

# FORUM

NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTINGENT, ADJUNCT, AND PART-TIME FACULTY (CAP)

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### From the Editor

Janice Albert

After attending the January 2003 sessions in Seattle on the topic of adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty, sponsored by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, I was left with questions.

But first, by way of background, two stories—

In 1997, after the Washington, D.C., meetings of 10 learned societies on the use and abuse of part-time faculty, I contacted the education writer for the San Francisco *Chronicle* in the spirit of getting this crisis to the public. She listened while I itemized the abuses endured by non-tenure-track faculty, and then she asked, “What difference does it make?” She went on to explain that if students in the classroom couldn’t tell the difference between tenured and NTT faculty, there was no story for her to take to the public—nothing to report.

The second story comes from my experience as a department head at a California community college. I was asked to listen to student testimony gathered with the purpose of letting a tenured instructor go after 25 years of service. One after another, students came to my office and told me about his behavior, which was careless, unprofessional, and embarrassing to the college. Since we all knew his “record,” there was nothing new to be shocked at. However, upon being questioned, each student reported that he or she had taken *more than one class* from this man, and that the final grade was always A. This experience has forever colored my opinion of student evaluations of instruction.

In Seattle, when I read the AAC&U description of the sessions on part-time faculty, I thought I was going to hear some real data about student outcomes and classroom results. Because of my conversations with the *Chronicle* reporter, I felt that finally I

## About Forum

*Forum* is published twice a year by the Committee on Contingent, Adjunct, and Part-Time Faculty (CAP) of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. As editor, I welcome you to submit news items, book reviews, editorials, and/or articles related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses. Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than May 1; for the winter issue, the deadline is September 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned.

Submit your work electronically via e-mail or an e-mail attachment. Address your work to [jmalbert2002@earthlink.net](mailto:jmalbert2002@earthlink.net) and put the words "Forum article" somewhere in your subject line. Submissions should include the following information:

- your name
- your title(s)
- your institution(s)
- home address and phone number; institutional address(es) and phone number(s)
- if applicable, venue(s) where submission was published or presented previously

For additional guidelines or information about *Forum*, contact Janice Albert, *Forum* editor, 565 Bellevue Ave., Suite 1704, Oakland, CA 94610 or phone (510) 839-1140.

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could get my hands on something tangible. Instead, I heard assertions from faculty that the results were too hard to get and besides "we already know the answer." This disappointed me and others sitting around me, administrators who were also asking themselves, "What difference does it make?"

In the absence of concrete data about student learning, other indices of excellence, such as student evaluations, seem fraught with problems of human nature in all its inventive cunning. Evaluations are administered very differently in various institutions. In many cases, students are completely unprotected if they try to use the evaluation process to call attention to the professor or his adjunct substitute. At my college, evaluations are submitted directly to the faculty member, who reads and turns them in with a biennial self-evaluation. Nobody keeps track of what the total is supposed to be; hence, nothing prevents the instructor from simply turning in the good ones and pitching the poor ones into the wastebasket.

Is it possible that full-time, tenured faculty themselves are responsible for the development of the problem of contingent faculty? Is it possible that vice presidents and business managers long ago perceived that as a group, full-time, tenured faculty would never rise up to scrutinize themselves and their colleagues on standards of accountability to students, and that they would turn a blind eye to problems that might develop through reliance on a budget-friendly but temporary academic workforce?

This is my principal question, and it is the reason that I lend my talent and experience

to the publication of *Forum* for CCCC. I see the part-time problem as integral to the goal of maintaining a professional workforce. Tenured faculty must take a look at their own behavior, gather some data on their performance and that of the adjuncts they rely on, and remedy any shortfall.

At the same time, adjuncts ought not to shrink from objective evidence of their performance as a group. If tests can show that they do a better job of getting students from Point A to Point B, then this would be another lever in the machinery of getting better pay and benefits. If tests were to show the reverse, then perhaps the adjunct problem would be solved by doing away with this category of employment and hiring people only into full-time positions.

