

FORUM

ISSUES ABOUT PART-TIME AND CONTINGENT FACULTY

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From the Editor: The Relationship of WPAs and Contingent Faculty: Us and Them at the Fault Lines

Vandana Gavaskar

How can those differently situated in the work of composition better understand, value, and represent the contribution that others make to the discipline?

—Lisa Ede, *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location*, 120

This issue of *Forum* is based on a solicited theme: How do WPAs who are responsible for the hiring, professionalization, and assessment of contingent faculty negotiate the material realities of contingent faculty in their own programs? To what extent do they feel the ethical demands of their position, the “managerial unconscious” of their role as pointed out by Stephen Fox?

How former contingent faculty deal with being the “Boss of Me” or an “almost-WPA” is the subject of Amy Lynch-Binieck and Ann Shivers McNair’s essay about being on both sides of the tenure line. The fourth contributor to this issue, Seth Kahn,

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About Forum

Forum is published twice a year by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Editor Vandana Gavaskar invites you to submit essays related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition. Of particular interest are impacts on the professionalization of the field of rhetoric and composition, the creation of best practices models in diverse academic environments, and the impact of accreditation standards on contingency. Administrators of writing programs and scholars in the field are invited to write about the issues from their perspective.

Essays should address theoretical and/or disciplinary debates. They will go through the standard peer-review and revision process.

Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than April 1; for the spring issue, August 1. Submissions will not be returned. Submit your work electronically and put the words "Forum article" in your subject line. Submissions should include your name, title(s), institution(s), home address and phone number, institutional address(es) and phone number(s), and if applicable, venue(s) where submission was published or presented previously.

For further information and to make submissions, please contact Dr. Vandana Gavaskar, Editor, *Forum*, at 252-335-3720 or vggavaskar@mail.ecsu.edu.

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advocates for contingent faculty in his essay, "'Never Take More Than You Need': Tenure-Track/Tenured Faculty and Contingent Labor Exploitation." Using an ethical appeal as the basis of his argument, he recommends several inclusionary practices, including working "with members of your department to schedule sabbaticals/reassignments in order to maximize full-time spots for people who want them."

I am struck by the ethos of these narratives, which describe the levels of tensions and complications of work that is hierarchical but manifested as collaborative, democratic, and inclusionary. It is significant that while Stephen Fox wears three hats as director, he does not get extra pay. Similarly, Ann Shivers McNair does an extraordinary array of tasks, all for one course release in the spring and summer that is not even built into her contract.

On yet another level, there are the unspoken gender dynamics of the contingent (and tenured) field being disproportionately peopled by women striving for professional respect for process-based and student-centered approaches seen as nurturing rather than rigorous and academic.

I am grateful to the contributors to this issue who responded so generously and readily to write on the theme of WPAs and contingent faculty. I invite you to speak to the issues raised here by contributing an essay for *Forum* so that people who are "differently situated in the work of composition better understand, value, and represent the contribution that others make to the discipline."

Looking in the WPA Mirror: Balancing Roles and Taking Actions

Stephen Fox

These days, my identity as “professor” tends to recede behind my identity as—well, as what? “Director”? My title is director of writing. A director has more status, apparently, than a coordinator, and as a director I receive invitations and emails also addressed to chairs. Unlike a chair, I receive no extra pay, even though the writing program is larger than many academic departments on campus. Fortunately, I work with a writing coordinating committee of senior lecturers who do much of the day-to-day coordination of our large program.

“Administrator”? I am a member of the Writing Program Administrators organization, which seeks to give scholarly respectability to this work and to provide a forum for WPAs to talk about their challenging jobs. Still, I’d rather be a teacher and grumble about the administrators. “Boss”? I don’t really fancy bossing anyone around, and the word makes me think of Boss Hogg. “Manager”? No, I really can’t be part of “management,” not with my membership in the CCCC’s Labor Caucus and my involvement in supporting labor action by local activists and organizers! And isn’t a “manager” someone who works in the retail or corporate world?

As Donna Strickland shows us, there is a “managerial unconscious” in composition studies. Many professors of composition have been program “managers” for decades, though their graduate courses seldom addressed that dimension of their future work, and their perception of themselves almost never involves the verb *manage* or the noun *manager*. Strickland argues that we need to make this managerial function explicit, that we should recognize it consciously as important work. “We can embrace [the role of manager] because it is ours and because it deserves much more attention if we are to truly work for the material benefit of administrators, teachers, and students alike” (122).

