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## Forum on Identity

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## Forum on Identity

### Comments

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## Forum on Identity

**Angela Billia, Christopher Dean, Judith Hebb,  
Monica F. Jacobs, and Doug Sweet**

Moderators: Sue Doe and Mike Palmquist

### OPENING STATEMENTS

**M**oderators: How do the labels, assumptions, and speculations that are often associated with contingent faculty, in combination with depressed labor conditions, work to shape the contingent faculty member's sense of identity? And how do these factors also shape the views that others (students, other faculty, administrators, staff, parents, and the larger public) have of contingent faculty?

*Opening Statement: Doug Sweet*

After a decade or so of work by scholars such as Eileen Schell and others, one might be tempted to think that we've done away with the "A" word altogether.

We know there's very little that's "adjunctive" in the reality faced by contingent labor in composition programs. Many established faculty carve their academic lives through theoretical discussions of the day-to-day teaching done by their representatives in the classroom, contingent instructors.

As someone who toiled for a number of years as a freeway flyer, cobbling a living wage by hiring myself out to a handful of colleges at any given time, I have a good idea of the epistemological and pedagogical contortions needed to stay in good graces with institutions, writing programs, and my own tenuous sense of myself as a teacher of composition. As a current writing program administrator (WPA), I'm more convinced than ever that, until we dispense with the label of *adjunct* and all its concomitant fantasies contrived by stable faculty and departments, we won't be able to identify the exact nature of the work done by contingent labor at the site of delivery for those programs: the first-year-composition classroom.

What, after all, are the meat and potatoes of any writing program except those myriad sections of 100-level composition? Program administrators may delight

(as I do often) in lauding the rhetorical or theoretical sophistication of our writing programs, but that level of sophistication depends in large part on what contingent faculty are able to do with students in introductory courses. Setting and resetting intellectual horizons, passing along contemporary thinking about writing, emphasizing the agentic capacity of composition—all these fundamental components of what we might term *effective teaching* are left to those we value least if salary, lack of benefits, and departmental obscurity are any indication of value.

One of my first appointments was at a university that prided itself on delivering a “personalized education.” My name on the office door, however, was a faded dot matrix printout on pinwheel computer paper—not exactly a firm sign of institutional support. Although I represented the writing program in a vital and physical way, I was labeled as disposable for all to see.

I’d like to see this forum taken seriously. Let’s call this enormous block of dedicated teachers what they are: “contingent” faculty. Not only are their very livelihoods contingent upon the whims of WPAs, the fluctuations of the economy, and the pretended “professionalization” of the field, but the worth of any writing program itself is also contingent on the work they do. Maybe such a dialectical way of thinking would lead us to reformulate and reconceptualize what we mean by “contingent” labor. We can do more than hope; we can put language to work at a task long overdue.

*Opening Statement: Monica F. Jacobs*

In a 2004 article in *Academe* (American Association of University Professors [AAUP]), longtime contingent faculty member and activist John Hess talked about the “entrepreneurial adjunct phenomenon,” and raised concerns about how various conceptions of one’s value in the market could negatively impact professional identity. Hess’s concern raises an important question that literature about contingent faculty has remained silent on to date: how do contingent academics come to see themselves within the academic institutions in which they labor? Anecdotal evidence tells us that contingent faculty see and feel their status as outsiders, marooned on the borderlands of scholarship and inclusion in the academic lives of their “home” departments, but how this influences their work as teachers and scholars has not been quantified—and should be. Raising such questions about “homeless academics,” which contingent faculty arguably are, is another side of current conversations about how the conditions of contingency radiate out negatively into all areas of faculty work. If the 68.8 percent of faculty serving contingently as of 2007 feel homeless, silenced, and abandoned to the margins of academic life, what exactly can we claim is the state of our profession?

Labor conditions must shape individual senses of self, just as they shape work histories on CVs and tax forms. If we combine the facts of contingent academic labor conditions made clear by statistical data and anecdotal evidence (like that of Schell

and Vincent Tirelli) with theories about how the human mind shapes an identity, we can begin to see that the isolation and exile of contingent faculty common across the disciplines and across institution types create a body of faculty who are likely to see themselves as outsiders and outcasts, taking on and expressing all of the psychological traits thereof. The ultimate result of this movement toward increasing contingency, then, is in every sense a “disbanded professoriate” (Hess).