Evidence of student achievement must be on a more objective basis than simply a final grade. In composition studies, the answer is at hand: exit essays scored holistically can become a means of evaluating instructional effectiveness. For the workman-like writing that most courses aim to produce, there is no better way.

Finally, the public has a right to know whether their offspring are in better hands with a part-time faculty member—rather like a teaching assistant, but with a degree—or whether tenure actually reflects an increased ability to supervise the education of the young. In the absence of concrete data, the public will maintain its apathy toward contingent faculty; thus, college administrators will have no reason to act. Part-timers will spin their wheels until the tread wears off, and tenured faculty will jockey to get out of the classroom and into the comfort of working only with their peers.

### **From the Chair**

Jim McDonald

When Deb Normand asked me to consider serving as co-chair of the CCCC Committee on Contingent, Adjunct, and Part-time Faculty, my first thought was that I shouldn't do it; I'm not contingent faculty. Most of the CAP Committee *are* contingent faculty, and that keeps our work grounded in the day-to-day lives of non-tenure-track faculty and teaching assistants and the realities of organizing without the salaries, resources, time, and security of tenure-track faculty. I am a professor of English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where I have worked in various WPA and department administrative positions. But I have been involved in contingent faculty issues for a long time. As a teaching assistant at Saint Louis University and the University of Texas at Austin and as an adjunct instructor at Winthrop University and Northern Illinois University in the 1970s and 1980s, I participated in several organizing efforts to improve local salaries and working conditions. In 1985, I witnessed the firing of 55

adjunct English instructors at the University of Texas, an event that drew national attention to the vulnerability of adjunct faculty and helped inspire the Wyoming Resolution a year later. Soon after coming to UL–Lafayette, I began working on contingent faculty issues with the Louisiana Association for College Composition and the state AAUP conference, and I helped organize Campus Equity Week activities on my campus in 2001. I have been a member of the CAP Committee for three years, and was recently appointed to the CCCC ad hoc Committee on Digital Writing, Teaching, and Assessment; I am also working to help ensure that the CCCC standards on technology in writing instruction reflect the concerns of contingent faculty.

I accepted Deb's invitation when I learned that I would be working with Laurie Delaney of Kent State University. I am excited about the opportunity to work with and get to know Laurie as co-chair. Already I can see that there is more than enough work to occupy us both. How Deb managed to run this committee so smoothly and accomplish so much as the sole chair amazes me. We owe her our thanks; I hope Laurie and I can be half as effective.

The CAP Committee has a lot on its plate this year. With the CCCC endorsement of Campus Equity Week, October 25–31, we will be doing our best to support campus publicity, organize efforts across the country, and learn more from these efforts about how to persuade policy makers in higher education to end the exploitation of contingent faculty. We also are charged with updating the 1989 CCCC Statement of Principles and Standards for the Post-Secondary Teaching of Writing. Laurie is organizing the committee's SIG for the CCCC Convention in San Antonio next year, and Janice Albert has proposed a session on organizing faculty.

In addition to endorsing Campus Equity Week, the CCCC, during its business meeting at the New York City convention, endorsed a proposal supported by the CAP Committee that sets standards of salaries, benefits, job security, academic freedom, and due process for composition faculty equivalent to what is afforded to other full-time faculty positions. This proposal also seeks to fund a permanent Academic Quality Commission that would investigate and reward programs that meet these standards, research campus efforts to improve faculty working conditions and disseminate information to support faculty in these efforts, hold hearings about teaching conditions at the CCCC Convention, and seek to cosponsor annual conferences on these issues with other professional associations.

I look forward to getting to know more people involved in local and regional efforts to improve working conditions for contingent composition faculty, and I hope to hear your ideas and concerns for the CAP Committee. My e-mail address is [jcm5337@louisiana.edu](mailto:jcm5337@louisiana.edu).