But if I embrace the role of manager, director, or administrator, I cannot shake the more negative connotations of that other synonym—*boss*—and I recall James Sledd’s caustic critique of “boss compositionists” who buy into an evil system, elevating the status of our discipline and thereby improving their own faculty status, while ignoring the many instructors who toil on our Pomo-compo plantations (146). I read with a shiver of recognition Joseph Harris’s still relevant article, “Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss,” in which he argues for developing a new class consciousness that helps us identify our interests with those of our part-time, non-tenure-track, and graduate student colleagues who teach basic and first-year writing (45, 64). I also think of Marc Bousquet’s critique of academic pragmatists in “Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers.” Those pragmatists, Bousquet says, yield too

quickly to the ideology of the managerial, corporate university.

In my role as “boss” of the first-year writing program, I have been part of decisions that result in teachers losing or gaining sections of first-year composition or not being asked back at all. I do not make decisions about their salaries and (lack of) benefits, but as a result of my hiring these instructors, they do the work of teaching college writing for about \$2,400 per course (almost \$2,600 if they have a PhD or MFA). They receive no health insurance, no retirement contributions, and no office or computer or phone. They can sign up for a few hours a week of cubicle space with a desktop computer that they can sign into. They do have an assigned filing cabinet drawer and a subsidy for buying a parking permit. (Oh, the perks of academic life!)

Such treatment shows that the institution views these instructors as disposable, easily hired and easily replaced, not a central or essential part of the university or the faculty. What this situation reveals about the institution’s attitude toward the writing program itself and those of us who administer it is an old story. Certainly, my Writing Coordinating Committee colleagues and I do *not* view these instructors as disposable; more like indispensable. We have to staff around 200 sections of first-year writing every year, and also staff the university writing center. “Part-time” faculty teach almost 60 percent of those sections, so they are essential to our program. And they represent years of experience and professional development. Yet, while we have some long-time instructors, we also have a lot of turnover. We have retained only 24 percent of part-time faculty hired over the past seven years. Faculty who had full-time, renewable contract positions or even well-paid part-time positions with good working conditions would not leave in such high numbers.

Most of the other 40 percent of our sections of first-year writing are taught by non-tenure-track faculty. Many of these instructors have been promoted to senior lecturer, with longer-term contracts, and many of them help administer the writing program (and teach our upper-division and graduate courses in writing and literacy). These faculty have full-time positions, with benefits and office space and computers. Their salaries, however, are often half as much as professors with comparable seniority in our system. Equally grating is the frequent lack of respect they receive. They are not universally granted the right to call themselves “professors” or even “scholars,” though they do what professors do in the classroom, and they practice the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Both part-time and full-time lecturers (non-tenure-track faculty) are often referred to in the literature as “contingent” faculty. I dislike that term. Its dictionary definitions include “intended for use in circumstances not completely foreseen.” Those reading this article know that the circumstances for which we “use” part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty in writing programs are completely foreseen, not

only likely but guaranteed to happen. The tiered, hierarchical system that employs *all* of us who teach first-year writing seems designed to frustrate professional, scholarly, ethical pedagogy and administration. That writing programs like ours achieve excellence happens in spite of this rickety system.

So how can someone who sees himself, proudly, as a “tenured radical,” who belongs to the “progressive faculty” email list on campus, and who wants to be in solidarity with labor and the working class negotiate a simultaneous identity as a “manager”? I am expected to vouch for the excellence of all these instructors and the quality of our program, and that does matter to me, but often all I can think about is the mediocrity (or worse) of their working conditions, the shabbiness of how the university treats them. I thought one year about quitting my position as director of writing, but was told by a longtime adjunct faculty labor organizer that such a quixotic act would not help part-time faculty. Someone else would take over my position and might not have the same commitment I have to equity in the workplace or the same alliances with non-tenure-track faculty.

Instead of quitting, I work year-round as an advocate for part-time and non-tenure-track faculty. Early in my stint as chair of the Writing Coordinating Committee (we didn’t have a director at that time), I asked the department chair why part-time faculty couldn’t have copying privileges. He did some quick math, and said, “Sure, why not?” For years I was famous for having obtained that simple privilege for our part-time faculty. It was a simple action with large consequences, for it was a gesture of inclusion. That one act has never been forgotten by longtime adjunct faculty. I have also spoken up at department meetings on behalf of part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty whenever the occasion arose. Having a Christmas party? “Aren’t we inviting part-time faculty?” I ask. Discussing travel money? “Is it available to non-tenure-track faculty?” I want to know.

