

Academic Labor: Research and Artistry

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Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty in
Composition and Technical and Professional
Communication*

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Data Takeaways

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Data Takeaways

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*“Contingent faculty need to be valued more.
We provide so much value and would provide more
if we were acknowledged and credited for it some way.”*
Study Participant

In the “Results and Findings from the Survey” article in this special issue, we presented much of the quantitative data from the survey in the form of descriptive statistics and graphical representation.

However, we knew we needed to add some perspectives to the data by placing the individual data points into a larger context. Particularly, after listening to the voices of contingent faculty across the nation, we are left asking “so what?” Often, other than commiserating and offering support, many writing program administrators (WPAs) and technical and professional communication program administrators (TPC PAs) are unsure how to enact real, meaningful change at their institution. To help address this concern, we offer a discussion of what we think are key takeaways from the data where action can be taken to improve the material work lives of contingent faculty. Again, we define material work conditions as “the day-to-day working conditions of faculty, such as teaching loads and institutional support” (Melonçon, England, & Ilyasova 2019). As such, this article will highlight and discuss the following topics:

- Heavy Teaching Load
- Significance of Titles
- Importance of Professional Development
- Questions of Quality and Qualified

Our goal with this discussion is to move beyond straight analysis and into a synthesis and holistic view of the data as a means to provide a deeper understanding of the material work lives of contingent faculty. This deeper understanding is framed by our interpretation of the data using three guiding questions:

- Why is this topic important?
- How does the data support this?
- What action can we take?

This three-part structure allows for synthesis of some of the major points in the data, but, more so, it encourages direct action to improve the material work lives of contingent faculty. Thinking of this article as more-than-an-analysis enables administrators and faculty the opportunity to form their own meaning of the labor realities within their local contexts.

Heavy Teaching Load

Why is this important?

Data show a significant number of adjuncts teach 5+ courses per term, with full-time non-tenure-track (FT NTT) faculty teaching a consistent 3-4 courses per term. The data also provide a noteworthy viewpoint on *what* they are teaching; in TPC, the key role contingent faculty play is in degree programs, while in composition, most faculty are teaching first-year composition (FYC). Our data indicate there is some frustration, not only with the contingent faculty's course load, but also with the courses available for teaching. When contingent faculty are teaching courses in their areas of expertise rather than being used to fill gaps and teach what are perceived as undesirable courses (often without training in that particular subject area), the issue of load becomes less problematic. Yet, overall, these concerns are analogous.

The difference—which is no surprise—is keyed to location. Again and again, our data demonstrate there is no consistency across the nation outside of the common finding that contingent faculty carry a heavy teaching load. Knowing this, the takeaway we may have some immediate control over is that contingent faculty often have several preps, frequently for courses they have no experience in, and in order to be the best teachers they can be (dignity, job security, student expectations, etc.), their scholarly goals and professional development are often sacrificed.

How does the data support this?

In addition to the figures referenced in “Results and Findings,” many participants chose to both select a provided answer and include a written response, especially to the question regarding course load. It is not a simple question to answer for contingent faculty because so much variation exists between institutions and between FT NTT and adjunct contingent faculty. The results included instances of FT NTT faculty who were adjuncting at other institutions, with one participant citing both workload and type of courses taught: *“I teach full time for one college, part time for another. Also, since this is a survey directly related to technical writing, I must add that most of my classes are composition I or II. I do also teach some technical writing (depends on what's needed).”* This situation is most common for TPC contingent faculty; their expertise in TPC is secondary as they are often tasked with teaching composition courses.

Regarding strictly load, though, the answers ranged from consistent 3/3, 4/4, or 5/5 loads for the FT NTT faculty (again, this varied wildly based on institution), and the expected (though no less problematic) responses from adjuncts who carried heavy loads across multiple institutions. One respondent shared, *“I typically teach at more than one school during a term. Usually I have between 6 -10 courses a term.”*

This particular takeaway should impact readers, as the implications of astronomical teaching loads are many and significant. Six to ten courses? Multiple preps? The academy should be concerned about this situation for multiple reasons: 1) the effect of this workload on the faculty member, 2) the impact that this demand must have on faculty performance, and 3) the consequences on student learning. Unfortunately, this set of employment circumstances is not uncommon as explained by one of our participants: *“As an adjunct, I teach at both a university and a community college. At the university, I am assigned 3 courses. At the community college, I am often given a course overload of 4, 5, or 6 courses, depending on enrollment.”* Our data contains countless similar examples, all ending on the same point: teaching loads are wildly out of control, leaving contingent faculty executing ridiculous teaching loads—often without job security, departmental support, or benefits—simply to pay living expenses. Matching many of the trade press narratives about adjunct teaching and “freeway flyers,” many of our study participants reported that they *“teach at 5 different colleges to try to make ends meet.”* As one participant pointed out, the load is draining and affects not only time and mental energy, but pride. Most contingent faculty, we can all agree, stay in these positions because they love teaching (see “Affective Investment” article in this special issue). The catch here is that their love of teaching is pushing them into roles where they must sacrifice the effectiveness of their teaching to make a living, as represented by the following participant. We include their lengthy comment unedited and in full because it offers a glimpse into material work conditions from those experiencing those conditions:

As you know, there is a glut of PhDs in English. Even though my very own were professors, I had to explain to them that I did not do anything wrong in my job search in the 1990s. I applied everywhere. I was not picky. I was on the market for seven years. But I was also adjunct teaching at the same time and thus never got my dissertation turned into a book. By the time I'd taught two or three years, I no longer had a field--all my research time was spent learning new preps in far-flung courses that I'd never taught or sometimes even taken. So I've made my peace with being the best teacher that I can (have taught for 24 years, 11 on contract). I don't mind not being able to keep up with scholarship. I DO mind not being able to be the best teacher that I can because of stumbling blocks provided by the university--low salary, no raises EVER (they are merit based, and most lecturers find little time for scholarship), high student caps, too many preps per semester, too many courses per year, etc. etc.

