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We Could Convert the Lines, But Not The People: A Postmortem on Changing Working Conditions in a Writing Program

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Academic Labor: *Research & Artistry*

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We Could Convert the Lines, But Not the People: A Postmortem on Changing Working Conditions in a Writing Program

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Abstract

In the conversion of part-time adjunct instructor positions at a small college, institutional limits and personal perspectives on what it means to be an adjunct instructor clashed with both newer principles and decades-old arguments in rhetoric and composition to improve working conditions.

Departments and programs need to provide equitable working conditions for all faculty, including reasonable workloads and protections against unnecessary changes; access to shared governance and curricular decisions; transparent and fair hiring, evaluation, and renewal processes; access to technology and other resources necessary for job performance; access to professional development and scholarly resources; and fair compensation. To provide such conditions, departments need consistent and transparent policies developed as much as possible in collaboration with NTT faculty.

—“Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure Track Writing Faculty”
from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

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In 2012, I used my influence and arguments commonly asserted in the field of writing studies to convert part-time adjunct positions to full-time lecturer positions on my small branch campus of a state university. I did this with the ethical zeal of a new writing program administrator (WPA), arguing for a corrective to the over-reliance on underpaid adjunct instructors. This was my first and only chance while I served in the role of WPA to improve labor conditions for writing instructors on my campus. The new positions were a success in structural terms; however, in human terms, the change may be considered a failure, as it caused both acute and chronic negative effects on people's career paths, program morale, and perceptions of job security.

This article explains the circumstances and effects of this conversion, relying on two theoretical lenses: Breslin et al.'s application of "intersectionality" in questions of decision-making within leadership, and, specifically to the "adjunct problem" within the field of rhetoric and composition, William B. Lalicker and Amy Lynch-Binieck's "Principles For Converting Contingent to Tenure-Track." In particular, I analyze our program's process and rhetoric to secure these positions, which were theoretically sound but created lasting fallout. By emphasizing the needs of adjunct instructors—rightfully bemoaned as second class citizens of the university—intersectionality resists the "either/or" arguments that the leaders of the field of rhetoric and composition have offered as the solutions to the adjunct problem, which seem to fundamentally ignore the desires of many adjuncts. I grapple with these sometimes-problematic arguments, such as suggesting that adjunct positions lead to poor experiences for students. And, I consider this problem from a place of intersectionality myself—as a former part-time adjunct and mother of young children who understands the appeal of part-time intellectual work.

Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck's Principles appear in the 2017 edited collection *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity*, the most recent and comprehensive call to action and compendium of methods to improve conditions for contingent faculty in writing studies (henceforth in this essay referred to as non-tenure-track writing faculty or NTTWF). In their introduction, the editors emphasize that the work to improve conditions for NTTWF is coterminous with efforts to fight "the denigration of composition studies" (Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck 7). Noting the many surveys and change-making efforts within professional organizations such as the Modern Language Association and the Association of American University Professors, the editors argue that, "we know enough [. . .] and it's possible to make concrete changes with what we know *right now*" (4, emphasis in original). The editors note that the vastness and variety of the adjunct problem means there can be no one solution but instead only continued, local efforts, which offer an alternative rhetoric to what they identify as a hollow/horrific binary: "efforts that have led concretely and effectively toward improved adjunct faculty working conditions" (7).

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This case from my own university is similar: it is a concrete and effective project. My reporting of it here will explore the key arguments that helped me gain traction on this project—yet, I maintain an alertness to how these arguments sometimes do not align with the desires of people in these roles—an important factor that I believe can go overlooked in rhetoric around contingent faculty and has no easy resolution. I look to intersectionality to do a better job of considering this situation from multiple angles. Then, I will move into a case analysis, applying Lalicker and Lynch-Binieć's Principles to my program's project.

