

# FORUM

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

10.1 FALL 2006

CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

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### From the Editor

Evelyn Beck

I'm delighted to appear here for the first time as the new editor of *FORUM*. Having worked as an adjunct for multiple institutions in several states, both on campus and online, I am well aware of how underpaid and unappreciated most adjunct faculty are. We must continue to make everyone aware of these realities and to push for change.

This issue of *FORUM* looks at the conditions under which adjuncts work and their own efforts as well as institutional efforts to improve those conditions. Please consider sharing your own story in a future issue.

### Struggling for Clarity: Contract Language and the Working Conditions of Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

Michael Hammond

On one particularly gray day during the third week of the 2004 strike at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU), a small group of striking faculty gathered on a quiet campus street corner, most wearing tattered sandwich-board size "ON STRIKE" signs. "We don't want to be known as the university that has holes in its shoes," commented librarian Jill Althage, comparing Northeastern Illinois University's staffing strategy and those of stores such as K-Mart or Wal-Mart and explaining that she had stepped down from her part-time administrator role to walk the picket line

## 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 email or an email attachment. Address your work to [beck.e@ptc.edu](mailto:beck.e@ptc.edu) 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 Evelyn Beck, *Forum* editor, Piedmont Technical College, 620 N. Emerald Rd., Greenwood, SC 29648 or phone 864-941-8450.

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ISSN 1522-7502

in support of underpaid junior faculty. Veteran Professor of Linguistics Rory Donnelly echoed Althage’s concern, urging the university to provide “tangible respect” to all teachers, rather than “running the university on the cheap,” pointing to salaries as low as approximately \$23,000 a year for some full-time non-tenure-track faculty prior to the strike’s settlement.

Naomi Klein’s book on corporate branding, *No Logo*, describes the new “travel light” corporate mentality, one in which “temporary contracts are replacing full, secure employment” (231). Klein describes an economy dominated, if not entirely held together, by a flexible workforce of “part-timers, temps, and freelancers,” in which the names and faces may change, but the brand lives on. Just as corporations’ profits depend on the efforts of “Wal-Mart sales associates,” “Gap greeters,” and other employees with “notoriously unstable, low-paying, and overwhelmingly part-time” jobs (232), colleges and universities depend on the productivity of omnipresent part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty (FTNTTF). According to the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, there were less than 41,000 FTNTTF in 1987; there were over 161,000 as of 2003 (qtd. in American Federation of Teachers)—and those numbers increase exponentially every year. Not surprisingly, source after source indicates that in universities of all kinds, FTNTTF work as many if not more hours serving as many if not more students than tenure-track faculty, making considerably less money

per course in the process (AAUP; Baldwin and Chronister 88; ISU Non-tenure Track Faculty Association).

Acting increasingly like brands, for which a marketable image of the brand itself is often more important than the products they produce or the individuals who produce them, universities are spending less on their instructional budgets and investing more on campus renovations and computer technology (AAUP) in hopes of competing more effectively for incoming students and their tuition dollars, thus “selling” the campus and image of the institution. During the years both previous and subsequent to the NEIU strike, which was eventually settled by a \$400,000 donation by a board member, the administration financed ongoing building renovations, near constant landscape improvements, an expensive (and not exactly attractive) statue, and even the construction of a parking garage to help make the commuter school more desirable to suburban students. Our neighbor North Park University underwent a major beautification and marketing project in the years after they transformed from North Park College, and more recently began gobbling up several neighborhood buildings for additional dorm space and a huge new recreation center.

The investment in a university’s superficial image at the expense of instruction may succeed in attracting new students or even boosting student morale, but at what cost to the academic integrity of the institution? Universities risk becoming mere credit factories with a shiny exterior and an increasingly hollow center, following the model of for-profit Internet-based schools like the most popular university in the U.S., the corporate-owned University of Phoenix Online (Scherman 2) or perhaps their competitor Kaplan University, where one teacher claims, “The faculty are told that the students are customers . . . and the customer is always right” (qtd. in Carnevale, “In an Online First”). Meanwhile, Congress has taken recent actions making it easier for Internet-based “diploma mills” to do business and for conventional universities to conduct a higher percentage of their courses online (Carnevale, “Rule Change”).

