As part of preparing the special issue, I invited a group of regular TETYC contributors and active two-year college teacher-scholar-activists to participate in a dialogic symposium on this topic. The contributors come at this issue from a variety of perspectives—relationships between two-year colleges and institutional transfer partners; through historical examination of the role of the community college; from the perspective of a contingent instructor who reflects on the importance of place; through the lens of shared governance; and in the context of the tensions between program regularization and disciplinary knowledge. Through this prism, the symposium invites readers to consider how we exercise our expertise, autonomy, and authority within the places we labor.

**Inter-Institutional Partnerships for Academic Freedom: Reversing “The Great Credit Grab”**

Stephen Ruffus and Christie Toth

Much of the recent scholarly conversation about academic freedom has been anxious, even despairing. The future of tenure looks bleak, neoliberal policies continue to advance the casualization of the academic workforce and the standardization of curricula, popular conservatism views academia as a leading source of leftist “brain-washing,” and legislatures are seeking to control course offerings and police faculty political expression. Community college faculty, who often have less of a role in institutional governance, fewer employment protections, and a greater likelihood of being hired in contingent positions, are particularly vulnerable to these forces. Given the grim national picture, we are glad to be able to report on some positive developments for academic freedom in our local context.

Over the last three years, we have been collaborating across our respective institutions—Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) and the University of Utah (“the U”)—to develop initiatives supporting transfer student writers. This partnership has become an opportunity to expand writing studies course offerings at SLCC and provide new intellectual and professional opportunities for SLCC and U faculty alike. We share our experiences in the hope that other two-year colleges...
Christie: For some time, a sense of competition within our hierarchical postsecondary system has worked against the academic freedom of community college faculty. English faculty at four-year institutions may view their two-year college neighbors with suspicion. These suspicions are fueled by anecdotal encounters with transfer students, negative stereotypes about community colleges, and an elitist/classist disregard for the intellectual work that takes place in these spaces—attitudes cultivated in many English studies graduate programs (see Calhoon-Dillahunt et al.; Jensen and Toth). Faculty express concerns about the “rigor” of community college classes and whether they adequately prepare transfer students for the demands of upper-division writing, particularly in major courses. “Transfer stigma,” or the assumption that community college students are inherently underprepared for university coursework (see Alexander et al.; Gere et al.), is alive and well in many four-year English departments.

Likewise, university faculty worry that two-year colleges are “siphoning off” students from their first-year writing courses. The efforts of state legislatures to move all basic writing instruction out of universities and into community colleges has exacerbated these tensions, with some university faculty choosing to defend their basic writing programs by trucking in stereotypes about “developmental” faculty at two-year colleges—stereotypes that ignore the reality that some of the most innovative developments in basic writing curriculum and pedagogy are currently being led by two-year college faculty (e.g., Adams et al.; Hassel et al.; Hern). Introductory writing is, frankly, one of the cash cows for English departments in a time of declining majors. It is also the leading source of funding for graduate students. Thus, the purported “diversion” of lower-division students from universities to community colleges could pose an existential threat to some English departments’ programs. Such fears have become more pronounced with the rapid growth in dual/concurrent enrollment.

Stephen: Given these suspicions and concerns about resources, university English departments have sometimes used their power as the transfer “destination” to restrict the range of lower-division English courses they will accept into their major. Functionally, this requires majors to take most of their English courses after they transfer to the university. Four-year faculty may see such efforts as exercising their own academic freedom to control curricular content and set “standards” for their majors. Ironically, one consequence of this exercise can be the curtailing of the academic freedom of two-year college faculty, at least when it comes to teaching and developing new disciplinary courses.

Perhaps the most vivid local example is the series of events that we only half-jokingly refer to as the Great Credit Grab of 1997. This was the period when the Utah State Higher Education (USHE) system converted from quarters to semesters. Courses that had been numbered at the 2000 level under the quarter system were now renumbered at the 3000 level under the semester system, eliminating the pos-
sibility of teaching them at the community college. This numbering restriction was an effort to prevent what state policymakers refer to as “academic creep.” Under that mentality, the community college may not offer 3000-level courses, as such courses do not fit its prescribed mission as defined by the Regents.

The 1997 renumbering demonstrated the artificiality of these distinctions. Functionally, it further restricted the teaching opportunities of community college faculty who were clearly qualified to teach these courses—indeed, they had been teaching these courses for years. Over time, that move has had the effect of diminishing the relevance of 2000-level courses for transfer purposes. Aspiring transfer students often consider these courses “just generals” to “get out of the way” because they don’t count toward university majors. This perception has inhibited our college’s ability to prepare students more thoroughly for transfer into disciplinary coursework. In many cases, it has also led students to transfer to universities before completing their associate’s degrees.