Improving Working Conditions and/or Improving Jobs

In a long-standing and complicated scene of debate and activism such as this one, there are many arguments to consider. In this section, I summarize two threads of argument that pertain to “the adjunct problem”: 1) that working conditions of NTTWF impact the respect and health of the field of writing studies; and, 2) that the guiding impetus has involved converting contingent positions to full-time lecturers and, better yet, tenure-track positions attendant with benefits, etc.

In the first perspective, Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieć equate the fight for fair pay and improved conditions for NTTWF with the continued effort to resist the denigration of the field of writing studies (7). From a university administrator's point of view, if anyone will teach writing for any amount of money, even under poor working conditions, it is not “worth” much and, hence, not worth putting extra (or equal) investment of funds towards NTTWF. From this perspective, the status quo is acceptable for many universities—that first-year writing in particular is cheap and easy, financially-speaking, and what Kahn et al. fear, perhaps intellectually-speaking as well. In this way, Kahn et al.'s position is simply about equity, a seemingly clear-cut concept and goal.

Another angle on this argument is the critique of the “internal payoff”—or the acceptance of low pay given the emotional rewards that come with teaching. Kahn cites Eileen Schell when he says: “teachers are expected to find the internal payoff of teaching so high that the financial payoff isn't relevant. Nowadays, the argument seems to be that anybody who doesn't find the emotional payoff sufficient is morally bankrupt” (Kahn 110). Schell and Kahn critique this stance, and yet it is quite common. Teachers at all levels sustain themselves emotionally through their passion for their work, even when their pay falls short.

Richard Colby and Rebekah Schultz Colby's defense of keeping the “teaching” portion and the “research” portion of the teaching of writing on equal footing reflects a worry about the de-professionalization of, or lack of respect afforded to, courses in fields taught by adjuncts. They worry that maintaining separate casts of teaching-focused faculty (usually contingent) and tenured faculty, whose focus is on research, also contributes to the denigration of the field's esteem: “this separation could potentially de-emphasize scholarship on writing pedagogy, creating an

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arbitrary binary between teaching and research and relegating teaching to merely service—a service which, within this separation, becomes mindless, as teaching then becomes separated from the knowledge construction of research” (63). Colby and Schultz Colby suggest that even in the creation of full-time non-tenure-track (FTNTT) positions, “we also want to contend that as representatives of the discipline of composition, a field that still is so often considered merely service, we are in fact scholars of practice with research agendas that improve our teaching and understanding of writing and rhetoric” (68). And, although there are certainly ways to elevate those who mainly focus on teaching in their emphasis on the artistic aspect, or through service-learning, or other values important to the field or the local university, this part of the “good for the field argument” takes the stance that the contingent faculty person who does not contribute to the field through scholarship may be harmful to the field.

The interest in maintaining a program of scholarship and/or professional development in NTTWF positions is the second perspective at issue in my local case. Put more generally, this perspective involves a focus on improving the career path of NTTWF. Colby and Schultz Colby discuss the “conversion” of contingent positions to tenure-track jobs as well as a similar, though perhaps lesser, method of achieving better job security, which is to create full-time lecturer jobs that do not require research but offer commensurate pay, benefits, participation in the department and university governance, and the professional resources, materials, space, etc. listed in the 2016 CCCC “Statement on Working Conditions.” Even while a change such as this improves some aspects of NTTWF’s working conditions, there is a caveat along social lines. Patricia Davies Pytleski explains: “although the terms of this proposal could greatly improve circumstances, involvement, respect, professional development, and conditions for contingent faculty, they would still be relegated to a place of lesser power” (A5).

From my point of view, these two perspectives clash: on the one hand, activists around contingent labor want to help create conditions in which NTTWF earn fair pay in the jobs as they are currently occupied (i.e., teaching-focused); on the other hand, one way to do this is to “professionalize” the jobs and align NTTWF’s work and compensation with the discipline’s values of scholarly practice. Of course, they do not always clash. Many adjuncts would embrace having more responsibility and greater pay in a full-time position with a sustainable wage. Still, the clash between these two values has always been a touchy part of the debate and activism around contingency.