Arguments that focus on the teaching abilities of part-time faculty in gatekeeper courses, or on the positive effects of full-time contingent positions, or even on the tangible, day-to-day reality of contingency are, collectively, red herrings. They distract from the core issue that arises out of contingency in the academy: the disintegration of the American professoriate, a body that should be shaping the nature of higher education in and out of the classroom. Instead, with over two-thirds of all faculty members disengaged from their institutions and silenced by disenfranchisement, faculty in higher education are becoming little better than the still, small voice in the darkness. For too many years, tenure-line faculty have stopped their analyses of contingency by saying, “There, but for the grace of God, go I,” recognizing their privileged positions in the labor system. But they should see past that recognition, into the problematic lack of identity their contingent colleagues experience—because, as in all things American, the majority rules, and the faculty majority is contingent.

*Opening Statement: Angela Bilia*

I occupy a full-time, non-tenure-line position at a large public university in the Midwest. Many of my part-time colleagues envy my health and retirement benefits and the luxury of full-time employment. Yet, I have discovered that my position does not confer any real professional status in the university structure. As a matter of fact, what I have come to experience are the tensions between the values associated with professionalism and the organized structure of a bureaucracy of the university, where the teaching of literacy is still regarded as menial work that can be managed, and where attempts at professionalization have been met by resistance from some senior faculty.

Since my initial hire as an instructor, which required a PhD, I’ve seen my position reclassified into college lecturer, a less secure rank. In this position, I’ve encountered conflicts that are indicative of the subordinate role that composition plays in departments of English, such as the inability to run my classes the way I want and my department’s reliance on a system of teaching assessment that turns out to be a management and control mechanism for contingent faculty. Another crucial conflict I’ve encountered is the senior faculty’s fear of de facto tenure, a fear that proved to be instrumental in the reclassification of my position to a lower level, further removed from direct involvement in curriculum decisions and with a cap on the number of contract renewals. At the heart of this conflict lies the fact that

contingent positions might well represent the symbolic class distinctions that the tenure system strives to maintain, distinctions that also define degrees of legitimacy, ownership, and professional integrity associated with tenure.

Richard Ohmann's observations about the complex ripple effects of postmodern capitalism in higher education and Frank Donoghue's analysis of the demise of tenure serve as the backdrop for my analysis of the de-professionalization of composition and devaluation of literacy instruction. The lesser status of contingent faculty in our departments (and institutions) denies us legitimacy and citizenship as professionals, despite our credentials, experience, and professional activity and presence, and confers instead a symbolic resident alien identity, one complicated by the misunderstandings and marginalization it entails. The political implications of our status include labeling composition as a subordinate field and casting the work of literacy teachers as peripheral and disposable. Although full-time, non-tenure-line positions have been regarded as a solution to the exploitation of literacy workers in English departments, the lack of tenure—along with the professional status and integrity it bestows, at least in the current system—means that such efforts won't be anything but quick fixes that further entrap and demoralize teachers of composition and literacy and devalue the field of composition. What might ultimately be needed is a reconceptualization of tenure as a form of inclusion rather than separation and alienation.

*Opening Statement: Judith Hebb*

At the small private college where I served as WPA for eight years, no faculty positions carried tenure. However, I was fully committed to the institution and my work as teacher and administrator. Unfortunately, despite my substantial professional contributions to the institution, I learned that I was expendable.

I never viewed myself as a "contingent" faculty member. I had a "permanent" full-time position. My assumption that I had a stable future, built on the support and respect of my colleagues, proved that our professional identities can change unexpectedly with the political climate of the institution.

My personal and academic world came crashing down in 2009. Having moved up to the rank of professor, I was teaching writing, literature, and linguistics courses, directing the writing program, and chairing the Department of Humanities and General Studies. I was also under the impression that I, the sole writing specialist, had constructed a "bulletproof" identity and a positive ethos. Even though we signed renewable one-year contracts, I assumed that my de facto WPA title secured my authority and status. I had constructed a strong teaching presence on campus and was mentoring adjuncts. Besides my WPA work, I had created the English program, initiated the English major, and chartered a chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. My identity embodied the English program; certainly my job was secure!

