

FORUM

NEWSLETTER FOR ISSUES ABOUT PART-TIME AND CONTINGENT FACULTY

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CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

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From the Editor: Contingency and Its Implications for Teaching and Learning Brad Hammer

The belief that adjuncts and other “contingent” instructors tend to be bottom-rung teachers can be seen in the policies of standardization that oftentimes demarcate a “goals-centered” curriculum. At my own institution, as well as at scores of others, contingent faculty (many of whom hold PhDs) teach standardized syllabi and have little to no choice in determining the texts and units that enter their classrooms. Humiliating and not at all collegial, this policing of our instructorate suggests instrumentalist rather than intellectual goals for our courses while asserting a skills-centric curriculum.

Further, these mechanisms of control detract from the quality of teaching and learning. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* published an article in November titled “Conditions Imposed on Part-Time Adjuncts Threaten Quality of Teaching, Researchers Say.” This article reports that it is “the conditions part-time instructors work under, and not the instructors themselves” that account for the “failure to use effective teaching methods more often” (Schmidt).

The misperceptions surrounding the cause of poor instruction are widespread. And those most silenced within our institutions are the easiest to blame.

Those of us who follow the WPA listserv see the debates over standardization for adjuncts within our ongoing discussion threads, which have titles such as “The problem of controlling adjuncts and ‘bad’ teachers.”¹ While there are many WPAs

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About Forum

Forum is published twice a year by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. As editor, I welcome your news items, book reviews, editorials, and/or articles related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses. Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than May 1; for the spring issue, the deadline is September 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned.

Submit your work electronically via email or an email attachment. Address your work to bhammer@unc.edu and put the words “*Forum* article” somewhere in your subject line. Submissions should include the following information:

- your name
- your title(s)
- your institution(s)
- home address and phone number; institutional address(es) and phone number(s)
- if applicable, venue(s) where submission was published or presented previously

For additional guidelines or information about *Forum*, contact Brad Hammer, *Forum* editor, bhammer@unc.edu, or phone 919-621-1000.

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who *permit* intellectual freedom, it is clear that the power to “control” contingent colleagues is antithetical to the professional norms within the tenure ranks. Consequently, the teaching lives of non-tenure-track faculty are always subjugate and “at-risk.” And, as these colleagues seek to create spaces for meaningful employment, their work is often pathologized in a manner that necessitates the building of mechanisms of control. In this issue, Sharon Tjaden-Glass, an adjunct instructor from the University of Dayton, will highlight the extent to which contingent faculty are voiceless and invisible within departments that fail to secure their employment and encourage rigorous debate.

As many of our readers know, *Forum* has been collecting national survey data over the past 18 months to determine the material conditions under which contingent faculty are employed. Along with this quantitative data, we’ve asked you to tell the story of your teaching life. Some common threads running through these stories are discussions of how low pay, lack of office space, and the general absence of intellectual freedom stymie otherwise enthusiastic instructors. Those who remain in the field despite low wages (60 percent of all respondents report that they make less than \$30,000 per year and 45 percent under \$20,000) articulate a desire to work closely with undergraduates and a commitment to teaching as their main draw to the profession. Based on the hundreds of survey responses we have received, we can say that contingent faculty are a group of highly

committed teachers with very few job-related benefits who work in a labor-intensive and student-centric enterprise. This pedagogical work of helping our students to develop critical-thinking skills is often seen as less valuable than “scholarship.” And it is that type of institutional bias that diminishes the prestige of our work and situates us in a position of non-belonging.

The *Forum* Contingent Faculty Questionnaire (please participate at <http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB229JDBVGW6B>) is bringing to light the treatment and working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty across the United States. From post-docs to adjunct labor, we are beginning to categorize and make public the multifarious and exploitive conditions under which thousands of our colleagues labor in their dedication to undergraduate instruction. Among the findings that are being illuminated by the survey are the complex effects of non-tenure-track labor on the quality of instruction—an area of research that is in need of further exploration. CCCC is also working on a documentary film, which will bring the voices from the questionnaire responses to a larger and more public audience.