For instance, the late 1980s brought the first documented conversation around labor conditions in the field of writing studies, which resulted in the “Wyoming Resolution,” a white paper drafted in 1986, published in *College English* in 1987, and endorsed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators in 1988. In their explanation of the

process of its creation, James C. McDonald and Eileen E. Schell explain the blind spots and disagreements on the topic of labor conditions for NTTWF that led to the resolution ultimately not embracing one of its original intents: to create standards for working conditions that the CCCC would hold institutions accountable to with a grievance and censure process. They cite a 1989 draft report by the CCCC that [such a process] would be impractical for CCCC to institute [...] as it ‘would require staffing and legal expenditures that are currently beyond the scope of the organization’” (“CCC Initiatives” 65 as qtd. in McDonald and Schell 370).

Because of that seemingly impossible either/or scenario, it seems the efforts of the project then became focused on how the jobs of part-time faculty could improve, rather than be abolished, emphasizing such changes as a complete hiring and review process leading toward career advancement, the provision of professional development opportunities, and research support and funding opportunities. According to McDonald and Schell, the framers of the “Statement of Principles” resulting from the “Wyoming Resolution” did not anticipate the resistance by part-timers to this “career model;” where part-timers wanted fair pay, benefits, and fair treatment, faculty understood “improving conditions” to mean “becoming full faculty.” McDonald and Schell write: “many contingent faculty and their supporters argued that the CCCC Statement’s emphasis on tenure, research, and publications won out over the discussion of job security and working conditions [...] the conflict over the CCCC Statement was precisely over the range of values about what constitutes work in the profession, who was represented in the statement and who was not” (372). One way to interpret “who was not” represented in the statements may be explored further as embedded assumptions within the two arguments under consideration.

In the “good for the field” argument, those who cannot perform and/or do not benefit in their job progression from conducting and publishing research are not useful and may in fact be harmful to the field. That is quite a leap in logic, given that first-year writing is not necessarily in danger—the field has grown and matured in disciplinarity in the past 40+ years in ways that have been heralded often (see, for recent examples, Leff; Phelps and Ackerman; Malenczyk et al.). Additionally, the “career path” argument may be even more insulting, given that adjunct instructors are Masters- or Ph.D.-holding professionals who have been hired by the very critics of the system with full knowledge that 21st century universities need them. These are harsh critiques. I float them here as a way to interrogate the “adjunct problem” and be as critical of my own case study as possible.

To do that fully, I draw on Breslin et al.’s interpretation of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality: “By emphasizing multiple and simultaneous dimensions of social inequality—most commonly gender, race, class, and sexuality—intersectionality reveals the unique experiences of individuals who occupy multiple marginalized

social categories” (161). Here, I examine how class in the sense of academic citizenship bears out in the case study and complicates the two arguments above. Gender adds an additional lens, given that many young women and mothers choose their adjunct positions as a way to maintain a professional foothold and earn higher-than-average part-time wages. Intersectionality lays bare that these threads of argument don’t totally represent the lived realities of actual adjunct faculty. There remain some assumptions, and perhaps missing perspectives, from the adjunct faculty themselves, which I, as a former adjunct faculty and young mother, know well and which helped me see why our local project of conversion was not as simply successful as I might have otherwise claimed.

I therefore highlight these clashing identities and values to situate my local case. In moving toward better job stability, pay, and participation in university governance, I advocated to “convert” part-time adjunct instructors who taught up to four sections of first-year writing semester-to-semester into full-time lecturers. The position of “lecturer” already existed on our campus. These jobs guaranteed year-to-year contracts with a full HR review process; better pay standardized by state law; benefits; and a change in status at our university, according them participation in governance and a vote in the department on curricular matters. However, I did not anticipate the way the identities and values would arise and clash, a condition and error which may be simply stated as: we could convert the lines, but not the people.

