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Forum: The Profession

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Forum on the Profession

Lisa Arnold, Laura Brady, Maggie Christensen, Joanne Baird Giordano, Holly Hassel, Ed Nagelhout, Nathalie Singh-Corcoran, and Julie Staggers
Moderators: Sue Doe and Mike Palmquist

OPENING STATEMENTS

Moderators: What barriers stand in the way of full participation of contingent faculty in the profession, and how can those barriers be overcome? What particular practices, policies, initiatives, or philosophies can be adopted by institutions, programs, colleagues in tenure-line positions, and contingent faculty themselves to improve the status and working conditions of contingent faculty?

Opening Statement: Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano

Full participation of contingent faculty in the profession is limited not just by material inequity in their working conditions, but also by the two-tiered system that most departments implicitly or explicitly embrace. Barriers include a lack of institutional resources, non-existent substantive dialogue between tenure-line and contingent faculty, a widespread disinvestment of tenure-line faculty in institutional policies that promote equity, and pervasive attitudes toward contingent faculty of mere tolerance or benign neglect. Although a focus on workplace equity remains important, English departments must address a set of challenges beyond material considerations to build on the expertise that contingent faculty bring to our institutions, preserve the academic freedom of contingent faculty in designing and teaching classes, and develop cohesive writing programs. We are particularly interested in the work of long-term contingent faculty at two-year institutions because their level of expertise and experience might not be mirrored by the contingent faculty who staff universities that rely heavily on graduate assistants and short-term lecturers to teach their
writing courses. For example, at our liberal arts transfer campus, some contingent instructors have been teaching college English for a decade or more.

We propose that conversations about contingent faculty include not only working conditions but also English department-specific responsibilities for strategically shaping the department’s culture. Departments can do this by including contingent faculty in decision making about writing programs (to maintain curricular integrity) and by providing opportunities for ongoing professional development to instructors who work off the tenure track.

For example, at our campus, tenure-line faculty and both full-time and part-time instructors collaborated to create departmental learning outcomes for first-year composition courses. Our work served as a springboard for the articulation of a cohesive, outcome-based writing program recently adopted by the thirteen two-year colleges in Wisconsin. This collaboration was an especially important acknowledgement of our institutional reality: contingent faculty teach every section of developmental courses in the University of Wisconsin colleges and a majority of composition classes. The process was also a recognition that contingent faculty are at the heart of teaching and learning in first-year composition; excluding them from conversations about program goals paints an incomplete picture of what that program is and what it actually does.

Given, however, the level of compensation that contingent faculty receive for their work, institutions should not expect their full involvement in the culture and life of the department. Yet we can’t assume that they lack the desire or the expertise for this. Because most institutions don’t have the resources to support tenure-line instructors in the teaching of first-year writing courses, contingent faculty shape college composition in ways that existing scholarship has not yet fully explored. We can no longer afford, as a discipline, to support writing programs that exclude contingent faculty from decision-making processes that affect how and what we teach students in composition courses.

Opening Statement: Lisa Arnold

I hesitate, in this short statement, to claim I can offer any solutions to the many barriers faced by contingent faculty in composition. Rather, I will expose a gap between two strands of composition scholarship that, if bridged, might better address shared goals related to contingent faculty and the future of the discipline. In *Terms of Work for Composition*, Bruce Horner argues that “we must abandon” the divisions habitually imagined between “intellectual” labor and the “material conditions of that labor.” Instead, he argues, we should illuminate the tensions that emerge between these seemingly dichotomous elements of our “work” (28–29). I am interested in extending Horner’s argument to explore a tension between the ostensibly separate intellectual and material sides of “work” that emerges between what I call activist and disciplinary strands of composition scholarship. Such an exploration is important because
these conversations share concerns about the poor working conditions experienced by contingent faculty. For scholars working within each vein, improvement in the material conditions of contingent faculty means improvement for the field as a whole. Underlying this exploration is an assumption that the rhetorics contained within both strands of scholarship hold significant consequences for contingent faculty.

Activist scholarship is most explicitly concerned with the material, lived conditions of contingent faculty and proposes solutions for the local and institutional, but not disciplinary, problems that enable exploitive practices (see, for example, Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola; Fontaine and Hunter; Schell and Stock). In contrast, disciplinary scholarship intervenes at the “intellectual” level, proposing ways in which composition might define itself more clearly as a legitimate discipline—a project that involves, implicitly at least, shedding the discipline’s embarrassing legacy of unjust labor practices (see, for example, Kathleen Blake Yancey’s and Susan McLeod’s separate proposals for the establishment of a writing major; College English’s recent symposium, “What Should College English Be?”; and Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle’s proposal that first-year composition become an “Introduction to Writing Studies” course). Although all disciplinary scholarship implicates contingent faculty—as curricular or disciplinary changes carry immediate and profound (material) consequences for them—it rarely concerns itself directly with this population. When such scholarship does explicitly acknowledge composition’s exploitive practices (see, for example, Sharon Crowley), it tends to downplay the consequences of the proposal for this population, almost as though what’s “best” for the discipline is more important than the everyday reality of those who work within it.