Christie: Perhaps unsurprisingly, the U seems to have little recollection of the Great Credit Grab—I’ve never heard any faculty there talk about it—but the memory is very much alive among longtime SLCC English faculty. It has been the cautionary backdrop to our recently renewed efforts at inter-institutional collaboration. The change in our relations has been made possible by the establishment of the U’s independent Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies. When the departments split, the English Department kept literary studies and creative writing. Our new department took the required first-year writing sequence and launched our own major and minor. Courses in our rapidly growing major include creative nonfiction, technical writing, writing in the professions and disciplines, various forms of multimodal composition, writing for activism and civic engagement, and an array of courses in rhetorical theory, including several focusing on specific cultural-rhetorical traditions (e.g., Indigenous, African American, Latina/o/x, and Mormon Rhetorics).
For faculty like me, who trained at universities where we only taught “service” courses, the opportunity to develop a wide range of writing and rhetoric courses for students invested in the subject matter has felt like academic freedom indeed.

Joining this new department right out of graduate school offered me the opportunity to pursue my longtime goal of collaborating with community college faculty to develop initiatives for transfer students. I accepted my position at the U in no small part because I had met several SLCC English faculty through TYCA and knew they were some of the most innovative teacher-scholars in the country. I hoped we could work together to build a disciplinary community across institutions that would support transfer students, create opportunities for graduate students, and foster the professional development of faculty in both departments. From my perspective, these efforts have yielded benefits far beyond what I anticipated when we first opened conversations about articulation.

Stephen: SLCC’s English department has a long history of innovation. Beginning in the late 1980s, rather than remain satisfied with the status quo, members of the department sought ways to put their disciplinary knowledge to use through curricular innovation, some of which was controversial at the time. For example, new faculty had developed a cultural studies–based curriculum, which caused a stir among the old guard. The mere fact that recent hires brought theory into their approach to teaching was enough to create suspicion. We launched a Student Writing Center and the nation’s first Community Writing Center not long after (see Rousculp). Several years ago, we developed a one-year Writing Certificate of Completion (WCC). While the certificate was an important move forward for our writing program, one that enabled us to develop more lower-division writing courses and helped grow our Publication Center, it was not designed to be a transfer degree. For the growing number of SLCC students who wanted concentrated coursework in writing but planned to transfer to a university, the WCC wasn’t always an adequate fit.

When Writing & Rhetoric Studies became an independent department at the U in 2014, we had a chance to begin reversing the Great Credit Grab that had taken place nearly two decades before. We quickly established an articulation agreement so that the WCC could transfer into the new major. And now we have developed an AS degree in writing studies, which we are launching in 2018. Notable components of the AS degree are the creation of two new 2000-level courses—Introduction to Writing Studies and Digital Writing—both of which have a course-to-course articulation with the U’s department. The creation of these new courses restores major-credit learning opportunities for students that were lost during the Great Credit Grab. These courses also create rewarding new disciplinary teaching opportunities for SLCC faculty.

Our department-to-department partnership is already benefiting students and faculty. We now have a funded summer bridge program called Writing Studies Scholars that is designed especially for SLCC students transferring into the Writing & Rhetoric Studies major. For this program, faculty at both institutions have
collaborated to develop and team-teach a free 3000-level writing course in which students connect with departmental faculty and U resources while writing about writing in the Salt Lake Valley. The SLCC English Department also works together to offer another 3000-level Writing in the Disciplines course on the SLCC campus for students in any major who are preparing to transfer to the U. This class, which fulfills the U’s upper-division writing-intensive course requirement, is an opportunity for students to get a running start at earning upper-division credits at community college tuition rates while investigating writing conventions within their major disciplinary community—and learning about many of the resources and opportunities available at the U in the process.

The relationship we have with the U’s Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies represents a true partnership in that we are operating from common interests and an explicit commitment to collaboration. Department-to-department partnerships like ours are perhaps the only means to address a system-wide problem that renders the associate’s degree a questionable pathway to upper-division coursework. Indeed, such partnerships may be our best hope for ensuring that the push for “guided pathways” currently transforming community college curricula (see Bailey et al.) becomes an opportunity to extend rather than restrict academic freedom.

With authentic partnerships—ones that depend upon mutual respect, appreciation of shared knowledge, and, most importantly, reciprocity—students who genuinely benefit from their community college experience are more likely to stay long enough to complete their degrees and transfer successfully. From this perspective, we might understand academic freedom as the inter-institutional conditions that allow all faculty to do their best work to the fullest extent.