My Local Case

I became the WPA of a small, public state university branch campus in 2011¹. I brought to the campus my own history of working as an M.A.-holding adjunct instructor and then as a teaching assistant (TA) in my Ph.D. program for a total of ten years. I already knew the hard-knock life of the adjunct instructor: driving between campuses, unstable enrollment, not enough pay, no health insurance, and balancing a retail job on top of the adjunct work and my graduate studies. After earning my Ph.D. and moving my family 1300 miles away from our home state to become a tenure-track assistant professor, I had a bit of a “bootstraps” attitude toward adjunct instructors: rejecting the conditions of the job and “trading up” was possible; I had done it. If a person accepted the conditions, then they had good reason to. Plenty of adjunct instructors do, whether to balance parenthood or to work in semi-retirement or to pursue artistic projects. I respected adjunct instructors and, frankly, did not hear many complaints on my campus.

¹ University of Wisconsin-Superior enrolls about 2500 undergraduate students and serves about 400 students in first-year writing courses per year. The program employs about 15 people in a mix of faculty, full-time lecturers, and part-time adjunct instructors.

I then attended the WPA Bootcamp in 2012, after my first year on the job. In this workshop, I was awakened to the topic of labor conditions more fully, and in my mentoring sessions it seemed that a number one priority for the continued improvement of our writing program should be to convert our adjunct instructors to full-time instructors with decent salaries and benefits. I was convinced that this was the kind of stability our program needed, and it coincidentally aligned with the rhetoric of our campus' then-provost, who was interested in raising the profile of adjunct instructors on our campus by limiting the number of sections they taught and changing their titles—perhaps a meager effort, but one that signaled that arguments to improve conditions further might be entertained. This kairotic moment aligned with my interest in shoring up the job security of the devoted adjuncts in our writing program. I spent the flight home brainstorming the arguments I would make to achieve this change.

Because this provost was motivated to change the perception of adjunct instructors, the deal was not that difficult to strike: we made full-time lecturer positions using creative budgeting. We asked the provost to draw from the well of money funded by students enrolled in our Basic Writing class, a 0-credit, pre-college course. This money stood alone and was earmarked for the support of Basic Writing students. Hence, the position descriptions stipulated that the lecturers would teach 50% Basic Writing and 50% mainstream first-year writing courses. Therefore, we didn't spend any more from the "regular" pot of money than otherwise would have been spent to pay adjunct instructors. I felt proud that we would be better and more consistently serving the Basic Writing students with full-time teachers who could re-invest the Basic Writing dollars into its own curriculum and pedagogy through their professional development and stable employment.

The trouble came when the search began. Our HR rules stated that the existing adjunct instructors' positions didn't actually exist—and, therefore, we could not consider these new jobs as conversions of old jobs. These were brand-new jobs that current adjunct instructors had to apply for. Another HR rule stated that we had to advertise these jobs nationally. This would mean, given the job market in the field of rhetoric and composition, that the qualifications of outside candidates would most likely exceed the qualifications of our current adjunct instructors. The reactions to the creation of the positions were mixed. Some did not want to work full-time; some could not compete with outside candidates; some did not want to be tied to Basic Writing. In the end, about three-quarters of the adjunct instructors applied for the jobs, and half were hired. Within a year, the instructors who opted out of applying and who did not get the jobs left the university.

In the intervening year, there was a generalized sense of anger, and acts of hostility were aimed at those who got the jobs. As time progressed, some measure of anxiety remained in the idea that jobs could be changed at any time (as opposed to the previous decades-long

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arrangement). And, finally, the new jobs happened to coincide with the arrival of new tenure-track faculty, creating more confusion and some enmity. Where before there existed a two-tiered hierarchy of adjuncts and tenured faculty (with no tenure-track people for many years), we now had a four-tiered hierarchy (adjuncts, full-time lecturers, tenure-track faculty, and tenured faculty). It seemed to some that new roles were less delineated than the previous combination.