This divide between activist and disciplinary rhetorics in composition scholarship presents a dichotomy between the material and intellectual that could more productively be understood as mutually constitutive, not oppositional, elements of composition’s work. That is, if we agree that these strands of scholarship share the common goal of improving working conditions for contingent faculty, which in turn will help legitimize the discipline, then both strands of scholarship are limited when they do not seriously consider the other (material or intellectual) side of composition’s work. I contend, therefore, that if we share these goals for professional equity and disciplinary legitimation, then future scholarship should aim to acknowledge both the material and intellectual aspects of the work of the profession.

Opening Statement: Nathalie Singh-Corcoran and Laura Brady

The prompt that guides our opening statement asks, “What barriers stand in the way of full participation of contingent faculty in the profession, and how can those barriers be overcome?” Like any good prompt, it leads to further questions. We find ourselves wondering just how stable the “profession” remains. After all, our English departments look significantly different than they did just twenty years ago.
We are particularly interested in the small but growing number of non-tenure-line appointments in writing program administration. These positions raise questions about the complexities of service and how writing program administration work “counts” in faculty evaluation.

Many of our professional organizations have already taken up the contingent faculty issue. For instance, the Association of Departments of English (ADE) Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing concludes its report “Education in the Balance” with several recommendations to ensure that all faculty members receive benefits, salary increases, opportunities for professional development, and a say in curriculum and governance. The report further recommends that departments attend carefully to their numbers of contingent faculty and remain conscious of the need to hire, retain, and promote these colleagues. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and ADE present similar reports (for ADE’s, see Laurence). These official statements all offer valuable recommendations, but we still need to address the specific needs and concerns of non-tenure-line writing program administrators (WPAs), especially with respect to annual evaluation, workload, job stability, and protection in the absence of tenure.

For example, what specific factors do departments and job candidates need to consider before creating or accepting a full-time, non-tenure-line position? Although we recognize that situations vary, we suggest that departments and job candidates carefully examine the following:

- The stability of the position in terms of an equitable salary scale and renewable funding
- The centrality of the position in terms of department, college, and university goals
- The integration of the position as a fully participating member of the department community with a voice in governance
- The transparency of evaluative procedures for the position to assist in equitable annual reviews and promotions
- Strategies to protect this position’s academic freedom in the absence of tenure

We propose a shift away from individual faculty roles and workloads to focus instead on the larger department and university context to which the work contributes. A department’s collective effort can provide a framing context for recognizing and valuing the contributions of non-tenure-line faculty, especially those who serve as WPAs.

Opening Statement: Maggie Christensen

Many efforts are currently underway to “stabilize the faculty infrastructure” in higher education (AAUP Committee on Contingency and the Profession), mostly by converting full-time contingent faculty positions to the tenure line or by providing some other type of continuous employment certificates, as recommended by MLA,
In the meantime, institutions need to determine how the concepts of review and promotion apply to their contingent faculty in order to improve the status and working conditions for these faculty members.

The documents and policies designed to empower, protect, and reward faculty in contingent positions have generally not kept pace with the growth of these positions, effectively assigning these instructors, intentionally or not, to a second-class status within their institutions. The review of full-time, non-tenure-line (FTNTL) faculty needs to be undertaken with the same seriousness applied to tenure-line faculty, accompanied by tangible rewards for promotion. Implementing a robust, substantive promotion process is just one part of a move toward consistency in contracts, reviews, and rewards for contingent faculty.

After six years of my being an FTNTL faculty member at my institution, with highly meritorious reviews each year, my promotion process was delayed and abbreviated because of administrative bureaucracy and lack of policy concerning my contingent position. When my department voted to rank me “Distinguished” in both teaching and service, and to recommend promotion (which I received), I was pleased, of course, with this support and recognition of my work. But I was also disappointed that I could not go through the same intense evaluation process required of my tenure-line colleagues. Whether deliberate or unintentional, the message sent to me, especially from the college level, was that positions like mine aren’t “real” faculty ones and do not warrant the same scrutiny afforded to tenure-line positions.