What action can we take?

We understand we may not have control over bigger-picture changes across the nation, but, ideally, one or more of the following actions would be possible at individual institutions to help with issues of course loads. FT NTTs who reported the highest job satisfaction often cited having access to/benefiting from a number of the opportunities described below.

Pay attention to faculty qualifications and position

Institutions should ensure contingent faculty are qualified to teach the courses they are teaching. Administrators should stop using contingent faculty as fillers and recognize that they have earned specific degrees with areas of specific expertise. Action items include being aware of contingent faculty placement and types of assigned courses; asking faculty for course preferences; and involving faculty in the scheduling process through the creation of open lines of communication. According to one participant: *“I am very frustrated with the fact that I have an MA and PhD in tech comm, yet if a literature professor wants to teach a course I have to step aside. To have someone in medieval lit teaching report writing is a little crazy to me.”* Administrators can and should advocate for contingent faculty who have more qualifications and experiences to teach certain types of courses.

For term adjuncts who lack the job security of FT NTTs, universities should, at the very least, institute annual contracts with a maximum 4/4 load, so faculty know what to prep and how to prepare. The stability of an annual contract without overloads would allow contingent faculty to schedule specific time for scholarship and professional development. The “unknown” of where the next paycheck comes from negatively affects so many aspects of teaching and learning: faculty/student relationships, faculty/colleague/department dynamics, faculty scholarship, faculty performance, faculty development, and quality of instruction (student outcomes). All were consistent themes study participants acknowledged were affected by the precarity of their positions.

Pay attention to preparation and scheduling

Program administrators should minimize course preps and also provide faculty who have innovated or excelled in some way the opportunity to teach a unique course. As the data in “Results and Findings” indicated, many contingent faculty teach the same series of courses, so when administrators pay close attention to scheduling, and open themselves up to conversations about preference, they could create more consistent schedules that inspire the faculty teaching the courses.

For adjuncts, administrators should commit to be flexible with scheduling so that contingent faculty can meet the commitments of their other jobs and, as many others have pointed out, work toward a more humane schedule so that courses are not added and dropped at the last minute. Coordinators can ask tenured faculty to take a turn at the 8:00

MWF classes, for example. Finally, chairs can provide consistent opportunities for support, development, and acknowledgement of teaching contributions (see “Looking Forward” article in this special issue).

Encourage pedagogical innovation

Department leaders can focus professional development on ways to improve and/or shift pedagogical practices that contingent faculty can then use across different types of courses. For example, faculty should be encouraged to establish more innovative ways of grading beyond leaving individual comments. Faculty can incorporate class critique and peer review, which has been confirmed to be helpful and can reduce the amount of faculty-led grading. Faculty should be motivated to incorporate other formative feedback measures. With strong formative and innovative feedback, summative grading can potentially be completed through rubrics and grade sheets that can also save instructor time. Additionally, other forms of “ungrading,” with tasks such as contract grading, should be considered. Pedagogical innovation can also come from creating a more collaborative departmental community. Participants who had access to pedagogy talks, brown bag lunches, and colleague workshops, even when they didn’t attend, reported feeling more valuable and respected, and the autonomy that comes with pedagogical innovation allows faculty to feel more connected with the courses they teach.

Encourage use of institutional support structures

Contingent faculty should be supported to access university resource centers that provide starting places for instructors to add new ideas to their courses without having to develop them individually. Mentors can compile and provide a list of starter ideas for in-class exercises and activities. Faculty can then provide multiple options for assignments and/or allow more autonomy in the creation/design/implementation of assignments and activities. When faculty have access to these resources, everyone wins: the services typically don’t cost money since they’re housed by the university, and the faculty member benefits from pedagogical support. As reported by one participant: *“We do have a good teaching academy, and they collaborate with online course development services to offer a 2x a year faculty conference where we get feedback on teaching methods and new technology. I wish every university had this.”* Either the university does not offer resources like this, or they do, but contingent faculty are not aware these resources exist. Administrators need to ensure that contingent faculty are aware of all professional development opportunities across their institutions.

Integrate feedback loops

Program administrators can discover ways to include contingent faculty in curricula decisions or, at the very least, in a robust feedback loop, which we define as listening channels so contingent faculty can voice concerns

and emphasize what is working in regard to standardized curricula or programmatic goals. Few people understand how well courses and programs are working as well as contingent faculty members, so enabling them a space and an opportunity to offer their experiential knowledge is a rather simple way administrators can help contingent faculty feel more valued while providing important data to improve courses and programs. The range of autonomy for course design varies greatly, as discussed in the “Affective Investment” article, but creating avenues by which faculty can help shape their own autonomy is a feasible step. One respondent explains what that might look like: *“We work as a team to design the curriculum. The learning objectives are set for the course. We agree about major assignments and grading percentages. We have flexibility with regard to the schedule and delivery of lessons.”* We shouldn’t dismiss the importance of contingent faculty having a voice in the material they teach.

