his research on adjunct labor and composition students. When the candidate was asked what possible solutions, if any, he saw for the issue of contingent labor in our discipline, his answer was simple and direct: “Get rid of all adjuncts.”

Given the argument I have made in this essay, it will come as no surprise to readers that I disagree with these positions. There can be no doubt that there are serious, systemic problems with Composition’s labor structure, and too many contingent faculty are exploited. However, I contend that by becoming professors of Composition, we have already “bought into” the problematic system Sledd describes. By virtue of our participation in the system of tenure and non-tenure track, full- and part-time, contingent and permanent faculty—by our very presence in the university—we have all become “part of the problem.” I reject Sledd’s contention that we cannot be part of the solution, however. I am persuaded by the words of Joseph Harris, who writes that Compositionists “need to admit that we are indeed workers in a corporate system that we hope to reform, rather than persisting in fantasies of escaping that system, of operating in some pure space as critics who may happen to work at a university but who are somehow not of it” (51). Let me be clear: our discipline’s heavy reliance on, and exploitation of, contingent laborers must change. Yet, I do not think we can ever effect such change if we refuse to admit that, by the nature of our positions as professors, we are complicit in that very system. We cannot persist in the fantastic notion that we are somehow outside this system if we hope to accomplish the reform that is desperately needed.

This is also why deans, provosts, vice-chancellors, and other university administrators with a background in Composition Studies are needed. If we want to overhaul working conditions for contingent faculty—to secure more money for salary/benefits, to propose more opportunities for professional development, to provide more and better-quality office space, to offer more consistent schedules, and to convert some part-time positions into full-time non-tenure track or tenure-track lines—then we require administrators who are amenable to such arguments and who are sensitive to the need for equitable treatment of

contingent faculty. From where will these administrators come? They need to come from the ranks of Composition and Rhetoric scholars, including current WPAs, who have a commitment to the issues and who can make a difference as they move into higher levels of administration. I realize this is not a popular argument, as many of us—including myself—were drawn to Composition Studies due to its focus on pedagogy and students. I personally have no desire to leave the classroom and the basic writers I love so much to become a full-time administrator. At the same time, however, it is difficult to educate administrators whose disciplines have not confronted these issues about the needs of our field. If we hope to change the system in which we are all complicit, we will have to grow our own administrators who can be allies in this work.

Finally, as a field we should understand that there are some contingent faculty for whom parts of the current system work. Some discussions of contingent labor assume that conditions are the same everywhere, that all universities are employing hordes of part-time adjuncts with Ph.D.s who long for a tenure-track position. It is certainly true that the number of full-time and tenure-track lines are decreasing, leading to more Ph.D.s competing for adjunct jobs in large urban centers and university towns. At universities such as these, employing only Ph.D.s as adjuncts will soon be a possibility, if it is not already a reality.

But that is not the case at my institution, where almost all of our contingent faculty have master's degrees, and a significant portion of our adjuncts don't want to teach full-time, let alone on the tenure-track. They enjoy being retired or working at other jobs they love. Even among the part-time faculty who want full-time employment, there is very little interest in earning a Ph.D. or pursuing tenure. If my department had the funding to convert part-time to full-time or non-tenure track to tenure-track—wildly improbable in the current economy—many of our contingent faculty would not accept these positions, due to the unwanted demands of a full-time and/or tenure-track career. This is why “getting rid of the adjuncts” is not a solution for a university such as mine, as we would be firing many teachers who are happy with their jobs and whose teaching of writing is outstanding—an action which hardly seems fair or equitable and reeks of corporate downsizing, as Schell has argued.

I realize that some may argue that our adjuncts will soon be squeezed out of their positions by Ph.D.s who cannot find tenure-line jobs. Yet even Ph.D.s in literature—who are far more numerous and more likely to work as contingent laborers than Ph.D.s in Composition and Rhetoric—are rare in places like Fort Wayne, Indiana, a small city whose university does not offer a Ph.D. in any subject. The supply of literary Ph.D.s has far outpaced the demand during all of my not-inconsiderable lifetime, but my writing program has only one adjunct with a Ph.D.—a Ph.D. in literature. This long history makes me skeptical that universities like mine, in locales such as Fort Wayne, will soon be employing a contingent labor

force consisting only of Ph.D.s in Composition and Rhetoric. While contingent labor is an issue everywhere, we must realize that the nature of the problem is quite different in cities like New York City and Boston than it is in places like Fort Wayne and Duluth. In short, we need a better understanding that conditions are not the same everywhere, and we should avoid assuming that there is one ideal solution to the problems of contingent labor. While thinking globally is a laudable goal, Compositionists should act locally when it comes to exploitative labor practices.

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## **Memos, Email, and Reports: Writing to and Being Written by Adjunct Faculty**

**M**ANY WPAS FIND THEMSELVES IN THE CONFLICTED POSITION OF wanting to ensure quality instruction in their Composition programs but in so doing becoming part of the exploitation of contingent faculty. WPAs do the hiring, the canceling of classes in the last week, the shuffling of schedules, and, of course, the firing. They have to figure out ways to meet administrative agendas for assessment, programmatic consistency, and, in some cases, standardization of materials and curriculum. Programs that rely on adjuncts to staff the majority of their writing classes face a situation where communication of policies and changes risks disrupting morale and teaching, as such alterations, often by necessity unilateral administrative decisions, remind the adjuncts of their status.

At the open-admissions university where I oversaw the English Composition program for eight years, we rely heavily on adjunct faculty. Of the 200 or so sections that we ran every semester during my time as WPA, only 5-8 were taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty. Another 20-25 were taught by full-time instructors, and TAs taught about 20 sections. We, therefore, relied on over 60 adjuncts to staff approximately 75% of our sections of English Composition. In such a situation, communicating programmatic needs ethically means keeping often disparate agendas in mind and trying to invoke a sense of team spirit or unity without manipulating the insecurities or desires of the adjuncts. Looking back, I fear, however, that the more I accommodated and sympathized with the adjuncts in my program, the more I enabled the exploitation of contingent labor to continue. The writing I did to communicate with the faculty, therefore, demonstrates my ambivalence in subtle ways.

To understand the labor situation in any given English department, categorizing adjuncts in terms of the reasons they are adjuncts constitutes an important first step. The faculty during the time I ran the program varied considerably in their interests and wants. In 1978, Howard Tuckman created a taxonomy often referred to in literature about adjunct exploitation. While Tuckman's taxonomy proved useful to an extent in describing the labor situation I confronted, he creates two broad categories and then five sub-categories that I think confuse the issue. I also believe the economic situation has changed in higher education, making some of Tuckman's observations antiquated. So while I borrow terminology from Tuckman in establishing categories of adjuncts, I move beyond his understandings.

For my first category, I use Tuckman's term the "Flexibility Seekers" (305). These would be retired faculty who teach one or two sections of English Composition for various reasons, students supplementing a stipend elsewhere with a section or two, and those who only want part-time work because of obligations to family. In breaking from Tuckman, I also want to include in this category the people who are employed full-time outside of academia and teach a section or two at night, on weekends, or in the early mornings.

The Flexibility Seekers rarely complained about working conditions. In fact, I used to hear from two or three every semester who would tell me that they liked their jobs and wanted to distance themselves from the voices who sought changes in the working conditions. I should note here that the fact that these workers only want part-time employment does not excuse the less-than-adequate wages we pay nation-wide, but I think part of what I'll call the Flexibility Seekers' compliance is that they do not want all positions to be converted into full-time jobs because they want flexibility, not full-time positions. I don't think they conceived of a situation where part-time workers could be paid proportionately to full-time workers. In any case, whether they relied on this work to help with bills or other financial matters, their main motivation for taking the work revolved around the flexibility of the positions. About 20 of the 60+ adjuncts in my department at the time would have fit this category.

My second category modifies what Gappa and Leslie call the "Aspiring Academics," which describes adjuncts who have been unable to find a tenure-track position or a non-tenure-track instructorship. Most of the adjuncts in the department had master's degrees in literature and either never attempted or did not complete a Ph.D. They would have liked a career as a professor, but were bound to the area by spousal commitments or other factors, such as unfinished work on a dissertation. They might have been involved in writing groups or tried to publish or attend conferences, but their defining characteristic was that they would apply for most of the full-time academic positions in the area. Those without the doctorate were probably confined to the plight of "freeway flying." Another 20 or so of the adjunct faculty in my department could have been accurately described as Aspiring Academics. They generally did not spend much time in the department and did not involve themselves much in programmatic issues, probably because they were too busy.

This leaves us with about a third of the adjuncts. These faculty wanted full-time work for the most part, but economic considerations almost seemed secondary. Rather, they wanted full-time work in this English department only. They wanted to be acknowledged by this institution, not any others, as legitimate, worthy academics. Tuckman alludes to these workers when he talks about the "psychic rewards" of teaching (307).

Eileen Schell, of course, has attempted to debunk "psychic income" as a viable explanation for faculty, especially women, staying in exploitive academic situations ("Gypsy" 16).



While Schell does give credence to the “emotional rewards” of teaching (68), she believes that the concept of psychic income has been used as a justification on the part of administration for not paying faculty more. In other words, she views the situation from the perspective of administrators, who feel psychic income can substitute for real income (40-41), rather than from the workers, who can be unconsciously motivated by psychic income to continue to seek adjunct work. My third category seeks to describe this latter effect of psychic income. As Katherine V. Wills explains, “psychic income is a powerful lure for workers seeking validation of their intellectual or service contribution” (201). So I will call the adjuncts in this category the “Validation Seekers.” They wanted more than anything to have their work as teachers validated. Receiving a full-time position was only one obvious way of achieving this type of validation. Unbelievably, being asked to do extra, uncompensated work was another way they achieved a sense of validation. They wanted their input to lead to some valuable changes in the program or department. Being asked to serve on committees, or to give some sample papers for a workshop, or to train new faculty how to use the computers in the classroom were other ways they gained psychic income when financial income was not forthcoming.

I do not wish to be condescending at all in creating this category or describing these faculty members. The need for psychic income begins with the lack of financial prospects in the job. This group of workers had to turn elsewhere because the pay and working conditions were so bad, and the pursuit of validation took on a life of its own. Administration shamelessly exploited this need for validation, establishing part-time teaching awards and appreciation days and acknowledging how hard adjuncts worked, even claiming that adjuncts did the “real work” of the university. But they would do nothing to change the working conditions. The system of exploitation created the Validation Seekers.

Validation Seekers tend to have been in a department for a long time. The most striking example from my campus was a woman who worked 34 years as an adjunct before passing away four years ago and had been in the department longer than any of the tenured professors. The Validation Seekers, as I came to understand them, felt they had learned writing instruction by doing it and favored “practitioner knowledge,” to use Stephen North’s term (21), to any studies, historical portraits, or especially theory in Composition Studies. While I think overlap existed with the other groups, the Validation Seekers more carefully guarded their pedagogies and defended them, if not directly, then in the hallway discourse.

After I started seeing what I considered to be patterns among the different group of adjuncts, I found that it was to this latter group, those that I assumed to be Validation Seekers, that I tacitly directed most of my departmental communication when I was a WPA. Not that the Flexibility Seekers and Aspiring Academics were not intended to see my memos and other correspondences, but the audience I had to invoke was the Validation Seekers. The

other two groups seemed to only give my words a cursory glance or responded without comment to any requests for information contained within those memos. The Validation Seekers scrutinized communications. Based on what I heard from others in the department—full-and-part-time faculty—those I am now referring to as the Validation Seekers wanted to be assured that any new procedures did not interfere with their autonomy. They were suspicious not so much of change but of the motives behind the change—why was it necessary? what had they been doing wrong?

I will admit here to struggling mightily in my memo writing and other correspondences. I replaced a popular WPA in the eyes of the adjuncts when I arrived at the university to take over the WPA duties. My dean wanted me to initiate program assessment and bring consistency to writing instruction in the department. Except for constraints in what texts the faculty could use, I found few guidelines for instructors to follow. I spent my first year listening, observing, and trying to uncover what type of instruction was occurring. To my disappointment, most every faculty member practiced tenets of current traditionalism. I had my hands full, then, in trying to encourage different pedagogical goals and implementing a portfolio system to do outcomes assessment. Some of my communication necessarily had to bring these issues up, and I struggled trying to hold back my critiques of the current pedagogy and maintain an even tone.