“Contingent” is now the overwhelmingly predominant rank among those who teach first-year writing. It is clear that in these hard economic times, contingency benefits the institution at the cost of both the dignity of teachers and the excellence of instruction. The cost benefits for the creation and maintenance of an exploitive situation are evident. What is less visible is what CCCC has been doing to stem the growth of this system. Also in this issue of *Forum*, Irvin Peckham, who chairs the CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor, will offer the chronology of work undertaken by CCCC over almost three decades to stem the uses of NTT faculty. For our readers, this report will become an annual feature of *Forum* so that we can better account to the constituency that we represent for both our progress and failures.

In regard to other avenues of progress, NCTE has just come out with a new position statement on the status and working conditions of contingent faculty; you can find it at http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/contingent_faculty. And CCCC will be creating two new Web spaces over the next year (URLs to be listed in the next issue of *Forum*). The first space will be a site for discussion as well as a place for NTT faculty to find support, raise questions, and post concerns. The second site, a part of the CCCC Connected Community, will be set up to host discussions relevant to NTT faculty that grow out of the essays within *Forum*.

As a final note, I would like to acknowledge the good work of Janice Albert, who served as editor of *Forum* from 2000 to 2005. Sadly, Janice passed away on May 23, 2010. During her years as editor, Janice worked tirelessly on part-time faculty issues, especially mentoring NTT faculty. Additionally, Janice sought out opportuni-

ties to bring forward the voices of adjunct faculty through publication (many for the first time) within the pages of *Forum*. Janice will be fondly remembered by her colleagues and for her important contribution to fair labor practices on behalf of the readership of *Forum*.

Note

1. For the complete thread see: <https://lists.asu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind1010&L=WPA-L&D=0&1=WPA-L&9=A&J=on&d=No+Match%3BMatch%3BMatches&z=4&P=132116>.

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Am I Fired? Clarifying Termination Procedures for Long-Term Contingent Faculty

Sharon Tjaden-Glass

In its 2009 issue brief on the academic workforce, the Modern Language Association argues that the "two-year mark" demarcates one's status as "contingent." However, faculty who teach in more long-term appointments, but still off the tenure track, are not, by MLA standards, considered contingent (1). In his 2009 *Forum* editorial, Hammer argues that contingency has not yet been adequately defined. Such definitions are crucial, however, as compositionists seek both viable teaching lives and disciplinary legitimacy.

Currently, contingent faculty members (including non-tenured full-time and part-time faculty) occupy 68.4 percent of all composition teaching positions (Gere). However, the MLA and the Association of Departments of English (ADE) assert, "only a small fraction of the faculty outside the tenure track can be reasonably considered contingent" ("Education" 16). In that same report, they recommend clear policies and procedures for the hiring, retention, and evaluation of all faculty members. Local institutions summarily ignore these, rendering recommendations for ensuring "appropriate security of employment for continuing non-tenure-track faculty members" ineffectual (16). Furthermore, without clearly articulated policies on terminating employment, academic departments deny fundamental responsibility to the instructorate and concomitantly devalue the collegial contexts of the institution.

As an illustration of the damaging effects of termination without sufficient due process, I offer my experience with my former employer and alma mater, Wright State University of Dayton, Ohio.

When I first began teaching in the LEAP (Intensive English) program at \$1,200 per 10-week course, my director suggested an interest in improving both the program's caliber and the teachers' working conditions. Consequently, after three years of stagnant wages, I raised the issue with the program's director.

Prior to our meeting, I confirmed with the provost's office that our university had not updated its adjunct instructor pay scales since 1994, which capped the salary of an adjunct instructor with a master's degree at \$1,700 per 10-week course. Concomitantly, I compiled data on contingent faculty wages in similar programs at other public universities in our state. Unfortunately, attempts to engage the director in dialogue, though first greeted benignly, were later treated with overt hostility. As part of the politics of voicelessness, I, like other part-time instructors who feared for their jobs, stopped asking questions.

