

# FORUM

ISSUES ABOUT PART-TIME AND CONTINGENT FACULTY

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CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

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### **From the Editor: Growing the Argument**

Amy Lynch-Binieik

I have in this space encouraged scholars at the intersections of English studies and labor studies to consider local contexts, as our geography, institutional settings, and personal circumstances can both enrich analysis and constrain appropriate action. In contrast, the authors in this issue of *Forum* remind me of the importance of keeping an eye on the larger picture, as well. The study of academic labor might benefit from appropriating the environmental activists' motto, "Think globally; act locally."

While we very much need continued study of English and writing departments, we should not lose sight of the parallel structures in other programs, departments, and universities; the more we can make connections among our contexts, the more information, allies, and possibilities are made available to us. In this issue, Robert Samuels reminds us, "The central problem is not primarily an issue of how people see the teaching of writing; rather, the problem stems from the social hierarchies placing research over teaching, faculty over students, theory over practice, and disciplines over general education" (7). How might reframing our research to consider the ways in which introductory math courses are staffed or resources given to contingent history professors enrich our understanding of the system?

We need to understand labor policies' connections to larger administrative, institutional and cultural contexts. Samuels explains, "Without a focus on the larger economic and political forces shaping higher education practices, teachers become the solution and problem to every social issue" (7).

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**About Forum**

*Forum* is published twice a year by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Amy Lynch-Binieck, editor of *FORUM*, welcomes you to submit essays related to the teaching, working conditions, professional life, activism, and perspectives of non-tenure-track faculty. Faculty and scholars from all academic positions are welcome to contribute. Of special interest are research, analyses, and strategies grounded in local contexts, given that labor conditions and the needs of contingent faculty vary greatly with geography, institutional settings, and personal circumstances.

Essays should address theoretical and/or disciplinary debates. They will go through the standard peer-review and revision process. For further information please contact Dr. Amy Lynch-Binieck at [lynchbin@kutztown.edu](mailto:lynchbin@kutztown.edu).

Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than April 1; for the spring issue, the deadline is August 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned. Submit your work electronically to [lynchbin@kutztown.edu](mailto:lynchbin@kutztown.edu) and put the words "Forum article" in your subject line. Submissions should include your name, title(s), institution(s), home address and phone number, institutional address(es) and phone number(s), and if applicable, venue(s) where the submission was published or presented previously.

**For further information and to make submissions, please contact Dr. Amy Lynch-Binieck, Editor, *Forum*, at [lynchbin@kutztown.edu](mailto:lynchbin@kutztown.edu).**

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The adjunct teacher is, in fact, still too often criticized for her very precarity, as though individual teachers could single-handedly alter the labor system by refusing a position. Dawn Fels, Clint Gardner, Maggie Herb, and Liliana M. Naydan report on their study of writing center conditions, in which interviews with writing center staff reinforce the reality that "contingent faculty are often blamed for their own 'willingness' to take a low-paying job. . . ." Yet the "just quit" stance belies the difficult material reality of alt-ac employment and ignores the role of collective action in labor reform.

As we face the complicated web that is higher education's labor system in our research, advocacy, and curricula, teachers may feel overwhelmed, even powerless. But if we want to change higher education for the better, it is crucial that we find strength in our growing body of knowledge and use our understanding of both the global and the local for scholarship and activism that make a positive difference in the lives of our teachers and our students. With that in mind, I am cutting my editor's introduction short in this issue to make room for the excellent work of our contributors.

## Contingent Labor, Writing Studies, and Writing about Writing

Robert Samuels

This article examines Elizabeth Wardle's "Intractable Writing Program Problems, *Kairos*, and Writing about Writing" to explain how the use and abuse of contingent faculty in higher education affects the ability to implement a writing studies approach to the teaching of composition. Central to writing studies is the argument that by focusing on a social science research agenda through the use of the concepts of transfer, genre, and metacognition, writing programs will enhance their disciplinary prestige, and this will bring more resources and tenure-track positions. The strategy then is to mimic the dominant university research paradigm, but the problem remains that research universities are structured by a series of social hierarchies privileging research over teaching, theory over practice, the sciences over the humanities, and graduate education over undergraduates.