I was assailed early on—directly and indirectly—by these faculty who I see now as Validation Seekers, not for what I wrote or said, but more for what I did not write or say. Consider the flyer on the next page, written before I had the Validation Seekers in mind as a primary audience:

## **Beyond the Modes: Ideas for Assignments, Facilitative Group Work, and Critical Response**

An English Composition Workshop

Wednesday, February 20 3:00-5:00 PM

\_\_\_\_\_ Hall 214

**All Faculty and Graduate Students Are Invited to Attend the First in a Continuing Series of English Composition Workshops.** The goal of this workshop is to offer exciting alternatives to the modal assignments often seen in textbooks (narrative, reflection, compare and contrast, etc.) and to discuss ways of implementing critical practices in order to help our students develop as writers. Participants can expect to hear suggestions about effective assignment construction and classroom processes to support the goals of those assignments while working in teams to devise and share assignments and exercises for classroom use. Bring pen and paper but nothing else except enthusiasm!

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Please return this bottom portion to the box of \_\_\_\_\_

Although you can make a last minute decision to attend and still be welcomed, I just want to have a rough idea of how many participants to expect.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will be attending the February 20th Workshop

\_\_\_\_\_ I will be unable to attend

In the flyer, I was trying to be careful not to criticize the present teaching, so I aimed my critique at textbooks, associating them with current-traditional precepts rather than the faculty. I also tried to dress up the workshop as something creative and interactive. But the Validation Seekers seized on the word “alternatives.” Why were alternatives needed? What was wrong with their teaching? The term “critical practices” also alarmed them. Weren’t they already engaging in critical writing? Weren’t they already helping students develop as writers? Most of the feedback I received about this flyer came from adjuncts who indicated that the unstat- ed seemed to sting that group I am here calling the Validation Seekers.

Similarly, the memo below about peer observations did not go over well:

**TO:** All Part-Time Faculty and Term Instructors  
**FROM:** William Thelin, Director of Composition  
**SUBJECT:** Peer Observations  
**DATE:** February 21, 20\_\_

I want us to set up a regular schedule of classroom observation for Composition faculty so that at least once every three or four years, instructors will be observed and have some feedback on their teaching. Currently, only term instructors, second-year TAs, and new faculty receive what I consider to be crucial information about teaching. I believe the program will prosper under a regular observation system, keeping us fresh and allowing us to share ideas about teaching.

These observations will be conducted by members of the Composition Program Committee. Their reports will consist of a description of what took place, an analysis of significant pedagogical areas of the session, and recommendations for the faculty member to consider. These observations will be sent for my review and put in your record. To get the process started, I have randomly selected certain faculty to be reviewed this semester. The instructor assigned to observe you will be in touch with you shortly.

To assist in this observation, please have available for the observer ahead of time a copy of your syllabus and an overview of the class plans for the day. Do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

As I alluded to in the memo, the program had had no system to give feedback on teaching. While I talk about “sharing ideas” and “keeping fresh,” the unstated assumption the Validation Seekers perceived, I think, was that the faculty needed feedback, that the teaching might have grown stale. While the Composition Program Committee at the time was made up primarily of adjuncts elected by the adjunct faculty, whom I consulted about the process of observation, the Validation Seekers still saw the observations as surveillance and a top-down approach to programmatic unity. From my protected position as a tenured faculty, I personally like to be observed, as it keeps me on my toes. I learn about bad habits I have and can get a set of eyes to view any problem areas. I don't view observations as a threat. But without the protection of continuous employment, the Validation Seekers—and not illogically so—did.

Of course, some of the unstated in these communications was true. I did not like what I saw in the program and had to do something to intervene. And I suffered from male tendencies to be direct. It does not help that I am a man who, in essence, supervised a faculty consisting mostly of women. I did not intend these forms of communication to contain threats. I certainly did not want the language to be perceived as harsh. I did not see how the contents could impact the adjuncts' day-to-day teaching lives. But I obviously had to respond better to the needs of my audience.

I want to mention right here an important point. Rhetoric cannot cover up the beliefs of a writer if the writer wishes to remain ethical. Like all writers, I have times when a person on the other end just completely reads something into my words not close to my intention. Email, which tends to be dashed off in a hurry, increases the possibility of this happening, as does texting. We cannot entirely control language, as we all know from our poststructuralist theories. But I do know how to write. I am capable of conveying warmth and friendliness. But maybe more than other writers, I have to feel warm and friendly in order to do so. I lack insincerity. Warmth and friendliness tend to come with respect. In order to have conveyed a better tone, then, I would have had to respect the teaching of my faculty and the curricular decisions they made.

Yet, in my role as a WPA, I had seen a serious problem with the teaching in my program. It has become fashionable in our field to ignore such problems in deference to concern for the economic plight of adjuncts. Schell, for example, states emphatically that the “generative question for higher education policymakers and administrators to ask is not, Why don’t part-time faculty provide quality education to their students? Rather it is, Why do institutions hire then fail to provide part-time faculty with working conditions necessary for the provision of quality education?” (“What Is ” 329). Schell lists the conditions necessary “for viable and sustainable teaching cultures,” including fair compensation and coalition building, but feels “growth and development” for teachers will emerge from the implementation of those work conditions (331-32). She does not mention subject knowledge. She feels that focusing on the quality of part-time education enables a critique of the part-time faculty “as individuals or as a class of undifferentiated faculty...shift[ing] responsibilities from institutions to individuals who occupy the problematic positions” (326). Kelly Latchaw discusses the “culture of fear that shapes the teaching of the adjunct,” suggesting that “conservative classroom practices” spring from the

“I would have had to respect the teaching of my faculty and the curricular decisions they made.”

adjuncts' lack of job security (Horner, et al. 82).<sup>1</sup> They do not want to risk losing their position and paycheck by going against the perceived norm. Another dominant strand of thought, similar to Schell's, admits that adjunct teaching might not be all it should be but views such results again as an outcome of the working conditions. Helen O'Grady invokes the need for "equitable salaries, reasonable teaching loads, benefits, office space, mailboxes, telephones, clerical support, access to copy machines, as well as time and reasonable support for research, scholarship, and professional development" to provide quality instruction (142). Implicit support for this position can be seen in many sources, but perhaps Janice Albert's article concerning the search for evidence of student learning states (or doesn't state) the belief best:

If tests show that they [adjuncts] do a better job of getting students from Point A to Point B, then this would be another lever in the machinery of getting better pay and benefits. If tests were to show the reverse, then perhaps the adjunct problem would be solved by doing away with this category of employment and hiring people only into full-time positions. (A3)

In other words, the lack of full-time positions is the culprit for any poor teaching, not the subject knowledge of the faculty filling these positions, nor the way aspects of current-traditionalism embed their way into the psyche of adjuncts to the point that current-traditional precepts must be defended in order for the adjuncts to be validated.

If we are to embrace this line of thought, however, we have to question why universities across the nation offer doctorates in Composition. If the knowledge produced by a doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition—knowledge that is informed by research and theory—has so little relevance to actual classroom practice that the creation of a full-time position allows an adjunct with an M.A. in literature to perform as well as rhet/comp Ph.D.s in first-year Composition—to have the same base of knowledge to handle the linguistic and rhetorical problems we see in our diverse student populations—the doctorate in Composition has been specious all along, as some of our literature colleagues have always claimed. Perhaps its real role is akin to what Richard Miller suggests—to produce middle-management for universities so that writing programs can be run efficiently and the labor of others overseen (98-99). It is more productive in my estimation to acknowledge that the labor situation buttresses current-traditionalism and that the lack of subject knowledge on the part of a great majority of adjuncts makes them gravitate toward many of current-traditionalism's precepts. The knowledge that Compositionists possess does matter, especially for programs with open-admissions and at-risk students who are in need of the understandings developed in our field

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1. It is not clear if Latchaw means to suggest current-traditionalism when speaking of conservative practices, but if we view tenets of current-traditionalism, such as the modes of discourse, as the status quo in Composition, I do not feel it is inaccurate to use the terms "conservative" and "current-traditionalism" as synonyms.

over the years. We do not need to blame the victim to see this situation for what it is. The chance to retool, as many knowledgeable Compositionists have done,<sup>2</sup> could occur with better employment conditions, but as a panacea for improved teaching, the call for full-time positions misses the complexities that surround the work done by adjuncts.

In communicating with the adjuncts in my program as the WPA, I could not cover up my concerns about the prevalence of current-traditionalism in our program with a tone that validated and praised the adjuncts. When our four non-tenure-track full-time lines were cut during my first year, I sympathized with the affected adjuncts who had come up to these positions through the ranks, and I argued for the positions' restoration, receiving instead two similar positions that required an ABD minimum. But I could not argue that the positions produced better teaching. I sensed that a competition had unfolded between my education and Validation Seekers' practitioner knowledge, so I even felt resistance to anything as innocuous as praising the adjuncts' dedication. The tone in my communications could not change under these circumstances. I needed to actually appreciate and value what the adjuncts were doing in the program first.

The adjuncts wanted more communication from me, however. The Validation Seekers seemed to want to show me that their pedagogies had merit. Some wanted a clearer sense of my intentions for the program. To facilitate this communication, I initiated small group meetings with them and started a listserv. This, by the way, is when I recognized the difference between the Flexibility Seekers, the Aspiring Academics, and the Validation Seekers. I could tell during the small group meetings that members who I am now classifying in the first two groups did not really have time or want to put the precious hours they did have into the program. The Aspiring Academics were balancing the needs of other programs they worked in, trying to negotiate hectic schedules and differing departmental requirements, all while applying for full-time positions or pondering changes in careers. Some admitted to me during small group meetings that they deleted email without reading it, as they assumed they already had all the information they needed. The small group meetings actually impinged upon their time, so some of our discussions appeared to me to be forced, as if they just wanted me to tell them what to do. The Flexibility Seekers, on the other hand, let me know that they agreed with certain new policies (as they often did offlist or offline), but I didn't hear any disagreements, making me wonder if they simply were keeping such things to themselves. We did talk about conflicting ideas regarding pedagogy, but the discussions didn't appear, at least from what I could tell, to cause them any great distress. The Validation Seekers, though, filled the hallways with gossip to the point that other full-time faculty

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2. Please see the WPA-L archives circa May 2005 for a strand on the subject of retooling.

approached me and wondered what was going on. On the listserv, they demanded attention from me by challenging positions I had taken with repetitive questions. In preparation for their meetings with me, they tried to find out from other adjuncts the type of comments I had made during my sessions with them and then presented ideas that, based on my knowledge at that point about their individual pedagogies, were meant to appease me. The more aggressive ones simply defended their pedagogical ideas and dismissed mine, leading to some tension-filled meetings.

Seeing the non-productive confrontation that had developed, I changed my tone.

The following is a series of listserv posts between a long-time Validation Seeker and myself about the newly implemented portfolio system and then about the listserv itself. You can hear in some of my comments a certain defensiveness, but I generally maintain an even tone. Keep in mind that I had already answered all of this person's questions in previous memos, listserv discussions, and meetings, which, I believe, accounts for the lack of anyone else entering the dialogue. While you will see me apologize for not answering questions immediately, I, in fact, had posted to the listserv several explanations and clarifications at the beginning of the semester. I have edited these posts for clarity and brevity, as well as to keep identities concealed.

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**From:** William Thelin  
**Sent:** Thu 1/30/20\_\_ 11:36 AM  
**To:** ENG-PTFAC@LISTS.\_\_\_\_\_.EDU  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** Answers to More Questions

**Good Morning:**

I'm sorry I have not had a chance to answer some of the questions that have been addressed to me. I have been busy putting together the small groups and dealing with other matters, not ignoring or avoiding your concerns. Let me put together today some responses to similar questions about the portfolios. Individuals, going through various channels, have wondered about exam week and the substance of the reflective letter.