The Idea of “Shared Governance” at the Public Community College

Howard Tinberg

What does “shared governance” look like in the context of a public, open-access college? How is governance shaped by the exigencies that public community colleges routinely face? Specifically, how does shared governance work, given the immediate needs of the external community that the college serves? How are internal stakeholders brought into the governance process in light of these pressures to be publicly accountable? The position of non-tenure-track, contingent faculty, who do most of the teaching at community colleges, brings this challenge into sharp focus: given the contingent nature of that role, these colleagues are routinely left out of academic decision making. What are the incentives and mechanisms for providing
those faculty a role in college governance? As Darin Jensen observes in a later essay in this symposium, contingent faculty literally have “no place” and standing at the institutions where they teach.

The American Association of University Professors’ 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities,” while acknowledging the unique demands and challenges of particular institutions, does nevertheless call for “appropriately shared responsibility and cooperative action among the components of the academic institution.” Similarly, the National Education Association’s 1987 statement on “Faculty Governance in Higher Education” affirms that institutional governance is a joint effort among several parties: faculty, academic staff, administrators, and the governing board. This relationship should be based on collegiality and mutual respect.” Interestingly, two years later, the NEA, recognizing the unique challenges facing public community colleges, produced a “Statement on Community College Governance.” In that statement the NEA invoked the democratic, open-access mission of public community colleges when making a case for faculty role in governance: “Unlike universities, these colleges have no academic hierarchy of research directors, endowed chairs, and graduate faculty. Consequently, they are more egalitarian and democratic, which should be reflected in their decision making.” And then there is this: “Regular part-time faculty should be included in academic governance at the departmental or divisional level.” Certainly these pronouncements seem aspirational and idealized within the reality of governance in the second decade of the twenty-first century—a reality that includes whole courses and degrees delivered online and the fact that as of 2014, nearly 60 percent of community college courses were being taught by non-tenure-track, contingent faculty (CCCSE).

To complicate matters further: According to a recent study, much of the public (including a majority of Republicans) has concluded that colleges have a “negative effect on the country” (Fingerhut). Reflecting the sharp partisan divides nationally on a whole range of issues, these results have no doubt also been fueled by disconcerting accounts of free-speech infringement (see, for example, McLaughlin) and the perception even among the left-leaning press that tenured radicals are “ruining college” (Powers). While private colleges, especially those with healthy endowments, may feel somewhat insulated from the growing public disenchantment with higher education, public colleges face a starkly different reality, especially community colleges, which have been historically underfunded and are accountable to state legislators, governors, boards of higher education, and various other external constituencies and have been exceptionally vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy. The bottom line, as it were, is that public community colleges are expected to react to these external pressures by promising to turn on a dime—to be flexible enough to adapt to even whiplash-level changes in the market environment (and thus separating themselves from less nimble segments of higher education). Community colleges have in effect been left to fend for themselves in a “free market,” as Patrick Sullivan notes in his essay, with the goal of attending to the immediate needs of that market. That promise of nimbleness has driven the way
decisions are made at community colleges for a very long time (Jenkins and Jensen): distinguished by top-down decision making and by the hiring of contingent labor.

But what actually happens when an administratively driven, academic initiative moves forward without adequate consultation and buy-in from those who must implement such an initiative? That in fact occurred at my own college, a comprehensive public community college in southeastern Massachusetts. Upper-level administration sought to obtain a grant from the Gates Foundation to fund the college’s own version of “Gateway to College,” an initiative supported by the Gates. My own college’s website describes the program this way: “Gateway to College students are part of a comprehensive dual enrollment program that offers the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and college credits. Gateway students take all of their classes at BCC, which means they are out of a ‘traditional’ high school setting and part of a rigorous yet supportive college environment. The program is currently offered at no cost to eligible students.” The goals of the program were worthy: to promote our college’s abiding commitment to open access to higher education and to give students who have not succeeded in school another chance to receive skills and credentialing, with the hope of gainful employment in the future. Unfortunately, minimal input from faculty and staff—who would be entrusted with implementation and instruction—was sought. When the grant was not awarded, the college nonetheless went ahead with the initiative, again without adequate consultation from faculty and staff. Faculty have by and large not stepped up to teach these students. Many faculty have questioned the premise of the program—that a change of scene will necessarily aid students who might have a range of challenges—and the extent to which staff have the expertise to confront the range of those challenges. The city, whose budget supported the program, has since cut funding for the program. Not surprisingly, the program has been put on hold.

Yet how can it be tenable to have three-quarters of the courses taught by contingent faculty (and a remarkable range of services provided by part-time staff) without affording those faculty and staff the “collegiality and mutual respect” that truly shared governance requires?