Institutions of higher education that rely on FTNTL positions would be well served by engaging in a substantive review process that includes promotions based on performance. When I refer to a robust or substantive promotion process, I mean something more than relying on student evaluations, a teaching narrative, or perhaps a peer observation to demonstrate teaching performance; this process would include teaching portfolios, faculty development activities, collaborative teaching efforts, teaching reflections, and statements of teaching philosophy. Applying SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) to “make teaching visible” (Gere xii) would also help to professionalize review for FTNTL faculty.

The process itself would help to guide faculty toward what is valued in these positions by the department and the discipline, such as quality teaching and service, and thus would work on a formative as well as summative level. A substantive review process also demonstrates the FTNTL faculty’s work—such as attendance and presentations at conferences, publications on pedagogy, and important service work at all levels of the institution—to a wider audience beyond the department. At the same time, this process requires institutional commitment to the FTNTL faculty and highlights the kinds of support required by the instructors, including job security, due process, and opportunities for faculty development. Because these policies and documents help protect academic freedom and fair working conditions,
implementing a robust review and promotion process for FTNTL faculty will benefit all faculty members.

Opening Statement: Ed Nagelbout and Julie Staggers

Contingent faculty play a vital—but unappreciated—role at most colleges and universities. Although we might be stating the obvious, often the primary barriers that we must overcome as WPAs are our own prejudices and ideals about teachers of writing. Changing policies and spearheading initiatives are necessary, but confronting some of our core beliefs about "good" teaching is even more important.

Although everyone agrees that supporting contingent faculty is imperative, discussions of how WPAs support them focus primarily on miscast ideals of indoctrination and surveillance promoted by position statements from such bodies as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) (in particular, see CCCC's 1982 "Preparation" statement and TYCA's 2004 "Guidelines"). These documents, although well intentioned and not without merit, generally define good teaching in terms of doing "more" without considering the reality of teaching as a contingent faculty member. They fail to consider lack of security; they fail to consider a standard workload; and, more important, they describe expectations in terms of "characteristics" without considering the kinds of support necessary to develop skills for good teaching over time.

We believe that every WPA has an ethical responsibility to contingent faculty, a commitment that uses support structures to provide more and privilege less, a more humane, practical approach to teaching expectations. All administrative support for contingent faculty, especially, must begin from a ten-hour-a-week perspective. This means that if four courses are considered full time, then a trained teacher should not be expected to spend more than ten hours per week on any one section. This includes time spent in class, time spent in office hours, time spent preparing for class, and time spent responding to and evaluating student writing.

The term trained teacher assumes that all writing programs provide an appropriate mentor or preparation program for anyone teaching a particular course for the first time. However, once the teachers have been trained, they still need more, in the form of significant support that helps them become more effective and more efficient. Support includes workshops, program-specific course and classroom materials, background readings, pedagogical materials, classroom activities, assessment and evaluation materials, and any processes or procedures necessary for success in a particular program.

Too often in the past, an overenthusiastic administrator would construct workshops and create policy without considering workload, thereby forcing contingent faculty in particular to take on unmanageable burdens. Teachers should not have to
do "overtime" to do their job well. Traditionally, support has been designed only to enhance the quality of the course and the quality of the teaching. Although these certainly remain important cornerstones, ethical administrators must also consider professional development activities in terms of expected workload, with the ten-hour-a-week expectation in mind. Ethically responsible support should reduce the workload of teachers by helping contingent faculty meet the ten-hour-a-week expectation. Our job as WPAs is to make their job easier.

**Follow-Up Questions**

**Moderators:** Your opening statements have focused, in large part, on the responsibility of rhetoric and composition programs, of English departments, and of larger university structures to more fully recognize and value (through word and deed) the professional roles, opportunities, and conditions of contingent faculty employment. Programs and units, you have argued, should raise the professional status of contingent faculty by developing a culture that honors their experience, includes them in faculty governance, and deepens their expertise. You have argued, among other concerns, for

- including contingent faculty in governance and decision making;
- recognizing that non-tenure-line faculty roles and responsibilities often extend into administration, necessitating an examination of the rewards (or lack of) for these efforts;
- providing meaningful evaluation and promotion standards and processes;
- resisting traditional strategies of surveillance and indoctrination, and moving instead toward boldly creative and equitable solutions such as Ed Nagelhout and Julie Staggers's ten-hour-a-week standard.

As you reconsider this list of possible institutional strategies, please address the approaches that seem best or most promising.

**Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano:** The first and most important consideration is to recognize that contingent faculty is not a blanket category. We cannot make recommendations for institutional strategies that address the status of members of our profession who work off the tenure track without considering their diverse backgrounds and varying levels of expertise.