## **Mediating Change: How Adjuncts at One University Gained Security, Status, and Benefits through Collaborative Engagement**

Darlene Hollon

Presented here is a case study of how the adjuncts at Northern Kentucky University in Highland Heights, Kentucky, located six miles south of Cincinnati, organized into an association and took the initiative to communicate with a new president and administration, effectively challenging the historical norms of hierarchical communication. Over a period of six years, since our inception in November 1997, the association has gained numerous benefits for the adjunct faculty, including salary increases, benefits, and security. By working with the diverse community and participating in the organizational structures created by the new administration, we achieved a better standard of living for our group.

### **New Era at Northern Kentucky University**

Northern Kentucky University caters to the education-seeking public that prefers the smaller classroom and smaller teacher-to-student ratio. In the economic crunch of the late 1980s and early 1990s, like most other institutions of higher learning, our state support dropped. Between 1987 and 1992, our funding-per-student dropped by 1.5%. Some programs were cut, staff was cut, and the 25% increase in student enrollment was staffed with “temporary” faculty positions (Office of Institutional Research, 2002). The University administration, undergoing the growing pains of the increasing student population, suffered at the hands of the state: more students, yet less money with which to educate them. One of the main goals of the former president of the University was to increase the student body by opening enrollment to all, using adjuncts to handle the increased teaching load. He succeeded in reaching his goal, yet the state was not forthcoming with the funds to support the increase. By the time he retired in 1995, the University had exploded from a mere 7,000 students to more than 12,000 (about a 70% increase) in just 12 years.

We began our search for a new president in 1996, and with an interim president at the helm, little changed in the way of funding from the state. One of the main concerns of the campus was to find a president who would be able to obtain funding for the decade-plus growth, and who had a vision to take us into the new century. Dr. James Votruba, with his background in higher education and administration, came to Northern Kentucky University in the summer of 1997. He spent the first six months asking questions, meeting with faculty and staff, and beginning to formulate his vision of what we could be. But most important, he listened to what everyone had to say. In April 1998, President Votruba presented to the campus the result of all of his question-

ing and listening—his strategic plan: “Vision, Values, and Voices: Defining Our Future: Northern Kentucky University’s Five-Year Strategic Agenda.” Areas he was most committed to were student retention, faculty excellence, and curriculum strength.

And so, in 1998, task forces, committees, and subcommittees were charged with making the “Vision, Values, and Voices” a reality: “Northern Kentucky University will become a preeminent, learner-centered, metropolitan university recognized for its contributions to the intellectual, social, economic, cultural, and civic vitality of its region and of the Commonwealth” (p. 2). Reform ’98 was launched within the University community.

### **Team Building and the Hierarchy of Communication**

It was no small undertaking to recreate a university from the inside out. Recognizing this, President Votruba began building a team of administrators to help him with this task. He assembled a select group of top-level administrators to oversee a series of task forces keyed to specific areas of the University, and to serve as the network for the rest of the team. Each month, they met with him, as team leader, to discuss any recommendations and/or problems. . . . “A team leader develops both intra- and inter-team communications. Members within the team . . . learn how to communicate with each other, other teams, and the rest of the [university]” (Petitt, 1997, p. 12). While it was very clear that President Votruba was at the top of the hierarchy, the rest of us on campus soon realized that we were able to initiate the conversations, and he expected us to participate in the restructuring of the University.

The “Vision, Values, and Voices” mission was set forth as the end goal. We worked to achieve our vision by continually referring to our core values which are: being learner-centered, having the commitment to the highest standards of excellence, being accessible to the public, engaging in partnerships with the public, supporting intellectual and creative freedom, advancing multiculturalism within the University and the community, committing to innovative and creative approaches to all that we do, and maintaining collegiality and collaboration from within and without. This mission helped us clarify the work that needed to be done, and through effective communication, we all had a “common understanding of and focus on what the [University was] trying to achieve” (D’Aprix, 1996, p. 3).