In May, I was laid off from my job following the arrival of a new academic dean who did not understand or support the writing program, the English program, or my contributions to the college. In the twinkling of an eye, my authority as director of the writing program and department chair was snatched away, my teaching record was expunged, and the writing and English programs were dismantled. I found myself replaced by part-time, contingent faculty working without benefits at much lower salaries. I was back on the job market, seeking an academic space where my teaching and administrative experience would be valued and secured and I could make a positive contribution as a teacher and scholar.

My cautionary tale adds another layer to the notion of contingency. My experience problematizes the notion of professional (and personal) identities that we construct for ourselves. Unfortunately, for contingent faculty, especially those in administrative positions, these identities are open to reconstruction by others without warning.

*Opening Statement: Christopher Dean*

Scott Jaschik, writing in 2008 for *Inside Higher Ed* about the “adjunctification of English,” draws attention to a Modern Language Association (MLA) report about “shrinking the role of tenure-track professors in English instruction.” One doesn’t have to read too deeply into the article to understand that what concerns MLA most is the increasing numbers of adjunct faculty vis-à-vis full-time, tenured faculty (par. 4). In the seventh paragraph, Rosemary G. Feal, executive director of MLA, says, “The impetus for the report [. . .] was a sense that departments were no longer in balance, and that those off the tenure track were increasingly doing the teaching, *without an appropriate level of involvement from the tenure track*” (qtd. in Jaschik; emphasis added).

The language I have emphasized shows how MLA and organizations such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), in its 1989 position statement, “Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing,” claim that tenure-line professors are needed to ensure quality instruction. The CCCC position statement, for example, claims that, “[t]o provide the highest quality of instruction, departments offering composition and writing courses should rely on full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members who are both prepared for and committed to the teaching of writing” (par. 6).

As a full-time lecturer in the University of California system, I find this attitude intriguing. Although MLA and CCCC seem sympathetic to the working conditions of their non-tenure-line colleagues, both organizations have used the “adjunct problem” to argue for more tenure-line faculty, typically to oversee the curriculum and insure “excellent” education.

The CCCC statement is particularly interesting in its juxtaposition of part-time and full-time faculty (the terms the statement uses most often). Using the software program Concordance, I found the two terms paired thirty-five times (within twenty words of each other) in the document. Most of the pairings are simple comparisons between the two. However, on several occasions, it becomes clear that the relationship between the two groups is understood to involve a seemingly obvious hierarchy in which it makes sense that

[p]art-time (and adjunct, non-tenure-track) faculty members are far less likely to receive regular evaluation and feedback from professional colleagues or to have opportunities to interact with colleagues, serve on committees, participate in faculty governance, attend professional conferences, or engage in research. Because of this, a smaller base of full-time faculty members carries this burden in addition to recruiting and screening the part-timers. (CCCC Executive Committee)

The CCCC position statement and the MLA statement are problematic in their understanding of how non-tenure-line faculty should be “read.” Because non-tenure-line faculty are not as “engaged in research,” the mechanism for raising the salaries of tenure-line faculty, they are not to be involved (particularly from the perspective of the MLA position statement) in the evaluation of the teaching performance of faculty in tenure lines (CCCC Executive Committee; ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing).

The time has come to challenge these assumptions. Contingent faculty regularly bring their expertise, engagement, and commitment to composition programs across the country. The wider field of English studies needs to understand that constructing contingent faculty as a problem to be solved does no good for faculty generally, and no good for the field as a whole.

#### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

**Moderators:** Chris offers a useful analysis of the rhetorical construction of contingent faculty by our professional organizations. To support his analysis, he notes that both the 1989 CCCC position statement and a recent MLA report support the argument that tenure-line faculty are needed to ensure instructional quality in writing courses. The clear implication is that the authors of these documents have accepted the need for a two-tier system in which tenure-line faculty provide curricular and pedagogical direction to their colleagues in contingent positions. This idea seems to have been internalized by others in the field, as suggested by Angela’s experience in her eroding full-time, non-tenure-line appointment. As Angela argues, the two-tier system is reflected in teaching assessments that serve as “management and control mechanisms” and job reclassifications that undermine job stability and maintain class distinctions. To what extent, then, do you find accurate Chris’s characterization of the CCCC and MLA positions on contingent faculty? And if it is accurate, what are



the implications of this characterization for our understanding of the professional identities of contingent faculty?

**Judith Hebb:** Unfortunately, I think Chris's characterization is accurate. Forums such as this one will help the underclass create a professional voice and draw the attention of those with more status to speak out for us. As our stories are made known, hopefully the door will open for us to create new identities that will be more beneficial to our field and to higher education. We clearly have our work cut out for us. I have answered several professional surveys over the past eight years that have failed to recognize that there are non-tenure-line, full-time positions when asking for the respondent's status.

**Angela Bilia:** Academia is aggressive. What's worse, it's passive-aggressive. Faculty, especially contingent faculty and graduate students, experience an aggression that parallels that of the corporate world. Deborah Tannen's analysis of this aggression in *The Argument Culture* underscores the role gender plays in how intensely this aggression is experienced, and in what scenarios. For women, graduate school is the boot camp for the rest of their lives in the academy (if they choose to stay), as they have to accept and internalize the gendered politics of academic culture. We did. We pay the price. Every day. Everywhere.

When tenured colleagues mentoring me in the reappointment process advised me to "tone things down," be "accommodating," "play the game," not be "aggressive," appear "humble," act like a nice "girl" who knows "her place," they were repeating the sexist clichés we have associated with the subordinate role women must play. Any analysis of language points to the symbolic significance of gender in our culture. Adjunctification, contingency, and subordination are manifestations of the feminization of our work.

**Monica F. Jacobs:** I find Chris's opening observation to be perfectly correct. Although these statements seem to offer support for contingent labor, they are used by organizations and departments to argue for a richer and deeper base of tenure-line faculty. This contradiction lies at the heart of all work on contingent academic labor in and out of rhetoric and composition. What is the goal in discussing this issue? More tenure lines? Better treatment and working conditions for contingent teachers? More parity among the academic classes? All of the above?

The answer varies with whom you ask. AAUP, for example, always turns the conversation toward more tenure lines—sometimes toward conversion of contingent positions into tenure-line or tenure-analogous appointments. (See the 2003 "Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession," as well as regulation 13 of "Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure," which deals with part-time appointments without any real acknowledgement of the full-time appointments that are also contingent. AAUP turns that conversation into ways to reduce contingent appointments each and every time.) MLA also uses this

sort of conversation to talk about tenure, although they are now giving in more fully to the broader conversation about contingent faculty within the profession, and not just how to change the labor structure. And CCCC and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) do the same thing. But so do individual faculty—from administrators on down to the contingent teachers themselves. I'm one of them. And without an answer to questions about the goals of conversations like this, can the conversations ever really end? Can contingent faculty ever distill a message out of all these disparate parts and change the rhetoric surrounding their own identities? Can they figure out what their identities are, really?

There are as many faces to contingency as there are possible goals in researching or working to change contingent academic labor. This is—partly—what makes it easy for professional organizations to make official policies and statements that marginalize us. I would love to say that these organizations have evolved past that in the intervening years (our first-year students weren't even born when the 1989 CCCC statement was written), but they have a message—stabilization and job security through tenure—they have stayed on for all these years, while we have been unfocused and lost in multiplicities—and, as a result, we have remained unvoiced.

**Christopher Dean:** Monica's observation about the unvoiced nature of contingent faculty identifies what is, in many ways, the "real problem" for those working as contingent labor. I think it's clear that not only do our organizations lack respect for the work done by contingent labor, but also our colleges and universities and, sadly, even we lack respect for that work. We need to respect and love the work we do as contingent faculty—and to convey that more powerfully to NCTE, CCCC, and ourselves.