Provide recognition

Department leaders should offer recognition and thanks, being certain to acknowledge the heavy course loads. Administrators should compliment faculty when they contribute an insightful idea or teaching strategy. Because of contingent faculty members’ major contribution of teaching, one of the only ways they gain recognition or a sense of accomplishment is through praise of their teaching. This recognition can come in the form of awards, merit pay increase, or a simple email from the department head praising excellent student evaluations. Faculty who are valued for their involvement in this way are more likely to continue making constructive contributions, often going above and beyond what they are contracted to do. Since teaching and service are critical components of contingent faculty jobs, universities should consider creating an annual teaching and/or service award with contingent-only eligibility. Establishing two categories for the award(s)—FT NTT and adjunct—would further acknowledge the value of non-permanent faculty. Without these types of recognition in place, we will continue to hear (when we ask, when we listen) contingent faculty reporting a lack of respect:

The NTT faculty in my department carry the bulk of the teaching load, but we receive the least amount of money and respect. My peers are treated as unwanted faculty, and younger, newly hired TT track faculty treat us without consideration for our contributions, knowledge, experience, and additions to the research and service mission of the university as a whole, and to our department in particular.

Further discussions of lack of respect and recognition can be found in the “Affective Investment” article in this special issue.

Make communication transparent

Administrators should create transparency in communication: disclosure regarding the day-to-day workings of departments, and the institutional initiatives that can affect the lives of contingent faculty, will promote awareness of policies and workplace politics. Although most WPAs and TPC PAs cannot change institutional cultures overnight, administrators can be more transparent about the challenges the program faces, including the fact that contingent faculty teach significant loads. Other examples of transparency include an open acknowledgement of the true role student evaluations play in the evaluation process. For example, at one of the author's institutions, student evaluations are mandated to be included as part of the faculty evaluation process. However, she does not put any emphasis on the scores. She openly acknowledges how she uses evaluations and further explains how they are interpreted and applied in the yearly faculty evaluation committee. Study participants reported a range of emotions when it came to the use of student evaluations, and it was clear that those who saw them as valuable or terrifying didn't hesitate to confirm that their specific program didn't emphasize them when it came time for reappointment. However, many other respondents were unclear how much these evaluations were used in staffing decisions, and often noted how that affected their teaching. *"I have no explicit pressure, but we all know it's a factor (or they wouldn't make us include teaching evaluations in promotion and award portfolios, right?)"* Responses like this were common, and it's clear that many contingent faculty don't know how/if evaluations are being used when it comes to renewing their contracts. Another author reflects on the fact that, while mandated at her institution as well, her department does a good job of offering a wide range of evaluation tools and times to administer them. It's clear that for many respondents, student evaluations are an important part of the evaluation process, but it's often unclear how much weight they carry. It is this clarity that we're calling for.

The Significance of Titles

Why is this important?

We use title here to refer to the institutionally approved and/or mandated term that is associated with one's job description. For tenure-line faculty, the assistant-, associate-, and full-professor ranks are easily identified and provide a visual and prominent marker to someone's identity, and, more importantly, to their place within higher education. The titles of contingent faculty are not as clear, but we want to underscore that titles for contingent faculty are just as important—if not more so—than their tenure-line colleagues.

Even though we failed to include a question in the survey specific to titles (what is your title?), we do know that the title someone holds matters. For example, in follow-up research, including titles found in

several of the survey's qualitative answers (e.g. to Question 1: "What is your current position"), as well as a re-visiting of the websites or contacting administrators of the same schools associated with the original research study design, we found a wide array of titles at the institutions such as:

- Assistant Professor, Educator
- Continuing Lecturer
- Instructor
- Lecturer
- Assistant Professor of Teaching
- Senior Lecturer
- Teaching Assistant

In these institutions, FT NTTs have the opportunity for promotion to a higher rank with a related pay raise. However, the different titles do not carry the same weight because: 1) they are inconsistent across institutions; thus, they lose meaning and significance, and 2) they do not fully represent the authority and expertise that contingent faculty bring to the classroom.

We see these circumstances often with contingent faculty: many are required only to teach and provide minimal service to the department, yet many are observed serving at the college and university levels; researching and publishing; and presenting at national conferences. Establishing job titles which reflect various aspects of this work is critical for to bringing a sense of respect and accomplishment (professor versus instructor or lecturer) to faculty positions—and is tightly bound to a sense of purpose and satisfaction.

How does the data support this?

Some of the takeaways from our data are obvious and involve load, autonomy, and salary. However, even without the inclusion of a specific question regarding titles, many respondents—without prompting—included discussion of how their title (or lack thereof) affected them. It may seem trivial that contingent faculty are affected so much by their title, but this data reveals that title was of vast concern and importance to contingent faculty:

I really hate the term 'contingent' [because it] makes me sound like I am a migrant worker. I have had this position for 31 years though given the economic climate, our new dean, and our new department chair, for the first time ever I am worried about my contract being renewed. I am a Senior Instructor and I cost them money. They could reduce me to part time - without benefits - and hire more part-time people and save themselves money. Very Heavy Sigh. Sometimes it seems to me that education is about

money - not actually about the quality of instruction that students receive.