When I reflect on this event, I see the clash in values and identities playing out very clearly: in reaching for the material changes that seem to matter most (pay, benefits, and security), the jobs had to become more than “just teaching;” because of the funding source, they became tied to a specialized sub-field which required professional development and, in practice, amounted to attending (or presenting at) conferences, subscribing to and maybe writing for journals, and generally “upping” participation in the field. This is the “good for the field” perspective.

However, that directly influenced the “career path” value, and many of our adjunct instructors didn’t want to do those things. They saw them as extra, difficult, and irrelevant to the fact that they were qualified to and had taught first-year writing successfully for years—with good course evaluations and great relationships with students. They were insulted and argued for themselves using the moral character arguments that Kahn critiques: they were passionate and would have continued working in the given conditions.

Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck’s Principles

In this section, I reflect using Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck’s Principles as if we had not yet converted the lines; in this way, I retrospectively apply the principles as a decision-making or decision-shaping heuristic. My reason for choosing this particular set of principles is that Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck work in Pennsylvania, a state known for teacher solidarity and garnering gains on collective bargaining, is enticing and inspiring to me, as my campus is a branch of a state university in a mid-western state that lost its ability to collectively bargain with the state legislature in 2011, “which virtually eliminated collective bargaining rights for most public-sector workers, as well as slashed those workers’ benefits, among other changes” (Madland and Rowell). Additionally, while other white papers exist for WPAs to consider in regards to improving the working conditions of adjunct faculty such as the “CCCC Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure Track Writing Faculty,” Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck’s Principles are specific to the conversion of positions, and not necessarily the improvement of other elements of the writing program; hence, I use it as my retrospective guide.

Principle 1: Departments should advertise for, and hire, real compositionists for composition-teaching jobs, not Jacks- and Jills-of-all-trades. In our case, our program was already able to hold our adjunct instructors to this standard; all of them had Master's degrees that did not privilege literature, thanks to a culture of hiring over time (though not a transparent process) that emphasized a general appreciation for writing of all kinds, and an awareness that what could perhaps be perceived as "preferred" writing genres (such as poetry) were indebted to the composition classes that kept the lights on. Therefore, in adhering to this principle for the new jobs, none of our adjunct instructors were categorically boxed-out of applying for them, but they were out-classed by their competition—or, predicted that they would be and opted out of applying for the jobs.

Principle 5: Maximize contingent faculty access to the complete collegial life of the department: meetings, policy discussions, social events, scholarly discussions, committee service, and funding for professional development. This is an area that already worked for our program; we tried to flatten the hierarchy as much as possible around curricular discussions and changes, asking for everyone's input and expertise. Occasionally, we had successfully secured funding to pay contingent instructors for service work outside of their contracted duties, and we had (and still today) maintained a collegial departmental culture with the occasional barbecue and Christmas party.

This makes work fun, and projects go smoothly for the most part; however, it must be said that when academic rank rears its head as a topic of consideration at the university, feelings can get hurt, a situation that leads to the next part of this principles-based analysis in which the "double bind" of the adjunct debate functions as a counter-argument to nearly every remaining best practice in NTTWF hiring: treating adjunct instructors like full citizens inevitably emphasizes that they are not full citizens. This is a double-bind in the sense that 1) it is the right thing to do and yet; 2) it sometimes asks for more work than adjunct instructors are expected to do—thereby recognizing their talents and work beyond "just teaching," but also raising a bar for performance that they are literally not contracted or paid to do. I am not arguing against treating all colleagues like full citizens of the university, but I am pointing out how the effort to do so often circles back to the old problem at hand. The remaining principles-based analysis helps elucidate this claim.