A short time prior to this initiative—and perhaps not coincidentally—the college faculty and staff organized to form the Faculty and Professional Staff Senate, representing full and part-time faculty and professional staff. The senate, in fairly short order, engaged the administration on the need to build in a process by which college-wide academic initiatives would receive open consultation by all stakeholders, and the communication loop with those stakeholders would be closed. The effort, conducted by a joint Task Force on Governance representing the senate and the administration, took years but did bear fruit in the form of a proposed set of guidelines for academic initiatives (“Proposed”). Implementation of the proposed guidelines has begun, used most conspicuously in the development of a review of general education.
The enterprise of shared governance at the college remains a work in progress. Conversations continue to be had about which college initiatives fall under the guidelines and the extent to which the guidelines need to be followed to the letter (or the spirit). As to the role of contingent faculty in academic governance, that too continues to be discussed. Contractually, contingent faculty are not required to attend departmental meetings, hold office hours, or sit on college committees—and most do not take up these roles. Yet how can it be tenable to have three-quarters of the courses taught by contingent faculty (and a remarkable range of services provided by part-time staff) without affording those faculty and staff the “collegiality and mutual respect” that truly shared governance requires?

**Freedom Requires a Place**  
Darin Jensen

A noted definition of academic freedom comes from the American Association of University Professors’ “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure.” The definition emphasizes freedom of inquiry, the protection of the professor as a citizen who maintains their freedom of speech, and freedom to discuss their subject in the classroom (AAUP, “1940”). But what do these freedoms mean to the adjunct who has their office in the back of their Mitsubishi as they travel between campuses and institutions eking out an existence? Not much. Each of these pieces of academic freedom requires a stable and secure position to be enacted fully. Each requires a place in which praxis and a professional identity can be grounded.

Over the last twenty years, some scholars in TYCA have sought to reconfigure our teaching identity (Andelora; Toth and Sullivan; Sullivan, “The Two-Year College”). For example, the second iteration of TYCA’s guidelines from the early 2000s on the preparation of teaching English in the community college argues: “At two-year colleges, good teaching matters most, but this committee views scholarship as a prerequisite and a corequisite for good teaching—because teachers’ scholarship legitimizes their expertise, informs their classroom practice, and provides their students with models for intellectual inquiry” (TYCA, “Research” 3–4). We might say then, that our inquiry, our scholarship, and our speech in the classroom usually center on teaching. In my practice, this is true. I began research as a professional and continued it in a doctoral program to understand my teaching and to better serve my students. For me, then, one important component of academic freedom worth emphasizing is the ability to freely inquire into the best practices of teaching. But, of course, it is more complicated. It is complicated if one is a full-time instructor in the neoliberal community college. It is even more complicated for the part-time contingent faculty member who is disposable and impermanent.

One kind of academic freedom is the ability to choose the assignments we teach, to have a hand in the curriculum and outcomes of the courses we teach. We know this freedom is limited for adjunct instructors. Books are set, diagnostic essays they didn’t choose or have a hand in are required to be administered. They
often have no vote in department meetings. Even if they have the freedom of curriculum, the stress and harriedness of gigging for our suppers prevents an easy path for deep engagement in our work. I am not saying that part-time instructors are not good teachers—many of them are the best I know. But they are exploited and overused (see Tinberg’s essay in this symposium) and undervalued. And for me, at least, thinking about where I’m going to get my next gig or how to juggle enough classes at two campuses to be able to make ends meet and pick my kid up in the afternoon takes a toll on my teaching and engagement with my students. How could it not? But nonetheless, this revelation isn’t new.

The barrier I’m interested in asking about in between the five sections of composition I’m teaching without benefits at two campuses this fall is the notion of place and its connection to academic freedom. In thinking about place, I’m drawn to Wendell Berry, who writes of the importance of place in his essay “Damage.” As he learned to be in a place, he tells us he was “careful to get expert advice” but that “no expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place. If one’s knowledge of one’s whereabouts is insufficient, if one’s judgment is unsound, then expert advice is of little use” (Berry 5). Let me extend and apply this metaphor. The adjunct is an expert. They have the graduate credential coupled with experience, sometimes decades of it. But they aren’t of the place where they teach—not really. At the institutions where I’ve taught, adjuncts don’t receive funding for travel, they don’t have permanent offices, they don’t have the same opportunities for professional development, and much of what is available might be charitably described as instrumental or as lip service. Heck, I had to buy my own gradebook this year. And they don’t have access to full rich institutional histories or the grounding culture of inhabiting a place fully. In fact, in a place I recently taught, a new instructional building has only cubbies for faculty—making all of the adjuncts a bit rootless because they do not even have the “luxury” of a permanent office space. Faculty have no permanency by design in this new building. Berry is referring to knowing a place, knowing the land so that one can develop it in ways that are harmonious. Our expert advice (our credentials and experience) are of less use (and are valued less) as adjuncts because we are not of the place where we teach. We might know where the copy machine or coffee maker is, but there is little shared governance or permanence in our work or identity. Without this deeper connection to an institution, the department, the students, and so on, the adjunct is not able to apply their expertise, to be most effective, to be most free in inquiring how to be the best teacher, or how to do what is best for students, and thus academic freedom is constrained and limited.
Berry goes on to write a bit later in his essay that he now lives in his “subject” (6). He means that he is writing about his land. He says that “my subject is my place in the world, and I live in my place” and that “there is a sense in which I no longer ‘go to work.’ If I live in my place, which is my subject, then I am ‘at’ my work even when I am not working. It is ‘my’ work because I cannot escape it” (6–7). I cannot help thinking about the difference between a job and a profession. The adjunct, because of their rootlessness, their lack of a permanent place, is less professionalized and, as a result, less free. They are part of the gig economy—temporary, to be employed to meet the ebbs of enrollment. While this might seem abstract, it has concrete consequences we are all familiar with in our teaching lives.