Having titles that reflect growth and professionalism would give contingent faculty both more self-worth and department value, as evidenced by the following participant:

I love teaching, so I'm happy that my primary work requirement is teaching. However, I am frustrated by the lack of advancement opportunities. I started as an instructor 15 years ago, and I will retire as an instructor--I have no opportunity to become a 'senior lecturer' or something similar. I do receive regular raises, so I am satisfied with my salary. It would be nice to have some means of recognizing my progress professionally.

As we move more and more toward contingent faculty teaching the brunt of courses in higher education, we expect an increase in the contention between tenure track and contingent. Many report heated discussions in faculty meetings as contingent faculty members fight for their rights to vote, enact change, and simply be heard. More and more, the lines of demarcation do not even include a difference in education or experience, as many contingent faculty have PhDs and experience in their fields. The reality is the competition for dwindling tenure-track positions has become fierce, and that puts additional pressure and stress on some contingent faculty. As one participant notes, *"It hurts that you have a lot of education and you are reminded in direct and indirect ways that you aren't a real professor. You're an instructor. I am reminded of that. I can't call myself professor, but I can call myself doctor. That helps, but the chair makes it clear that you're not on the same level as the rest of us."* Logistically, not all qualified academics will secure a tenure-line position, but because of their love of teaching and scholarship, they "settle" for contingent roles where their work is not respected or applauded—and title is a critical part of satisfaction:

In a recent search for a FT NTT faculty member at my institution, out of over 100 applicants, the vast majority had PhDs. So when non tenure-track faculty are made to feel less than, it is offensive. Of course, if universities opened up more TT lines, we wouldn't see this issue as much, but as that doesn't seem to be the case, we need to change the conversation so that non tenure-track don't feel less than. I don't get offended too much because I don't have my PhD and feel that this makes a difference. But for the NTT who do have their PhDs, I can't imagine how that feels. They've got terminal degrees, they're experts in their field, but they can't be called professor. It's degrading.

Titles are also tied to precarity issues, as one respondent explained:

At my university, certain departments fought several years ago for a promotional ladder for instructors: instructor, advanced instructor, senior instructor. Each advancement came with a small salary boost and a longer contract. Although this program was lauded and written about, in recent years, the university has hired more truly contingent faculty members, and our dean refuses to allow advancement at all for the last four instructors hired, all of whom have been here multiple years now and are integral to our core programs. They are all on one-year contracts. Last year and this year, we hired five more, all of whom are on one-year contracts.

What action can we take?

Ideally, we are arguing for consistency across the academy and joining those, such as Adrianna Kezar, who have advocated for a distinct teaching professorship that carries with it the same prestige and professional respect as current tenure-line positions with a research focus. We need to look to model institutions without the existing hierarchies and remove language from titles that mark some faculty as lesser than. For example, Carnegie Mellon, University of Denver, and University of Cincinnati have titles that highlight teaching, but on the same level as tenure-track faculty. For adjuncts, we need a better title than “staff” that appears in course listings and something better than part-time when (if this happens at all) term-to-term faculty are listed in online directories.

We should work toward updating internal documentation where there are not only titles that reflect the intellectual commitment and rigor of the teaching position, but that also come with the opportunity for advancement (see the final piece “Looking Forward” in this special issue for more information on this topic).

Universities can ensure that all contingent faculty—FT NTTs and adjuncts—are listed on the faculty page of the website and are not relegated to a different page or section. While this change is seemingly insignificant, perceptible consequences exist when faculty are listed in different locations, as it reinforces unhealthy and unhelpful hierarchies that do little for morale and subsequently impact student learning.

A title brings a sense of respect and accomplishment (such as professor). When a title reflects status and value, contingent faculty may be encouraged to grow in their teaching role and seek opportunities to professionalize as members of the academic community.

The Importance of Professional Development

Why is this important?

Professional development is important because contingent faculty are the faces of most of our classrooms, from service courses that support the entire institution to specialized courses that build student expertise. As discussed earlier, many contingent faculty are teaching heavy course loads, often loads where the course content lies outside of their area of expertise. If we are asking TPC contingent faculty, for instance, to teach composition, they need training and development in that area. Likewise, contingent faculty without a background in TPC are being asked to teach specialized TPC classes with no training or development. Each institution has a duty to ensure that all faculty are adequately trained, developed, and supported to be the most effective faculty they can be. However, meeting these demands can come with challenges in implementation. For instance: What kind of professional development should be offered/encouraged? What is most helpful for the contingent faculty, particular to each institution? Online teaching resources and access/funding to professional organizations, journals, and conferences would be useful to engage adjuncts as part of the larger discipline. Department chairs can consider local professional development in the form of brown-bag seminars, teaching and technology demonstrations, and mentoring. Leaders can survey the faculty to develop an idea of their needs/interests and then offer/fund these opportunities. Issues concerning time, funding, relevance, and worth are critical to decipher. According to some of our participants, even if professional development is offered, it becomes a struggle to find time to attend, or the institution does not make it worth their time/effort to participate in these offerings: *“Some of these programs are offered. But as an adjunct working at 2 or 3 schools, there is no time for professional development. Since these schools also have hiring freezes, there is no real reason to participate.”*