As branded universities inch closer and closer to the corporate paradigm, less likely to make long-term investments in either communities or individuals, the escalation of presidential salaries combined with the spawning of countless new administrative positions—executive assistants and assistants to the assistants—has created what Karen Thompson calls an “hourglass employment structure—wide at the top and bottom, pinched in the middle—exactly parallel to the workforce picture in the larger society, and just as perilous in terms of mobility, skill transmission, and collegiality” (46).

University presidents, meanwhile, are becoming the new celebrity CEOs of academe, with a select few now earning seven figures, several public university

presidents making more than \$600,000 annually, and the national median presidential salary escalating greatly (Williams June; Bowen and Buck). Many presidents, whose primary role is shifting to fund-raising, even defend their lofty incomes by embracing the CEO analogy, claiming that as someone responsible for multimillion-dollar budgets and hundreds, if not thousands, of employees, they are underpaid (Fain). While this stance may seem sensible given academe's move towards a corporate business model, the CEO-president model is mind-boggling given its correspondence with flat-lined government funding for higher education and corresponding tuition increases. Given that a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey of university presidents concluded that financial matters dominate their daily activities (Selingo), one must wonder if today's university presidents remain the keepers of their institutions or if some have become penny-pinching, budget-slashing axe-men or axe-women building golden parachutes on the backs of an increasingly migratory workforce?

The working life of the typical full-time non-tenure-track instructor occupying the bottom of Thompson's hourglass model has been well documented in countless first-person testimonials and in-depth studies: low pay, little or no job security, little or no voice in the department, little or no representation in faculty governance, insufficient (if any) office space, and an intimidating workload. One result of this professional instability is a pervasive lack of clarity for both a system struggling to define a burgeoning class of employees it cannot function without and for individuals struggling to find their place within a system that offers them few guarantees. Contracts attempt to fill the gaps, to offer some semblance of stability, but no uniformity exists among contracts nationwide; even many individual contracts struggle to achieve true clarity.

Baldwin and Chronister's 2001 book *Teaching without Tenure*, the definitive study of FTNTTF, examines contract samples from around the nation, sharing representative, albeit remarkably disparate, contract language, finding that "Few of the institutional policies . . . contained clearly defined roles for full-time non-tenure track faculty" (31) and, in fact, "No consistent definitions of roles for full-time non-tenure track faculty emerged from our study" (34). *Teaching without Tenure* confirms an undeniable lack of collective consistency or clarity of contract language in terms of contract length (42–3), governance participation (57), evaluation methods, (60–1), and even job titles held by FTNTTF.

Both the job description and title held by FTNTTF, for whom "Lucy Snowe" penned the moniker "Professor Nobody," vary greatly from school to school. The term "visiting lecturer" has been commonly used to describe the typical full-timer, although many of these lecturers have been "visiting" for over a decade. Contin-

gent faculty, term faculty, and contract faculty are other common labels. Obviously, none of these terms is stable, often meaning different things in different places and describing different responsibilities. Despite the fact that many of these jobs are anything but temporary, almost all of the terms exist as euphemisms for the perceived disposability of non-tenure-track faculty, creating an image converse to the ubiquitous and stable name associated with the branded university that would apparently flush away non-tenure-track faculty once the term, visit, or contract expires.

There is reason to believe, however, that contract language can assist in the establishment of more appropriate titles. After over a decade with the dreaded "Unit B" designation, a label that triggers comparisons to several undesirable popular images, such as "B" movies or the "B" team, NEIU's non-tenure tracks now possess the more desirable label of "instructors" thanks to contract language won during a negotiation period that highly prioritized their needs. The change can only be seen as a major improvement over the antiquated, demeaning, and unfortunately hard to kill "B" label, yet even the more generous term "instructor" becomes complicated by NEIU's administration's post-contract attempt to pigeon-hole instructors as "teachers only"—credit-churning cattle ridden for all they're worth, despite contract language apparently granting instructors increased opportunities stretching far beyond the role of classroom teacher. Perhaps a new term that reflects the full scholastic possibilities of professionals who publish, present, and, as of the most recent contract, may even take sabbatical, might be necessary.