Throughout my experiences at Wright State, I realized that power and place are emblematic features of those who "own" the program. Despite my director's articulated vision for "equal shareholding," the LEAP program was ultimately her property, and (as I was ongoingly reminded), I was fortunate to have any stake at all. Regardless of my years of dedicated service, my voice (and sense of belonging) proved immaterial.

In the end, I was in fact replaced for asserting voice. In short, I was discarded—supplanted by a new graduate with no direct expertise in the course. Even more profoundly disenfranchising was the reality that, due to my contingent status, the program did not need to formally fire me—rather, I was simply ignored and forced to fade away with neither voice nor forum for retort.

Two weeks before the start of the next term, I learned of my dismissal through the absence of my name on the university course listings posted on the Internet. No personal communication was required for contingent laborers. My contingency made me invisible and, worse, made my years of commitment to the program essentially worthless.

Supported by other part-time instructors who feared reprisal, I submitted a letter of grievance to the chair of our English department. In that text, I asked him to mediate between the part-time instructors and the director in hopes of codifying a process for a mandated dialogue. After two preliminary meetings with the chair and our director's supervisor, we were informed that we could not meet with our director until the end of the summer term. Throughout that period, the remaining part-timers continued to teach without resolution. Nearly three months later, the chair

offered a meeting to deliver information about salaries and hiring practices. In that setting, I asked if the contingent faculty could be assured that a phone call, email, or some kind of human contact would be used for termination notification.

My question was essentially rebuffed through the authority of his silence.

Ultimately, the meetings with the administration offered no more than lip service to the part-time LEAP instructors. Consequently, academic due process through the process of conflict mediation was never attempted. In the end, we were warned not to raise our grievances further with the provost. Essentially, who would dare?

I contend that, by keeping us voiceless, the administration weakened the democratic contexts of the institution while thwarting the collegial integrity of the department.

The MLA and ADE's report on the academic workforce in English advocates for transparency in the staffing practices of departments, but does not mention the need for established procedures for professional dismissal of part-time contingent faculty from their positions, even when those positions are held on a continuing basis. Consequently, as my situation illustrates, even when part-time instructors take initiative to improve their working conditions, their actions can be misconstrued as subversive. Therefore, I charge CCCC (specifically the Executive Committee, in conjunction with the Committee on Part-Time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor) to codify the very processes that could reduce the tensions and power struggles between contingent faculty and administrators in an attempt to engage more collegially in a professional dialogue about the working conditions of our contingent and otherwise voiceless colleagues.

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The State of Contingency: A Report from the CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor

Irvin Peckham and Brad Hammer

Editor's Note: This is an updated version of the report that appeared in the Fall 2010 issue of Forum, which was published with College Composition and Communication.

For the past 25 years, CCCC has worked to stem the growth of contingency within our ranks. Most recently, the CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor has been constituted to address the ongoing frustrations that our colleagues voice over low wages, terminal contracts, and exploitive working conditions. Readers of *Forum* have consistently echoed these concerns and have asked what, if anything, is being accomplished by NCTE or CCCC on their behalf. Consequently, *Forum* will publish a report annually (in both our CCC and TETYC editions) that details the work of the CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor.

This initial report is a way to account to our readership for the long history of focused efforts to reverse exploitive labor practices in college writing programs. Even as this report is being revised for the TETYC issue of *Forum*, the latest attempt to codify NCTE's current position on the status and working conditions of contingent faculty is being ratified (College Section Steering Committee). The reach of this current position statement is yet to be determined. Nevertheless, two things are historically clear:

1. There exist few, if any, real mechanisms for non-tenure-track writing teachers to benefit from past recommendations made by CCCC.
2. The number of contingent faculty is growing in spite of recommendations to reverse this trend.

From the Contingent Faculty Questionnaire and comments from our readers, it becomes clear that non-tenure-track writing teachers consider themselves divorced from the institutions in which they teach. In spite of numerous attempts by our professional organizations, we have clearly failed to construct viable procedures for change. Simply, our calls for change rarely go beyond recommending self-policing mechanisms that yield few rewards.