Someone was concerned that I was demanding that you be available throughout exam week. This is not the case. I said that for someone teaching three classes, 4-6 hours in your office during exam week should be fine. It seems to me that the easiest thing to do is to meet your students in your classroom during your scheduled exam time and hand back the



portfolios with brief parting oral remarks. Your classrooms will be available. But you can also spend the exam period times in your office and have students come to you OR put aside a block of hours (I believe I suggested something like 9-1 on a particular day) where students from all of your classes can come and retrieve the portfolios. Just make sure that you accommodate those individuals who have an exam schedule conflict.

The question about the reflective letter asked if it could be “a parting goodbye argument about student growth.” There are many acceptable ways to work the reflective letter into your course. At our pre-semester meeting, Jeff K [an adjunct] and Linda A [a professor of Composition], among others, suggested ways to make the letter an ongoing part of the classroom. But the content must be consistent for the outcomes assessment to have any validity. Therefore, I don’t think a focus on student growth will be enough. In the reflective letter, students should talk about the quality of their revisions in the portfolio and their revision strategies. In doing this, they should be able to articulate essential concepts, such as audience awareness, critical thinking, language use (specific versus general, concrete versus abstract, connotations versus denotations, etc.), relevant detail, arrangement, and other major considerations, and then be able to refer to specific places in their writing where they have worked on these issues. Their growth as a writer might be a factor in such a letter, but it should not be the point of the letter.

Remember that this semester is the one where we will be practicing and adjusting to this system. I noticed in some syllabi that there is no reference to a reflective letter or a portfolio. While I told you that you did not have to redo your syllabus to incorporate this system into this semester, you will be depriving yourself of the opportunity to learn how this system can work in your courses if you do not put some elements of this type of assessment into it. Therefore, if you are not collecting a portfolio, per se, make sure you have some assignment that has the students reflect on their writing in the manner outlined above and that you return this writing to them during exam week. The writing can be an in-class assignment for this semester, if you so choose, but do something that will prepare you for the second phase of the assessment that we will start in fall. Please see me individually if you are struggling in any way to incorporate the portfolio and/or letter into your present syllabus.

I’ll get to another question tomorrow.

Thanks

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From: W.,Esther [an adjunct]  
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 20\_\_ 8:54 PM  
To: ENG-PTFAC@LISTS.\_\_\_\_\_.EDU  
Subject: Re: Answers to More Questions

What is it that we are assessing with this tool—what is the outcome we desire? The students' ability to articulate certain concepts? Is that the point? Dr. Thelin, you said that the point is not the students' growth as writers.) The exact thing(s) we are supposed to be measuring or assessing—not exactly clear yet to me yet from the meeting, listserv letters, or open discussion here.

By the way, has it come to your attention, Dr. Thelin, that the listserv misses Part-time faculty who are not on it by accident and by design as well as Part-time faculty who do not or cannot use their e-mail. This means that some are missing your messages if you don't send them paper copies. And, of course, from the letter you forwarded from [the department chair], we see that the entire Full-time Faculty is left out of this Composition Faculty Discussion. Shouldn't they be included?

Esther W.

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From: William Thelin  
Sent: Fri 1/31/20\_\_ 10:10 AM  
To: ENG-PTFAC@LISTS.\_\_\_\_\_.EDU  
Cc:  
Subject: Re: Answers to More Questions

I think the issue Esther brings up is why we must make an effort during Week 15 to do some mock portfolio sessions. I'm not sure if she is talking about the reflective letter or the portfolio in general when she speaks about a "tool," but I will try to answer as best I can.

The desired outcome of the portfolio is two-fold, meant to respond to differing forces on campus and nationally. First, do the students know what they are talking about when they discuss writing? Second, can they demonstrate an application of this knowledge through their revisions? Through the letter, the revisions, and the in-class essay, we should get a sense of both of these areas. I have also said that versatility should be a component in assessment, as we want to make sure students are not staying in a safe zone, so to speak, and have abilities that can be applied to varying writing situations.

I said that growth should not be the point of the reflective letter, not that student growth is irrelevant. Learning involves growing, after all. But we are NOT assessing the amount of

improvement in the student, so I think a letter focusing on how much a student has grown or developed over the semester might blur the issues we are concerned with.

I will not duplicate these posts in paper form. Some faculty opted out of the listserv. I am working to get accurate email addresses for others. Most of us who want to discuss matters relevant to the program, then, have access and have had the choice to participate. Perhaps since you are concerned about the one or two faculty members without email, Esther, you can print out my messages to them and forward any responses to me. Otherwise, my door is still open to all faculty, regardless of email access, who have questions about the program. All formal announcements will continue to be made through paper.

[The department chair] will be joining this listserv. The tenured and tenure-track faculty have their own listserv. None of them has expressed any desire to be included on this one. If I hear from any such faculty, I will consult with you to make sure it is okay for them to be added. Otherwise, I'm not sure these issues concern them, as programmatic changes are announced through regular channels.

Let me know if there is still confusion on any of these items.

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From: W., Esther  
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 20\_\_ 8:05 PM  
To: ENG-PTFAC@LISTS.\_\_\_\_\_.EDU  
Subject: Re: Answers to More Questions

There are a few things to cover here.

Apologies, Dr. Thelin, if I was unclear on this point: I did not mean that all faculty should be included on a PART time faculty listserv; after all, this one is for PART time faculty.

The issue is that COMPOSITION issues are of concern to COMPOSITION faculty, which the English department faculty are, by definition of the by-laws, unless that was also changed last May?<sup>3</sup> If it wasn't, then all faculty are in and of the Composition program. Perhaps—as you claim—they do not wish to DISCUSS Composition issues, and certainly this listserv is not a hotbed of DISCUSSION.

But it is nearly impossible to believe that the people I know on our faculty are not interested

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3. This is a reference to a change made to the by-laws to appoint from a group of volunteers rather than to elect part-time representatives to the Composition Committee. The number of votes for the election had dwindled to the point that the last group of elected representatives had earned their position with only two votes, so the process had flaws.

in the writing program; still, it is good to know that you keep them informed of the program through regular channels so that they are keeping up with the rest of us.

When all is said and done, if an assessment program is to be effective and valid, the assessment must be done program wide. That means that the entire faculty, Full—as well as Part—time must participate. Why is this so hard to understand?

As to the issue of my keeping others on the faculty informed of departmental issues, I shall do my best, and I do try. But it is not my job to reach out with official news and programs. And it is not in my budget.

As to the "tool" I name, I speak of the reflective letter, which Dr. Thelin discusses in detail, but which has no described point. It is that letter that I ask about specifically, "What is the point?" because Dr. Thelin noted that growth is not the point, but he does not say what is the point of the letter. He mentions that students are describing the revising process in the language of the course, so I wondered if that were the point. I am hoping that there is something more, for this vague "outcome" is not something I can see as a valuable, valid thing to assess, and I don't think it is one that will fly with national assessment programs. I think they will be looking more at products, such as essays.

I am not sure yet what to ask about the portfolio itself. I know it is a collection of revised essays with earlier drafts, a record of the composing and revising and reflecting processes. I am into that. But I think that assessment of achievement is where we should be going.

It will be harder—but it will be more acceptable to those who are assessing us! That is why places such as [a local university] demand a yes/no pass/fail vote by impartial anonymous faculty for students finishing the course. Certainly we could come up with something—something based on the actual research of writing assessment, such as the fact that the most reliable assessment of writing is done by two experienced classroom teachers reading a writing sample. Did you all know that? So why not have a timed writing sample and train raters? And read holistically? And let the sample count for 20% of the grade? Experienced third raters could resolve differences. That writing sample would at least affect the final grade. We did that in the pilot freshman writing program. If you can catch Emeritus Professor Ted D., ask him about it.

Yours in process--

Esther

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One of the Flexibility Seekers complimented me on this exchange for what she perceived as my great restraint and patience considering that we had covered these issues in a faculty meeting and in prior communications. However, a Validation Seeker, not the one who dialogued with me here, accused me of screaming in this communication. I definitely can see places in retrospect where my directness did not do me any favors.

Of interest to me in this dialogue are the underlying issues. Esther wants her ideas to be read by the full-time faculty. Notice in her January 31st post the emphasizing of “Part” and “Composition.” Clearly, she is making a statement about the way the department designates her status with the capitalized “part,” but she appears also to be implying the importance of Composition by capitalizing it, perhaps in response to its secondary status within the department. Further, she suggests that full-time professors are members of the Composition faculty. I am not sure what section of the by-laws she was referring to, but the full-time professors, even the Compositionists teaching in our graduate program, took great strides at the time to distance themselves from the Composition program. She also wants the full-time faculty to participate in the portfolio assessment, claiming issues of validity as her reason. Notice that I mentioned nothing about full-time participation in my posts, so she pulled that from elsewhere to make it seem like I had not understood something. It would seem she must know that validity would not be compromised if we had data from 155 out of 160 sections. She feels rather, I think, the lack of privilege in her status and wants it leveled off. Finally, in her last paragraph, she makes a vague reference to research in the field of assessment and a desire to do uncompensated work. She wants her perspective validated and is willing, if I am reading this correctly, to do extra work in the form of a double-blind read in order to get it. Look at her question, “Did you all know that?” Perhaps she echoes, here, the language use of myself and the other Compositionists when we defend our pedagogies.<sup>4</sup> Further, her use of the term “process” in her closing seems to me to be an attempt to align her position with what she perceives to be the current trend in the teaching of Composition, which is interesting given her call for a timed writing.

The needs of the Validation Seekers hampered communication, so even when one adjunct perceived my tone to be polite and professional, another found me arrogant and demanding. And as a writer, I was very conflicted. Again, I recognized I was communicating with a group of people who, with a few exceptions, had not read the literature in Composition. In this listserv post, the person asserted knowledge based supposedly on research but wanted to revert to what I considered to be a regressive form of assessment—20% of a student's grade based on a pass/fail timed essay with no input from the instructor of the student.

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4. It is also interesting to note that Janice Albert in *Forum*, the publication for adjuncts in *College Composition and Communication*, calls for the exact same type of assessment that Esther does in the article previously cited.

I wanted to validate the people doing the work and join their side in the fight against exploitive working conditions. But I could not validate the type of teaching that undermines progressive teaching methods.

Like most people, I do not enjoy confrontation, so creating a more positive atmosphere in the program became a priority. The endless negativity in the Validation Seekers' complaints undermined programmatic goals and confused many new part-time employees regarding requirements and guidelines. An idea from a supportive adjunct instructor to start a reading group on Composition struck me as a possibility toward professional development as well as programmatic healing. She and I agreed on three books and invited the entire adjunct faculty to meet in my house for wine and cheese and robust discussion of pedagogy and theory. Ira Shor inadvertently contributed a twist to this group. We chose his book, *Empowering Education*, as the first selection, and upon hearing this in a private email exchange between him and me, Ira volunteered to do a conference call with the group. Ira answered questions and initiated dialogue for over an hour, and the group so enjoyed it that I found a way to get every other author we have read in our six summers in the group to do a conference call as well. The conversations with the authors not only helped drive discussion, but it gave the adjuncts a sense of being a part of the profession. This type of professional sharing allowed me to see the dozen or so adjuncts who popped in and out of the group in a more respectful light, as I saw them thinking through important issues and wondering ways to incorporate ideas into their pedagogy. While most prominent Validation Seekers never attended, I gleaned their ethos from these meetings anyway.

A final example below of my communication shows yet another shift in tone.

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**TO:** Composition Faculty  
**FROM:** William Thelin  
Director of Composition  
**DATE:** November 22, 20\_\_  
**SUBJECT:** Norming Groups

I am very pleased with the progress we have made in implementing the portfolio assessment. I appreciate the effort and skill you are bringing to this project. Please continue to give me your input as we approach the end of the semester.

It is time again to form norming groups for Week 15. I have put a schedule of available times on my office door. As per the wishes of the majority of you, we will limit groups to three persons. Sign your name or the names of a pre-formed group for the date and time

you wish to norm. If you need to vary the time slightly to fit everyone's schedule in your group, just let me know. Also, if you would like to be in a group that norms only with English I or English II, please indicate this with something like "EN I only" next to the designated slot. I will do my best to accommodate you.