Don't let the term "contract" faculty fool you. Contracts are hard to come by for most FTNTTF; most work on one-year renewable but non-guaranteed contracts. However, some unions have fought for and gained slightly more secure situations, ranging from two- or three-year deals to various stepladder models where a defined time of service with outstanding evaluations can earn the employee a contract with a longer defined term, such as six one-year contracts leading to a three-year contract, which then leads to a five-year contract (Baldwin and Chronister 42–3). At some institutions, however, FTNTTF still cannot serve beyond a defined "temporary" assignment, usually lasting in the range of five to seven years. Disturbingly, *On Campus* magazine documents situations in which lecturers were very close to qualifying for long-term renewal, only to be let go (Myers Kelly 12). Negotiators must make a priority of contract provisions meant to protect lecturers in these situations and, in general, must fight the temp-worker mentality promulgated by the non-guaranteed contract model. In order to rise above the stifling corporate paradigm, contracts, as well as job titles and assignments defined therein, should reflect a reasonable expectation of annual re-employment despite short-term contracts.

Though traditionally excluded, non-tenure-track faculty are gradually becoming more involved in governance, as indicated by the fact that FTNTTF are now eligible for some participation at a majority of universities (Baldwin and Chronister 57–8). As was the case at NEIU, new contract language can directly impact eligibility, forcing the hand of governance bodies to begin integrating FTNTTF. Given the numbers involved, the transition has not been seamless; at campuses around the country, systems are bending to integrate the large numbers entering the fold. Resistance comes from administrations that view empowered non-tenure-track faculty as barbarians at the proverbial gate, and even some tenure-track faculty fully supportive of non-tenure-track causes find themselves looking over their shoulders, worried about how the influx of the brand new voting-privileged “non-tenured majority” (AAUP) will affect department politics.

One must wonder how strong a voice new non-tenure-track representatives might have in governance, given their lack of participation in the framing process of most university constitutions and department bylaws. It’s hard to imagine newly assimilated non-tenure-track faculty quickly morphing from the utterly voiceless to the equally or even appropriately represented. Will they exist only as an included exception, a minority concern still excluded despite their assimilation into the general group? Given the influence that contract language can have in opening up governance opportunities, it is crucial that non-tenure-track faculty have as strong an influence as possible in creating both contract and constitutional language that best includes them into governance bodies.

For employees with short-term contracts, some of the most crucial areas of any contract involve evaluation and grievance, sections where language can directly impact the employees’ standing, conditions, and even employment longevity. Annual evaluations are standard for many FTNTTF, and in most cases negative evaluations are devastating, usually putting the employees on probationary status, if not costing them their jobs outright. The threat of looming evaluations and frequent class observations darkens the mood of many courses, contributing to the “deeply corrosive” (Snowe) atmosphere of timidity and vulnerability that beleaguers FTNTTF.

Given that contract language will directly impact the manner, method, and frequency of faculty evaluations, one of the most crucial tasks of contract negotiators is to bargain language guaranteeing as fair and unobtrusive an evaluation model as possible. University Professionals of Illinois (UPI) negotiated a modified evaluation model during the most recent negotiations at NEIU. Historically, newly hired Unit B faculty were observed only by the department chair, a situation in which a potentially acrimonious relationship with a chairperson could, in theory,

spell the end of an instructor, especially given that most power of final say on rehiring belonged to the dean. The new contract made it more difficult for the dean to indiscriminately remove an instructor by installing a rigidly defined employment roster and an evaluation portfolio system including, most notably, a new peer observation conducted by fellow instructors or tenure-track faculty; however, the unfortunate trade-off was that these two observations would need to be conducted annually for *all* instructors, including veterans of more than a decade, resulting in increased stress on instructors and a waste of valuable department and administrative resources.