The experiences of participants in this forum illustrate that contingent faculty contribute to English departments in many different ways, showing that contingent status can mean very different things both for institutions and for non-tenure-line professionals in our discipline. Although contingent employment sometimes creates job insecurity and uncertainty, it can also provide rich and often evolving opportunities for those who don’t want (or aren’t yet ready for) the inflexible tenure structure at most colleges and universities.
It’s also complex and challenging for us to make recommendations for institutional change without first looking at local needs, which are invariably shaped by the student populations that institutions serve. Contingent positions give departments the flexibility to adapt programs to meet the often rapidly changing needs of their students. We can’t view contingency itself as a problem that needs solving, because it works for most institutions and for many members of our profession in some situations or at certain points in their lives. We also can’t assume that contingent faculty have nothing to offer their departments beyond teaching classes; they might even be qualified for tenure-line positions if their circumstances were different.

Acknowledging this, we have several suggestions for approaches that would create a stronger sense of disciplinary responsibility. Administrators and tenure-line faculty should be encouraged to invite contingent faculty members into discussions about programs. They should also be encouraged to extend university resources to such faculty. Ideally the resources would include not just the material conditions that make work possible, but also competitive funding for instructors who want to attend conferences, present at them, conduct research, or purchase materials to support projects. Departments should recognize that often, contingent faculty have the preparation that graduate training in English provides, so their experience should be used to strengthen writing programs and other areas of English that depend on the work that they do.

Nathalie Singh-Corcoran and Laura Brady: All of our opening statements speak in some way to compensation, contracts, or working conditions, but none of us really addresses the type of alliances that will help achieve goals both locally and in the profession at large. Karen Thompson suggests that we need to build not only internal collegiality between full-time and part-time teachers, but also external alliances with students, parents, communities, alumni, and legislators so that everyone knows what’s at stake (193). These alliances are crucial if we are to tell a new story that dispels myths about the limited qualifications and transience of contingent faculty. Alliances are also necessary if we are to shift away from narratives about how contingent faculty save institutions money, to a new frame that emphasizes the costly long-term consequences for higher education when reliance on part-time labor becomes commonplace.

Maggie Christensen: The academic structure we’ve always known has changed dramatically even in the past decade, and it’s time for us to recognize that the two-tier system for full-time faculty is neither fair nor conducive to quality education.

Let’s make all lines tenurable for full-time faculty who are known as contingent but who, in reality, are not. Let’s change our fundamental conceptions of what tenure means (and who is “worthy” of it) and develop different criteria for tenure depending on the line (teaching, research, administrative, or some combination). I agree with Holly and Joanne’s assertion that English departments rely on contingency to some
extent (because of, among other issues, changes in courses and the need for a department’s flexibility), but in reality many of us work year after year, deeply involved in the department’s decision making and service, and yet are classified as contingent. Contingency in many cases has become an excuse for an administration not to offer job security or rewards for many of its full-time faculty members.

I am well aware of all the arguments against converting these positions to the tenure line, including concerns over cost or management flexibility, and even concerns that the “standards” of a program will be lowered. As this forum has made clear, contingency does not equal “teaching only,” nor does it refer only to those faculty members without terminal degrees. Nathalie and Laura are right when they argue that it’s time to tell a story that “dispels myths about the limited qualifications and transience of contingent faculty.”

Ed Nagelhout and Julie Staggers: We have found that the biggest problems for contingent faculty arise from a lack of programmatic thinking. In our experience, when a writing program is not developed as a program, when the only coherence and consistency come from common course numbering, when teachers are left to their own devices (or given “academic freedom”), contingent faculty suffer. This might occur because of an overworked or underprepared WPA, the lack of a WPA, or an overworked or underprepared curriculum committee. For us, all of the suffering inflicted upon contingent faculty—in all of the various guises described in these opening statements—occurs because they are first marginalized and then isolated. We realize that this is not new information, but we believe that strength comes only in the collective, especially for contingent faculty.

As WPAs, we want contingent faculty members to participate, we want them to offer their insight and experience, and we want them to work to be better teachers. We want them to be good employees, but that is all. Although Holly and Joanne make a good argument for inclusion, we disagree that contingent faculty members should have any real say in the “decision-making processes that affect how and what we teach students in composition courses.” They are contingent faculty for a reason. In our experience, the vast majority of contingent faculty members (part-time instructors, adjuncts, and even the FTNTL that Maggie describes) do not have the training or the expertise to make large-scale curricular decisions for a writing program. That is not their job. For us, this is a programmatic issue, not an “academic freedom” issue. This does not mean that we don’t value their input, but we were hired as WPAs for a reason.