Although I focus on research universities, many of the practices developed at these institutions are spreading to all forms of higher education in a globalizing mode of social conformity: in an effort to reduce costs and increase administrative control, universities around the world are increasing their reliance on inexpensive, just-in-time academic labor. On many levels, writing studies is itself structured by the contradictory nature of its relation to the dominant university research paradigm: while the teaching of writing challenges many of the standard institutional hierarchies, the desire for more resources often pushes composition programs to reproduce the structures that place writing, teaching, students, form, and practice in a debased position. Wardle's work is important here because she both acknowledges the need for structural change at the same time she offers a curricular and theoretical solution.

Wardle begins her article by highlighting the problematic relation between the theories of writing studies and the practice of actual composition courses:

Macro-level knowledge and resolutions from the larger field of Writing Studies are frequently unable to inform the micro-level of individual composition classes, largely because of our field's infamous labor problems. In other words, composition curricula and programs often struggle to act out of the knowledge of the field—not because we don't know how to do so, but because we are often caught in a cycle of having to hire part-time instructors at the last minute for very little pay and asking those teachers (who often don't have degrees in Rhetoric and Composition) to begin teaching a course within a week or two.<sup>1</sup>

Here, Wardle correctly indicates that we cannot promote new pedagogical practices, theories, and research projects, if we do not also deal with academic labor

issues. As she stresses, it is hard to mentor and train faculty who are hired at the last minute and may not have expertise in writing studies. This important framing of the relation between research and teaching can help us to think about the political, economic, and institutional affordances shaping the possibilities of writing studies.

A concern for the material conditions structuring higher education weaves in and out of Wardle's article, and it is my contention that a close reading of her argument reveals a conflict concerning the ways positive change can be made at higher education institutions. On the one hand, Wardle points to large structural forces determining how writing is taught, and on the other hand, she seeks to provide a local example of how individuals at a particular location can enact new pedagogical models. The question remains whether a move to adopt a writing studies approach in the teaching of composition courses can be achieved without collective action dedicated to transforming our institutions of higher education. If institutions value research over teaching, graduate education over undergraduate education, theory over practice, and content over form, can writing studies' focus on researching how undergraduate students learn and write take hold?<sup>2</sup>

For Wardle, material conditions and institutional expectations help to define the possibilities and limitations of classroom practices: "Often these courses are far larger than the class size suggested by NCTE, likely because of the high cost of lowering class size and of widespread misconceptions about what writing is (a 'basic skill') and what writing classes do ('fix' writing problems)." From this perspective, the determination of class size is driven by an economic concern and an institutional interpretation. In response to this analysis, an important question to ask is whether economic concerns are driving the pedagogical expectations, or is the reductive understanding of writing producing a rationale for cost saving? To be precise, are economics producing cultural understandings, or is culture determining the material conditions?

As academic thinkers and people invested in the power of rhetoric, we often believe that culture drives social institutions, and so the best way to change a system is to change the culture. However, what if we have it backwards, and economic forces produce cultural interpretations? For instance, behind some of the recent pushes to focus on a writing studies approach to the teaching of composition is the implicit argument that the best way to increase resources for these programs is to enhance the cultural respect for the field (see Adler-Kassner and O'Neill; Beaufort; Dobrin). Yet one has to still ask if this approach is too focused on a rhetoric of logos and ethos. Furthermore, if the major forces structuring the distribution of resources in higher education are irrational and unethical, then rational and ethical appeals may not prevail.

It is my contention that the social hierarchies placing research over teaching, the sciences over the humanities, theory over practice, and graduates over undergraduates are not rational or ethical structures; rather, they are irrational power structures rationalized after the fact in order to maintain a system of prestige and privilege. Moreover, these power structures can only be countered by organized collective action, and they will not be transformed by merely rational and ethical appeals. This does not mean that we should stop making rational and ethical arguments, but we need to understand that these rhetorical devices will not be enough. We need to add to pathos, logos, and ethos, a fourth category of social power.

In returning to Wardle's text, we see both the strength and weakness of her institutional analysis:

In addition, composition courses continue to be housed largely in English departments, where they tend to get the least attention and funding of all the low-funded English programs and where sometimes faculty with little interest in or training to teach writing are nonetheless required to do so. Sometimes entire composition programs are staffed with brand new graduate students, many if not most of whom are graduate students in fields other than Rhetoric and Composition, and who have taken, at most, one graduate course in how to teach writing before walking into a classroom.