As always, feel free to come to me with any problems. I will again make myself available during all times listed to answer questions that come up, review a particularly troublesome portfolio, or help in any other way. Do not forget to submit a finished norming chart at the end of your team's meeting.

Please sign up for a date and time by Wednesday, December 1.

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I must confess some serious discomfort with this memo. In a certain light, I can read the first few lines as pandering to the Validation Seekers. Yet, it also marks a change in my view of the situation and my shifting relationship with the adjuncts, a shift that is more complicated than might be seen at first glance. In springboarding from the summer reading meetings, I realized the need in Freirean terms to understand the local situation as much as possible. Freire talks about working with liberation movements in Africa after the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. "Not even here," he says, "where going beyond commonsense knowledge was a matter of life and death, would it be legitimate to belittle that knowledge or look down on it. It must be respected. A transcendence of commonsense knowledge...must be achieved only by the way of that very knowledge" (146). In working with the adjunct faculty, I had to find a way to respect the practitioner knowledge they brought to the classroom, even as I wanted to transform it. The adjuncts' knowledge did not materialize out of their collective desire to follow current traditionalism. My sense of competition drew largely out of my own head. The Validation Seekers did not, I think, have any great desire to challenge more contemporary views of Composition. Rather, they were trying to serve students, a large percentage of whom were first-generation or at-risk, within a program that offered little professional development opportunities and few forms of validation. Instead of looking at their teaching as "a static and unexamined approach to teaching writing," as Maxine Hairston termed it years ago in "The Winds of Change" (80), I tried to look at their pedagogies with fresh eyes. What I saw were practices designed to help with problems the instructors perceived in student writing, such as organization and sentence structure. I saw assignments trying to encourage reflection and open up possibilities for students. I saw attempts at showing students the value of good writing. It was actually plain amazing how good the teaching of writing was, even as it lacked in

crucial areas. And in recognizing these strong points, I was able to say, “I see your concerns. Have you ever tried this?” As opposed to, “That goal is not worthy. You need to be doing this.” Not that I was ever this blunt, but perception deemed my communications as such.

This was a two-way street. While by the time I stepped down, four Validation Seekers absolutely hated me and what I represented, the majority appeared to respect what I had brought to the program. I received an 80% approval rating from the adjuncts in my last administrative assessment in 2008. Many of their comments talked about the English Composition sequence as finally having a direction. Initial resistance to the portfolio assessment had transformed into, “Look what I have found out from that reflective letter” along with great suggestions of how to make the assignment better. So when I look at this example of one of my later memos, I know I was sincere when I talk about their “effort and skill.” I was validating in the absence of economic rewards.

Yet, while this might have been a victory for me and to some extent for better teaching practices in the program, it marked a defeat for the battle against exploitive working conditions. My validation of the adjuncts fulfilled the need for psychic income. It made what should be intolerable working conditions tolerable. It lessened the chance that the adjuncts would work toward change, at least the group I have labeled the Validation Seekers; if they find fulfillment through programmatic affirmation, they will not seek the economic justice the position deserves. The creation of full-time positions must come from adjunct agitation. Many will find it hard to agitate against exploitation when they enjoy their jobs.

I purposely proposed *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers* for our summer reading group one year, knowing the collection’s focus on the exploitation of adjunct labor would stir up the group. We engaged in a thought-provoking conference call with co-editor Tony Scott, and the discussion spilled over onto the part-time listserv the next day. Based on Steve Parks’s ideas of designing writing assignments for our students around economic issues and the university itself, I suggested that a group of adjuncts could develop solidarity with the students by making the theme of work at least a part of their syllabus. While I worried about adjuncts

“worried about adjuncts preaching to their students under these conditions”

preaching to their students under these conditions, I thought well-designed assignments could still teach writing and let students come to their own conclusion while exposing the economic situation within the university and opening some student eyes. To lead the way, I took some key terms from the adjuncts’ posts to the listserv, such as “exploitation” and “accommodation,” and



turned them into assignments that would allow for the students to explore many different paths and perspectives. The adjuncts appeared to greet these assignments with enthusiasm, and several said they would test them out or develop ones of their own. In anticipation of the results, I even submitted a proposal to a national conference to report the findings.

I had forgotten about psychic income. In order for the adjuncts to develop a unit on work in the university, they would have had to expose themselves as contingent labor. To have presented themselves as exploited labor to their students would have shattered illusions, for the students, of course, but also, I think, for the instructors. Not one adjunct to my knowledge used any of these assignments or derivatives of them to make students aware of the exploitation of part-time labor. Further, one of the Validation Seekers even reported my efforts to an administrator directly above me (although he did not see the assignments as inappropriate, he kindly recommended that I tone down my “political leanings” as the WPA). The adjuncts apparently preferred to secure their identity as respected professionals. Walter Jacobsohn condemns this practice he calls “adjunct passing,” believing it degrades its practitioners and others in the community. He feels it is “only right” that students be made aware of how their institution of higher learning, through the exploitation of adjunct labor, does not support their learning. Adjunct passing, he asserts “make[s] the working conditions of adjunct faculty almost impossible to change” (171). Katherine Wills also suggests that adjuncts who want “to avoid being outed” can slow down the organizing process for collective bargaining (205).<sup>5</sup>

Steve Street comments in “Don’t Be Kind to Adjuncts” that acts of kindness are actually less than kind if not accompanied by discourse designed to put adjunct issues “front and center” (A36). Given the strength of this psychic income, then, perhaps I would have helped the adjuncts more if I had taken Street’s title literally and assumed (or continued?) an enemy role, the Boss Compositionist who privileges theory and research over practitioner knowledge. Validating the work of adjuncts, after all, reduces tension when for conditions to be changed, unrest is needed. The terms of the adjuncts’ employment were the problem, and in many ways, I ended up enabling that problem to continue by measures not dissimilar to the upper administrators that I bemoaned earlier. Ultimately, then, the system of adjunct exploitation has created roles or identities for workers (WPAs included) that—brilliantly, I’m sure, from an administrative perspective—suppress the type of dissent necessary for wholesale change. Without collective action targeting the system and building allies, individual adjuncts will simply rely on the benevolence of administrators to create full-time positions and then compete against their colleagues for the few positions that pop up here and there. WPAs, sympathetic or not, will continue to dole out validation for a job well done, appeasing

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5. I should point out here that my state’s laws forbid the unionization of part-time workers.

some adjuncts but harming far too many, especially the Aspiring Academics, who want, need, and deserve full-time positions with a professional salary and benefits.<sup>6</sup>

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6. This article was based on a presentation given at the WPA Summer Conference. The author would like to thank the members of the audience for giving helpful suggestions and would especially like to acknowledge Lisa Lebduska, who gave wonderful feedback during the transformation of the paper into an article.

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## Who Is Teaching Composition?

**MY BROTHER AND I ARE BOTH ENGLISH TEACHERS. ON ONE CHILLY** autumn evening a few years ago, we sat at my kitchen table drinking coffee and discussing our work. I mulled over the repercussions of my early work in Composition, objecting to the position I had been in as a teacher with only superficial training. I explained how I often felt lost in my early years as an English master's student, teaching writing: Did no one mind that I knew nothing about how people acquire discourse conventions? That I planned my courses with a series of guesses, based mostly on my memories of the writing course I had taken as a freshman? As a graduate student and later a lecturer in comparative literature and foreign languages, some of my brother's teaching experience has been in Composition. My brother's nose crinkled as he leaned back in his chair, the familiar sign that I was in for a debate rather than a discussion. His sticking point: anyone can teach Composition.

"I don't need any special knowledge to teach writing, really," he began, then adding, "No offense. I'm sure you know much more about it than I do." His position was indicative of an opinion many academics harbor. (Thankfully, my brother's opinion has changed over time.) While I worked long and diligently completing a degree in Composition, many believe that Composition Studies is, in a sense, superfluous, because just being a good writer is qualification enough to teach writing. I believe that most teachers do not have any conscious malice or condescension toward Compositionists or the field of Composition; yet, the labor system that treats teaching as generic dismisses and diminishes my studies, my degree, and my scholarship. Moreover, it has negative repercussions for both unprepared Composition teachers and their students.

As the use of part-time and graduate student labor has increased across disciplines, comprising a combined 57.8%, and full-time but nontenure-track has come to account for another 14.9% of all teaching positions in 2007 (Jaschik, "The Disappearing"), academics are becoming more openly critical of the labor system.<sup>1</sup> Institutions with open-admissions policies may demonstrate an even more disproportionate use of part-time labor. While I was unable to locate a study that categorizes labor practices at open-admission institutions specifically, public community colleges and public four-year colleges and universities that do not

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1. The percentages reported in Jaschik's 2009 article are from an American Federation of Teachers study; the AFT analyzed data from 1997 through 2007 in order to demonstrate the decline of full-time and tenure-track jobs over time.

grant Ph.D.s are the most likely types of institutions to have open-admissions policies. Public community colleges employ 68.6% of faculty in part-time positions, and another 13.8% in full-time, nontenure-track roles. Almost 44% of teachers at public four-year schools without doctoral programs are part-time; 6.3% are graduate assistants, and 10.9% full-time, non-tenure-track (Jaschik, "The Disappearing"). Much has been written about the challenges of meeting the needs of students at open-admissions institutions; likewise, much has been published regarding the economic plight and poor working conditions of adjunct faculty. Yet, few studies make connections between the two. As a former adjunct and GA, and now as a tenured teacher who values the work of adjuncts at my campus, I can sense why: critiquing the work of faculty already usually underpaid and treated as second class citizens of the university seems to add insult to injury. Despite this awkward position, I not only believe that we should be interested in the implications of the connections between labor practices and teaching practices, I assert that we can no longer afford to ignore them. As education budgets nationwide are slashed and austerity measures become commonplace at public institutions, providing the services and attention non-traditional students need will only become more difficult. At the same time, the trend of replacing "expensive" full time and tenure track employees with a flex-labor force will become even more attractive to administrators. The majority of our at-risk students will be introduced into the culture of the university by passing through a first-year Composition course, a course taught most frequently by temporary faculty. We have here, then, both a potential problem and a potential opportunity.

Pegeen Reichert Powell, in "Retention and Writing Instruction: Implications for Access and Pedagogy," comments on the increased difficulty of retaining students at open admissions colleges, noting that "the more selective an institution, the higher the retention rates, and persistence to a bachelor's degree is affected by whether or not a student initially enrolls at a two-year or a four-year college" (668). The numbers she presents are sobering: "We know that (depending on where we teach) there is a chance that up to 50 percent of our first-year students will never graduate, and that possibly up to 30 percent will not even stick around for sophomore year" (676). Powell further argues that "Composition faculty are especially well positioned to participate in conversations about retention. The unique context of writing classroom as an interface between students' past and future educational experiences, as an introduction to the discourse practices of higher education, and as one of the only universal requirements at most institutions makes it a prime site for retention efforts (669). At institutions where Composition is a gatekeeping course, students' continued access often hinges upon the learning they do there (674). By extension, the teaching they encounter in these courses becomes high stakes as well.

I have written elsewhere about how the casualization of Composition teaching may

affect the pedagogical choices in first-year writing programs staffed by those with little or no formal Composition study. I argued that staffing practices have stunted the pedagogical growth of Composition programs; that is, while many Compositionists strive to move the teaching of writing in progressive directions, institutional policies result in the reiteration of theoretically weak pedagogies. When instructors are hired to teach Composition with little or no training in Composition studies, they may make pedagogical choices for reasons of familiarity and efficiency rather than for any strong theoretical rationale—working thoughtfully and hard, to be sure, but often without a solid foundation. On the other hand, some WPAs squelch instructors' potentially effective, locally derived pedagogies with required textbooks and prepackaged curriculum, a measure meant to compensate for the temporary faculty's lack of training ("Filling in the Blanks"). I've been an instructor in both of those positions.