Professional development opportunities are included as part of “politics of service” (see related article in this special issue) because contingent faculty routinely ask for professional development opportunities, as seen from the data in this study and previous research on contingent faculty (Melonçon; Melonçon, England, & Ilyasova). With contingent faculty teaching the majority of FYC courses and TPC service courses, it becomes the university’s job to ensure those faculty are prepared to teach the courses to which they are assigned. Contingent faculty take pride in their jobs (why would so many work for so little if they did not?), so they often sacrifice time and pay out of their own pockets to ensure they stay relevant in their fields, as indicated by the following survey response:

I often wonder what the point of research is if those in the classroom don’t have access to it. With heavier course loads,

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lower salaries, and minimal faculty development funds, where are instructors supposed to find the time and financial resources to do research? Many do it, anyway, and it seems unethical to force faculty to fund their own research endeavors and then to do that work on top of their work in the classroom (uncompensated, that is). It seems to me that the expectations for teaching faculty are becoming identical to those for research faculty, but without the stability.

In addition to professional development enhancing the teaching and expertise of the faculty, it also considerably benefits the institution where the contingent faculty work. For some participants, this understanding prompted an ethical question: is it acceptable that the institution does not support the faculty's professional development but benefits from their work (conference presentations, publications)? One respondent reflects:

Even in a position like mine (full-time, contract-based), there is inherently a difference in expectations between people in my position and those who are tenured/tenure track. I think we're expected to do as much work for much less money. The justification provided for this is that we (at my university) are not expected to complete scholarly work. What this means is that we are not paid as much as those who are considered scholars, despite the fact that we often complete scholarly work on our own. Essentially, if we want to complete scholarly work, we can't expect the university we work for to support us financially for it. However, they inherently benefit when we complete scholarly work, and although they're not supposed to consider factors such as publications when we're up for reappointment, we are encouraged to include this information in our portfolios.

These responses beg the question: why should these faculty make the time/effort to develop themselves if the institution fails to value their expertise? Why attend professional development opportunities, on their own dime and at great inconvenience to their already packed schedule, if it does not mean greater respect or job security? The next section works through how the data from the survey shed light on these questions, and the final section provides ways to address these concerns. If universities want to ensure their programs are offering the best instruction, those same programs need to ensure they are providing their instructors with valuable professional development resources and opportunities.

How does the data support this?

In "Faculty Development as Working Condition," Ed Nagelhout contends, "If faculty development affects working conditions, our initial point of

departure is that we can improve working conditions [through faculty development]” (A14–15). Nagelhout’s position that we can improve working conditions through professional development is supported by the survey data insofar as contingent faculty do want to participate in professional development opportunities. However, four issues impede professional development: lack of money, time, value, and opportunity. Many contingent faculty are not funded, others are given partial funding and must pay the rest out of pocket (i.e., many have the conference registration paid for but all travel expenses are not covered), and very few are granted full funding for one conference a year. Even if money were not an issue, many contingent faculty note they do not have the time due to heavy teaching loads and their own life responsibilities. And even if they do attend, what’s the return on investment if the development won’t help ensure their position? Finally, some contingent faculty report that there are few, if any, opportunities for them to partake in professional development. All of these issues combine to limit the sense of community, value, and belonging for contingent faculty. Feeling that your professional presence and instruction matter when there is not time, money, or opportunity to get involved and contribute to your field can be incredibly frustrating in these circumstances. In one interview, the comparison of contingent faculty to office furniture highlighted the severe consequences when contingent faculty did not feel a sense of belonging. As one participant comments, *“The work environment is a sensitive issue for me. I love the teaching part. I don’t like the political environment... this is something that really hurts. There is nothing, no money or support, for those that aren’t TT. Sometimes it’s like I’m looking in the door, and there’s a party going on, and I’m not included. I don’t think I’m alone in this.”* The problem with professional development for contingent faculty is that the opportunities are wide ranging, from “zero opportunities” to full funding for travel and conferences: *“We have excellent departmental support for both attending and presenting at a variety of conferences for teaching and for teaching writing.”* Much of contingent life depends on the university and the value the institution assigns to contingent faculty members. Most agree, however, that time is a factor, even when the opportunities are available and encouraged.

What action can we take?

Harper College in Illinois has recently encouraged adjuncts to observe other faculty—including tenure-track faculty—in the classroom and then apply relevant teaching techniques to their own courses. American University and the University of Colorado at Denver have compensated adjuncts to take professional-development courses. With a focus at most universities on retention, administrators are realizing most first-year courses are taught by adjuncts and recognize that professionalizing these faculty positively affects enrollment and retention. Increasing professional development opportunities and finding ways to compensate adjuncts for

duties outside of their usual job and contracts will allow universities to shift to institutional changes, such as internal grants for course releases and specialized training with compensation or travel funds.

One aspect of professional development that is rarely talked about is encouraging the connection between teaching and research, which has been made most eloquently by Brad Hammer and, more recently, by Richard Colby and Rebekah Shultz Colby. Particularly, Colby and Colby discuss the pros and cons of their jobs, including the fact that they are best positioned to do the type of research necessary to advance writing pedagogy, but they lack the time to do it. Framed as professional development, these associations would also allow contingent faculty to take more ownership and investment in the programs in which they teach and—most likely—improve student learning. For example, one author is encouraged regularly to publish on the pedagogical strategies she employs in her own classroom. This marrying of research with ongoing instruction would allow contingent faculty to showcase what it is they do best. Additionally, when contingent faculty share their research with other contingent faculty, a critical level of professional development can be realized by both the presenter of the research and those reading it. Actual publications aside, especially because time is an issue for many contingent faculty, by setting up a system where contingent faculty can visit their colleagues' classrooms (and invite colleagues into their own), not for the purpose of evaluation or critique but for the purpose of development, we would likely see an increase in community and best teaching practices.