In point of fact, part-time instructors—whether they stay with us for two semesters or ten—have been hired to teach our course in our program. Individual instructors are free to teach to their particular strengths and, to some extent, their interests, if assessment measures show that students are achieving the learning outcomes specified for the course.
Our job is to provide the vision and assessment methods to keep the program on course, and to provide material support so that instructors can teach to their strengths and interests without sacrificing the program’s need to provide equivalent learning experiences to students in sixty sections a year. By equivalent, we don’t mean identical classroom environments or emphases, but rather that students across sections demonstrate the same competencies at the end of the course. Standardizing our program by ensuring that all sections are using the same textbook, syllabi (with a Chinese menu of options for configuring projects over the course of the semester), rubrics, and assessment measures makes it possible for us to honor our ten-hour-a-week commitment to instructors.

Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano: We agree that taking an administrative perspective is highly important, and we concur with Ed and Julie that a program must have “vision and assessment methods” and “material support so that instructors can teach to their strengths and interests without sacrificing the program’s need to provide equivalent learning experiences to students in sixty sections a year,” which they specify as achievement of the same competencies.

Where we part ways is how we view the role of contingent faculty specifically within English departments and, for us, more broadly within the profession. In their response, Ed and Julie write, “We want them to be good employees, but that is all.” We don’t have to invoke the concept of academic freedom, which applies primarily but not exclusively to research interests and responsibilities, to disagree with this point. As the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing notes, “[O]nly 32% of faculty members in English, across all institutions, hold tenured or tenure-track positions” (4). It’s clear that failing to involve contingent faculty in substantive ways with shaping the program of a particular department means ignoring substantial numbers of the teaching staff at any given institution. As a result, we would define “thinking programmatically” as a department availing itself of the pool of knowledge, expertise, and experience that this majority of their first-year writing instructors brings to their classrooms—beyond “valuing their input,” as Ed and Julie state.

We also want to question their claims that “[t]hey are contingent faculty for a reason” and that “the vast majority of contingent faculty (part-time instructors, adjuncts, and even the FTNTL that Maggie describes) do not have the training or the expertise to make large-scale curricular decisions for a writing program.” Although we don’t want to devalue the expertise that WPAs bring to their positions, we would support a program model where contingent faculty have a voice in—and a “real say” in—the development of writing programs, partly because graduate training, even pre-PhD, is professional preparation in the field. Additional years of teaching experience cultivate a level of expertise that does enable contingent faculty to contribute to program decision making.
Nathalie Singh-Corcoran and Laura Brady: One of the problems with the ten-hour-a-week frame is that it reinforces the sense that contingent faculty are hourly wage workers who, as Ed and Julie claim, “do not have the training or the expertise to make large-scale curricular decisions for a writing program.” We disagree. Contingent faculty are credentialed professionals who frequently spend years at the same institution gathering invaluable expertise with students.

Ed Nagelhout and Julie Staggers: We are committed to a participatory workplace, but skeptical about allowing contingent faculty a decision-making voice about larger programmatic or curricular issues. We are most uncomfortable with contingent faculty taking on administrative responsibilities without clear definitions of expectations and rewards in place. And although we certainly would support meaningful promotion standards and processes for contingent faculty, we are mostly unfamiliar with this administrative possibility at our university. This is a much larger issue that needs to be addressed in much greater detail at the local level, with clear advocates among the tenure-line faculty.

The notion that people should actually be paid for the work they do and not work “off the clock” (especially when they are not generously paid to begin with) is not shocking everywhere, but it is shocking here. We are advocates of Michel Foucault’s approach to remaking institutions through discourse by effecting small changes at the bottom and letting them trickle up (see Porter et al.; Sullivan and Porter).

Lisa Arnold: Although all of us agree that contingent faculty have been traditionally undervalued and underappreciated in the academy, and that improvement of their status is a key concern, our various opening statements reveal disagreements about the roles (that should be) played by contingent faculty and the values that attend these roles. Holly and Joanne are most interested in “long-term contingent faculty at two-year institutions,” whose “expertise and experience,” they argue, differs significantly from those of other contingent faculty—such as “graduate assistants and short-term lecturers.” Nathalie and Laura concern themselves with full-time, non-tenure-line WPAs, especially through questions surrounding the “complexities of service and how writing program administration work ‘counts’ in faculty evaluation.” And Maggie is particularly troubled by the way that departmental review and promotion processes work to undervalue full-time, non-tenure-line faculty. I am concerned that identifying certain members of this already marginalized population as “different from” other contingent faculty members suggests that those who have “put in the time” or who hold full-time or administrative positions are somehow more valuable than—or at least worth spending more time on—those with less experience or fewer classes and responsibilities. Even in the discourse of those who are most invested in changing the terms of the debate so as to improve the working conditions of contingent faculty, the debate continues to be dictated by the very hierarchies of value that we mean to work against.
Ed and Julie offer a different definition of contingent faculty, arguing that contingent faculty should not have a say in curricular or program development because they “do not have the training or the expertise” to participate meaningfully in such conversations. They contend, ultimately, that WPAs have an “ethical responsibility” to support contingent faculty, both in terms of training and in a clear reduction of each instructor’s workload to a ten-hour-a-week-per-course standard. Although their warrant for this understanding of contingent faculty is primarily practical—“[w]e want them to be good employees, but that is all”—their definition forecloses the multiple ways in which writing teachers can be understood, ways that others in the forum (including me) would define as more appropriate. For example, Holly and Joanne both contradict and complicate Ed and Julie’s proposal when they argue that “contingent faculty are at the heart of teaching and learning in first-year composition; excluding them from conversations about program goals and changes paints an incomplete picture of what that program is and what it actually does.” This important point suggests that before assuming we know what’s best for what is obviously a highly diverse population, it might be more ethical to ask individual faculty members how they would define themselves and what role they want to play in our writing programs.