My purpose in this essay is to explore how the academic labor system negatively affects the quality of Composition teaching, the role of compositionists, and the status of the field of Composition itself. That is, I want to unpack the ways in which employment practices reinforce an implicit belief that expertise in Composition Studies gained through graduate study, and by extension compositionists, is unnecessary. In fact, I argue that Composition study must be considered adjunct (pun intended) in order for the current labor system to work. This system has complicated consequences for both teachers and students.

## **The Transformation of Academic Labor**

As the university has become corporatized, part of a global trend towards neoliberalism, staffing conventions have become more often based on cost-effectiveness than expertise. Graduate study and expertise in Composition are threats to this system: systematic study of the theories underlying one's views of writing, teaching, and learning includes acknowledging biases or gaps in knowledge that might disrupt the rationale behind current labor and funding arrangements. If administrators deem knowledge of Composition Studies unnecessary to the teaching of Composition, they may then cheaply staff writing courses with graduate students, adjuncts, and temporary employees who may have little or no knowledge of the field. The budget's bottom line trumps the teacher's subject knowledge.

Certainly staffing across all academic disciplines has undergone a transformation in the past thirty years. Writing for *Inside Higher Ed*, Scott Jaschik reports that in 1975, 30 percent of university faculty were part-time. In contrast, in 2005, "part-time positions made up 48 percent of faculty jobs. . . ." As more full-time yet non-tenure track positions are created, making up "20 percent of jobs in the 2005 . . . tenured and tenure-track positions have become decidedly in the minority" (Jaschik "Rethinking"). This development is part of a larger global trend, as Richard Ohmann observes in "Accountability and the Conditions for Cur-

ricular Change.” Ohmann insists that, “one can see in the casualization of academic labor the same process of dispersal and degradation that capital initiated against the core workforce in almost every industry around 1970” (68). If “the university has become more like a business” (69), it is because administrators are adopting the dominant economic philosophy.

This profit-driven, corporate philosophy may be rooted in the global rise of neoliberalism, which David Harvey traces in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. In that text, Harvey describes the growing dominance of this philosophy worldwide, giving special attention to its evolution in the United States, Great Britain and China. He defines it thus: “Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). Harvey argues that neoliberalism has been the driving force in both global politics and corporate practice in the past forty years. Moreover, he describes it as a system that “seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (3), further claiming that, “Neoliberalism has meant, in short, the financialization of everything” (33).

Academia’s turn towards part-time untenured labor certainly parallels Harvey’s description of neoliberal labor policy: “Workers are hired on contract, and in the neoliberal scheme of things short term contracts are preferred in order to maximize flexibility” (167-168). In order to maintain this flex-work system, managers attack unions and get rid of tenure systems (168). Faculty’s willingness to fight neoliberal policies in academia is complicated by their now tenuous positions. In *The University In Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*, Henry Giroux notes that, “Faculty power once rested in the fact that most faculty were full-time and a large percentage of them had tenure, so they could confront administrators without fear of losing their jobs” (118). That changed in the 1980s, however, as “the newly corporatized university” began “to limit faculty power by hiring fewer full-time faculty, promoting fewer faculty to tenure, and instituting ‘post-tenure’ reviews that threaten to take tenure away” (118). This situation has escalated recently, as teachers’ unions have been challenged and broken in several states, and public employees generally have been characterized by the Republican far right as pampered burdens on state and federal budgets. Today, “Many faculty live under the constant threat of being downsized, punished, or fired and are less concerned about quality research and teaching than about accepting new rules of corporate-based professionalism in order to simply survive in the new corporatized academy” (Giroux 128). These rules include the increased casualization of labor, which is met with insufficient resistance from a disempowered faculty, resulting in a teaching staff increasingly populated by graduate students and temporary instructors.

## The Division of Labor In Composition

While the trend towards part-time and untenured positions is systemic in academia, nowhere is it so entrenched as in Composition, so much so that many administrators no longer see anything alarming in a subject being taught almost entirely by contingent labor, albeit supervised by full-time professors. In *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*, Marc Bousquet provides an overview of the history of Composition labor:

While the course [freshman Composition] was commonly staffed by full-time lecturers and tenure-stream faculty until the 1940s, the expansion of higher education under the G.I. Bill initiated the practice of adjunct hiring and reliance on graduate employees to teach the course. By the mid 1960s, the casualization of writing instruction was institutionalized and massively expanded in order to fuel cross-subsidy of research and other university activities. During this expansion, a significant fraction of the collective labor of rhetoric and composition specialists was devoted to supervising and training casualized first-year writing staff. (158)

While increases in the number of graduate programs suggest that Composition Studies has achieved some success as a field, the truth is that at most institutions, Composition faculty are untenured and have “little acquaintance with the disciplinary knowledge of rhet-comp” (Bousquet 158). Little seems to have changed in the twenty years since Sledd called Composition teaching “a slave trade” (“See and Say” 138). The continued use of non-Compositionist, contingent workers prompts Joseph Harris to lament that, despite the growing “disciplinary apparatus” of Composition Studies, including “our presses and journals and conferences and graduate programs,” the actual practice of staffing of courses has remained much the same (357-358). Similarly, David Downing notes that while the theoretical work of literature and Composition changes, “What doesn’t change is most often revealed in the perpetuation of exactly the same basic labor practices . . .” (93). That is, the use of temporary and part-time flexible workers. So, while Compositionist Ph.D.s may currently find more tenure-track jobs than those in other branches of English Studies, their numbers do not make a dent in the ratio of casualized labor to full-time, tenure-track faculty.

While some programs do hire full-time, degreed compositionists exclusively to teach, most institutions are more interested in hiring compositionists to be Writing Program Administrators (WPAs). Overall, those with the most knowledge of Composition Studies are often actually doing the least teaching in order to attend to administrative duties, getting alternative work assignments, a.k.a course reassignments or, as they are unfortunately known on my campus, course releases (a term that assumes release from teaching is a reward). One may argue that compositionist WPAs contribute to a system wherein knowledge of Composition Studies filters down to the contingent and nonspecialist faculty working in their pro-



grams. For an exploration of how that structure can be problematic, see Bill Thelin's "Being Written by Adjuncts" in this volume. In addition to the complications Thelin documents, Composition Studies in this model is divorced from Composition teaching, disciplinary expertise instead qualifying one to supervise contingent faculty. Lynn Worsham explains in an interview with Scott Mcleeme that this move "to collapse the work of administration into the work of theory" is "a disservice," making Composition theorists into the rulers of an underclass of part-timers. Bousquet calls this "the problem of 'tenured bosses and disposable teachers'" (158). Bousquet's choice of phrase is homage to James Sledd, who famously critiqued the "boss compositionists" ("Why the Wyoming" 173) who oversee contingent Composition teachers with "contempt" for their lack of disciplinary study (172). Sledd is angry with a system that rewards research but not teaching (175). More recently, Bousquet and Worsham observe that the system rewards research by removing the Composition scholar from teaching as much as possible.

In the model described by Worsham, Bousquet and Sledd, tenured bosses produce research but do not teach (or teach much less); disposable teachers instruct, but are seldom asked to engage Composition scholarship, whether by studying, writing, or reflecting on practice. Indeed, this reflects my own experience. For most of my time as an adjunct, I was not offered significant professional development or support for scholarship. At two of the three schools that employed me, I was never even observed or evaluated by other faculty. I taught much more than I do now, sometimes five or six classes across institutions. Once I began a Ph.D. program in Composition, I was offered a position as director of a writing center. At my current job, I have served as both Writing Center Director and Coordinator of Composition, both positions resulting in a reduction in my teaching load.

"I was never even  
observed or evaluated  
by other faculty."

The division of labor in Composition is ultimately motivated by the trend Ohmann and Giroux identified in the university as a whole—a growing concern for profitability. Ohmann argues that as universities "look to the bottom line as businesses do," they will assess the English department's value using largely financial standards (71). This is what prompts Michael Bérubé to note that, "What rationale we [English departments] have usually relies on our functions as teachers of writing" (32). English departments are moneymakers for the university primarily because most every student, regardless of major, is enrolled in one, two, or three semesters of required writing courses. Cheaply staffing writing courses with adjuncts and graduate students makes budgetary good sense.

What's more, this system becomes self-perpetuating. In his assessment of neoliberal labor practices, Harvey suggests that, "Employers have historically used differentiations within the labour pool to divide and rule" (168). The workforce is more easily manipulated if placed into tiers. Contingent workers may feel powerless to question their lot; meanwhile, WPAs and full-time professors know that their benefits and status are tenuous in an atmosphere marked by challenges to funding and tenure—an ever more contentious atmosphere given the events in Wisconsin and Ohio in 2010 and 2011, wherein teachers have been demoralized and attacked by anti-union conservatives. As the economy has faltered and unemployment rises, neoliberal politicians are able to drum up resentment of public employees who have fought hard to win a semblance of job security, health benefits, and living wages. Unions have been broken and teachers fired and retrenched.

The resulting, understandable insecurity of full-time professors may keep them from seeking solidarity with contingent faculty. Sledd notes more selfish motivations for tenured faculty's inaction. English professors need Composition courses to bolster their threatened budgets (budgets which, he notes, support their research), but as a whole they have little interest in teaching Composition themselves. Professors may be willing, then, to turn a blind eye to the inequities of the system that allows them to maintain funding while teaching literature ("Why the Wyoming" 166). As a result, the division of labor into full-time WPA Composition specialists and contingent instructors is challenged by a minority of scholars and activists, but otherwise perpetuated.

Some colleges have attempted to solve the problems of a contingent work force by creating Composition programs staffed entirely by full-time but non-tenure-track Compositionists. Doug Hesse has received attention for his initiative in setting up such a program at the University of Denver. At the Modern Language Association Conference in December 2007, Hesse described Denver's program as similar to one at Georgia State University, with "multiple-year, renewable contracts that have resulted in full-time jobs with better pay and benefits than adjuncts could have earned, even teaching many courses." Still, Hesse worries, "whether the creation of these jobs was a form of 'collaboration' with the system that fails to create tenure-track jobs. Was the program, he wondered, 'a composition Vichy regime'?" Hesse ultimately says that since these new programs improve teaching, they are positive overall: "What's best for students trumps everything for me." Hesse concludes, "If academics wait until colleges return to the assumption that every possible position should be tenure-track, 'we'll wait an awfully long time'" (qtd. in Jaschik, "Rethinking").

While the University of Denver and universities with similar programs may have improved conditions and teaching at their institutions, they still contribute to the diminishment of Composition faculty. Composition programs staffed by full-time non-tenure-track

teachers give the illusion of equity, but in reality, the message sent is that Composition teaching is less important than instruction in other fields which merit tenure lines. Bousquet suggests that teaching Composition is still not seen as “faculty work” (183) and distinguishes being “treated like” colleagues from actually being colleagues (182). By extension, Composition Studies is still positioned as a second-class scholarly pursuit when Compositionists are sequestered at the bottom of a tiered system, even a system of full-timers.

Many educational critics have called for large-scale reforms, or even abolishment of the tenure system as a potential solution, one that can account for economic concerns. For example, Michael Murphy argues in “New Faculty for a New University: Toward a Full-Time Teaching-Intensive Faculty Track in Composition” that the “traditional professoriate” is no longer an economically practical or sustainable model, and says that the cost of supporting research—research required to earn tenure—is the “real expense” of faculty (20). He proposes that writing programs employ “some combination of traditional research-informed faculty and full-time tenurable teaching-intensive faculty—along with a smaller number of regular part-time faculty and temporary part-time faculty” (25). He runs the numbers, and claims that the effect on the budget’s bottom line would be attractive to administrators, necessitating minimal cost increases, while acknowledging that teaching-intensive faculty do indeed already exist (25). Murphy’s proposal prompted some passionate responses in the CCC “Interchanges,” with James Sledd writing that Murphy’s plan “would maintain a five-rank hierarchy rather like the one I knew as a graduate student” (147) and Bernstein, Green, and Ready noting that his numbers are not applicable across institutional contexts (149). They further ask, “who would staff such [teaching-intensive] positions?” (151), drawing attention to the disproportionately large role women still play in staffing basic writing classrooms.

I pose this same question, but with a different answer in mind. Most of us who teach Composition are contingent, most of us are women, and, significantly, most of us have not studied Composition and Rhetoric.