This report, compiled by the CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor, is an effort to inform the thousands of non-tenure-track writing teachers of the ongoing project to end irresponsible labor practices. Our readers have articulated clearly that they want to know what we have learned from past efforts

and the current charge(s) of the committee to reverse these practices. We describe the history and current charge of this project below.

The Early Years (1986): Defining Contingency and Its Relevant Implications

The CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor had its origin in the Wyoming Resolution that emerged from the 1986 conference in Laramie. The resolution articulated the overflowing anger that non-tenure-track writing teachers felt as a consequence of their working conditions.¹ These instructors were resisting their alignment into a secondary or tertiary status within English departments. For an interpretive history of the Wyoming Resolution, read James D. McDonald and Eileen E. Schell's piece, "The Spirit and Influence of the Wyoming Resolution: Looking Back to Look Forward," in the March 2011 issue of *College English*.

The Wyoming Resolution was transformed into the divisive CCCC "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Post-Secondary Teaching of Writing" in 1989. This position statement seemed to leave the non-tenure-track writing teachers behind, arguing for the professionalization of writing instruction by largely limiting teaching to graduate students and tenured or tenure-track professors.²

The Committee on Professional Standards, charged to carry out the provisions of the Wyoming Resolution, disbanded in the early 1990s. The subsequent conversation over exploitative labor conditions continued in publications, in conversations, and on the WPA listserv, engendering an us-against-them rhetoric, aligning writing program administrators as bosses and teachers as laborers, a realignment that subverted opportunities for significant change.

Although WPAs, English department chairs, and non-tenure-track writing teachers have a shared interest in creating sustainable working conditions and promoting teaching excellence, the college itself benefits from the exploitation of cheap labor. The consequence of this has been a pitting of exploited social groups against one another, disabling their ability to unite in opposition to the system of exploitation. The "boss compositionists" rhetoric recently dominating our discussions has arguably constructed an unproductive binary between writing faculty and department-level administrators. Although we should not ignore how the professoriate benefits from the surplus labor of full- and part-time instructors, the opposition between professors and instructors serves the larger economic goals of the entire institution. Therefore, at the upper administrative level, little is done to secure reasonable working conditions for non-tenure-track writing teachers, whose labor is interpreted as "service," which plays second fiddle to the research and publishing on which college and university prestige rests.

During the 2003 business meeting of CCCC, the membership pushed once again for change when it passed the “Resolution on Professional Standards for Instruction.” The most salient feature of the resolution was a requirement that all writing teachers receive salaries and benefits equivalent to tenured and tenure-track professors. This point had multiple implications, not the least of which concerned the value of a PhD and the de facto social hierarchy within English departments. While many departments agreed to the resolution in principle, the upper administrations within universities, who would have to make the budget decisions that would support this central goal, have ignored the resolution.

As a result of the 2003 resolution, the CCCC Committee on Academic Quality was formed in 2005. This committee, perhaps for the same reasons that have bedeviled the issue of exploitive labor practices since the Wyoming Resolution, has had difficulty gaining traction, resulting in no appreciable improvement in the working conditions of non-tenure-track writing teachers. Consequently, the CCCC Executive Committee has recently constituted the current Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor, which had its first face-to-face meeting at the CCCC convention in Louisville, Kentucky, in March 2010. The remainder of this report will summarize the discussion from that meeting and discuss proposed projects that may move the charge of the Wyoming Conference Resolution forward.

The Latest Conversation: Louisville 2010

Although the Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor has several charges, our central focus is to improve the working conditions of non-tenure-track writing teachers and promote strategies that will help local institutions discontinue their reliance on part-time writing teachers.