Principle 2: Hire contingent faculty with as much care and attention to their long-term collegial and scholarly roles as you demonstrate towards regular tenure-track faculty. In order to activate the university HR processes that would allow a search committee to be formed and the Dean to charge the committee to follow the rules, which would afford the type of "care and attention" the principle suggests, a budget-line job must be

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created. This was an institutional-level change we did make by creating the new jobs; however, as I have explained, it caused negative effects. This principle thus seems to loop back on itself, and I see this, again, as a double-bind.

Principle 4: Make sure all current or long-standing contingent faculty are credited for doing satisfactory service according to the real requirements under which they were hired—“grandparent” them into qualifications when any new requirements for conversion are established by the department or the administration. I mentioned that some of our adjunct instructors were happy to serve the department (attending meetings, working on curricular or assessment sub-committees, etc.) without the extra pay we could sometimes secure. This condition bumps up against contractual obligations on the part of the department. Since traditional adjunct contracts say nothing about service, the chair best holds up their end of the deal by not expecting it and not rewarding it in the interest of fairness to others who can't or don't want to (by rights) serve. Some adjunct instructors never contributed any service, which had never been used “against” anyone; this begs the question: should the opposite be true?

Principle 6: Evaluate contingent faculty for their whole set of academic talents, just as you evaluate tenure-track faculty: for teaching, but also for collegial service and scholarship. Similarly, this principle bumps up against contractual obligations on the part of the department; where traditional adjunct contracts say nothing about service and scholarship, the chair best holds up their end of the deal by not expecting it and not rewarding it, even if it should happen anyway. This is in the interest of fairness to others who can't or don't want to (by rights) serve or produce scholarship.

Principle 3: New faculty should all be made directly aware of a conversion clause and any departmental policies guiding it. In this case, this is a moot point; no such policy existed. And, in fact, since our home-made conversion occurred, it has become part of the departmental lore: that former instructors “are gone” because of the jobs. This in some way serves to sever any link to a culture of possibility for promotion or conversion. On the other hand, I can extend this principle to my local context to affirm that any new instructor should be clearly informed of their job's potential to be maintained or increased as university conditions allow. The most humane version of this is to be direct that there are no prospects of being retained semester-to-semester.

Applying Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck's Principles helps explain where my conversion project perhaps went wrong. For instance, in pushing me to think about the service and scholarship portion of potential full-time jobs, I would have asked the questions I ask above about “double binds” in reference to Principles 2, 4, and 6. Such questioning may have

resulted in a more nuanced approach or a wider variety of job categories that were amenable to my part-time colleagues. In particular, I am sure that the desire and capacity to conduct research or approach teaching writing from a more scholarly point of view would have become a more prominent feature in discussions about what the jobs could have been.

To complicate that discussion through the lens of intersectionality further, there are two types of colleagues whose working conditions I will tease out for one final point of consideration: retired teachers and mothers of young children, for whom adjunct teaching was beneficial to their personal and professional goals. I believe the former category is a little more self-explanatory—people in this position enjoyed a very part-time job that drew on their considerable skills and experience. They were aware of and employed the various theories and perspectives in the field and thought deeply about their teaching—call it a “scholarly-informed practice,” one that these colleagues were not interested in contributing to, but in benefitting from. Note that while this was true in my local case, Margaret Betz would term such examples as the “side gig” myth, a perspective that “allows universities to perpetuate a system that exploits contingent academics by willfully ignoring the reality of the situation in favor of protecting the status quo” (Betz).

The latter colleagues have enjoyed more attention in our field’s conversations. Mothers of young children also benefit from the part-time and flexible work of adjunct teaching. (Note that I have never met any fathers in this position.) Sometimes this position lays a foundation for the “career path” arguments; it did for me, as I noted briefly above. As an adjunct instructor, I appreciated the connection I maintained to the field and especially the professional development opportunities that were afforded me. Sometimes, I could not take advantage of them—it depended on how old the baby was or whether it was within, say, a 100-mile drive. But, overall, these working conditions allowed me professional and even intellectually-grounded, part-time employment during a time when I was waiting to be able to work—or attend graduate school—full-time. Once my children were a bit older and able to attend pre-school, my years of having adjunct-taught contributed to my overall career trajectory.