## **Generic Teaching in the Composition Classroom**

This widespread dominance of profit and the belief that almost anyone can teach writing are neither inadvertent nor innocuous. In 2001, the Conference on College Composition and Communication Committee on Part-time / Adjunct Issues reported that 75% of Composition teachers are graduate students [GAs], adjuncts, and temporary employees (340); degreed Compositionists make up a small percentage of this group. I argue that, in order to justify hiring from a pool of persons lacking discipline-specific expertise, managers perpetuate the belief that expertise in Composition is unnecessary. In turn, the actions of administrators encourage many writing instructors to believe that knowledge of Composition Studies is not

vital to their own practices.

Certainly a person with no graduate study in Composition might be an excellent writing teacher. Certainly Literature and Composition are closely entwined fields, so that the majority of those who teach Composition—GAs and contingent labor more likely to have degrees (or degrees-in-progress) in Literary Studies—have some education that can inform their work. On the other hand, most writing teachers lack a foundation of knowledge regarding the acquisition of advanced literacy and are not current with developments in the field. Bousquet puts this situation in perspective:

. . . it is now typical for students to take nearly all first-year, and many lower-division, and some advanced topics courses from nondegreed persons who are imperfectly attuned to disciplinary knowledge and who may or may not have an active research agenda or a future in the profession. (42)

As graduate study in English currently stands at most universities, unless one chooses to concentrate in Composition Studies specifically, a graduate student rarely receives more than a cursory introduction to the field. Sledd notes that graduate students with no background in Composition Studies may benefit from “limited teaching, after careful training and under intelligent supervision.” However, he worries that what is most often offered these new teachers is “surveillance, rather than instruction” (“Why the Wyoming” 168). Some institutions do offer more in-depth teacher training for graduate students in English who teach Composition, and some literature programs offer or even require a full course or two in Composition. Yet I cannot help but object, as Sledd does, that such moves are not enough to excuse staffing Composition “with the least experienced, least prepared, most poorly paid of teachers” (“Why the Wyoming” 167), who, moreover, are also shouldering a full schedule of graduate credits (“Or Get Off The Pot” 85). Moreover, the foundational assumption behind these required courses and training programs is that they result in sufficient expertise to teach writing.

Recently, a colleague asserted just this point when the subject of hiring more Compositionists was raised in a meeting. Her comment was in regards to the many full-time tenure-track professors in literature who teach Composition on our campus. Surely they are better prepared than senior faculty who have never studied Composition, she said. Well, sure. Yet I can't help but note that this rationale would not be accepted in the reverse. The two courses I took in literary theory (one in a master's program, the other in a doctoral program) would never be accepted as sufficient expertise to assign me to teach that course. My colleague was well-intended, no doubt, likely just being supportive of movements to integrate Literature and Composition in graduate programs. But the subtle implication, one many colleagues seem unconscious of making, is that my degree in Composition is an unnecessary

excess. Most of higher education operates on this premise, and it allows graduate students and adjuncts to be used as a source of very cheap labor, and tenure-track professors to be repurposed in lieu of additional hires. Some might be successful Composition teachers despite this system, but it is not constructed to foster good teaching.

In contrast, Murphy claims that the work of part-time instructors of his acquaintance “is probably better than that done in Composition classrooms today by the average full-time faculty member teaching writing, who typically has little training or respect for Composition theory and would prefer teaching literature” (29). He rejects the image of the

“Some might be successful Composition teachers despite this system, but it is not constructed to foster good teaching.”

“ill-prepared and under-supported ‘freeway flier’” as a “very damaging false stereotype” (“On Buying Out, and Having To” 156). His descriptions imply that adjuncts, in his experience, do have more significant training in Composition; what that training is, however, is left unexamined. They may indeed have more training and desire, but that does not excuse systematic abuse of adjunct labor. It does not mean that we should not want teachers with discipline-specific expertise, the job security, resources, and academic freedom to do their best work. What’s more, as Bernstein, Green, and Ready point out, Murphy’s observations are not so readily transferable to other contexts. As I noted earlier, my own early work as an adjunct writing teacher was problematic, to say the least. I resembled Murphy’s description of the average full-time professor, without the paycheck and benefits to match. Murphy may have worked as one of many adjuncts well-schooled in Composition theory and pedagogy; I was making it up as I went along, and, like the other adjuncts in my bullpen, saw the occasional introduction to literature course as a reward from the WPA for a job well done. I worked very hard at my jobs at three institutions, but toiled under a lot of misconceptions about Composition. I never met a compositionist at any of my adjunct jobs. In fact, I didn’t know the field existed for most of that time, stumbling across it as I considered a return to graduate school. Murphy’s perspectives are further challenged by research in contingent faculty work demonstrating that our teaching conditions *really do* affect the learning conditions of students.

Concerned with contingent faculty across all disciplines, Paul Umbach analyzed data collected in the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, administered to 132 institutions in 2004. He found that “compared with their tenured and tenure-track peers, contingent faculty . . . are underperforming in their delivery of undergraduate instruction” (110). Specifically,

“Part-time faculty interact with students less frequently, use active and collaborative techniques less often, spend less time preparing for class, and have lower academic expectations than their tenured and tenure-track peers” (110). Full-time contingent faculty also spend less time interacting with students and “require slightly less effort from their students,” but spend “more time than tenured and tenure-track faculty preparing for class” (110). Umbach is quick to argue that these results should not be interpreted as a lack of competence. Rather, as many labor activists have noted, contingent working conditions limit what faculty can accomplish.

In the English department, managers and even tenured faculty have objected little to the contingent staff’s lack of Composition study, suggesting that Composition’s disciplinary knowledge is not widely regarded as a professional prerequisite to teaching writing. Until quite recently, I have been one person in an on-call staffing army, populated mostly by persons with little or no expertise in teaching writing beyond having been hired to teach sections of Composition at other schools in the past. This suggests to me that, however I may define myself, many define “Composition teacher” as a warm body with graduate credits in English.

Of course some administrators and faculty may privately believe or even publicly claim that Composition teachers should have studied Composition, but to act openly on this preference would disrupt the current practice of employing persons with little or no disciplinary knowledge. Hillocks describes the situation thusly: “The educationists seem to believe that teaching is generic: Once one knows how to teach, one can teach anything” (3). Managers using the contingent system, then, do not necessarily hire teachers with content knowledge of Composition, as much as those with some experience with teaching in general. Hillocks explains the contradiction at the heart of this preference: “Today, on the one hand, we hear from the writing establishment that writing is a special craft that requires a trained professoriate. But college and school personnel administrators tell us, through their actions, that nearly anyone can teach it” (4). Managers accept the latter stance as it allows them easily to draw from the pool of cheap labor in English Studies.

Moreover, managers’ support of this system tacitly subjugates Composition Studies. In the corporate model, Composition Studies is not a profitable commodity; it is a niche market that does not pay off. As administrators maintain this perspective through their hiring policies, graduate and contingent employees are behooved to agree (at least publicly) that teaching is generic and Composition Studies is superfluous.

For instance, I can speculate why my brother, looking skeptical at me over our mugs of coffee, was not eager to consider the place (or absence) of Composition Studies in his own work. Given that Composition teaching helped to fund his own education in literature and later supplemented his income, he and other employees are naturally defensive of their positions; indeed, they have little motivation even to consider the rationale behind their funding.

Without the assistantships that position graduate students as Composition teachers, many would not be able to afford their educations. While a few English graduate programs are working to integrate the Studies of Literature and Composition, most students must choose one track or the other. If the administration insisted that all writing teachers either be students of Composition or be thoroughly trained in the field, many English graduate students would either lose funding to those on a Composition track, or spend a great deal of time supplementing their already full plate of literary studies with Composition texts or coursework. Contingent faculty already holding degrees but ungrounded in Composition are in the same position; they need their jobs teaching writing and so are not in a strong position from which to admit any detriments their lack of Composition study may bring.

Many tenure-track and tenured professors have become entrenched in this system as well. For instance, Joseph Harris argues in "Thinking like a Program" that writing teachers need not be compositionists. While he values Composition scholarship (362), he does not believe that compositionists have any "unique skill in teaching students the moves and strategies of academic writing" (360). Armed with that philosophy, Harris has created a first-year writing staff at Duke University comprised entirely of post-doctoral fellows from "a wide range of disciplines" outside of English Studies, the majority of whom have not previously taught or studied Composition. These non-tenure track employees are not required to engage Composition Studies in any great, extended depth, though Harris works with them on designing assignments and defining course goals (360). Yet, I suspect his willingness to employ teachers ungrounded in the field has more to do with his worry that the labor system and the status of Compositionists cannot be changed. Harris admits that:

If . . . more than a few American universities were willing to support the work of first-year writing teachers as a separate discipline, with the protections and privileges of departmental status and tenure, then I would gladly sign on the cause. But that is not a choice most of us have been offered, and I don't see how accepting a subordinate status in an existing discipline is preferable to working as a valued member of a multidisciplinary program. (362)

Rather than challenge the administration, then, Harris has adopted its position that the teaching and study of writing are separate endeavors. Harris does not quite embody Marc Bousquet's claim that tenure-line faculty choose to ignore concerns with Composition labor "as a managerial responsibility" (20)—he does, after all, make the effort to try something new. But he also chooses to "reform" labor by accepting as inevitable management's policy of generic, contingent teaching.

I believe that one serious consequence of Composition's labor system, whether it takes the form of graduate assistantships, temporary contracts, or WPAs, is that it may dis-



courage teachers from exploring or even acknowledging the assumptions at work behind their positions as writing instructors (or their role in hiring instructors). In turn, instruction may stagnate. Karen Thompson argues, “When academic freedom is weak, quality education becomes threatened by conformity, mediocrity, and the safest approaches..., grade inflation, and choosing to protect one’s position rather than extend students’ horizons” (45). Gwendolyn Bradley adds, “Largely unprotected against sudden termination of their employment, contingent faculty have every incentive to avoid taking risks in the classroom....”

In my own case, when I reflected on my limitations both as an adjunct and a writing teacher, I returned to graduate study in Composition; however, I had the significant benefit of a supportive, well-employed spouse who could shoulder the burden of the cost. Many persons teaching writing do not have the resources to study Composition; after all, they are already graduate students in English literature, or living on contingent-worker salaries. Just as significant, I had the desire to pursue Composition as my primary field. Many writing teachers are not interested in getting a Composition degree—they teach writing as a condition of their employment or funding, and are actively working for jobs focused on teaching literature or cultural Studies. They may enjoy teaching writing and certainly can be good teachers. A few may even do scholarly work in Composition. At the same time, there is little motivation for such teachers to upset labor and funding arrangements by attaching any great consequence to a lack of disciplinary knowledge. Rather, they are more likely to see teaching Composition as “dues paying” in the English Department and to do their best. They need the job, after all, and their employers rarely demand further study beyond an introductory course. WPAAs, who must find multitudes of teachers willing to work for contingent pay or with temporary contracts, cannot afford to make expertise a deal-breaker, given that most of the people applying are not degreed Compositionists.

## **Contingent Teaching and Professional Development in Composition**

The combination of a philosophy of generic teaching, a contingent labor force, and disregard of Composition Studies can be detrimental to professional development. That is, Composition teachers under this system have a much more difficult time pursuing their own scholarship in the field—once they are in place, their working conditions do not nurture further study. Maureen Murphy Nutting reports that they often do not qualify for professional development programs (36). Moreover, teaching an overload of courses at more than one institution to make ends meet makes staying current with scholarship in the field extremely challenging (36). The American Association of University Professors reports that even when in full-time but non-tenure-track positions, such faculty’s larger course loads provide “less



time . . . to pursue scholarship or even keep up with developments in the field" (Curtis and Jacobs 7). Moreover, these positions often do not have research requirements, making it less likely that administration will even consider supporting their scholarship (7).