Certainly the solitary acts of a gadfly are not as effective as collective action. I formed a part-time faculty advisory committee in the writing program a few years ago which developed into a part-time faculty organization for the entire School of Liberal Arts, and soon into a coalition of such faculty for the entire campus. I attended almost every meeting of the coalition, joined them in a workshop, met with their leaders and the dean on several occasions, and stood in the back of the room holding a picket sign during the university system president’s state of the university address. But the part-time faculty leaders took the lead in all this action. Since that group formed, the dean has given two (small) raises to part-time faculty in our School of Liberal Arts, made improvements in the way their office space is administered, and listened to their concerns. Our last provost established a travel fund for adjunct faculty to present at conferences.

Articles about the coalition have been published in two local newspapers. Much

remains to be done, but the coalition has great potential. In that role, I have been able to act as “manager” while still joining forces with “labor”—after all, as a professor, I am in some ways labor administered or “managed” myself. It’s a tricky balancing act. And it is difficult to convince colleagues, tenured or non-tenure-track, to join in such collective labor action.

Another collective action I took was working with the Writing Coordinating Committee to draft a proposal requesting that our dean convert a number of part-time positions to full-time positions. In response, the dean gave us permission to search for two full-time lecturers two years in a row, and he has let us appoint three visiting lecturers as well.

I like to think that taking these kinds of collective actions makes my work—whether one sees it as being a manager, an administrator, or a boss of a writing program—more ethical and professionally fulfilling. James Sledd might still excoriate me for “buying in.” But perhaps—am I rationalizing my behavior again?—he would say I am closer to being *in* but not *of* the system. Yom Kippur ended the other night: will this article serve as my confession? Who will grant me atonement for my WPA guilt?

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The Ethos of Contingency and Writing Program Administration

Ann Shivers McNair and Amy Lynch-Binieck

Recent scholarship, including Theresa Enos and Shane Borrowman’s *The Promise and Perils of Writing Program Administration*, and Debra Frank Dew and Alic Horning’s *Untenured Faculty as Writing Program Administrators*, demonstrates that the role of writing program administrator is one fraught with workplace politics, fluctuating job descriptions, and inconstant academic capital. To illustrate the complicated ethics of positions like ours, we offer narratives of how we grapple with profes-

sional ethos and perceptions of our ethos. In our administrative ethos, we often face the ethics of working in a labor system that is dependent upon contingent workers. For differing reasons, we see ourselves as not *in*, but *in between* many of the positions Ann Penrose uses to describe professional identity in our field: “colleague, mentor, [and] co-learner” (118).

While our job descriptions differ most significantly, perhaps, in employment status—Ann is contingent faculty and Amy is a tenured assistant professor—we both coordinate and assess basic writing, design professional development materials, and mentor faculty. We find that we share the same challenge in understanding our professional identities: positioning ourselves in relationship to coworkers when job stability, teaching experience, access to resources, and professional power are fluctuating variables.

Ann’s Story

I am a visiting instructor and the basic composition coordinator, a contingent WPA or, to borrow Joyce Inman’s phrase, an “almost-WPA” who is a full-time, non-tenure-track, non-voting member of my department. I have helped to pilot and fully implement our basic writing program, which serves 500 students (one-third of students taking first-year composition). I assess and teach in the program, which comprises five full-time (and non-visiting) composition instructors, two adjunct instructors, and eight graduate students (all PhD candidates in English literature or creative writing). I have had one course release in the spring and an additional release for the summer each year (a 4/4 load)—though this is not written into my contract. I design curriculum that instructors adapt to their interests and develop instructional basic writing materials—handouts, additional readings, writing and reflection activities. I plan monthly meetings to discuss day-to-day curriculum, pedagogy, instructor concerns, and student issues. I wrestle constantly with my ethos, both as a colleague and as a coordinator. That ethos illustrates the professional challenges I face.