### **The Association in Support of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty**

Northern Kentucky University’s Department of Literature and Language historically has used a large number of adjuncts to fill its needs. Because of the increasing enrollment, Freshman Composition courses were often added at the last minute before the beginning of the fall semester. There were times when a course wasn’t staffed until just a few hours before the class began. Because of the number of adjuncts, the depart-

ment had formed a Part-Time Faculty Affairs Committee many years before in order to address some of the concerns of the part-time faculty. While in reality little could be done because of lack of funding from the state and little interest from the administration, the effort was intended to make them feel a part of the department.

In November 1997, independent of what the new president was coordinating, the Part-Time Faculty Affairs Committee initiated steps towards broadening the participation of other departments in our vision to help part-time faculty. The salaries and working conditions of part-time faculty were in direct conflict with “Vision, Values and Voices” in that the part-time faculty historically had been treated as the unwanted stepchild of the University. There were virtually no opportunities for development; innovation and creativity came at the risk of losing one’s job; and because 30+% of all general studies curriculum courses were taught by the adjuncts (Office of Institutional Research, 2002), student retention was a concern. If the students encountered only adjuncts who were more concerned about making a living than focusing on the classroom, students might decide not to return to the classroom or even the University. The History Department and the Communications Department came forward and participated in how we would open this idea to the University as a whole. We decided that one way to grab the attention of the University would be to invite everyone to a showing of Barbara Wolf’s documentary, *Degrees of Shame—Part-Time Faculty: Migrant Workers of the Information Economy*.

It was the showing of this documentary that launched The Association in Support of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty. We stood independently from the University as a means of gaining support from our constituency. The lack of trust was still evident, and we didn’t want anyone to believe that we were the administration’s puppet. Being a free-standing association, we had to have money to function, so we solicited membership dues from the campus faculty, both adjunct and tenure/tenure-track. We asked anyone who chose to join the association to contribute only what they could, but we based our request for support on a sliding scale of \$1.00 to \$10.00, the lowest amount for the part-time faculty and the highest for the tenured faculty. To our pleasure, we even had some of the top-level administrators join our cause. At that point, we knew that we would be able to achieve something.

Using a collegial approach, but breaking the communication hierarchy, we also invited the administrators to a viewing of *Degrees of Shame*, followed by an open question and answer session. By inviting discussion between the groups, administrators saw the crisis at hand and made a commitment to work within the campus community to better the working conditions of the adjuncts. Before we could meet with the administrators one-on-one, however, we had to elect an executive board that would organize and conduct such meetings. In the spring of 1998, elections were held and I was elected president.

The executive committee met to formulate a plan on how to best approach the administrators and explain its concerns. At the top of the list of concerns were health benefits and salaries for adjuncts. After drawing up an agenda, we decided to once again break the communication hierarchy and invite the administrators to a relaxed dinner to discuss our concerns. On May 13, 1998, we began the first of a series of conversations and exchanges of ideas with administrators, deans, the chair of chairs, and the freshman-year experience coordinator. One of our main objectives was to explain to them the philosophy of the Association so that they understood that we were completely non-adversarial. We wanted to work with them in a collegial manner and as a part of the team designed to recreate the university from within. At this point, we also explained that the adjuncts were the only group on campus that had no input or representation in collegial governance. We had committed ourselves to representing this group, and the administrators agreed to work with us.

At this meeting, we presented a Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Development Package that included:

- aligning salaries with other adjunct salaries in the area consortium,
- adopting a rollover policy so that, if a department could show part-time enrollment equivalent to a full-time teaching load, then twelve hours of part-time should be rolled over into a lectureship,
- offering health benefits,
- appointing senior part-time faculty to continuing three-year contracts,
- devising a “Grow Your Own” approach to adjunct faculty by hiring from within,
- creating joint positions with other universities in the consortium,
- educating department chairs in the ethical treatment of part-time faculty,
- offering tuition remission for a core group of adjunct faculty (those who met a specific criteria), and
- providing university e-mail accounts and computer facilities in every department and/or college.