However, I would say that we also need to go out and organize. We need to get contingent labor to understand that we are labor, and that the only way that we are likely to change the things that get in the way of pride in our work (things like not having offices, being appointed semester to semester despite years of service, and so on) is to organize around the one thing that institutions seem to value about us: our labor.

**Doug Sweet:** I'd ask somehow all the academic intelligentsia of rhetoric and composition, all those who make their living in large part by running programs, by publishing in the field, by fueling national discussions—I'd ask all of them to stand up and defend the theoretical premises so many preach in terms of what makes good writing instruction and who is qualified to teach it. I'd ask them to delineate to larger audiences that contingent labor is a problem not because it waters down instruction or weakens programs. They should shout the opposite—that writing instruction, in contradistinction from other fields, doesn't necessarily depend on PhD level accreditation to be excellent, but that those who perform this tremendously formative and important function should be treated like the professionals they are.

Not publishing in scholarly journals on some regulated schedule or not having tenure doesn't translate to weak or substandard teaching; in fact, students often receive much more intensive, personal, and concentrated help from writing teachers than they could ever expect from so-called research faculty. We've failed to admit this obvious lacuna in our established "stages" of professional development and, in the managed university, we've failed to make the case so that it's general knowledge to all parties involved. As English departments, we've by and large adapted to sweeping and fundamental changes in what we consider academically legitimate curricula: no longer is having a medievalist, a romantic, a Shakespeare and Milton and Chaucer expert, or even a marginalized "theory only" person considered absolutely essential. We ought to reframe our internal practices to match up to the realities we all know exist.

**Angela Bilia:** Encouraged largely by a general anti-intellectual climate, careerism (the popular belief that college is preparation for a career) and the conviction that first-year English is a fix-it "skills" approach (preparing students for the complexities of their future) have made the English composition course a battleground symbolically and literally. This has been adequately documented in numerous studies, and has already raised important questions about the nature of our course, who finances it and under what circumstances, the competing ideologies that permeate higher education in general, and, of course, the nature of our contingency—the question of the contingency of critical literacy in higher education (Brandt; Durst; Horner, *Terms* and "Traditions;" Ohmann; Shor).

Our institutions value us mostly in the utilitarian role we play: we fill the holes, we quiet the masses, we deal with the charge to fix the problems that underprepared high school graduates bring to college. We are the mechanics in the assembly line, plugging in little parts. Our departments love us because we teach the course that few tenured colleagues want to teach, and thus they appreciate the value we add to their professional lives (more time for them to research and publish).

Yet, at the same time, our schools treat us as unimportant and irrelevant to the rest of the "intellectual" production and learning that take place there. In institutional discussions where the productivity of individual departments is measured by the number of students enrolled in the major, English composition (by far the most populated course in total enrollments in any semester in the English department) is absent—except in the form of an appreciative, sympathetic smile and a parenthetical side remark. What is emphasized instead is the number of English majors graduating and the value this number adds to the English department. Ironically, however, the English department claims a significant share in the teaching that takes place at the institution through the first-year composition course, a financial benefit to the institution in terms of both high student enrollment and cheap labor. Teaching is thus regarded as hard work performed by the staff, the amorphous mass, but not as intellectual production.

Our departments echo this institutional assumption by means of a performance evaluation process that precisely duplicates the offense. Half of our performance depends on student approval, while the other half is vaguely defined by mention of faculty observations as well as other evidence of teaching, such as assignments, and so on—and none of these items is given precise weight or described in language associated with intellectual production. The service we provide does not count despite the fact that we are invited to participate in committees and that some of our courses involve service. Our intellectual contributions by means of our research, conference presentations, and ongoing engagement in pedagogy are also absent from our job descriptions. We are in a utopia—literally a no-place; what we do does not have a legitimate place to exist, as if the product of our teaching is completely cut off from any intellectual endeavor.