Ethos as Colleague

Like my contingent colleagues, I am always aware of the tenuous nature of my position. Though I do not have an official voice in my department and am not evaluated for research in my annual review, I find that maintaining an active research agenda has been important in shoring up my ethos. Most recently, my ongoing research on student-veterans in first-year composition played an important role in leveraging funding for veteran peer tutors in the first-year writing course I teach at a nearby military post. And yet, while my research has been important in establishing my ethos in the department, I realize that it also symbolizes my in-between status: un-

like my contingent colleagues, I have access to funding for research, and unlike my tenure-track colleagues, I am not expected to do research.

Ethos as Mentor

In addition to my programmatic work, I also serve as a mentor for graduate students and adjunct instructors in our department. I am a young teacher myself, and I have an MA; thus I am careful in the way I approach my mentor role—especially since some of the instructors I mentor have as much or more graduate training or teaching experience than I, but typically not in basic writing.

Each semester, I observe two or three graduate or adjunct instructors, meet with them throughout the semester, and provide a narrative of my observation to the instructors and to the director of composition. Sometimes I do not provide formal feedback to the department but rather help a new instructor navigate her teaching and service responsibilities and prepare her for annual review. Even though both the instructors and I are aware that my observation narratives do have some role in the department's assessment of their effectiveness, I distance myself from language that highlights the (relative and minimal) authority of my position.

At the same time, I have to make requests of my basic writing colleagues, both as a program coordinator and as a researcher. Especially in our pilot years, I asked instructors to follow the curriculum I had designed closely, so we could assess the effectiveness of individual assignments and the arc of assignments. And as a researcher (a role I have to frame carefully as separate from my coordinator and assessor roles), I ask to visit classes to administer surveys and instruments. I seek volunteers to participate in interviews and to allow me to interview and observe students in their classes. Realizing that my requests are complicated by the tensions between my perceived ethos and my administrative role, I try to build expectations from a position of empathy.

In the few instances when colleagues have objected to having me as a mentor or chosen not to do something program-related I've asked them to do, I have felt my tenuous ethos acutely. During my first year as coordinator, an adjunct instructor with the same amount of teaching experience found it "insulting" to be assigned to me. I empathized with his difficulty in accepting my role (and assigned another mentor), but I had to resist the temptation to take this resistance personally.

Ethos as Co-learner

I find myself most comfortable inhabiting the role of co-learner. I am always looking for feedback on and new ideas for curriculum and pedagogical practices, and instructors participate both in the work of assessment and in discussions about how assessment should be conducted. Because we still have to justify our rather ex-

pensive program to administrators, we do not assume that any part of the program is a given or a unilateral success, and each year, instructors make suggestions and recommendations that shape the program for the following year. As a co-learner, I can embrace the tensions and challenges of my position as opportunities; after all, even the most frustrating situations can become—and be framed as—learning experiences.

Let me be clear: my tenuous status constrains much of what I do. But I am also learning to see my “in-between-ness” as a way into advocacy, empathy, and self-reflection.

Amy’s Story

I remember my adjunct days very well. Over the course of ten years, I taught at several institutions, each with varying degrees of oversight and professional regard for contingent faculty. Now a tenured professor, I find myself wrestling with the ethos of my new position, composition coordinator in the English department of a public university.

Ethos as Colleague

I am fortunate in that my home institution does not (yet) match the national trend, in which composition is primarily taught by contingent workers, including graduate students, adjuncts, or temporary faculty. I work at a unionized university, and our current contract caps the number of contingent workers. Almost everyone in our 40-faculty-member department teaches composition. Moreover, the university strives to treat contingent professors with the respect due them as colleagues. Contingent teachers are eligible for travel assistance funds and research grants. Our department chair works diligently to keep contingent faculty informed of their outlook for further employment, and their pay is above the national average. A clause in the contract even allows the department to request that contingent lines be converted to the tenure track.

Despite this backdrop, I still have moments of doubt when I worry, like Tim McCormack in “Boss of Me: When the Former Adjunct Runs the Writing Shop,” that “I remain complicit in unfair labor practices I cannot control” (166). When I speak and write to the “temporary faculty,” as they are known on our campus, I hear my own words with the ears of my former adjunct-self and read every crack in the system’s facade. I want to be an advocate for these faculty, to help them work to their own best interests, but I also want to advocate for our program, to make it the best it can be. I want them to take advantage of the professional opportunities our department has to offer, but I don’t want the system to take advantage of them. These goals, I sometimes find, are at odds.