Giroux argues that as a consequence, "the intellectual culture of the university declines" (118). I believe that this effect is direr in Composition than in other disciplines. Most contingent Composition teachers are actually literature specialists. As a result, any time they do set aside for scholarly work is less likely to be dedicated to Composition Studies. Ironically, then, the longer they teach Composition in the contingent system, the farther they might be removed from developments in Composition. Compositionists (employed as WPAs) and Composition teachers are placed into separate categories. The contrast is not only one of tenured versus contingent faculty; the division of labor perpetuates the belief that Composition study itself is adjunct.

This belief may reinforce the growing rift between Literary and Composition Studies, discouraging English graduate programs from integrating their study. Why give equal time and resources to Composition theory in the English degree if a person can be employed to teach writing without it? Moreover, the view of Composition Studies as superfluous to teaching writing may make compositionists resentful, as it characterizes their degrees as intellectual wastes of time. It may also result in Composition teachers who concentrate in literature studies feeling under prepared, overwhelmed or neglected by those who assign them Composition classes without providing a sufficient foundation.

## **The Quality of Contingent Teaching**

The lack of scholarly knowledge of Composition, coupled with the poor working conditions of the majority of Composition teachers, can be detrimental to the quality of teaching, through no fault of the teachers themselves. Giroux notes that working conditions, including "less time to prepare, larger class loads, almost no time for research, and excessive grading demands" can lead to teachers "becoming demoralized and ineffective" (121). In addition, administrators often supply little or no training in Composition teaching even though their staff has minimal disciplinary knowledge, and they often fail to provide material resources in terms of office space and sometimes even library privileges. The best of teachers may work effectively even under these circumstances. However, Bousquet points out that, "The system of cheap teaching doesn't sort for the best teachers; it sorts for the persons who are in a financial position to accept compensation below the living wage" (3).

Management says it wants quality teaching, yet its actions suggest that economical teaching is the priority. Gwendolyn Bradley observes that, "Courses that are packaged once and delivered over and over by low-paid, part-time teachers are cheaper and more efficient

to produce than courses designed individually by highly qualified, tenure-track professors.” Prioritizing economics over quality has consequences: “Cheap teaching is not a victimless crime” (Bousquet 41). Composition teachers are made to struggle both financially and professionally, inevitably negatively affecting instruction.

Poor material circumstances and a lack of a foundation in Composition Studies can, at best, result in a lack of reflective teaching. At worst, instructors may perpetuate methods that, while useful in their own experiences as writers or learners, may not be appropriate for the students in their classrooms. Both Hillocks and Salvatori note that this is a genuine problem. Salvatori observes that when people assume teaching is generic, requiring “no special training,” then teachers are less likely “to engage questions that pose a threat to comfortable ways of teaching and habitual ways of thinking about teaching” (300). Hillocks’s study of writing teachers revealed that teachers do frequently put too much faith in the methods they have used previously, or those that were used to teach them. When students fail, teachers tend to rationalize and blame the students rather than question their pedagogical choices:

If students do not learn much . . . it is not surprising because they are weak and cannot be expected to learn. The teaching has not failed; the students have. . . . Teaching writing becomes a protected activity. There is no need to call assumptions about methods into question, no reason to try something new, no reason to doubt oneself as a teacher. (28)

Students may be branded as incompetent or unintelligent if they do not respond to the stance and method adopted by the teacher. I do not mean to say that every writing teacher without a degree in Composition fails in this way. Rather, it is a risk significantly increased when management staffs courses with those working outside of their fields and training.

I do not mean to judge teachers of writing too harshly. Stephen North cautions scholars against making practitioners the “source” of “a knowledge and method crisis” (324). This criticism too easily devolves, he says, into portraying teachers as mere “technicians” (331) who must be instructed by the more savvy scholars, or worse, “something like the simple, indigent population of the newly discovered, mostly unexplored territory of Composition” (325). Sledd expresses the same concern, balking at the “contempt” that Compositionists express “for the real teachers of Composition,” the contingent workers (“Why the Wyoming” 172-173). And their concern is a legitimate one—North cites several scholars whose condescension towards teachers makes their work painful for me to read, especially since I can recall being spoken to in such a manner by colleagues when I was an adjunct. This stance can reinforce the false theory-practice binary by belittling the importance of lore and alienating teachers.

## Asking the Question

Rather than reject a more reflective and responsible role for Composition teachers because of these obstacles, I have tried to show here how the complex demands of the role can serve as a justification for reforming current labor practices. Initially, the terms “Composition teacher” and “compositionist” should be collapsed. When departments and WPAs meet to make hiring decisions in Composition, they should not accept as inevitable the economic rationales that now determine what it means to be a Composition teacher. Instead, they can initiate discussions about the role of the disciplinary expertise of candidates, both tenure track and nontenure track, full-time and part-time. In turn, armed with the discourse and research regarding the pedagogical consequences of labor practices, they can make cases for altering hiring practices in their departments—be it one position at a time, or an entire program.

I’m suggesting that where arguments about fair pay and office space have failed to move many administrators and complicit faculty to reform, arguments about the quality of our teaching may succeed. Powell reminds us that, “Presumably, arguments about access are not just about getting students in the door, but about providing students with an education” (670). Likewise, we should remind our colleagues and ourselves that hiring is not just about getting a teacher in front of the writing classroom, but providing our students, who often come to us struggling and underprepared, with instructors schooled in the appropriation of advanced literacy. Encouraging us to pay attention to retention scholarship, Powell further urges, “As retention efforts move into the classrooms, writing programs need to be informed about the politics and priorities of the retention efforts at our respective institutions, so that composition faculty are not recruited to participate in efforts that run counter to our own goals and pedagogies” (669). In the same way, we can no longer ignore the politics and priorities of labor practices, especially as they run counter to our goals and pedagogies in Composition. I believe we have a moral obligation to our students, our colleagues, and ourselves to reject the flex-labor system which prioritizes profit, and instead fight for a labor system that makes quality education the priority. In every meeting and every conversation about hiring and program development, we need to ask: Who is teaching Composition?

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Marcia Bost

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## **Moments in the Stream: Reflections on Fifteen Years as an Adjunct**

### **My Contingent Status**

**A** DREARY FATE THAT LEADS ONE TO BE UNCHALLENGED, DISRESPECTED, and unrewarded; a job that is equivalent to being a permanent slave; a position that is historically marginalized: those are all terms that Laura Micciche found in her study of affective rhetoric discussing freshman Composition courses and those who teach them (166-167). My fifteen years teaching freshman Comp as contingent faculty both confirm and complicate Micciche's findings.

I will not attempt to chronicle in detail my first fascination with words on the page: my father reads us girls a story, as we sit in his lap in a farmhouse that can only be reached by fording a creek at the end of a Tennessee dirt road. Now it's 7 a.m. on a January morning, and I am walking Atlanta's downtown sidewalks, shouldering a heavy backpack. My intention in this narrative is not to detail every moment, just the ones that stand out like islands—moments that still inform my teaching, which in turn inform my theory.

I stand before my first freshman Composition class with the grammar exercise book that I have been handed. It has to be better than student teaching in high school; surely the students are more mature than those ninth graders—besides, they have been admitted to a Christian college and presumably been taught respect. They are, and they have. I have planned to use several writing invention activities from my student teaching. The grammar takes over; we don't get to most of them. The activities that I do try fall flat. The grammar is boring; I yawn as much as they do. We spice up the process when I intentionally (and unintentionally) make mistakes in explaining the grammar and challenge them to find my mistakes.

I zip on campus, teach my course, and leave. I joke with the academic vice president's secretary that no one would know if I didn't show. She assures me that she would know. She usually has chocolate on her desk for overstressed academics. We begin a friendship that lasts until I leave nine years later.

Based on my master's work in English education, I choose a book of essays to use in the second semester along with a handbook that teaches MLA, APA, and Chicago style of doc-

umentation. We do one paper using each style, and then students choose their favorite style for the last paper. The essays challenge us to think beyond the five-paragraph essay format.

I begin to think about formulating a new five-year plan for my professional life. Having finished the master's, I begin to consider a doctorate and a summer gig teaching English in China. A positive pregnancy test puts all that on hold. I walk more and more slowly as the academic year winds down towards May, using all the handicapped ramps and door openers. Instead of a final exam, the students turn in a final paper on the last day of class. I grade furiously over the weekend and mail my grades on the way to the hospital to deliver my younger son.

I would swear—if I were a swearing person—that the administration lets in anyone who can sign their name to an application. I have a student who cannot write a coherent sentence; I suspect a learning disability, but I don't have the training to help him. Although the college admitted him, this small institution does not have the resources to help him access academia either.

I also have students who say they have not written any papers in high school and prove it. Most affirm that they have not had grammar since ninth grade. One lets me know that she never uses commas because her high school teacher counted two points off for a wrongly used comma, but only one point off for a missed comma. "I can do the math," she says. I tell her that I count off equally for both errors. And I count 21 comma errors on another student's three-page paper. I experiment by only counting the number of errors but not marking them on the paper, challenging the students to find them.

A new chair of the humanities department comes—a woman with a Rhet/Comp doctorate but little experience in administrating a department. We change to a literature-based approach with MLA documentation and change themes each semester to prevent students' reusing papers. Mostly, the students find the themes more interesting. One student can't handle our readings on death (ironically the theme is named "Dealing with Life") because a friend from high school committed suicide. I approve his dropping the course.

In spite of the literature emphasis, we continue to have high standards for grammar and other conventions. My chair wants to give a "D" to a student who does not have a perfect Works Cited in her final revised paper. I gave her a "B" looking at it holistically, and that grade is confirmed when I do a mathematical analysis. I joke that we should have hats that say "MLA Enforcer." She is not amused.

The chair is serious about professional development and sends in proposals for the two adjuncts to present at several conferences (led by her, of course). We present at two. I offer to get my doctorate and concentrate on the areas where the college needs courses, especially since the faculty handbook mentions paying for these courses. We discover that I can

never be hired full-time because I am not a member of the sponsoring denomination. I was not told that when I was hired as a contingent instructor.

Because of the number of students who are struggling with writing, including formatting a paper using the computer, I suggest a writing lab. For one hour each, I have two classes that meet in the computer lab, where I have set up tasks that will help them complete their freshman comp papers. Some appreciate my reading over their shoulders, and others hate it. Most at least finish the papers. We experiment with having these basic students both mainstreamed and taught in separate but equivalent classes.

I find that I am drawn to nontraditional students who are returning to school, since that mirrors my own journey. Mary<sup>1</sup> confesses that she passed high school English because she babysat her teacher's children. Even then she knew that she didn't learn to write, but figured that she would be a professional dancer and wouldn't need to know. Now she does, and I spend extra time after class talking about her writing. A businesswoman who can afford to do so, she gives me a rolling suitcase at the end of the year. "It's for all the books and folders you have to drag around," she says.

It's a small campus; the professors and students can eat lunch together at the cafeteria. I often sit with the other professors and join in their conversations. I was originally hired by the Vice President of Academics, and we often talk at lunch, exchanging irreverent words in sign language. I've become accustomed to thinking of myself as a professor and get a small charge out of getting junk mail and review books addressed to "Professor Bost." My new chair informs me that I am not a professor: I am merely an adjunct instructor; therefore, I am never to use that word to refer to myself.

From those lunchtime conversations, I learn that the education department has had difficulty finding a satisfactory instructor for Introduction to Linguistics, which is part of the state endorsement requirements to teach English as a Second Language (ESL). In fact, the last teacher refused to do part of the course. I've had that course on the master's level and taught ESL, so I ask the dean to let me try it. The first year is a challenge, especially since one of the students is the wife of the professor of philosophy. I'm sure that everything I do and say is talked about. The textbook is extremely difficult because it is intended for master's level students. Most lectures end up concentrating on the "Bost Version" of the textbook. Also, we have no idea of how to do the required in-school experience, which was set up as an interview. Some of my students cannot get their English learners at a public school to answer a single question. By the next year, I have a new textbook that concentrates on aspects of linguistics that teachers need to know, new activities that allow the students to express linguistics

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1. All the names are fictional.



tic concepts in posters and reflective pieces, and a new concept to allow interaction with ESL students: games designed by my college students. We have English learner students volunteering to “play” with us.