We have collectively defined the needs of contingent faculty according to the standards set up by the modern university—standards that promote hierarchies of, and assumptions about, intellectual work that have been historically oppressive for contingent faculty in particular. In the opening statements and discussions that follow, words such as performance, expertise, responsibility, review, and evaluation are used repeatedly, revealing an implicit belief that it is appropriate to expect contingent faculty members to “work their way” up the academic ladder in ways similar to the processes of tenure already in place. This seems problematic, however, in the sense that it pits contingent faculty members, who already lack power, status, and security, against one another for more prestigious (but still contingent) positions. And further, because contingent faculty members are ostensibly evaluated (at least in part) by department heads and other tenured faculty, oppressive structures of power remain intact. A more critical analysis of the discourse we accept and use can help us better understand whether and how it prevents us from truly disrupting traditional processes of power.

In my opening statement, I suggested that we need to pay attention to how composition scholarship works to make and perpetuate distinctions between the material and the intellectual in counterproductive ways; I argued that making, and maintaining, these distinctions actually works against the purposes explicitly defined by scholars writing activist and disciplinary scholarship. Although I have moved away from the specifics of that opening statement in my response here, my primary concern remains the same: in what ways do our professional rhetorics delimit the
ways we read, write, and think about contingent faculty in rhetoric and composition? I ask this question and present my analysis of our discussion because I believe our professional rhetorics, left unexamined, might prevent us from acting collectively in ways that will meaningfully disrupt deeply embedded structures of power that exist even within our scholarly discourse.

Closing Statements

Moderators: In your discussion, you’ve challenged one another’s perspectives on a range of issues and called attention to

- the need for local approaches that are responsive to local needs and are also responsible to the disciplinary expectations and expertise of the profession;
- the need for a clear change in direction, such as arguing for the wholesale conversion of contingent positions to tenure-line positions, clear limits on the amount of time devoted to teaching a single course, full-time professional positions for writing faculty, and so on;
- the need for alliances and/or the need for a voice in decision making;
- the need to construct and share new stories of contingency.

Please consider these as points of departure as you develop your closing statements.

Closing Statement: Nathalie Singh-Corcoran and Laura Brady

How have we, as a profession and as citizens, let higher education come to the point where our institutions rely on underpaid and undervalued contingent faculty? As we conclude this forum, we think it’s worth a quick review of the issues that have led to our increasing dependence on contingent labor—and the stories associated with that reliance.

Too often, the story that justifies an increasing reliance on contingent faculty is framed in terms of cost-saving measures. We are all aware of the decline in government support for higher education and institutions’ subsequent need to raise tuition rates to the point that higher education is becoming out of reach for more and more people. Roger Baldwin and Jay Chronister note other economic factors, such as increased institutional costs associated with delayed retirement for existing faculty and new costs required for the purchase, maintenance, and administration of new technologies (15, 18). Although we all have to confront these economic realities, it’s time to reframe the contingent faculty story to demonstrate long-term economic issues and costs. Specifically, we need to look at what happens to the quality of instruction when universities do not support all faculty members in ways that encourage professional renewal and growth.
We are particularly interested in the ways that WPAs can help frame the stories we tell. We support Linda Adler-Kassner’s vision of the WPA as activist. She asserts, “By changing stories at a local level and then working outward to our communities and with our colleagues, we can make a difference” (22). But the WPA perspective is only part of the story. We also need stories that recognize the contributions of contingent faculty and the need for material conditions that make it possible for them to provide quality education. We need stories that affirm the benefits of professionally active colleagues regardless of rank or status. We need stories that demonstrate that a renewal of funding for higher education benefits everyone.

On our campus, our next step is to gain institutional support for policies that transform contingent faculty into continuing faculty with longer-term contracts, and to secure resources necessary to sustain their professional growth. To do this, we will need to emphasize the story about the essential roles that contingent faculty play for our students and on our campus—and do our best to get that story out to colleagues, administrators, and the community.