Ethos as Mentor

When the position I hold was created, the title “coordinator” was carefully chosen; faculty were striving for a more collaborative and less hierarchical working environment. We have had some success in that regard, so in many ways, my role is better described as a composition mentor than WPA. At times, this role is comforting, but a mentor role can also complicate my relationship with both the contingent faculty and the program.

For example, I run workshops and discussion groups designed to aid all faculty in better meeting course objectives. Semester after semester, however, the vast majority availing themselves of these voluntary opportunities are the contingent faculty. They are more likely than other faculty to show up for workshops, to read and respond to sample assignments, and to request feedback on their syllabi.

As comp coordinator, I’m frustrated that more of my fellow permanent faculty don’t prioritize composition the way that contingent faculty do. I also can’t help but consider motivation. Adjunct English faculty are likely to make a career out of teaching composition, no matter their specialty. Is this why they attend? Or do they attend because the comp coordinator, a woman with the authority to at least influence their status, has asked them to do so? Are their reasons pedagogical, professional, or political?

The answer is, of course, “yes” to each interpretation. In my own adjunct days, I attended every “optional” meeting I could, demonstrating my dedication to the WPA. But I also learned much about composition in these offerings, long before I went back to complete a PhD in the field. So, why do I feel so bad being on the other side of the fence?

Because I also remember that volunteering for professional development used up my resources in terms of time and energy, resources I could not then apply to course prep, to scholarship, and to my ongoing search for more stable employment. Permanent faculty can choose to waive optional professional development and focus their attention where they see fit. Contingent faculty often feel pressured to do it all.

When we evaluate our contingent faculty, our department takes official note of service and scholarship. In some ways, this makes us progressive: Sue Doe et al. found that institutions often do not acknowledge the work of contingent faculty beyond teaching and provide “virtually no time to carry it out” (438). At the same time, “contingent faculty members . . . understood that research, scholarship, and artistry often function as central measures of productivity in the research-intensive university” (438). I cannot in good conscience rationalize my demands on their time by claiming that they don’t need or want to research. But neither do I want to discourage them from attending professional development, as it can greatly benefit

their teaching and by extension our program. Despite the good intentions of my title, I wonder if I am less a mentor after all.

Ethos as Co-learner

The contingent faculty offer experience, expertise and research that are invaluable to our students and our department. Often, the best opportunity I personally have to learn from them is through departmental service; getting to work side-by-side on a committee has at times allowed me to shed my discomfort with my own authority, at least for the duration of a meeting. Recently, however, I had to give up the illusion that I can somehow suspend the tensions and material concerns that are intrinsic to the tenuous positions of contingent professors. When I decided that I needed a co-chair for our annual student composition conference, a contingent faculty member was the first to volunteer. I was excited to have this smart and experienced woman as my partner, yet I found myself asking her to take time to reconsider. Again, while we do officially record the service of contingent faculty, they are not obliged to do such work. Should I encourage temporary faculty to complete service above and beyond their contracts? Should I discourage them when participation may make them more attractive to decision makers who renew contracts and approve conversion of positions to tenure lines? My colleague ultimately argued that, while she appreciated my concerns for her position, she saw the work as far more beneficial than potentially detrimental. It may be our best conference yet. But did we do the right thing?

Conclusion

As our narratives reveal, our administrative ethos is caught in a complex web of credentials, rank, and employment status, all relative to the faculty with whom we work. We think that what allows us to carry on in a labor system that can be inconsistent and inequitable is our sense that our professional identities are not static job descriptions or lists of duties created and carried out. Rather, we believe WPAs must necessarily explore the “in-between-ness” of our roles if we are to ethically protect our programs, our faculty and ourselves. When contingent faculty supervise permanent instructors, when tenured professors must ask adjuncts for “voluntary” labor, then advocacy, empathy, and self-reflection have profound value. We aren’t offering any easy answers, but rather inviting you to ask some uneasy questions:

- When and how should a WPA advocate for her own position, especially when challenged by colleagues of equal or greater status under her direction?
- How should we parse the complex and sometimes conflicting professional needs of contingent faculty?

- How might we be better mentors while acknowledging the experience and status of instructors?
- How might we balance our institutional constraints with our desires to improve the work-life of our colleagues and the efficacy of our programs?

We believe that reflection on the ethos of our positions, however, is a useful lens for moving us forward toward contextual answers, as its contemplation reveals the strengths, snags, hypocrisies, and achievements of the labor systems on which our programs are built.