The new annual re-employment portfolios that each instructor must submit place us in a position of literally asking for our job back every year by requiring the instructors to express their desire to return in writing. To help remove additional stress on non-tenure-track faculty and to lessen the bureaucratic strain on personnel committees, department chairs, and even administrators, multiyear contracts with a less comprehensive evaluation process should be established, especially in the case of veteran instructors with more than five years' service. The benefits of increased job security and decreased scrutiny for FTNTTF ultimately reaches students, as a healthier and more comfortable academic environment—one in which FTNTTF can create a home base at a university—makes for better, more focused, and more productive instructors.

In cases of unfair dismissal or other grievance procedures, explicit contract language is the only protection for non-tenure-track faculty, who according to Jamie Daniel, Director of Organizing and Development for UPI Local 4100, "are some of the most vulnerable on campus":

Previously, the highest recourse was the university administration itself. Any person working at a university without the protection of tenure is at the mercy of arbitrary administrative decisions about spending money. You need something to guarantee that there have to be specific conditions and situations in place before you can even be considered for losing your job.

The existence of a clearly defined and effective grievance procedure is crucial, as contractual language on grievance will directly determine the grievance process and the manner by which a decision will be made. The modified grievance process bargained at NEIU in 2004 has been put to the test. Once the strike was over and the contract signed, the battle raged on through the grievance process, as many of the victories the union thought won at the table were brought into question; thus, the redefined grievance process determined how many bargained contract provisions would or wouldn't be utilized in practice.

When the panel “Rhetoric at Work: Lessons Learned from a University Strike” was accepted for the 57th Annual Conference on College Composition and Communication, I was congratulated by my colleagues, many of whom reminded me that I could earn .5 credit units (CUs) for the presentation, thanks to the newly negotiated Article 37, Category C of the NEIU *Collective Bargaining Agreement: “Research and Creative Activities Credit Unit Equivalencies”* (UPI Local 4100 152), which extended non-teaching CUs to instructors for the first time ever. A few months later, department and union colleagues alike were stunned by the Provost’s unexpected refusal to grant the .5 CUs and sensed a potentially precedent-setting grievance.

During my grievance procedure, both parties maintained the other blatantly and inexcusably misread the language of the contract. UPI feels the contract allows for CUs for conference presentations, as the action is explicitly mentioned among a laundry list of activities that qualify under Category C. The Provost, to whom the contract clearly grants the power to approve CUs, uses the tag “The Provost may assign these duties under special circumstances” in the heading of Category C to claim that approval of CUs is only granted for activities he deems “unusual,” such as a book deal (an example mentioned during the hearing). However, the contract does not specifically define “unusual,” nor does it mention a hierarchy among the thirteen listed activities. In fact, the Provost maintains he need not even provide a rationale for denying CUs. As one UPI grievance committee member mentioned later in the process, if a presentation at CCCC, the most respected conference in my field, does not create an unusual circumstance, one must wonder if any conference presentation could ever live up to the Provost’s lofty standards.

In the case of the new grievance model at NEIU, a Step Two panel was added, in which two administration appointees and two members of the union grievance committee heard the evidence collected during the initial Step One hearing. The panel’s decision was predictably political, with the two administration appointees reaching nearly identical conclusions, reiterating the argument of the administration’s contract administrator to a T. Likewise, the two UPI officers took my side, although both of their reports reflected an individually conceived rationale. Even in the improbable likelihood that an administration appointee would decide for the grievant during Step Two, the panel’s role was only to offer a recommendation to the university President, who has final say, and she, of course, sided in favor of the Provost.

Calculatedly vague contract provisions and overriding “final say” language are intriguing examples of an emerging “loophole strategy” among administrations, where even one carefully placed word can create complicating wiggle room that may allow for manipulation of a contract—a dangerous situation considering that

most faculty, especially extremely vulnerable lecturers working on non-guaranteed contracts, are highly unlikely to have the time, energy, or willingness to endure a taxing grievance procedure. Even the most judicious and methodically stepped procedures prove ultimately meaningless if, according to California Federation of Teachers spokesperson Fred Glass, who echoes Jamie Daniel, “the highest authority in deciding grievances over the language and realities of the contract” belongs to the administration. Reflecting on a contract signed by lecturers at the University of California after two and a half years of negotiation, Glass said, “Firm language on neutral dispute resolution had to be in the contract in order to make the other sections’ language on grievances ‘meaningful.’”