We set a goal to achieve our objectives over a five-year period, which fit directly within the “Vision, Values, and Voices” strategic plan. In order for both plans to work, we had to focus on student retention, faculty excellence, and curriculum strength. With a continual flux in the part-time faculty ranks, we also had to determine a core group of faculty on which to base our requests. Like many universities, we had a number of adjuncts who had been in place for ten years and more. These individuals, we believed, were as much a part of the university faculty as were tenured faculty; however, the commitment from the University was marginal. How could a position that lasted ten-plus years still be considered “temporary”? Our position was to urge a continuing conversion of part-time faculty positions to full-time ones to better promote

student retention and success, ensure stability within departments and across the curriculum, and improve the balance between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty.

Another factor that helped us gain a voice with the administrators was that NKU recently had undergone its reaccreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a decennial review. In its report, one entire section focuses on "Reducing Reliance on Part-time Instruction." It states: "Given that part-time faculty are and will remain an integral and important part of the faculty at NKU, how can they be better utilized to achieve the University's educational goals?" (p. 36). The Association already had been assembled and had met with the administrators, but this accreditation process made the opportunity for us even greater. At this point, we were asked to select a representative from our executive committee to sit on two of President Votruba's Reform '98 Task Forces, The Student Recruitment and Retention Task Force, and the Faculty Task Force.

### **Achievements**

Besides being invited to be represented in Reform '98, in 1998 we also accomplished the following: part-time faculty were given a 10% pay increase in the spring of 1998; part-time faculty were now receiving five paychecks per semester instead of four, which helped them close the gaps of the January and August no-paycheck months; non-tenure-track faculty were now being notified via their department chair of tenure-track position openings; e-mail accounts and photo IDs were available to all adjunct faculty; four \$250 project grants were offered and rewarded to non-tenure-track faculty; and a survey was conducted to create a profile of our constituency so that administrators had a better idea of their educational backgrounds, positions, and responsibilities on campus and off, and their suggestions for making their jobs better.

All of this was accomplished as a result of written correspondence between the administrators and the Association, one dinner meeting, and two Open Forums, which the President and Provost attended to listen to concerns and to answer questions. Our collective engagement enabled the administrators to see exactly how dismal the adjunct situation was and allowed the Association to voice concerns and make recommendations for change. Because of our non-adversarial approach, our concerns were given full attention; what could be resolved immediately was implemented, and other items were put into motion for change at a later time.

Our relationship has remained collegial and even friendly. Through the course of these five years, we have been able to accomplish a great deal. Considerable strides have been made in adjunct salaries—part-time salaries alone have increased by about 29% and non-tenure-track salaries by about 28%; the core part-time faculty now have tuition remission for six credit hours per semester; temporary full-time faculty have the

option to buy into dental insurance; and more part-time positions have been converted to temporary full-time positions, which makes these individuals eligible for health insurance.

The most important accomplishment we have had to date is that all adjuncts who have been full time at the university for at least three consecutive years now have the full range of benefits, which include retirement, life and disability insurances, and dental insurance. We have moved beyond the time when a “temporary” faculty member with ten-plus years with the university will retire with no retirement benefits. Getting this benefit illustrates perfectly the administration’s commitment to the adjunct faculty here at NKU, as well as their commitment to maintaining open lines of communication.

We still have work to do on narrowing the gap. Budget cuts once again are hitting post-secondary education hard, and once again, we are expected to do more with less. This time, however, our gains are already hard items in the budget, and it appears that these are secure. Now we must work to eliminate other inequities that exist and continue our open dialogue between the Association and the administrators at Northern Kentucky University.

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[*Editor's Note:* In the Fall 2002 issue of *Forum*, we began a dialogue on the question of why people seek the jobs they do. In particular, we are asking why the imbalance exists between the large number of people standing in line for a few college-level jobs, and the smaller number of people standing in line for an abundance of high school teaching jobs. The following article is the third response in this series.—JA]

### **The Hunt**

Melissa Reeve

Few saw any method to the madness of my first three years out of grad school. During that time, I held a wide range of teaching appointments in both ESL and mainstream college English: two small Catholic colleges, two summer intensive ESL programs, the Freshman writing program at a major public university, and evening courses at a two-year college. I juggled as many as three jobs at a time (plus a fourth, scoring standardized exams), and at one point my daily rounds between sites totaled 90 miles. The obvious effort and instability of my pieced-together employment caused friends and family to wonder: Why didn't I look for a "real" job, perhaps in the (then booming) dot-com industry? Or, if I insisted on teaching, why didn't I apply at a high school?