Classroom teachers are not only the best people to do the research but are also in the most need of it as a way to keep connected to current scholarship in the field and see how it relates to current practice. This entire study is a model on how to involve contingent faculty in research as collaborators for pedagogical and programmatic research. Inviting and encouraging research is a form of professional development to improve teaching but also to remain engaged in the larger fields and the research process. Participating in research helps contingent faculty assess how or whether the ideas being put forth in the scholarship can actually function in an applied setting. This recursive process of producing conceptual ideas from localized case studies, to testing them at other locations, and then revising or expanding the ideas, is much needed in both composition and TPC. Contingent faculty are poised to participate in these endeavors as part of their professional development.

To ensure this participation, departments need to control budgets and provide a pool for professional development. Reallocation is possible; however, the sad reality is that when institutions prioritize, doing so is almost always at the expense of contingent faculty, which is significant since they are doing the majority of classroom instruction. Many respondents wrote lengthy replies suggesting strategies to enhance access and funding for professional development opportunities, such as the following:

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A dream scenario would allow funding for instructors to attend conferences and outside workshops. Instead of requiring that they present, perhaps require that instructors review sessions attended and report back to their colleagues. A system would be in place for colleagues to share these reviews where they could be easily accessed; colleagues would regularly meet to discuss various issues and to check in with each other on how the semester is going; colleagues would have input into the programs they are teaching instead of others simply telling them what is going to happen (without having any day-to-day experience in the classroom). A dream scenario would provide more opportunities for instructors to do research supported by the department that could actually serve the department's needs.

Professional development and departmental relations are key both to enhancing contingent faculty's sense of belonging to the department and to ensuring their courses and contributions matter. Many are willing to go above and beyond their contractual obligations to obtain this sense of belonging. Belonging is defined here as having a sense that they (contingent faculty) matter, that their work matters, and that they are given adequate support and compensation for the work they do. When contingent faculty have access to money and opportunities—and when their time spent on professional development is recognized and valued—everyone benefits: not just the faculty member, but also the department, the students, the institution, and the greater field of study.

We want to end this section on professional development and its importance to contingent faculty by turning back to WPAs and TPC PAs. Administrators need training too, and they need to actively seek out opportunities to continue to grow, learn, and be challenged to be effective leaders. The first part of this training needs to be continual instruction and reflection on how to be effective listeners. As we highlighted in the introduction to this special issue, too often tenure-line faculty and administrators are not effectively listening to the concerns of contingent faculty. Including professional development for administrators is as important as those same administrators working toward implementing professional development opportunities for contingent faculty.

Questions of Quality and Qualified

Why is this important?

Initiating these discussions is challenging for several reasons. Non-college-educated working citizens may have difficulty comprehending why working adults in possession of a Master's or Doctorate degree are unable to make a living wage. Professors are often characterized in the media as highly compensated, working two days a week with summers off. The existence of adjunct faculty is contrary to the mantra "stay in

school to be successful,” which is instilled in children at a young age. Additionally, engaging contingent faculty in these conversations can become a power struggle in itself: contingent faculty may feel blamed or characterized as contributing to these working conditions. There were several instances where participants described the feeling of having to be “grateful” just to be employed or selfish for wanting more: *“I’d rather be teaching here than at Wal-Mart, of course...”* Quotes such as this pinpoint the precarity many contingent faculty feel when they ask for “more.” As another participant pointed out, *“I had no part in the creation of my job status, yet it is held against me on a daily basis.”* Without union representation, without the department, university, and wider field enacting change, many contingent faculty will continue to feel guilty for the labor they are forced to endure. But what can they do, alone? Moreover, some tenure-track faculty avoid participating in academic labor discussions, dismissing contingent faculty as not as qualified (or worthy of limited department resources) since they are only part time. From the quotes above (and those found in the “Affective Investment” and “Politics of Service” articles), it is clear that even when we invite contingent faculty to the discussion, they are regularly dismissed as “noisy” or “attention seeking.” As one participant noted from a faculty meeting about representation, *“It’s not just hinted at. A colleague actually said ‘I’m tenure track and you’re not. There’s got to be a difference.’”* The division between being on and off the tenure track will be hard to bridge. Many conversations regarding non-tenure-track faculty are politically sensitive and arguably threaten tenured faculty as it relates to salary, rank, sabbatical, and teaching load.

Qualified: we use this term to describe what contingent faculty “bring to the table”—their degrees, their work experience, and their expertise in the field (even narrower is the expertise they bring to each course they teach). Think about this hypothetical: What happens when a contingent faculty member is more qualified for a specific course than a tenure-track professor? In most scenarios, the course goes to the unqualified tenure-track professor, and the contingent faculty is left to work behind the scenes developing the course and materials, and the students’ experience is not maximized (as noted in previous participant quotes, as well as those in the “Affective Investment” article in this special issue).

Quality: we use this term to show how the issue of qualified faculty affects the quality of instruction our students receive. According to one participant, qualified contingent faculty are passed over for the courses they are most qualified to teach, and the less-qualified (but tenured) faculty are assigned courses which they have no expertise in.