Obtaining advantageous new contract provisions is difficult, especially for a group with as little leverage as non-tenure-track faculty; obtaining advantageous new provisions with specific and clear language is supremely challenging. Glass believes it is the “contested terrain” of a negotiation that ultimately makes contract language so ambiguous, referring to “the very specific language that reflects relationships of power in concrete situations.” While even bargained language among two well-intentioned parties struggles to clearly capture the complexities of the intentions of opposing forces, some administrations seem willing to pay costly legal fees to ensure that contract language is consistently and calculatedly vague and prove equally willing to spend countless administrative hours haggling over matters involving relatively small amounts of money.

The political motivation for the administration’s “reading” in my case notwithstanding—being an instructor in overload, .5 CUs translate directly into \$400—there remains an undeniable ambiguity in the language of Article 37, and many articles just like it, that goes beyond even the loophole theory and opens the door for such creative interpretation. Contract language is, like written text of any kind, merely dead words on a page, dormant unless put to use, and even then, it proves slippery, open to interpretation, and easy to manipulate, dependent on action and practice for the breath of life. Given that some administrators seem eager to take advantage of ambiguous contract language, it puts the onus on non-tenure-track faculty to be equally eager to overcome their timidity and hopelessness and take the fight to the negotiating table and into grievance hearings.

Despite my frustrating contract dispute, the inevitable polarization of the negotiation process, and the naturally ambiguous nature of bargained contract language, union leaders and other labor activists rightly point to the potential power of collective bargaining agreements as useful tools for forging better conditions, helping non-tenure-track faculty open doors, and giving them a final layer of protection. As the new contract at NEIU demonstrated, the contract remains the most viable arena for positive change. Our *Collective Bargaining Agreement* (as

referred to in its full-length printed form) spelled out many immediate financial benefits, such as an annual raise of 3.5% for all faculty and, most notably, a new salary schedule that forced sizeable equity adjustments for many newly hired and drastically underpaid instructors. With the existence of a contractually defined workload range and a clear-cut credit hour adjustment scale providing a bit more credit for more demanding teaching assignments (such as paper-grading heavy general education writing courses), many instructors in the NEIU English department received significant overload checks at the end of the academic year. While the new salary schedule by no means made these positions lucrative, the annual raises and overload checks proved significant enough to impact my living conditions, contributing to my ability to devote more time and energy to my job, my research, and my personal scholarly development. The contract also put in place numerous other provisions impacting instructors positively, such as a new policy on online office hours and the availability of both excellence awards and paid academic leave.

It is at the negotiating table, on the picket lines, and during the grievance process that any advances in respect, income, conditions, benefits, and opportunities for non-tenure-track faculty will be gained. Ever mindful of administrators' reliance on linguistic loopholes, the goal for FTNTTF must be not only to gain advantageous new provisions, but to aspire to obtain contract language clear and definitive enough to ensure those opportunities and benefits are practically realized without having to resort to a complicated, frustrating, and potentially fruitless grievance process. The practical benefits of these victories reach far beyond FTNTTF—talented teachers and scholars who comprise the foundation of their universities—as improved working conditions for FTNTTF are for the good of all involved, including the departments and universities they serve and, most important, the students they teach.

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### **Training and Mentoring for Adjuncts**

Eileen Clark, Sara Minton, and Judy Andree

The University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) is a small liberal arts, open-admissions institution. The main campus is located in Juneau, Alaska, with satellite campuses in Sitka and Ketchikan. New students are given a placement test in order to determine the appropriate composition course for them as they begin their college experience. UAS offers several pre-GER composition courses (GER refers to the general education requirements that all students must take regardless of their degree program), and in recent years approximately 80% of new students have tested into English 110, a portfolio-driven course that includes external assessment and is followed by the first of two composition GERs. Currently, most of our composition pre-GER and GER courses are taught by adjuncts. Obviously, any institution with this level of reliance on adjuncts is wise to provide both training and mentoring for these important members of the faculty.