Truth be told, at first I didn't mind teaching as an adjunct. I'd expected these conditions, as professors and counselors in my graduate program had cautioned that those of us planning to work in higher education had a long road ahead of us. Further, I was fresh to the local scene, having just arrived back in my native San Francisco area from an M.A. program in Hawaii. I reasoned that it would take some time to make contacts in the Bay Area job market, and that working at a number of schools was the best way to accomplish this. Finally, at twenty-something and single, secure, full-time employment held less draw for me than sticking to my guns. Nevertheless, after five semesters, I reached my breaking point. I informed my part-time employers I was no longer available, requested as many reader-hours as the standardized testing company would give me, and for five months, made finding a full-time job my full-time mission.

I focused my academic job hunt exclusively on (two-year) community colleges, except one long shot for a permanent, part-time slot at the university where I'd worked. Additionally, I researched opportunities in non-educational fields: technical writing, human resources, marketing, and public relations. I applied and even interviewed for a job with a long-distance company. But through it all, I never considered applying for a job teaching high school. With a B.A. in English and an M.A. in TESOL, I often heard that many high schools in my area would be thrilled to have me. And yet, without even trying it, I was convinced I'd sooner leave education completely than go that route.

In part, I eschewed public high schools due to a sense that I had no experience to prepare me for that environment. I'd spent my own grades 9–12 in an elite private school where state requirements such as Speech and Government were replaced by electives such as Russian History, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy, and Introduction to Law. Students had the freedom to follow their passions, and so did our teachers. Preselected for academic excellence and free of outside standards or assessments save those required for college admission, we enjoyed as thriving an intellectual community as teenagers can muster. In contrast, public high school graduates I met in college and graduate school reported bleak, stifling experiences, brightened only occasionally by an honors class taught by a bright young teacher not yet bored and bitter. Add notoriously low pay, crushing workloads, and incessant media attention to rising violence and plummeting student performance in the public schools, and let's face it: I wasn't interested.

At the same time, I knew there was no place for me teaching in a prep school like the one I'd attended. I had specialized in ESL, not Literature, and I had done so for a reason: I was interested in the growing number of Californian college students with home languages other than English. Tutoring friends, I'd seen evidence that native-like oral fluency in English could mask non-native structures in writing, and I had a hunch these writers' needs represented a future niche in my state's institutions of higher education.\* In short, my academic interest lay at the crossroads between ESL and college-level composition. A job teaching Shakespeare to privileged and gifted teenagers would have taken me almost as far from this goal as that job with the long-distance company.

In hindsight, rash stereotypes may have colored my judgment of public high schools. The students in my "target market" are certainly there, and no one ever really believed I'd be happier in an office job than in a classroom. Luckily, I never had to find out.

I'm now finishing my second year as a full-time, tenure-track instructor at a two-year college in an agricultural community. Our college employs seven other full-time English faculty and two full-time ESL instructors. My position straddles the two departments, allowing me to teach everything from entry-level ESL grammar courses to transfer-level courses in Literature and Critical Thinking. Not surprisingly, I also encounter the full continuum of English proficiency, including, in great proportion, "Generation 1.5" (see note)—in this case, often the grown children of agricultural laborers, raised in Spanish-speaking enclaves and educated in English, Spanish, and "Spanglish" in the public schools of California, Arizona, and Texas. My background in TESOL allows me to respect and foster these students' ongoing language development while they keep pace with native-speaker classmates in a typical, college-level writing sequence centered around interpreting literature and analyzing current, controversial issues.