In “Toward Local Teacher-Scholar Communities of Practice: Findings from National TYCA Survey,” Christie Toth and Patrick Sullivan call for the cultivation of local teacher-scholar communities of practice, which they identify as a “professional model in which scholarly engagement becomes an integral part of a department’s teaching and administrative work. Such communities would situate teacher-scholarship within shared day-to-day departmental practices, fostering faculty professional identities grounded in both local and disciplinary knowledge making” (248). I concur. The word I emphasize in their call is local. The word comes from the Latin locus, meaning “a place, a spot.” Our teaching work, our inquiry into serving our students is necessarily local, it is of a place. In his book The Third Reconstruction, Reverend William J. Barber II asserts that activism for racial and economic justice is rooted in a place. He argues “you can only do this sort of work locally—among people whose names you know and who, likewise, know you” (xiii).

The adjunct teacher, though an expert, is not fully a member of the community of practice Toth and Sullivan describe because they are not fully of the place. The contingent faculty member is not able to do their work because they are not situated locally in the ways Berry and Barber reveal as fundamental to the work. Academic freedom, the ability to teach, inquire, discuss, do the work, as it were, is necessarily limited because the adjunct isn’t allowed the full membership in the institution, which precludes full membership in the profession.

Different Kinds of Freedom
Patrick Sullivan

Most of the themes and topics for this special issue devoted to academic freedom can be traced back to the economic theory that has dominated thinking in business, government, education, and most other areas of public policy around the world for the last forty years—neoliberalism (Harvey; Sullivan, Economic; Meek). Although the language and “theoretical utopianism” of neoliberalism (Harvey 19) celebrate freedom, choice, and the power of the free market to produce prosperity and opportunity for all (Friedman and Friedman; Hayek, Road; Hayek, Constitution), neoliberal policies have, in fact, produced economic inequality on an epic scale (Atkinson; Duncan and Murnane; Piketty; Reich; Stiglitz). Neoliberalism can
be described as a form of libertarianism that values personal liberty and the free market above all else (Sandel 58–74). Much of this liberty is theorized in relation to freedom from “coercive” government intrusion in public life and business dealings. Within the ideal theoretical model, individuals are free to make choices and pursue their interests, and this freedom produces opportunity, innovation, and growth. In everyday practice, however, while this system produces freedom for some, it also produces unfreedoms for many others (Sen 3–34).

As economist John Maynard Keynes remarked, the ideas of economists exert a very powerful influence on our lives, whether we are aware of them or not: “The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist” (383). This is emphatically the case in America today. This is why a corporate economic model has come to dominate daily life at two-year colleges nationwide.

Most of the concerns expressed in the call for manuscripts for this special issue derive directly from this economic model. These include “faculty autonomy,” “contingency, expectations of continuing employment, and short-term or long-term contract faculty,” and “faculty protections and job security inflected differently across the states, including assaults on public unions, threats to tenure and shared governance; legislation mandating right-to-work policies, etc.” These troubling developments related to working conditions at two-year colleges have been produced by neoliberal economic theory as it has worked its way through public debate, various election cycles, and state and federal legislation. Neoliberal free market theory has legitimized a remorseless, methodical attack on labor worldwide, challenging collective bargaining, demonizing unions, and producing a precarious, low-wage workplace for many Americans, including an alarming proportion of college faculty (Bousquet, *How*; Kezar). A handful of the wealthiest and most powerful billionaire philanthropists in America, including Bill and Melinda Gates and the Walton family, are driving this assault on the living wage, collective bargaining, and public education in America (Lafer; Maclean; Ravitch 19–31, 39–43, 300–12, 313–25).