We also realize that the contingent faculty story has to stay visible not just locally but nationally. This forum helps in that effort, but we would like to see working conditions for contingent faculty become a regular and ongoing feature in our journals—and in venues that reach a broader audience.

Closing Statement: Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano

What is most important to us as we close this forum is to reinforce our position that contingent faculty must have opportunities for full participation in the profession in ways that both acknowledge and develop their expertise.

Invitations and inclusion versus mandates and marginalization. We support inclusion (which we do not equate with exploitation) for contingent faculty in English departments. To us, this means both material and intellectual inclusion of contingent faculty at all types of institutions, especially long-term instructors working both part time and full time. Departments can invite but not require the participation of contingent faculty in the life of the department, whether through informal measures like reading circles and brown-bag discussion groups, or invited participation in more formal decision-making bodies like university senates, department meetings, and curriculum committees. This does not mean a requirement to work without compensation beyond their work in the classroom; invitations to participate must recognize that contingent faculty have diverse needs, desires, and career objectives.

Contingency: problem versus opportunity. Contingency is not in and of itself the problem. We support institutional changes that both add to the stability of contingent faculty and recognize the benefits of contingency for many instructors who view the flexible hours and variable course loads as opportunities rather than as income instability. For example, in October 2009, Chronicle of Higher Education reported that
nearly half of part-time adjuncts preferred this schedule, “some because they said it fit with the demands of family life” (Wilson). Consequently, we support many of the approaches discussed in this forum, and would add that part-time contingent positions should be preserved because they serve particular faculty and institutional needs.

*Mentoring versus supervision.* The model of inclusion that we promote provides mentoring rather than supervision. It involves a shared set of learning outcomes for first-year writing courses (and beyond), a set of recommended (but not required) materials to achieve those outcomes, meaningful opportunities for feedback from and discussions with professional peers about those outcomes, and equal access to professional development resources.

*A paradigm shift.* Contingent faculty already participate in both substantive material and intellectual ways in the profession. We encourage departments to move away from program models that are based on the assumption that contingent faculty lack the experience, knowledge, or training to contribute meaningfully to department culture.

**Closing Statement: Lisa Arnold**

The participants in this forum have all stressed the important role that institutions, administrators, and fellow faculty must accept in promoting ethical and equitable treatment of contingent faculty in individual departments, especially as this treatment works to recognize and compensate faculty members fairly for all work, inside and outside of the classroom. Several have also stressed the importance of including contingent faculty in the life of the department, especially ensuring that contingent faculty have access to consistent mentoring, training, and (material and intellectual) support.

These suggestions provide solid ground on which to continue advocating for equitable and ethical treatment of all faculty in the discipline. However, these proposals tend to maintain the binary between intellectual and material labor that I noted in my opening statement. For example, although inter- and extra-departmental alliances might strengthen our ability to act collectively, such “action” is primarily concerned with (and defined by) the acquisition of fair treatment as measured according to material standards. Likewise, although committee representation, brown-bag lunches, and equitable pay and status are all necessary to improve departmental life and ensure better communication among faculty, these improvements are materially grounded and can occur only at a local level.

As a discipline, rhetoric and composition can best be defined by the knowledge it makes; if our intellectual work does not ethically (or equitably) represent or consider the voices of contingent faculty, then we cannot hope for lasting change at the local level. Instead of being relegated to special issues or newsletters, contingent faculty should be invited to collaborate with and contribute to research outside of “activist”
forums such as this. We need to redefine and remeasure fair treatment according to both material and intellectual standards. I contend, therefore, that members of our profession who are committed to the improved conditions of contingent faculty have an ethical obligation to include and acknowledge the voices of contingent faculty *consistently* in our primary research and scholarship.

**Closing Statement: Maggie Christensen**

This forum has explored many of the complexities involved when considering full- and part-time contingent faculty in the profession. In many institutions, including mine, full-time, non-tenure-line faculty cross traditional borders and complicate old (stereotypical) notions of contingent faculty. For example, at my institution, we have (or have had) PhD, ABD, and MA level instructors and lecturers, many holding important department or college-wide administrative positions, and all of us teaching courses outside of the first-year writing program, in addition to our composition duties. We are actively involved in the service and decision making of the department, including curricular and program decisions.