I still can't help but marvel that my job even exists: somewhere between Literature, Composition, and ESL; somewhere between high school and university, I have found, at the community college, exactly the job I envisioned from the start. A clear sense of not only what I wanted to teach, but whom, allowed me to keep my search focused, and to select adjunct appointments that directly contributed both relevant experience and a supportive professional network. Who knows what would have happened if I'd bolted towards private-industry money or high school job security? The dot-coms are bust, and layoffs loom over the state's high schools. I'll stick to my path—halfway to tenure at a job that's tailor-made for me.

\*Now recognized in the ESL field as “Generation 1.5,” these learners generally emigrated to the U.S. as school-age children, completing a substantial part of their K–12 education in the U.S. Their complex patterns of multilanguage use and related issues of national and ethnic self-identity are the subject of a recent but rapidly expanding body of research, raising significant questions about traditional definitions of “Basic Writing” and “ESL” programs in American colleges and universities.

*Melissa Reeve teaches English and ESL at Hartnell College in Salinas, California, and at Hartnell's new King City Education Center. These days, she finds wedding planning to be a welcome change from job-hunting.*

### **Words to the Wise? Questioning the Conventional Job-Search Advice**

John A. Dern

Very often, “words to the wise” from well-meaning teachers and colleagues shape one's approach to the usually difficult academic job search. Understandably, graduate students and part-time teachers—many of whom want to be part of the full-time academic world—value the advice offered by those who have managed to enter it. The counsel of one's teachers or tenure-track peers simply rings true because it comes from those who have succeeded; moreover, it often proves useful. Indeed, many eager applicants design their job searches *around* particular pieces of advice, as I did for years. However, personal experience has taught me that such advice may lack the general applicability with which mentors and friends dispense it.

Not too long ago, for instance, I eagerly began reading an article entitled “What Search Committees Want.” Published in a leading academic journal, this piece, I thought, would give me definitive help in undertaking my job search. However, the following passage arrested me about halfway through: “Specifically, course evaluations and teaching awards were cited as more important than the number and quality

of the candidate's publications." What?

When I was a graduate student, my teachers insisted that nothing—*nothing*—had more to do with a successful job search than “the number and quality” of one’s publications. Especially the number. The irony is that I love to teach and, fortunately, always have prided myself on receiving good teaching evaluations from my students; nonetheless, I have made great efforts as both a graduate student and an adjunct instructor to research, present, and publish efforts that, if the quote above is to be believed, seem to constitute an important and worthwhile pursuit rather than the foremost *vitae* item. Still, around my publishing and to the neglect of my teaching evaluations, I designed my applications. In fact, only somewhat recently did I even start to maintain a file of evaluations that I could copy and submit to search committees on request, even though I still believed that publishing was the most important facet of my application.

This belief, passed on to me in various forms by teachers and colleagues, but easily summarized in the cliché “publish or perish,” suddenly lost its weight as the guiding principle of my academic life. Obviously, I did not summarily dismiss the importance of publications, but, I thought, it was lucky that I had paid close attention to the quality of my teaching, for teaching quality, I had been told, was of secondary interest to search committees as long as a basic competence was evident. As a result of the article’s revelation to the contrary, however, I began to wonder about other “words to the wise” I had received over the years.

- 1. If you have earned all of your degrees from one institution, a search committee will not consider you a viable candidate.** As a graduate student in a master’s degree program, I heard from a few of my professors that I should seek my doctorate at another school. I already had earned a bachelor’s degree from this same institution, and my professors feared, that I would not be able to find a job if I earned all three of my degrees at the same school.
- 2. More than just a few different adjunct positions on your vitae will make you a less viable candidate.** One of my employers once urged me not to work as an adjunct for too many different institutions. More than three or four institutional listings on one’s *vitae*, she said, would cause a search committee to pass over my application. “Job hopping” makes a candidate seem unprofessional.
- 3. If you remain on the full-time job market for more than five years after you obtain your terminal degree, search committees no longer will consider you a viable candidate.** A part-time colleague who had reached this magical number informed me of this “truth,” which he had received from the powers that be when he followed up on an application.
- 4. You have little chance of being hired in your own geographical area.** One of my professors at my doctoral institution told me that search committees try to

find candidates who come from as far away as possible. Apparently, the argument goes, a candidate from a distance will bring a “different perspective” than one from the same region, and committees want to encourage this diversity.