The two-year college has increasingly become an institution staffed by contingent, part-time, and just-in-time employees. Many campuses are now beginning to resemble giant corporate distribution warehouses staffed by only a handful of full-time employees. The “imposition of corporate models on the two-year college mission” and the systematic “reductions in state funding and disinvestment in public higher education” are philosophically validated by neoliberal economic theory, which seeks to apply a business model to all areas of human endeavor—because the market “knows best” (Brown 221). This theoretical model defines educational value as “return on investment,” relies heavily on standardized assessment, and is generally wary of any government initiative designed to promote the “public good,” which neoliberals routinely dismiss as chimerical (for a counterperspective, see Goldin and Katz; McMahon, “Financing”; McMahon, Higher). Neoliberals have also redefined “student aid” as student debt (Goldrick-Rab), have reduced the amount of financial
aid available to poor and middle-class students wishing to continue their education (Goldrick-Rab), and in as many ways as possible have championed “personal responsibility” and the free market over government programs and policies.

History is calling two-year college English teachers as perhaps never before to defend open admissions institutions and the ideals of social justice they embody. In very real ways, this is a vitally important moment for our profession (Andelora, “Teacher/Scholar/Activist”; Hassel and Giordano; Kroll; Lovas; Newfield, “End”; Newfield, Great; Pickett; Welch and Scott). To be uninvolved—to teach our courses, grade our papers, and go home—is to help regressive forces do their work and to support bad ideas and bad public policy (Newkirk). Just as we now have disposable two-year college teachers and staff members, we now appear to have disposable students at two-year colleges as well. As Christopher M. Mullin notes in a recent brief for the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), “in policy conversations, especially those concerned with policies related to access and choice, there is a silent movement to redirect educational opportunity to ‘deserving’ students” (4). This is a direct attack on the mandate and mission of the open admissions two-year college, which is based on the premise that all students are deserving, even the most underprepared.

Unfortunately, with the protections of tenure and job security eroding or at risk in many states, our profession’s academic freedom is in peril as well (Bousquet, How). Absent these safeguards, academic freedom cannot really be said to exist because we are serving at the pleasure of administrators and legislators who can terminate our employment as they wish (Worthen). This obviously puts considerable responsibility on the shrinking number of two-year college English teachers who have tenure and job security. We must look to these individuals to provide leadership at this crucial moment in our history.

In my TETYC essay about the two-year college teacher-scholar-activist, I suggested that two-year college faculty and staff might need to think of themselves as activists—and conduct themselves more intentionally and deliberately as activists. The final item on the call for submissions for this special issue references this essay: “The risks and rewards of teacher-scholar-activist work; with a greater need than ever for faculty advocacy, what are the risks of such work (see Sullivan, “Two-Year”)?” It is a great honor to be able to respond to this question, especially the very valid concern related to risk.

There are many ways we might conduct ourselves as activists that involve virtually no risk at all. By far the single most effective action we can take, by several...
orders of magnitude, involves electoral politics, the ballot box, and helping to win elections. There is nothing more important—and nothing we can do that will further the interests of our students more—than helping to elect individuals who understand and value the two-year college. In many ways, academic freedom, access, and social justice begins and ends here. As we know, participation in the electoral process is a sacred democratic activity that carries many protections.

One can also engage in low-risk activist activity simply by being vigilant, being well informed, and looking to move things forward in positive ways on our campuses and in our local communities. This can be done quietly and effectively in department meetings, at home reading TETYC or CCC, bringing a best practice or new research finding to the attention of colleagues or administrators, translating research and scholarship into effective classroom practices, participating in regional TYCA events, joining an NCTE committee, supporting non-tenure-track faculty (Kezar and Maxey), or advocating in all the ways teachers of English are expected to advocate, provide leadership, and guide college policy as part of our normal day-to-day activities. One can also provide leadership at one’s faculty council or faculty senate, as Holly Hassel suggests. This is a way to pursue “governance as activism” and promote “better living through policy.” One can also encourage students to contribute essays to The Community College Success Stories Project, a website I established (with the help of a CCCC Research Initiative grant) to celebrate community colleges. The site, which has just gone live, features essays written by community college students about their journeys to and from open admissions institutions (http://www.communitycollegesuccessstories.org).

Some individuals may wish to engage in other forms of activism that involve a bit more risk (for perspective, see Tinberg, “Interview—Part I” and “Interview—Part II”). These options include writing op ed essays and letters to the editor, joining public protests, helping to shape the public narrative about community colleges and higher education (Sullivan, “Shaping”; Tinberg, “2014”; Tinberg, Border), organizing local activist committees or advocacy groups, running for elective office (as some of my colleagues at MCC have done), serving on town committees, establishing or contributing to an activist blog or website like Teacher Scholar Activist (https://teacher-scholar-activist.org/) or Everyday Advocacy (https://everydayadvocacy.org/), consulting with legislators, joining activist groups like COCAL, the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (http://www.cocalinternational.org/), forming local communities of practice (Toth and Sullivan), establishing partnerships with local high school English teachers (Cecchini), forming allies and alliances across institutional boundaries, and becoming a community organizer or coalition builder.