The identity of contingent faculty is fraught with contradictions, conflicts, and insecurities. In a two-tier system, it is almost impossible to experience fully the benefits of socialization and acculturation with your intellectual equals when you are regarded as an antagonist. Moreover, you never fully experience accomplishment as a professional when you are constantly treated as an apprentice who needs supervision and direction from those on top. When the assessment of contingent faculty depends only on what is currently termed “teaching”—a contentious category that in practice is treated as training in many ways similar to skilled labor—our value and the integrity of our intellectual production are diminished. We are constantly placed in the subservient position of having to seek approval, doubting and questioning the effectiveness of what we do, not fully experiencing the self-confidence necessary to affirm ourselves as professionals and participate as equal partners in the professional life of our institutions and departments.

#### CLOSING STATEMENTS

**Moderators:** Throughout the discussion in this forum, there’s been a movement from an individual sense of identity to reflections on a collective sense of identity. In your concluding statements, please reflect on the defining characteristics of contingent faculty as a group. In an ideal world—or perhaps simply a potentially realizable world—what identities do you imagine for contingent faculty in our discipline?

*Closing Statement: Monica F. Jacobs*

Sadly, I don’t need to imagine identities for contingent faculty in English studies. Not only am I a contingent academic, but I have been doing academic labor work publicly for long enough that people stop me at conferences, conventions, and meetings to tell me their stories. As individuals, contingent teachers are graduate students still fooling themselves into believing another semester of teaching will help their

job prospects; recent PhDs who think they are holding out for the right job in the right place; academics without doctoral training who entered a different job market where skill in the classroom was once valued more than another set of transcripts; and teachers who have been doing this for so long they don't know what else to do. Collectively, contingent faculty are the vast majority of teachers in American institutions of higher education—and, as Marc Bousquet claims in *How the University Works*, the teaching body serving as the face of rhetoric and composition at most universities around the country (158).

It is this collective and public identity that has served the field and contingent academics themselves the least, as writing programs and scholars increasingly seek to define themselves and their work beyond first-year composition. In the preface to his edited collection *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work*, Gary A. Olson explains that these “debates over the identity of the field” currently center on

the dispute over whether rhetoric and composition should be an intellectual as well as service discipline. That is, while many compositionists insist that all research, all inquiry in the field, should serve the sole purpose of furthering and refining the *teaching* of composition, many of us contend that although we desire to learn more about the teaching of writing or about our own writing processes, these are not the *only* intellectual concerns we should have as a discipline, that constituting rhetoric and composition as a discipline whose *raison d'être* is the teaching of writing is dangerously and unacceptably narrow and even, in some people's eyes, anti-intellectual. (xii; emphasis in original)

It seems that movement away from the idea of a service discipline could and should go hand in hand with movement away from contingent labor and its practices. Instead, however, the gap is widening between the service provided by writing programs and the valuable intellectual work that can be and is being done in this discipline.

As a result, little obvious chance exists for disciplinary solidarity among contingent teachers in this field and, if we follow Bousquet's logic, management likes it just fine, as contingent faculty remain disparate individuals in and out of the categories described above. Where does this leave us for a collective identity for contingent faculty? It leaves us with the challenge to construct this identity ourselves, perhaps one campus at a time and perhaps with a national—or international—Web-based movement. This kind of solidarity—collective and individual action for a collective purpose—should be at the front of conversations about contingent faculty identity. It's something I can imagine—and hope to see.

*Closing Statement: Judith Hebb*

As long as we are subject to the labeling of the elitist power structure of academia, “contingent” faculty will forever remain a disenfranchised underclass. First, the

definition of contingency needs to be opened up to include all of the kinds of positions we take on, as we have described them in this forum. Second, we need to be recognized for the professional contributions we make to higher education. Personally, I have never viewed myself as contingent to the production and delivery of academic knowledge; yet, the power to construct my own identity has been in the hands of others. I have become “other.”

In spite of the connotations associated with the word *contingent*, we are not part of the “backup” team for English studies. Because instruction in English is carried out mostly by faculty members who are capable but off the tenure track, the very identity of our field is contingent. We still have doubts about our collective identity, as evidenced by our ongoing discussions. If our discipline is ever going to be “professionalized,” both within our own discipline and in the eyes of other disciplines, we must shed stepchild and basement-dweller relationships. Until all faculty teaching English, and especially those of us teaching writing, are fully adopted into the family, we as a field will not enjoy equal status in academia.