- 5. If you enter the administration or the private sector and then try to return to academia, you are wasting your time.** Another professor at my doctoral institution told me that a move into the private sector for any amount of time is a virtual death sentence to a candidate. One’s vitae must not reveal any gaps whatsoever in teaching experience. (Admittedly, this “rule” always seemed to me to contradict the “publish or perish” mandate, which implicitly downplays the importance of teaching.)

Not surprisingly, I have encountered exceptions to all of these “rules”; I have, in fact, encountered *numerous* exceptions to some of them, so many as to convince me of their general inapplicability. Nevertheless, each “rule” was presented to me dogmatically, so I can conclude that each one has been true at some time and in some place, that each one informed the job-search experience of someone, somewhere, but that no one of them is universal. Still, they collectively affected for years how I undertook the job search every time I perused a list of openings or readied an application.

This is not to imply that one should wholly ignore such pieces of advice, however. Although it maintains that publications are less important than I originally was led to believe, “What Search Committees Want” also verifies some of what I have heard. For example, the study from which it stems found that letters of application and reference carry a good deal of weight, a truism nearly as popular as “publish or perish” in the circles I frequent.

Perhaps most of all, though, the article implicitly reveals that search committees reflect the caprices and idiosyncrasies of those who comprise them. Consequently, the job search is fraught with potential pitfalls and advantages depending upon the people who do the interviewing and the beliefs to which they subscribe. People are different, so search committees are different.

What have I learned from all of this reflection? Listen to advice, but do not construct a job search around only a few “words to the wise.” Analyze the advertisement to which you are responding and figure out what the institution is seeking. Research the institution if you can. Most important, outline your ability to fill the needs of the people whom both advertisement and institutional information characterize; *do not* make presumptions about what they think. Sell yourself based on how well you fit the position described. The rest is up to fate.

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### **Campus Equity Week, October 28 through November 3, 2003**

Once again, adjunct faculty are encouraged to participate in Campus Equity Week, seven days of public activity intended to make the point that “teachers’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions.” Through events across the country, faculty sponsors hope to raise the consciousness of students and the general public concerning the two-tier faculty hiring practices at colleges and universities in both the United States and Canada.

International problems require international thinking, and the Steering Committee for CEW is composed of both Americans and Canadians. Wherever you are, you may want to contact one of these Central Coordinators: on the East Coast, Flo Hatcher (203) 392-7805; Eastern Canada, Pierre Ouellet (450) 971-4798; West Coast, Chris Storer (650) 949-2287.

From wherever you are, you can access the Web site: [www.cewAction.org](http://www.cewAction.org). This site links organizations supporting CEW and lists activities that may be helpful in bringing the message of contingent faculty to the general public.

Still wondering how you can help? Photocopy the following statement and send it to fellow faculty, your dean, or the local newspaper. Let them know you belong to an organization that has taken a stand.

### **CCCC Statement on Standards for Part-time Employment**

At its 2003 business meeting in New York City, **the Conference on College Composition and Communication of the National Council of Teachers of English** reconfirmed its commitment to excellent instruction by addressing the consequences of institutions relying on part-time assignments in their composition programs. CCCC members passed this resolution in March:

The professional standard for writing positions shall be full-time lines equivalent in salary and benefits to other full-time academic positions.

1. Faculty members who prefer part-time work can request less than full-time load with prorated salary and benefits. Faculty members requesting less than full-time loads can staff a maximum of 20% of the course coverage in any department or program.
2. All writing instructors shall be protected with the same professional security, academic freedom, and due process accorded other faculty members within their institutions.
3. All full-time writing positions will be tenurable or covered by continuous employment certificates.
4. Graduate students shall be required to teach no more than three semester-equivalent writing courses per academic year, shall undertake overloads only at their own choice, and shall receive ongoing professional development and careful mentoring from experts credentialed in the field of composition/ rhetoric.