Having spoken with a number of individuals who founded my own community college in the early 1960s as part of the work I am doing on a research project documenting the history of our institution, I came to understand that my community college did not, of course, found itself. Like most open admissions institutions around the country, my college was created by activists who worked tirelessly over many years, overcoming many complex and difficult challenges. These endeavors were driven by a deep commitment to community, higher education, and
social justice. For decades now, we have been enjoying the fruits of this important work. But advances can always be reversed. Policies we believe to be “permanent” can prove to be quite impermanent. And especially during times of fiscal austerity like today, what we take for granted can be challenged with all manner of ill-advised or expedient public policy. In Connecticut, just in the last five years, English teachers have had to respond to state legislation that dramatically changed the way we taught developmental education (Public Act 12-40, which was passed in 2012 [Hassel et al.]), defend the idea of open admissions (Sullivan, “Ideas”), contend with increasingly dire budget shortfalls, and battle against a recent radical reorganization proposal by our Board of Regents called Students First, which will strip the community colleges in the system of our leadership—our presidents, deans, and most of our administrative staff—and consolidate these functions at a central office. This plan was approved by our Board of Regents just two weeks ago (December 2017).

We can no longer enjoy the academic freedom of simply teaching our classes and meeting with our students, benefiting from the work done by activists of past generations. We are being called upon to defend this vital American institution and the revolutionary freedoms it offers students to create better lives, better selves, and better futures for themselves and their families. Only activism and engagement will keep these freedoms alive. One celebrated local activist I talked with as part of my research for this symposium said that all the work that she and her fellow activists did in the 1960s and early 1970s “made it so the next generation didn’t have to fight. Now, they don’t know how to fight.”

Let us understand that the times are calling us (austerity, extreme political polarization, a deeply cynical post-truth culture) as perhaps never before. Let us embrace the gift of this responsibility, and each do what we can to move this important work forward.

**Academic Freedom and the Idea of a Writing Program**

Annie Del Principe and Jacqueline Brady

Sam (a pseudonym) is an experienced teacher at a community college where he primarily teaches first-year composition courses—the bread and butter of the English department. Devoted to his students, Sam takes great pride and responsibility in the courses he teaches. A decade ago, the composition program, with the
help of faculty on the department’s composition committee, established a flexible shared curriculum structure for both of the required FYC courses. Five years ago, the program further specified that the last major assignment of Comp 1 should include a small amount of research. Initially, Sam revised his own syllabus to align with these curricular requirements, experimenting with various ways of integrating research into the final project for his course. After a couple of semesters, however, Sam grew disappointed with what his students were producing, so made the independent decision to eliminate the required research component. He felt that he had compromised the quality of his instruction in attempting to make space for teaching research and that his students were simply not ready to do even a small amount of it at the end of Comp 1.

We open with the hypothetical scenario of Sam in part because we routinely encounter versions of it in the writing program that we direct; but more importantly and more broadly, Sam’s story highlights tensions in power relations and raises several pressing questions regarding academic freedom that often exist in writing programs at two-year colleges. In the limited space of this forum piece, we examine some of the salient aspects of this situation in order to tease out rather than resolve these important tensions. This is not an argument about how or why to discipline or contain Sam. We discuss Sam’s situation in order to learn from it.

In her historical work on academic freedom, Ellen Schrecker points out that the concept of academic freedom along with its core principle of the autonomy of faculty was created partly to distinguish highly educated university instructors from ordinary workers. Academic freedom arrived in historical conjunction with the professionalization of professors, the development of the distinct disciplines, and the rise of the notion of academic fields of expertise. To this day, the basic belief that professors possess expertise in specific fields of knowledge underscores their right to make decisions in and about their classrooms. Ideally, their expertise protects faculty from negative appraisal and intervention by outsiders, such as politicians and administrators, who do not know or understand their fields of knowledge or how best to teach them. But this history of academic freedom also has created a conundrum for faculty today because it situates all of us who labor in the increasingly corporatized academy at a crossroads between experts and workers. One direction from this intersection takes us down a (probably elitist) path where academic training, educational credentials, and participation in our chosen field is thought to matter. The other way points us toward a (probably more democratic) route where we are all seen as workers with equally valuable ideas to contribute and experiences from which to draw.