As contingent faculty, perhaps we could change our collective identity to a more favorable term, such as *core faculty* or *support faculty*. We need professional participation in academic and political decisions. We need a voice as well as an identity. We need interaction and collaboration with tenure-line faculty and with one another. We need representation within our institutions. We need professional recognition in our organizations and publications. And if this doesn’t happen, we need to unite and form a collective political movement. Without us, English studies is a house of cards.

*Closing Statement: Doug Sweet*

Nick Nolte’s character in the film *North Dallas Forty* sums up the dynamic between management and labor in terms quite familiar to contingent laborers. “When I call it a business,” he says, “they call it a game. And when I call it a game, they call it a business.” Substitute “educational integrity” or “academic ethics” for “game,” and you’ll be staring at our collective predicament.

In the fancies of the “managed” university, this sleight of mind explains how claims of “personalized education,” so prevalent in our fabricated *sensus communis*, live comfortably next to notions of “outcomes per student hour.” We, as a discipline, as a field, as a *profession*, seem to have severed our guts from our brains (Micciche). What else explains such dysfunctional processes as separating the majority of instructors from any of the very material securities and opportunities commonly seen as cultural capital in our lives?

I’m a WPA who’s listed in department rankings as an instructor; I’m not speaking from some protected, insulated seat of superiority. As this discussion has proceeded, I’ve repeatedly been brought back to some salient words from Pierre Bourdieu:

Even in their most utopian images, students and academics remain imprisoned by the logic of the institution in its present form. [. . .] Because the academic system is never seen as the system of interdependence that it really is, the diagnoses put forward by its partners remain caught in the dichotomies that permit them to pass praise and blame back and forth to one another indefinitely. (23)

I'm suggesting that, if this forum is to be of any lasting influence, we ought to organize to re-politicize our discourse and practices. If our institutions are, in fact, businesses, then let's bargain as contingent laborers collectively, publicize our positions, put political pressure where it matters these days: on the public whose taxes support institutions, on every so-called academic discussion. In other words: let's be real. We're not just contingent labor in the disadvantaged sense; most every educational institution in the country's quality of undergraduate instruction is *contingent on our labor*. That's a reality we probably ought to profess and professionalize in our own ways.

I'd like to close, then, by referring to Perry Anderson's examination of ancient notions of manual, or lowest-level, labor in Greece because the patterns he identifies seem remarkably familiar and shed ideological light on the conditions we're all discussing:

Once manual labor became deeply associated with loss of liberty, there was no free social rationale for invention. The stifling effects of slavery on technique were not a simple function of the low average productivity of slave-labour itself, or even of the volume of its use: *they subtly affected all forms of labour*. [. . .] The structural constraint of slavery on technology lay [. . .] in *the mediate social ideology* which enveloped the totality of manual work in the classical world, contaminating hired and even independent labour with the *stigma of debasement*. [. . .] The divorce of material work from the sphere of liberty was so rigorous that the Greeks had no word in their language to even express the concept of labour, either as a social function or as personal conduct. Both agricultural and artisanal work were essentially deemed "adaptations" to nature, not transformations of it; they were both *forms of service*. (26; emphasis added)

We seem still to be working against a "mediate social ideology" which delimits contingent labor with a "stigma of debasement," making it clearly a "form of service." Until these paradigmatic realities are deconstructed, officially and socially, I fear we'll always be the ugly stepchild of the "professional" academy.

*Closing Statement: Christopher Dean*

Contingent faculty are freeway flyers, lecturers, and God knows what else in the eyes of people who "give" us an identity.

However, we can become much more. We can come to the sort of class consciousness that Joseph Harris describes in his 2000 article, where he calls on compositionists to "to form a new class consciousness centered on the issue of good

teaching for fair pay” (43). This seems a precondition to the sort of change in the identity of contingent faculty that the writers of this forum want to see.

But before this happens, we have to do something very uncomfortable as a field; we have to come to terms with a key point that Ira Shor makes in an interview with Leo Parascondola:

Without a doubt, in the past thirty years, Composition has been blessed by luminaries and pioneers who have opened up critical options to traditional instruction. [. . .] Yet, all this remarkable activity rests on a mountain of cheap labor, where too many women teachers are paid too little for too much work. (par. 2)

Composition has grown in a variety ways that we can be very proud of in the last thirty years. But that growth has come with a cost.