We [TPC faculty] can’t just let anyone teach tech comm courses as though it was some simple sort of writing course. It’s a really sad feeling to work your tail off to get a good education and you’re

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stuck facing paying back student loans, [and] what I feel the most, is that I have this great education but I don't have any respect in this department. No one else wants to teach it so let's throw it to her. I'm allowed to teach in my field if they let me or allow me to. They hire lit and CW professors but their courses don't fill. But the tech comm courses fill so they [TT CW faculty] get to teach the courses. The American literature professor will be teaching the tech comm because she can't fill her course. When I think of the working conditions, I don't just think of myself or the adjuncts, but I think of what it's doing to the students.

This is just one of the issues raised when looking at the data through questions of quality and qualified. One participant paints another grim scenario: “*I have no clue how to combat the influx of unqualified contingent faculty. The goal, it seems, is ‘butts in seats’ and the knee-jerk reaction to that is ‘adjuncts, adjuncts, adjuncts.’ But then they [adjuncts] are given no guidance or support and . . . [departments are] left with what we have now.*” Program administrators need to move toward a system that ensures departments maintain quality in all faculty; too many contingent faculty are teaching without mentoring and support.

How does the data support this?

Kahn asks for a level of pedagogy that “draw[s] explicit attention to the reality that material conditions are teaching and learning conditions[,]” but there is little understanding in much of the composition scholarship that calls into question issues of quality and qualified (120). Readily accessible scholarship demonstrates not just anyone can teach writing, but yet programs consistently hire faculty who are not qualified to teach composition or TPC. The issue is actually more acute in TPC where the data found that the majority of those teaching in TPC programs do not consider themselves TPC scholars/teachers and underscores a point from Don Cunningham that anyone can teach the TPC service course (see below quotes from contingent faculty). Even though Melonçon and England raised this issue, TPC has not in any way picked up the question, nor focused on the larger problem of contingency within the field, nor addressed the issue raised years ago by Melonçon about TPC’s standards for who they feel are qualified to teach TPC courses.

Then, alternatively, we have qualified contingent faculty who cannot provide the quality instruction we so desperately need because of the limitations of their positions:

*The system is ***extremely*** exploitative. My qualifications and skills are equal to, and maybe even exceed, those of some tenured faculty members. And of course the same goes with my fellow contingent workers. The only reason we're not tenure track is that not everyone who wants to can have that job...it is*

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depressing to know that our low salaries and willingness to teach low-level classes enable tenure-track faculty to teach great classes and even enjoy the occasional sabbatical.

Contingent faculty are continuously being held back from providing quality instruction because of their status as “second class” citizens. As one participant noted, “*Expectations are patronizing. Can’t have a PhD student but I have one [a PhD] and am knowledgeable in the area.*” Contingent faculty are qualified mentors, especially as mentorship relates to teaching and classroom procedures. However, as this respondent highlights, PhD students are predominantly assigned to tenure-line faculty for research and mentoring.

Complicating the issue further are two aspects rarely discussed: legacy adjuncts and external pressure on quality instruction. Question 38 asks, “Do you teach at the same institution where you obtained your highest degree?” Mahli Mechenbier defines “legacy” adjuncts as adjuncts who earned their degrees from the same university where they now teach (228). Contingent faculty who remain at the highest-degree-granting institution face additional obstacles such as being viewed by tenure-track faculty as a former student who could not secure outside employment, or as a former student who remains within a known safety zone without seeking other options. Although technically qualified (in possession of the required degree), legacy adjuncts are not necessarily perceived as quality faculty who were hired and selected through a national search process. These internally trained faculty may face challenges regarding their experience, professionalization, and viability in the national job market.

As it relates to quality instruction, Larry Beason argues that fostering a sense of place based on the classroom can enable quality instruction and thus student learning (149). We interpret this “sense of place” to be the identity an instructor builds in their classroom. It comes back to ownership. Is it their classroom? Or someone else’s? The students feel this. Beason makes a persuasive case, but what happens when the sense of place that instructors believe in, that is, their classrooms, are undermined in some ways by policies outside of their control? Take, for example, a scenario of changing budgets as discussed by one of our study’s participants:

The state has gone to a system of reimbursement based not on twelfth-day class rolls but on “pass rates” on the last day. The state does not pay the university for students who have made Ds, Fs, Ws (Withdraws), or I’s (Incompletes). The university message to us is to “get the students up to a C.” This borders on explicit--everyone is always watching our individual “DWFI” rates. I have been called on the carpet on more than one occasion for being too stringent. The university wants my students to be competent. Yet it does not want to allow me to do what I feel I need to do to provide

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students w/ tools for this competence. (For example, I am expected to call students who have disappeared and “check on them” to make sure that they do not drop the course. When/If these students return, I am encouraged not to penalize them for any absence...)