Of course, there are downsides to my story. Giving birth in September one year meant I “missed” a semester and lost my seniority. I had to go to the back of the adjunct line for sections and schedule preferences. This experience precipitated my interest in earning a Ph.D. and securing an assistant professor position. Other women’s experiences focus on how motherhood has damaged or sidelined their careers through what Betz calls the “defective myth,” or the idea that academic mothers are in contingent employment not for their own personal, parenting-related reasons but because being a mother automatically means they are less dedicated or otherwise capable than those in full-faculty positions (Betz).

I’ll admit, my own argument here is getting circular; however, this reflects the larger issue, filled with double-binds with no one solution other

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than the radical suggestion of “abolition,” an argument to end first-year writing—the idea of cutting the snake off at the head, providing no reason to employ thousands of people in poor or moderately poor conditions (Russell 133). Ironically, the entrenchment of the first-year required course within the growth of the neoliberal “managed university” puts that project hand-in-hand with the “adjunct problem”—perhaps best attended to and only possible in local projects.

Where Are They Now?

By way of concluding, I’ll mention the status of those in the full-time jobs: they have upped their participation in scholarship and professional development as per their job descriptions. They continue to teach and serve our students very well, as well as perform departmental and university service. One person is the campus writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) coordinator on re-assignment. And another person is pursuing an Ed.D. in developmental education, even while continuing to work full-time. So, that story—that contingent and NTTWF jobs can advance career paths—is playing out well. The “better for the field” argument may also be playing out at a departmental level. Eight years later, our writing program is doing well—we have changed our traditional first-year, two-semester course sequence to a two-year course sequence in the spirit of a “vertical curriculum,” and we continue to respond to trends in enrollment, assessment findings, pedagogy, and creative projects of improvement that I, for one, find reward in.

This is all true despite the lingering “where are they now?” rumors and lore from the job conversions and the real effects on several colleagues whom I imagine would judge this “conversion project” as an unfair and cruel ousting. In attending to the adjunct problem in my local context—even with the support from the WPA Council and my own first-hand experience—I was unprepared to contend with the effects of the clash between the “good for the field” and “career path” perspectives in the adjunct debate. Attuned as I was to the second-class citizenship of, especially, young women in the academy holding adjunct instructor positions, the “adjunct problem” has rendered itself even more clearly to me through this experience. As the years have passed and the attempts in our field to provide lists, advice, and heuristics, including the 2016 CCC Statement and such publications as Lalicker and Lynch-Binieks’ chapter have increased, I am able to identify at least two complicated truths-for-now that have allowed me to better understand and possibly improve my decision-making:

1. The adjunct problem itself is neither universally understood nor accepted, especially by some individual NTTWF, who find “better for the field” claims demeaning and insulting and even embrace the moral character argument on their own behalf.

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2. In my local context, I can convert lines, but not people—a structural limit that can improve working conditions for only some people interested in pursuing professional development down the “career path.”

Identifying these “truths-for-now” has created new goals for improving working conditions on my campus; perhaps my biggest oversight was that the jobs were the problem—there are clearly bigger and deeper structures at play, such as our state university system HR rules. As I go forward, I will continue to rely on multiple lenses and consider the wants and needs of those in positions of lesser power to judge the problem and potential solutions, while continuing to rely on a chief finding of Breslin et al.: “intersectionality demonstrates how shared value assumptions—on the basis of membership in particular social categories—are troubling” (178). Staying attuned to the fact that even our most tested models and principles will reflect the value assumptions of the “upper class” of the field of rhetoric and composition, the caveats and clashes incumbent in a messy and complicated project of social justice can become useful tools for improving the working conditions of adjunct faculty.

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