Adjunct faculty need training in both instructional issues and university procedures and policies, including payroll, personnel, technology, and scheduling. University administration and the adjunct faculty “union” should take a leading role in the training required in this area. New adjuncts need an introduction to the campus policies and support systems, and they should be compensated for attendance at training sessions designed to provide such information. At UAS, the administrative assistant in the humanities department is an important link for composition adjuncts new to the system. In addition, each adjunct is provided with an Adjunct Faculty Handbook that outlines the various campus policies and procedures.

In addition to university policies, adjuncts need training in the instructional issues unique to teaching post-secondary composition. These include syllabus formatting, grading, course expectations, portfolio assemblage and reading, technology, and best practices. University administration in conjunction with the appropriate departments should take responsibility for instructional issues training. This can best be implemented with a mentoring system, much of which can be done informally, but the campus administration would do well to encourage the mentoring by (1) funding mentoring time for mentors (tenure faculty) and adjunct faculty, (2) encouraging the development and implementation of a mentoring program within departments, and (3) funding adjunct faculty time to attend faculty and department meetings (thus encouraging more collegiality). Effective mentoring facilitates a long-term training and support process that provides many opportunities for follow-up contact between mentor and new adjunct.

At UAS, English 110 serves as a training opportunity for new adjuncts. If scheduling allows, potential adjuncts are invited to participate in the 110 portfolio reading prior to teaching a class. This reading process is done twice a semester, and faculty teaching English 110 on all three UAS campuses gather in Juneau to participate, including all adjuncts who are teaching English 110. Prior to the actual portfolio reading, attendees participate in a *norming session*, which includes lively discussions about instructional expectations and student outcomes. Readers are compensated at a rate of .5 credits per semester. In addition, new adjuncts meet other faculty, establish links with colleagues, and gain a sense of the expectations, not only for English 110, but also for the composition GERs that follow in the sequence. If the department needs to assign an adjunct to teach English 110 at the last minute, that adjunct is prepared due, at least in part, to the instructional support that the portfolio reading provides.

The portfolio process offers built-in mentoring for new composition faculty. UAS provides further support through an online English 110 booklet that describes the portfolio process as well as a composition faculty handbook that provides guidelines for all the composition GERs. These are reviewed with new faculty in one-on-one meetings with the UAS director of composition. At this meeting, new adjuncts also receive an anthology of student writing that illustrates the types and level of writing expected at the 110 level. A similar anthology is available for the first composition GER.

Another mentoring activity that has received positive feedback from UAS adjuncts and full-time composition faculty is the regular semester meetings of the English faculty. In these meetings, composition issues and policies are discussed, but the most valuable activity is the sharing of assignments and teaching practices. Each participant is responsible for bringing one assignment and/or teaching technique that has proven successful. Such meetings build collegiality as well as instructional expertise.

An open-admissions institution presents unique challenges for both adjuncts and full-time faculty. Adjuncts bring to the table considerable skill and expertise that can strengthen a composition program, and full-time faculty can learn much from adjuncts. In an effort to show appreciation for adjunct faculty, the UAS humanities department recently began recognizing the importance of adjuncts by a yearly Outstanding Adjunct Award. This award does not carry a monetary value, but it is a way to highlight the importance of adjunct faculty and their contributions to the university's composition program.

Training for composition adjuncts is crucial to the success of any composition program. Adjuncts deserve solid mentoring by seasoned faculty during the adjustment period. New faculty should be compensated for attending training sessions,

and these sessions should be institutionalized as an automatic part of new adjunct hiring. Such support can increase adjunct retention, which in turn strengthens a writing program. As post-secondary institutions rely more heavily on adjuncts as part of their struggle to deal with funding issues, there must be in place a clear process for training, mentoring, and supporting these essential faculty members.

*Eileen Clark and Sara Minton are composition adjunct faculty at the University of Alaska Southeast. Judy Andree is the UAS Director of Composition.*

### **How I Made the Transition**

Bonnie Startt

When I began as an adjunct at Virginia's Tidewater Community College (TCC) over 15 years ago, I was a stay-at-home mom who wanted to work but remain active in my children's lives. I began teaching one developmental class a semester to get out of the house. After a few years, I moved to two classes a semester, and that eventually grew to three. While I was teaching, the department chairs always made staff (including adjunct instructors) aware of any TCC classes that were available on updating computer skills or improving teaching techniques. I have always been grateful for the professional development TCC offered *all* of its staff.