One way “to emphasize the story about the essential roles that contingent faculty play for our students and on our campus” (as Nathalie and Laura rightly suggest) is to implement and enforce institutional policies concerning review of our contingent faculty. By using institutional channels, a complete accounting of those roles and valuable contributions will be made visible to the wider campus in a consistent and official manner, rather than only anecdotally. Further, as mentioned elsewhere, a robust review process will assist departments in setting specific expectations for each position and ensure the quality of teaching and service, while at the same time providing fair treatment to faculty members, especially if consistent rewards (for example, raises and extended contracts) are attached to the review process. To accomplish this task, departments must update and align their policies and documents to match the realities of their changing programs, and institutions must show commitment and appropriate support to these faculty members for them to be able to achieve their goals.

Of course, implementing a substantive review process is just one component in the larger goal of consistency in contracts, reviews, and rewards for these faculty members, which includes the move toward longer contracts or conversion to the tenure line, as well as guarantees of due process and faculty development support. Even when contingent positions are robustly reviewed and fully integrated into the life of a program, the question of job security—which can affect the quality of teaching or service—looms ever present. For many programs, implementation of a fair and robust review process, one that sets standards high and is applied with the same seriousness as that given to tenure-line faculty, is a realistic goal that will not
only benefit all faculty and students, but also inform the wider campus about the valuable contributions of contingent faculty.

**Closing Statement: Ed Nagelhout and Julie Staggers**

Our opening statement offered a practical (and local) first step for ethical WPAs to address the issue of working conditions for contingent faculty. We want to close with an attempt to articulate briefly one theoretical (and global) lens that informs this administrative thinking.

As we have stated throughout this forum, we can operate only from our own administrative (and tenure-line) perspective. This does not mean that we don’t understand the plight of contingent faculty: most WPAs “get it.” We, too, have hope. But we realize that perspective is insidious, and worry that we focus overmuch on “dialogue” as the first step in working through problems and resolving conflicts. In the absence of real understanding and shared warrants, dialogue devolves rapidly into dueling monologues, in which the person who isn’t speaking also isn’t listening, but instead contemplating what to say next. It’s very difficult to find shared warrants when we are so committed to resolving things to our liking, or to being heard.

So we offer a quote from Robert C. Koehler in his recent column on “civilized violence”: “Real power occurs in silence: the silence of reaching out, listening, understanding.” For us, *civilized violence* too often describes (if only metaphorically) the relationships of contingent faculty with a writing program, an English department, and the rest of the university. We all recognize civilized violence. Stories from our own circle run from the all-too-familiar—a desperate plea for work from a former (stellar) graduate teaching assistant left high and dry by the job market at a time when we have no part-time work to offer—to the obscene—a contingent faculty member at the local community college, who, while checking on the status of her overdue paycheck (delayed a month due to clerical error), was informed that she should “learn to budget better.” These are not isolated incidents. There are a million little horror stories of how the system exploits bodies, squanders talent, tramples hearts. But recognition is not enough.

As James Sosnoski once noted, “Institutions, like all social contracts, can be rewritten. However, this is not a simple process” (212). Neither is it a top-down process. In a corporate structure that does not accept change to the hierarchy easily or neatly, graciously or gracefully, the power of silence must never be the silence of oppression; instead, small improvements in working conditions occur from opening our senses to explore what we can accomplish right now with what we have, who we are, where we are. Drawing on the power of silence, in part, means abandoning unproductive whining or tilting at windmills in vain hope of achieving some sort of idealized equality and, in part, means quietly uncovering our shared warrants and
working together to enact real hope, those small changes that help remake the social and cultural space of our programs, departments, and institutions.

Administrators alone can do only so much. Reaching out, listening, and understanding are the hallmarks of the ethical WPA, and the power of “silence” is just a first step toward being responsive and responsible, toward thinking globally and acting locally, toward equity.

Notes

1. H. H. and J. G.: Some of these issues include office space, compensation, reward structures, and the devaluing of the doctorate. For example, see recent issues of *Forum: Newsletter for Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty in CCC* and the special issue of *Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 20, 2009).

2. L. A.: Crowley, for example, argues that as long as first-year composition is universally required—a requirement that maintains exploitative labor practices—composition will forever retain its “low” and illegitimate disciplinary status. Crowley acknowledges briefly that her proposal will negatively affect contingent faculty, noting rather flipantly that “some composition teachers may lose their jobs”; but, she argues without compelling evidence, the vertical curriculum she proposes instead will maintain a high demand (246).

3. L. A.: Here I am referring to the *Forum: Newsletter for Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty* published annually in both CCC and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TETYC)*. It is specially marked by wheat-colored pages that occupy the center of the journal, often shoved into the middle of a “standard” article, which virtually ensures that readers will flip past the “special” section (it’s marked) to continue the reading that was so rudely interrupted.

Works Cited


Thompson, Karen. “Faculty at the Crossroads: Making the Part-Time Problem a Full-Time Focus.” Schell and Stock 185–95.