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"Never Take More Than You Need": Tenure-Track/Tenured Faculty and Contingent Labor Exploitation¹

Seth Kahn

It should be obvious that working conditions at today's American colleges and universities cause tension between contingent and noncontingent faculty. Contingent faculty often get paid pennies on the dollar for the same work, are denied benefits or asked to pay extortion-level rates for them, and have little if any job security.

My goal in this essay is to concretize that abstraction, especially for advanced (tenured, promoted) faculty. All too often I hear colleagues bemoan the exploitation of contingent faculty while making professional choices that directly feed that ex-

ploitation. While there's an element of *calling out* that's inevitable in the arguments I'm about to make, more important to me is that we senior faculty, collectively, start doing at least the easy things that move us towards equitable labor conditions in our own institutions. Or put another way: as a lifelong activist, I've learned that campaigns aimed at very large, intractable problems often need elements of small victories and incremental changes to sustain them. That's what I'm after here.

Or you can hear it this way, if it'll make you more likely to listen: In January 2012, then incoming MLA president Michael Bérubé, who has been a solid voice of labor equity for many years, announced and reiterated the MLA's recommendations on improved pay, benefits, and job security for contingent faculty:

Following a review of best practices in various institutions, the MLA recommends minimum compensation for 2011–12 of \$6,800 for a standard 3-credit-hour semester course or \$4,530 for a standard 3-credit-hour quarter or trimester course. These recommendations are based on a full-time load of 3 courses per semester (6 per year) or 3 courses per quarter or trimester (9 per year); annual full-time equivalent thus falls in a range of \$40,770 to \$40,800.

He follows the specifics with this exhortation:

If institutions are going to do anything to improve the working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty members, then . . . they will have to show that they respect those employees . . . by paying them a salary commensurate with a decent level of professional respect and dignity. (n. pag.)

If you're one of those folks who smiled, grimly, wishing Berube's *exhortation* were more than *hortatory*, I'm talking directly to you.

Aside from the financial situations beyond any (contingent or non-contingent) faculty control, my experience as a contingent labor advocate, WPA, and contract enforcement/grievance officer for my faculty union (APSCUF—Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty) has shown me at least these ways that senior faculty contribute to contingent labor exploitation:

- Taking on research and administrative assignments that require part-time replacements;
- Opting out of general education courses that are taught primarily by contingent faculty when taking those reassignments;
- Failing to hire and evaluate contingent faculty rigorously, carefully, and supportively.

Let me be very clear that I'm *not* calling for senior faculty to stop taking reassign time, sabbaticals, research leaves, and so on. I'm calling for us to be thoughtful about how and when we do, how often, how we're to be replaced when we do,

and whether we can coordinate our efforts in ways that support contingent faculty.

For various reasons, senior faculty reassignments usually result in open sections of general education, nearly always composition courses, once schedules have moved around. Often, those of us in senior faculty have to teach courses in our specialties on schedules we don't control; sometimes, given our preferences, we'd rather teach upper-division students and majors, or graduate students, than gen-ed students. The point is, all too often our reassignments result in openings to teach courses for which we usually hire contingent faculty, and do so in a piecemeal fashion that contributes to poor working conditions.

The exploitation of contingent labor, particularly to teach general education writing, has effects that extend beyond the negatives for the exploited faculty themselves. The conditions under which contingent faculty work (lack of office space, the need to fly from one job to another, burnout, and other negatives) often hurt their relationships with students. The fact that many contingent faculty in writing courses aren't trained in composition adds another layer of difficulty. Amy Lynch-Binieck's "Who Is Teaching Composition?" and Bill Thelin's "Memos, Email, and Reports: Writing to and Being Written by Adjunct Faculty," recently published in a special issue of *Open Words*, both argue that a labor force doing the work of the discipline without advanced training in the discipline can't help but hurt the discipline. While I agree with them, the solution to that problem is outside the purview of my argument here.

I want to end, rather than with a prayer or a vague hope that neo-liberal hegemony will suddenly end and simple human decency can take hold, with a series of suggestions to senior faculty, those of us already tenured and promoted, that we can undertake *immediately* and *for free*. That is, these suggestions take no resources we don't already have. All they require, I believe, is a little of the mindfulness we seem willing to offer when we bemoan the current situation. And, to be clear, Michael Berube acknowledges other "for free" moves we can make to support contingent faculty: inclusion in governance, offering basic professional resources, and so on, and I don't mean for these suggestions to erase those, but to supplement them.