In its previous incarnation (2007–2009), this committee completed an extensive survey of labor practices. One of our projects will be to make this survey accessible to WPAs and other individuals looking to conduct an analysis of the data in a searchable and updatable form. Glen Blalock and Irvin Peckham will work on this project with the ultimate goal of housing the data at NCTE with Web-based links from MLA, CCCC, and CompPile websites, once the necessary permissions are obtained. Additionally, our committee is now working to coordinate our project with both the MLA and NCTE committees addressing labor issues.

At our first meeting in Louisville, we discussed strategies to investigate the practicality of an accreditation process for writing programs. Much of our discussion centered on uncovering/naming which national accreditation organization (perhaps NCATE) to align ourselves with in order to effect change within local institutions. In the months following our meeting in Louisville, as we’ve looked into the complex

issues related to accreditation, we've determined that there is not enough direct influence within our professional organizations to exert meaningful pressure on offending programs through accreditation. However, since great effort was put into these deliberations, it is still worthwhile to highlight the context of this debate and its areas of contention:

1. Any accreditation process should not wholly align itself with prior attempts to force improved labor practices through punitive measures, but rather set fair standards for the employment and retention of writing faculty. Put simply, any accreditation process should work to aid and empower programs rather than discredit them.
2. Any accreditation process must be co-developed with the larger joint goals of CCCC, NCTE, and MLA. A good deal of our discussion focused on bridging connections with each of these stakeholders. Our conversation further underscored the need to work with entities outside CCCC, NCTE, and MLA, due to their inability to assert compliance.

We discussed ways of coordinating with accrediting organizations to encourage good labor practices by rewarding schools that rely on full-time teachers with full benefits. Although conditions for writing teachers might not meet an ideal standard, we need to seek out local sites that provide the best working conditions available for writing teachers.

Our committee will also propose the funding of the following three research projects to the CCCC Executive Committee:

1. Research the administrative hierarchy within which writing programs are embedded. This study should seek to discover the pressure points to which deans and provosts might respond when accreditation officials make arguments for improved working conditions for writing teachers.
2. With the goal of arguing more forcefully for the funding of full-time positions, research the causal links between the quality of writing instruction and the reliance on part-time labor. (For further reading in this area, see Peter Schmidt's article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.)
3. Research student attitudes toward writing instruction when students are taught in situations that rely on part-time teachers versus situations relying on full-time faculty. This research can address the secondary implications of instructor abuse (lack of office space, heavy teaching loads, etc.) as factors in student satisfaction. If this kind of research is pursued with large enough populations *and* if research shows that full-time teaching conditions result in greater gains in attitude and achievement, we can imagine these results serving as powerful arguments to improve the working conditions of part-time teachers.

In this report and through our recent discussions, the CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor has relied on language that situates the debate over labor practices within a larger discussion concerning teaching excellence and student satisfaction. (It is possible that previous discussions occurring outside this framework may have undermined progress on the issue.) We also note that assuming such a framework does not necessitate adversarial positions between instructors and administrators who both share the larger goals of teaching excellence. Rather than employing the rhetoric of “boss versus compositionists,” we are suggesting that all stakeholders might find through our research ways of working together for the purpose of improved writing instruction. Further, it is our charge to report more regularly on our committee’s efforts and ongoing discussions within the pages of *Forum* in order to disseminate our findings and further incorporate contingent faculty into the processes that seek to redress exploitive labor practices.

Notes

1. See Robertson, Crowley, and Lentricchia.
2. To understand the divisive nature of the statement, see CCCC Executive Committee and Robinson.

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Call for Candidates: Editor of *Forum*

The Conference on College Composition and Communication seeks applications and nominations from its membership for the editorship of *Forum: Newsletter for Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*. *Forum* is published twice a year (alternately in CCC and TETYC). The newsletter's purpose is to publish articles, news, reviews, and other items related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses. The editor of *Forum* is a member of the CCCC editors' team, which meets face-to-face at the CCCC conference and, on occasion, virtually throughout the year. This three-year position begins January 1, 2012. Send a letter of application and CV **by July 1, 2011** to Kristen Suchor, CCCC Liaison, at cccc@ncte.org.