The importance of this view is the inherent implicit and explicit pressure felt by faculty who are already hesitant to work toward a model of instruction that may not be quality instruction: rather, instruction based on achieving an institutional funding or enrollment standard and/or a favorable end-of-term student evaluation. Since contingent faculty teach so many of these types of introductory courses, where universities are pressured to retain their freshmen, the pressure on contingent faculty to pass students can be intense. Student preparedness, therefore, may fall on an adjunct who wants to engage her students yet is not a full member of the institution herself. Since student evaluations are such a central component to adjunct faculty renewal, adjuncts feel they must meet the needs of these student-clients in order to maintain their positions: *“Absolutely! One hundred percent! Raising grades, dropping assignments, giving lots of extra credit, ignoring absences, giving extensions for papers that are already late! The list goes on and on. I am at a good institution with decent students, but I always feel pressure to let the student have their way in order to get good evaluations so that I can keep my job.”* How do scenarios where the teacher is not in control, such as this response detailed in the survey, fit into this ideal of a “sense of place?” What can contingent faculty do when they have no power?

What action can we take?

In some ways, action relates directly to professional development. Training is an important means of ensuring our contingent faculty are qualified and the level of instruction they provide is high quality. Instead of responding to the “butts in seats” mentality highlighted above, contingent faculty (including adjuncts) should be selected specifically for the courses they would be teaching, rather than just having a general pool that can “fill in” where needed. If we want to tout our institutions as places of higher learning, then we have to begin by enforcing them as places of higher quality teaching.

Although tenure-track faculty may recoil politically from this topic, academics need to initiate hard disciplinary conversations about standards for qualifications beyond a degree in English. The standards would be different between composition and TPC, and these sorts of conversations should be interdisciplinary and honest, welcoming perspectives from all ranks.

Professional development also includes finding the time and money to assist faculty in more effectively completing their jobs. The issue is particularly acute in TPC because there are more instructors with composition degrees who need a job and find themselves teaching in TPC

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programs in some capacity. The concept that any writing degree is satisfactory is no different from the arguments composition faculty have been making that anyone can teach writing. Different kinds of writing do require different specializations (parallel to the uncontested claim that different kinds of literature require different specializations), and as it concerns scheduling lower-division courses with adjuncts, this type of degree qualification is something no one wants to talk about.

Outside of professional development opportunities, we need to work toward systemic change that can shift the perennial cycle of the way we hire. The data shows that composition and TPC have a large number of more stable faculty: that is, FT NTT faculty who have taught at the same place for a number of years. With this sort of foundational stability, more attention can be paid to ensuring those same faculty are prepared to teach the courses they have been assigned and feel comfortable doing so. In addition, programmatic data (e.g., Lang) should be applied to help develop just-in-time teaching practices that can assist administrators in knowing where the weaknesses in the curriculum are from both student and faculty perspectives.

While our classes are taught by an assemblage that changes radically each semester, we cannot pretend to make many claims about the consistency of the quality of our teachers. This is not to say that we do not have wonderful and dedicated teachers; it would seem from all of the available, anecdotal evidence that the contrary is true. The problem here is clear: we can have only anecdotal evidence to rely upon while we depend on a heavily contingent workforce (Ashe 156-57).

What we do know from the data is that many of our instructors would not meet the preferred qualifications for someone to teach writing. They, of course, are dedicated teachers with a desire to teach, but we can no longer continue to turn away from the tricky and awkward conversations about qualified and quality. Compounding this issue is one of professional identity that is so intimately connected to contingency. As Ann Penrose suggests, “we are well aware of the factors that would make it natural for non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty to wonder if they are truly members of the academic community” (109). WPAs and TPC PAs need to look at their own hiring practices and continue to argue for hiring practices that raise the minimum qualification for teaching writing from someone with a PhD in anything and some experience teaching writing to someone with a degree in the field. Should we have continued searches where we do not hire the number of instructors we need because of this shift in minimum qualifications, then we can begin to send a message to administration about the staffing of key courses in the curriculum with instructors who are highly qualified.

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Conclusion

Too often, those furthest from positions of power have little incentive to speak up. That is an actionable step we can take—ensuring that our programs are inclusive and open, and that we are creating safe spaces where contingent faculty feel as though they can speak up and voice questions and concerns. Granted, many systemic problems cannot be addressed immediately or overnight, but opening up our programmatic spaces is definitely one that is possible and should be implemented. Is it easy? No, because contingent faculty often feel they have little to nothing to gain if they speak up, and instead of gaining, they may be punished. Yet, we need to hear these voices and begin implementing these takeaways as we move toward true institutional change (see “Looking Forward” article in this special issue). Universities should ensure all faculty have access to professional development opportunities. Departments should make efforts to ensure faculty directories are up-to-date and inclusive of adjunct faculty. Titles should represent the education, expertise, and capability of each faculty member. WPCs should be aware of the number of course preps faculty are responsible for in their teaching duties. Administrators should acknowledge and thank faculty for their contributions to the classroom and the university.

It is clear from the survey responses and interviews that the issues contingent faculty face daily are not individual but collective throughout the disciplines of composition and TPC. Contingent faculty long for what Penrose has defined as being key to professional identities—expertise, autonomy, and community. As the data illustrate, specific steps can be taken to improve the material work conditions of contingent faculty. Questions about autonomy emphasized issues concerning professional development, research, and respect. Questions about research introduced anxieties with time, worth, and value—and it all relates back to precarity. Contingent faculty are clearly not in the profession for a paycheck. They want to make a difference. They are often committed and focused and entrenched in their fields. However, they rarely procure the compensation, respect, and security this commitment requires to be truly successful. The next two articles in this issue—“Affective Investment” and “Politics of Service”—primarily explore the nuances and complexities of contingent faculty’s material work conditions.

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