The position of tenured compositionists rests in part on the exploitation of “a mountain of cheap labor.” Tenured compositionists are often the “bosses” that Harris speaks of in his article, and, as I pointed out earlier, there is a way in which official documents created by NCTE and MLA position contingent faculty as a group that needs to be supervised and evaluated.

What would this change in identity and class consciousness involve? It could involve real discomfort. It’s likely to involve contingent faculty engaging in labor actions—as it did at University of California (UC) at Santa Barbara, and across the entire UC system, during the strike of 2002—because labor actions seem to be one of the best ways to get across the point that contingent faculty labor is valuable.

Finally, I want to build on what Doug said in his opening statement to this forum: “the worth of any writing program itself is contingent upon the work they [contingent faculty] do.” I want to extend Doug’s idea and say that the worth of the work that composition as a field does is contingent on the work that contingent faculty does.

Addendum: We haven’t explicitly made this connection, but in focusing on *contingent* as a multivariied concept, we might want to include that, in a rhetorical sense, “contingent” truth was predominately the purview of composition, of public oratory, of much argumentation. In contrast (and it’s more than a simple binary) to “absolute” or “capital *T* truth,” contingency was the realm of, and means to pursue, political agency.

*Closing Statement: Angela Bilia*

In his 2005 chair’s address to the CCCC convention, Doug Hesse prompted us to answer the question, “Who Owns Writing?” In his message, he stressed the increasing changing nature of writing as a self-sponsored activity. I’d like to revisit Hesse’s point in the context of our forum and the relevance it bears for contingent faculty for two important reasons: first, the responsibility that comes with self-sponsored activities in the context of the communities where they take place, and second, the responsibility of those who organize such activities and shape their ends. We are the writers of our own lives; our language is the measure of our success. What we



do in our classrooms and outside of them is directly connected to the reality of the large majority of the American people who, as Michael Zweig puts it in his book *The Working Class Majority*, feel the oppressive weight of the economic power of the ruling class. It is precisely for this reason that we should be the agents of the changes that must take place in our lives. As writers of our own identities, we need to take charge of our lives and build solidarity. We need to shed the identity academia has scripted for us—that of the invisible servant, inadequate and silenced in the margins. We should speak up and claim our teaching as the sanctioned site of higher education. Rhetoric and composition as a field, through its professional journals, should sanction this self-sponsored writing as part of the official discourse of the field and validate it as the voice of the majority. Our professional organizations should step up to the responsibility they have to accurately represent their majority—all of us. Departments of English should finally come to terms with the reality of their own potential demise if they keep acting as the gatekeepers, internalizing and reenacting the logic of the postmodern capitalism that will eventually render them obsolete. It is the responsibility of all faculty members to dig in and take care of the contingent labor problem because it is the cancer that will eat up the entire body. Shared governance is a responsibility of all; it is what democracy is about. Democracy is self-sponsored.

I suppose this is the bottom line: our identity is a political identity, and it is within the context of our political selves that we should claim our place in the academy. What else is the voice heard in the *Forum* newsletter on contingent faculty wedged into yellow pages in *College Composition and Communication*? What else are the testimonials that surface in *Moving a Mountain* (Schell and Lambert Stock), in *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers* (Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola), in Bousquet's *How the University Works*, and in countless other books and articles that have been appearing not only in the journals of our fields but also in the popular press and news reports? Shor and others have proposed solutions that have political ramifications: we need "a labor policy that would affirm that all teaching jobs in writing programs are full-time, tenure-track faculty positions" (Shor in Shor and Parascondola). AAUP's Subcommittee of the Committee on Contingent Faculty and the Profession echoes the need for such policy in its recent report regarding the conversion of contingent appointments to tenure-line appointments, published in the November–December 2009 issue of *Academe*. Our own voices in this forum also underscore this need and proclaim that we should be engaged in making it a reality. Our political identity should be not simply contingent, but tenurable.

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