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From the Editors

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Academic Labor: *Research & Artistry*

From the Editors

The collective scholarship included in this sixth volume of *Academic Labor: Research & Artistry* explores key issues at the intersection of contingency studies and the COVID-19 pandemic. One thing is clear, as Natalie Dorfeld definitively states, “2020-2021 shed light on academic haves and have-nots.” Each contributor to this issue shines that light into the deep recesses of academic labor life, wherein they find the negative effects of neoliberalism, an ideology which, according to political theorist Wendy Brown, “casts the political and social spheres both as appropriately dominated by market concerns and as themselves organized by market rationality” (694). The authors of this volume elucidate the myriad ways neoliberalism wrecks havoc on faculty and students’ physical and mental health, preparation, working conditions, and sense of purpose.

We begin with an analysis of classic neoliberalism at work. **Courtney Allen Wooten and her colleagues** discuss faculty experience at an institution that, like so many others during the pandemic, added additional online and hybrid sections to keep up enrollments. These modalities, however, come with difficulties, such as “helping students understand the hybrid course format (and) building bridges between synchronous instruction and asynchronous online instruction,” that often fall at the feet of contingency faculty. Next, **Natalie Dorfeld** takes a hard look at the specific issues that resulted from universities’ decisions to return to face-to-face instruction in the Fall of 2020. Many already vulnerable adjuncts were laid off, and those who weren’t risked illness and death by returning to the classroom before a vaccine became available. Some older faculty did die, in fact, including one of Dr. Dorfeld’s own colleagues at Florida Tech. In the third article, **Amy Flick and Sommer Marie Sterud** recount their experience using labor-based grading contracts during the pandemic. The authors chose this assessment strategy in order to be more equitable but found that such contracts did not account for the emotional labor students put into their writing and academic work.

Next, **Jason King et al.** frame contingent issues within human rights and religious doctrine by revisiting their earlier study which highlighted “the increasing reliance on contingent faculty in Catholic higher education from 2001 - 2017.” In the present study, which analyzes 2020 data trends, the authors find that conditions have not improved. Yet keenly of interest for King et al. is the uneven effect of the pandemic on men vs. women. Our issue continues with **Sarah V. Seeley**, who uses faculty’s recent experience using Zoom for distance learning to assess “classroom engagement in terms of performativity.” Seeley extends Jane Thompson’s “critique of the performance model of education” from

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focusing on teachers to students as well. We end this issue with an article from **Kelli Lycke and Ann Shivers-McNair**, who analyze COVID-era “calendar disruptions” as examples of “a culture of overwork” brought on by what Allison Laubach Wright names the *rhetoric of excellence*, a neoliberal ideology that hides the competitive, market-driven nature of academic practices.

At the time of publication, COVID deaths have topped 800,000 in the United States alone. While devastating, this context has enabled new labor conversations across many industries—an encouraging development to those of us who have long been engaged in academic labor issues. We are grateful for these contributors' keen sense of *kairos* during this extremely difficult time. It is inspiring and heartening, and it adds to the momentum of achieving equitable, humane working conditions and compensation for all faculty.

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