By now, I’ve asked for an office and been allowed to use the one vacated after the death of a long-tenured and beloved history professor. It’s on the floor with the education faculty. When the education department has its certification review, I am pressed into service proofreading the submitted documents, as well as analyzing my linguistics class materials for evidence that we have met all the standards. I’m even grilled by the assessment committee about whether I would mind my children being taught by a former student who made a “C.” “Yes,” I answer; “those who make ‘C’s’ generally do so because they can’t handle the responsibility of getting papers in on time or other similar issues. Those who don’t get the concepts make ‘D’s’ or ‘F’s.’”

A couple of male students think making me their “buddy” is the way to pass my class. One puts his arm around my shoulder in front of the class while he tries to explain away his missing assignment. I am furious but manage not to yell. I step away and explain that I do not appreciate this activity. The student flunks the course and drops out. Another one slaps me on the back—hard—while I am sitting down with another student discussing her writing. When I talk to the vice-president about the incident, he is serious for once. He requires that the student apologize. The student transfers to a state university.

My teaching load is three courses and two labs, for a total of 11 hours—one short of being full-time. At the end of spring semester, I have 68 student portfolios with eight papers each, plus at least one draft for each assignment. I hole up in the basement with bags of Hershey’s kisses and stacks of folders. True to our new process philosophy, I have not graded any of the drafts, only responded to them. I can hear my five-year-old rampaging through the house with his father and older brother and sister. It could be worse: I had 76 students at the beginning of the semester.

Usually, I attend convocation that begins our academic year. There’s frequently an overflow crowd outside in the vestibule; we can see through the glass and hear somewhat through the sound system speakers. This year, I’m the only one standing there. This scene becomes a metaphor for my last year at this institution.

On my own, I send off an abstract to the state council of teachers of English and am accepted to present on my favorite objects—quilts and books. My chair is not amused. I take the Graduate Record Exam and visit a couple of campuses, but I put off beginning my doctorate again because by now my older son is going to college.

Even though I’m from a different denomination, I volunteer to lead a discipleship group of four women and am approved. We meet weekly in my office to discuss the Bible

and our lives. On a particular Wednesday, only one person shows up. She tells me that she has heard from another student that my chair has said my contract will not be renewed. I am minutes away from being observed in class by my chair. My student and I pray for my composure. I've planned small group discussions on our reading in preparation for a writing assignment. It goes perfectly: the students are engaged, responding to the questions and each other. My chair can only complain that I have not lectured.

After class, I drop in on the vice president and discuss the rumor I've heard. I tell him that I understand my contract has only been from semester to semester, but that plan A has always been to come back the next semester. I ask, "Do I need a plan B?" "Yes," he responds.

I leave my red check curtains (which originally hung in the kitchen of our first house) with the education professor who has the office next to mine. She's often listened to me vent. I leave on good terms with everyone except my chair. I go back occasionally to have lunch with the education professor.

Plan B turns out to be another Christian college, which called me the year I had 76 students. I had declined then because I didn't think I could do a good job with another class. Now I call the undergraduate dean back, and soon I'm hired to teach the campus classes of EN 101 and 102, again as a contingent instructor. This is a smaller campus; there's no lunchroom. I'm the only English teacher in the humanities department. Most professors are theologians and ordained ministers. I joke that I am the token layperson.

By the second year, I am teaching both the campus and the online classes. The students who typically attend this college and seminary are enmeshed in their careers as pastors, ministry leaders, and soldiers, and therefore many of them take online classes. Most have been out of high school for ten to twenty years. They may have been laid off from a career in one field and are following a calling into another. They are non-traditional in age, but traditional in beliefs.

The online class turns out to be another adventure in learning. The pattern of assignments and due dates is different. I can require that an online student read a chapter and write the assignment in the same week. In fact, it makes more sense to do it that way. The first year, I am receiving everything by email over a dial-up connection. Gradually, the students and I learn to use the course software in more efficient ways.

Online teaching is problematic in another way. If I am listening to a student in person, I can usually guess why he or she is having problems. A lot of that contextual information is missing in an email. Jack emailed me that he was having trouble understanding EN 101, but doesn't say why. I misunderstand this as whining and respond accordingly. I soon realize from his writing that he is from Africa. I ask if English is his second language. Actually, it is his third, and he is quite fluent in French and has served as an international banking

consultant. I try to assure him that his ideas are good, but that his lack of fluency in English is hurting his grade. But the damage is done, and he complains about only getting a “D” after all his hard work. I recommend more time learning English. He comes to campus, but I am able to spend only 15 minutes with him because I am in the middle of the campus class. He enrolls in the EN 102 but drops out. The graduate dean shares with me his angry comments about my warning that EN 102 is harder than EN 101. The dean supports my warning. Two years later, Jack is back in the EN 102 course and in my World Literature course because he needs those to graduate. I am careful in how I communicate (I’ve rewritten the warning he found problematic). He is careful to show that he wants to learn how to write academic papers. In spite of a dangerous trip back to his home country midsemester, he is able to pass both classes with B’s. He emails that he hopes I will be at his graduation so he can thank me in person. I have to be at my daughter’s graduation in another state.

Initially to update my high school teaching certificate, I’ve gone back to college as a student. When getting a graduate research assistantship requires that I enroll in a master’s degree program, I do. My professor sets me to writing all the documents necessary for putting her ESL classes online and passing a Quality Matters review. She also encourages me to get a doctorate, as do other professors in my writing program. Even one of my older students, in his pastoral counseling mode, encourages me to get that degree. By the time I am accepted into a doctorate program, I am four courses short of another masters; I finish and start the doctorate at the same time and still teach my freshman courses. I joke that I am thoroughly institutionalized.

My family rolls their eyes collectively and individually. My youngest asks if I am a professional student. “Pretty much,” I reply. I don’t explain that teachers are always already learners

first. He loudly and vehemently announces that he does not want to be a teacher like his older siblings, like me, like his great aunt, like his great grandmother. I wonder if he is protesting too much. I didn’t set out to be a teacher, either.

However, I will keep on teaching. Two students remind me of why. Fred comes to EN 101 on campus a week late and in shock. A nontraditional student, he has missed the first class because his father died; he has never wanted to come to school anyway because he figured college couldn’t teach him anything. In the middle of a grammar quiz, he suddenly looks up and exclaims out loud, “I get it now!” I see him on campus occasionally, at the library or drifting through my room talking to other students. I tease him about the day the lights went on. He calls me his professor and insists that I will be at his graduation next

“I joke that I am thoroughly institutionalized.”

spring. I will be there.

Ellen shares in her writing that she has had a difficult life, including overcoming a drug addiction. After class, she says that she is using what she has learned in her speech and Bible classes. “Mrs. Bost, whenever I write, I hear your voice in my head,” she says. My first reaction is apologize for doing that to her. “No, no,” she insists, “it helps to hear you telling me how to write a paper.”

While I am hiking to that 8 a.m. graduate seminar, I don't think of my low contingent faculty status, my marginalization, my “nagging legitimacy problem” (to use Micciche's term). I think of Mary, Jack, Fred, and Ellen.

## **My Pedagogy**

Also, when forming my pedagogy, I am seldom thinking of any of those discouraging terms for contingent faculty; teaching my students is foremost on my mind. Like Mary, Jack, Fred, and Ellen, most of my current students have been shut out of higher education for decades due to their own life choices, family and work obligations, or previous educational failures. A few come from relatively sheltered situations like home schooling. With an institutional ethos that includes invitations to belief<sup>2</sup> issued to “whosoever will,” access is open. I've had students from all the continents except Antarctica and Australia. In a recent campus class, I had students who were natives of three African nations and two Caribbean islands, as well as the United States.

In structuring my courses, I consider Erika Lindemann's question: “what is the purpose of a writing course?” (referenced in Julier 140). The purpose of the freshman writing course that I teach, as described by the dean when I was hired and confirmed by feedback that I have received, was to prepare the students to write scholarly papers for their theology professors (and to a lesser extent for their sociology and counseling professors). Most of my students did not make the conventions of grammar and formatting a part of their writing in high school. Sooner or later, a majority will concede that they dreaded confronting writing/grammar/research/English and find they are pleasantly surprised to be learning. Thus, the first order of business is the one generally maligned in Composition and Rhetoric: reviewing/ teaching grammar. In contradiction to those in the field who say that grammar cannot and should not be taught (see for example Constance Weaver's description of the controversy and Hillocks' meta-analysis), I do.

In fact, the description of the current-traditional method fits my first semester EN 101 course like spandex. Although I am a writer by experience (eight years as a reporter) and

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2. The evangelical world view emphasizes the need to invite everyone, regardless of race, gender, or other diversities, to believe in Christ Jesus.

by training (Don Murray's text *A Writer Teaches Writing*), I find that Murray's non-directive approach does not provide the guidance my students need. If I play too much of a passive role, I will "fail to provide enough structure, guidance, and direct instruction about particular conventions and strategies" (Tobin 11). Although I do provide that structure, I try not to teach grammar with the attitude of "drill and kill." I frame the grammar exercises with illustrations of how correct grammar helps the students accurately convey the story that they have to tell. (And I assure them repeatedly that they have a marvelous story to tell.) I also require reflection on the writing process with journal topics that ask the students to identify their greatest grammar difficulties, their greatest success, and their strategies for solving problems, among others. My acknowledgement of process writing is to require students to revise their paragraphs. Through this revision, I also help the students put grammar in the context in which it belongs—their own writing (Kolln 148)—by making detailed comments on their paragraphs as we work through narration, description, classification, illustration, and persuasion. Yes, I confess: not only do I teach grammar, but also I teach the modes. There are some students whom I have had for EN 102 who have obviously still not "gotten it." There have been others who have demonstrated they are learning. EN 101 is definitely a course in which I teach writing as a skill, in contradiction to Rose (403). However, students need those skills and techniques to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. I believe, like Jeff Smith, that "we are ethically bound by students' own aims" (qtd. in Ann George 101). My students aim to pass their courses for a ministry degree, but most importantly to live out the validity of their beliefs to the glory of God.

The EN 102 class that I teach more closely follows the process writing paradigm. In this class, I spend time on invention, research, arrangement, and revision. The requirement is for one larger paper, on a topic of their choosing, that is persuasive. Weekly assignments include evaluating an internet source, writing and then updating a storyboard, preparing an annotated bibliography and writing a rough draft, on the way to the finished product. Even students in the online course do two projects that require group work: evaluating student writing for plagiarism and peer reviewing each other's rough drafts.

In all my classes, I try to be specific about what I expect. As Bartholomae points out, student writers try to determine what the professor wants and what the professor knows (386). As a student myself, I know that analysis of the assignment (the rhetorical situation) is the first task of beginning to write. I try to be as transparent as I can to help them figure out not only how to pass my course and the courses of other professors, but also how to keep learning and expanding their writing abilities. In this manner I hope to demonstrate "that writing is a very unique skill, not really a tool but an ability fundamental to academic inquiry, an ability whose development is not fixed but ongoing" (Rose 413). I share my own writing

conundrums, gaffs, and revisions.

For Mary, Jack, Fred, and Ellen and students like them, I'm the gatekeeper to higher education, and I want to fling that barrier wide open and drag, direct, and/or push them through. I position myself as the coach: "Yes, team, you have to run those wind sprints up and down the stadium stairs!" Not only am I a gatekeeper, but I also see myself as having a broader function: that of an academic literacy sponsor. Deborah Brandt writes, "They [literacy sponsors] help to organize and administer stratified systems of opportunity and access, and they raise the literacy stakes in struggles for competitive advantage. Sponsors enable and hinder literacy activity, often forcing the formation of new literacy requirements, while decertifying older ones" (16). Students, especially those in freshman Composition are often faced with "inventing the university," as Bartholomae points out. He states that it is especially difficult for a student to imagine the audience for his or her paper (386). I want to be that audience, that mentor, the literacy sponsor who opens the door to the academic discourse community.

My department chair emails me: "Will you be available to teach EN 102 in the spring?" I immediately reply, "Yes, of course!" My students and I are only half way through the marathon that is First Year Composition. My job is contingent, but so is life. Both are sometimes blessed.

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