Eventually, at the recommendation of other adjuncts, I found my way to a teaching position in the Writing Center. This wonderful opportunity to work with a wide variety of students was, looking back, one of the most rewarding jobs I have ever held. As a group, we took students who could not write a coherent sentence through to their entrance essays for four-year colleges. In addition, this gave me an office, a phone, and an opportunity to see what kind of assignments my fellow instructors were assigning, what worked well and what worked better. This was also where I learned about Web development. I am not sure how it happened, but I soon found myself working closely with the TCC webmaster to create an online Writing Center complete with handouts.

The assistant to the dean took me under her wing and guided me in the intricacies of teaching at the college level. She also suggested that we look at what I might need in order to be considered for a full-time position in the future. At the time, Virginia was in the midst of a hiring freeze, but it couldn't hurt to be ready. She encouraged me to explore committee work as well as professional memberships. My first committee work involved reviewing sample development papers for assessment. This led to other committees as well as an opportunity to be paid to review entrance exam writing samples.

Another suggestion to prepare me for full-time teaching at the college level was to make a presentation at a professional conference. A colleague kindly offered to share her room with me at TYCA-SE in Memphis, so I could afford to go to make a presentation in February 2000. At this conference, it was announced that TYCA-SE wanted a Web presence. I volunteered to help and was appointed the organization's first webmaster. I could never have imagined at that time what an impact this would have on my future. I served in this position for over six years, attending the TYCA-SE conferences and making great friends and contacts. When the conference was held in my home state, I made sure I was presenting and that I was available to help in any way that I could.

Feeling empowered, I made a presentation at our Virginia New Horizons Conference. This is an annual meeting sponsored by VCCS (Virginia Community College System), whose main focus is technology in the classroom. It is open to all staff, part-time as well as full-time. The Commonwealth of Virginia has been very supportive of continuing education and defrays the cost for all instructors; half the cost of the room is paid and most meals are provided.

Soon after that, I made a presentation at the VCCS English Peer Conference. Virginia allows for conferences every other year in each division. It is a fantastic way to meet people, network, and keep current in teaching changes. I also attended a wonderful session on "How to Get Hired" and filed my handout away for future use. As a result of contacts made there, I volunteered to be on the committee for planning the next Peer Conference, which was being held in Virginia Beach.

As you can see, each activity opened a new door to me, which allowed me to become a more active, well-rounded candidate in many ways. It was through these conferences that I was able to get my name out and network with members of my community. When the Peer Conference was held here in Virginia Beach and the committee members were introduced, our college president, Dr. Deborah DiCroese, asked why she did not know who I was. When she found out I was an adjunct, she made sure we met. She eventually asked me to serve on her PAPC (President's Advisory and Planning Committee) as an adjunct liaison.

It was a few more years before any instructors were hired on our campus, but when it happened, I was one of the individuals hired. The funniest comment I got from most people was not "Congratulations," but "I thought you already were full-time."

I have just served on my first hiring committee, and I really saw how all of these steps came together in my being hired:

- People knew my name.
- I had memberships in professional organizations in my field.

- I attended professional conferences.
- I made presentations at various conferences.
- I was active in administration by serving on committees.
- I kept current in changes in my area of study.
- I had experience teaching all levels of classes in my field at the community college.
- I carefully read the ad and provided everything mentioned.
- I did not assume the committee would see that a particular job filled a requirement—I told them.
- I was (and still am) happy to come to work each day.

*Bonnie Startt has been an assistant to the dean since 2002 and a full-time instructor since 2003 at Tidewater Community College's Virginia Beach campus.*

### **Mark Your Calendar!**

- ✓ NCTE Annual Convention  
November 16–21, Nashville, Tennessee
- ✓ CCCC Annual Convention  
March 21–24, 2007, New York, New York
- ✓ Next *FORUM* issue in the March *TETYC*

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