First, and it's a shame I feel I have to say this out loud: Meet your contingent faculty members. Learn their names. Talk to them as colleagues, because they are.

Second, and most lofty (read: impractical, but do it anyway): To the extent feasible, push for contingent lines to be converted, for pay equity, long-term contracts, full governance rights, and other rights enjoyed by full-time faculty. Our faculty union, which represents both contingent and non-contingent faculty, is working with our faculty senate and our campus curriculum committee to find seats for contingent faculty—and unsurprisingly finding some resistance. But

we're pushing and, I believe, making some progress.

Third, don't take more reassign time than you need. On some campuses, getting reassign credits is a kind of game, or badge of honor. The losers of that game aren't just the people who get fewer reassigned credits, but also the people whose job prospects are thrown into disarray as a result of the instability.

Fourth, find out the percentage of contingent faculty on your campus and what their compensation is. Compare it to other campuses, and post to The Adjunct Project spreadsheet.³ Share information from the spreadsheet and the blog with your colleagues, especially if your campus conditions would rate you poorly compared to others.

Fifth, work with members of your department to schedule sabbaticals/reassignments in order to maximize full-time spots for people who want them. For example, my system offers half-year or full-year sabbaticals. When I'm ready to take a half-year, which is all I'd want, I'll do my very best to coordinate with other faculty in my department to see whether somebody is planning or willing to take the other semester of an academic year. I, personally, won't take my semester until I can work that out. Once I have, and once the sabbatical is approved, I'll work with my department chairperson and scheduler to ensure, to the extent possible, that *one* contingent faculty member gets a full-time load *for an entire year* as a result of an open full-time schedule for a year. Another example: My department chair asked me, a couple of years ago, whether I'd be willing to give up a general education writing course for an upper division course she needed to add at the last minute. I told her I'd do it under one condition—that she gave my rescheduled writing section to somebody who needed another section to become eligible for better benefits—that is, if she had to hire a new person for one section without any benefits, I wouldn't do it. Neither of those ideas is terribly complicated or labor-intensive; neither costs anybody a penny. All it takes is a little foresight and mindfulness.

Sixth, and finally, make your contingent faculty hiring and evaluation practices ethical and meaningful. Too many departments (not necessarily English departments) are willing to hire and retain marginal teachers because they don't cost much and are often willing to accept scraps of assignments. If we make it a priority to hire quality faculty and evaluate (and of course support) them well; and if we make it a priority *not* to retain faculty who aren't doing the job well simply because they're convenient, then we can go a long way toward addressing the darker, deeper underbelly of the situation, which I haven't even tried to answer to in this piece.

I know that some of you will find this kind of incremental, piecemeal approach unsatisfying if not counterproductive. I've read Malcolm Gladwell's "Small Change" essay, in which he contends that small-scale efforts defuse larger efforts by acting as a safety valve that releases the pressure to do more. However, although I'm a relative newbie to the world of contingent labor activism, I'm fully aware of the sense that history simply continues to unfold and recycle; every generation, new activists get mad, get involved, get burned out, and move on. I'm convinced small-scale changes that demonstrate and catalyze awareness among senior faculty in our departments and programs are key to the larger changes that will ultimately get us closer to real equity.

Notes

1. The title comes from a painting by Randy Bolton (http://www.littlejohncontemporary.com/Bolton/bolton_dir.html). The essay is revised/expanded from a poster-session presentation at the 2012 CCCC Convention, a Special Event co-hosted by Rhetoricians for Peace and the CCCC Labor Caucus. Special thanks to Bill Thelin, Megan Fulwiler, Jennifer Marlow, Amy Lynch-Binieck, and everybody who planned, presented, and participated in the event.
2. The percentage violates a provision in our collective bargaining agreement (CBA) requiring that no campus in our state system employ more than 25 percent "temporary" (our CBA term) faculty by FTE. That's another story altogether, although it certainly impacts our hiring practices, as well as the way we imagine hiring and supporting contingent faculty.
3. The Adjunct Project, if you've missed it, is a crowdsourced spreadsheet of contingent faculty working conditions (pay, load, benefits, support, unionization). Josh Boldt has earned standing ovations from any room he walks into for this idea and the work he's done publicizing and maintaining it.

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