At the most general level, Sam points out the tension between the individual and the collective. In this situation, the instructor’s freedom to make pedagogical and curricular choices regarding the classroom stands in direct conflict with the collective decision of the group of faculty administering the program and serving on the committee. According to the AAUP, in multisection courses like Composition 1 and Composition 2, where many faculty teach the same course, the privilege of academic freedom resides with the larger faculty collective such that “the decisions
of the group may prevail over the dissenting position of a particular individual.” This is partly how first-year writing programs across the country justify a mandate for a unified choice of course theme or text. But the AAUP also wisely cautions “deliberations leading to such decisions ought to involve substantial reflection and discussion by all those who teach the courses” (“AAUP Statement”). Former AAUP president Cary Nelson further warns that there are no clear guidelines about how such collective deliberations or decision making should proceed (19). And Marc Bousquet puts this warning yet another way when addressing the uneven power relations existing in most TYC writing programs, which rely on the cheap and insecure labor of adjuncts. He asks, “How does the WPA’s right to establish curriculum and set policies square with the teachers’ right to ‘autonomy over their work’? Who defines teaching that doesn’t ‘work out’? Why should it be the WPA and not other teachers, as in other disciplines?” (“Composition” 515). This line of questioning and Sam’s case compel us to closely consider what constitutes expertise in a writing program.

This conundrum is further exacerbated in writing programs at two-year colleges where instructors have a wide range of backgrounds—some primarily scholarly but most primarily experiential—that qualify them to teach composition. The issue is epistemological: how is knowledge made in composition? And how do we think it should be made? The seemingly theoretical question of whether Stephen M. North’s “lore,” or what we know by teaching in the classroom, is as valuable and reliable as knowledge gained through research and scholarship becomes a practical dilemma in the TYC.

In most community college writing programs, the clear labor and power dynamics seen in R1 contexts staffed by TA grad students are made murkier by a teaching labor force that is mostly not nationally credentialed but possesses decades of experience teaching FYC. Richard Fulkerson astutely cautions us that relying on our personal classroom experience as our primary source of knowledge in composition puts us in the poor position of not being able to tell “good” lore from “bad” lore (48). If we value time on the job as the main origin of “expertise,” then we put our programs in a position of extreme relativism where all teachers should simply follow their sense of “what works for them.” In contrast, if we value advanced degrees in comp/rhet and English education—and the related participation in scholarship—as the source of expertise, we risk that our teaching labor force will feel that their “autonomy, professionalism, and competence,” and therefore their academic freedom, are threatened (Janangelo and Klausman 136).

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So an urgent task facing writing programs at TYCs is to determine a way forward that reconciles these two different approaches, honoring both the practical knowledge gleaned from teaching and the breadth of knowledge gained through formal education and research. Academic freedom in these settings relies upon what we mean by, or want from, our writing programs.
So an urgent task facing writing programs at TYCs is to determine a way forward that reconciles these two different approaches, honoring both the practical knowledge gleaned from teaching and the breadth of knowledge gained through formal education and research. Academic freedom in these settings relies upon what we mean by, or want from, our writing programs. While it is true that “there is no agreed-upon concept of ‘writing program’” (Schwalm), scholars offer competing views regarding what they might look like. Some envision programs that don’t necessitate a centralizing authority, like a WPA, and that rely instead upon collaboration among the faculty who actually teach the courses, whether or not they are credentialed in the field of comp/rhet (Bousquet, “Composition”; Calhoon-Dillahunt). In contrast, others resist calling an aggregate of sections of writing classes a “program” unless they all share a coherent curriculum, faculty development, and meaningful program assessment and are led by some type of authority figure (Klausman; White et al.). This latter vision strives toward professionalism and cohesiveness, which, again, are grounded in a particular construct of expertise within our field. In this vein, Jeffrey Klausman asks us: “Can we say that a person with a Master of Arts in Imaginative Literature and little graduate training in composition, who is not current in the field and does not read the journals or attend the conferences, who relies upon lore primarily in his or her teaching, is a ‘professional’ in composition? It would be difficult to say so” (244). Clearly, how we define writing program along with the terms professional and expertise has enormous implications for academic freedom.

Let’s return to our opening anecdote about Sam. His academic freedom to choose to disregard the collectively established curricular expectations in the writing program within which he teaches raises the following pressing questions that we think all writing faculty and writing programs should consider:

> What type of expertise does this program value and why?
> Does an individual’s type of expertise qualify him or her for greater or lesser freedom to make independent decisions about his or her own teaching? To what degree does an instructor’s rank and employment status impact his or her sense of academic freedom within the classroom? And how are these two variables, expertise and employment status, made visible in the program?
> If, in programs mainly composed of multisection courses, academic freedom is largely a collective right, to what degree, and how, does the writing program act as a collective?
> What forms of governance exist within the program, and what are the power dynamics enacted by those forms?

Works Cited


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