She begins this important analysis by pointing out the problems many composition programs face because they are located in English departments and are often at the low end of the funding and prestige hierarchy (see Bousquet; Crowley; Schell). Since theory and literature are privileged over practice and writing, the importance of writing studies is devalued, and the teaching of composition is seen as an activity that requires little expertise, experience, or concern.

In stressing culture over economics, Wardle argues that promoters of the field of writing studies have to realize that composition has been treated by management in a different way than other disciplines:

No administrator would ever send untrained faculty members or graduate students from another discipline to staff an entire segment of courses in, say, biology or history or mathematics or economics. Yet this happens every day in composition programs. Because of these and other entrenched practices, locations, and labor conditions, and despite our field's advances in how best to teach writing, we can still find composition classrooms where the students are learning modes or grammar or literature in formalistic ways, or are learning popular culture with little to no attention to writing itself, in courses sometimes if not frequently taught by faculty or graduate students with little to no training (or even interest) in teaching writing.

Once again Wardle homes in on the main problem, which is that teachers' working conditions shape students' learning conditions, but her analysis does not go

far enough. Not only are first-year writing courses often devalued in the higher education institutional hierarchy, but many first-year courses are devalued and underfunded no matter the discipline.<sup>3</sup> The central problem then is not primarily an issue of how people see the teaching of writing; rather, the problem stems from the social hierarchies placing research over teaching, faculty over students, theory over practice, and disciplines over general education.<sup>4</sup>

Writing studies often flies in the face of the dominant social hierarchies shaping higher education because it uses research to focus on student learning and effective pedagogical practices. Moreover, the attention to which skills and knowledge transfer from one class to the next—and from inside and outside of the academy—positions writing studies to be a major player in assessment and the evaluation of instructional quality (Adler-Kassner and O'Neil). Still, the problematic nature of labor conditions for writing instructors threatens to undermine the desire to produce specific outcomes: "The fact that research has suggested for many decades now that students in composition courses often do not reach desired course outcomes or improve as writers in measurable ways in one or two composition courses is not an unrelated problem. It seems reasonable to assume that if we staffed any set of courses in any discipline with teachers who had little training or interest in teaching them, we would likely see a problem in student achievement." As several longitudinal studies have looked at what students learn and transfer in and from their writing courses, it has become apparent that students are often not learning or retaining the desired outcomes of courses. Wardle argues that one reason for this failure to transfer is that the faculty teaching the courses have little training in writing studies. However, one unintended risk with this focus on transfer is that it can feed the current political ideology that blames teachers for all of our educational and social problems. Without a focus on the larger economic and political forces shaping higher education practices, teachers become the solution and problem to every social issue (Ravitch). In the case of higher education, the lack of expertise and experience of graduate student instructors places them in a difficult situation: they are often pushed to teach courses outside of their interests and knowledge, and then they are blamed for not being experts.

A materialist analysis of higher education tells us that graduate students play a contradictory role since they are supposed to be both students and teachers. For example, many graduate students are recruited for graduate programs in order to keep certain subdisciplines alive, but once they start to study, they are immediately asked to be teachers of courses outside of their area of specialization (Bousquet). One could even argue that the use and abuse of graduate student workers has been a major driver in the casualization of the academic labor force. The fact that depart-

ments allow grad students to teach undergrad courses sends the message that one does not need a degree, or expertise, or even experience to teach at a research university. This system lowers the bar of entry into the profession so low that the door is open for virtually anyone to teach required undergraduate courses. A reason, then, why there are so few jobs for graduate students when they earn their PhDs is that there are so many grad students and contingent faculty without degrees teaching the courses (Bousquet).

As writing studies emerges as the dominant paradigm for the teaching of composition, this troubling use of grad student instructors becomes even more apparent. If writing is not just a practice, but it is also a subject of study, it then requires expert practitioners with degrees and experience; however, the larger structures of higher education can undermine this quest for expertise. Wardle adds that this labor problem is enhanced by the fact that there appears to be little consensus in the field concerning what people are actually supposed to be doing:

The fact that composition courses often do not seem to achieve desired outcomes is made more complex because our field does not necessarily agree on what appropriate outcomes are or should be for first-year composition. Despite the valiant and important efforts of those who worked (and continue to work) on the WPA Outcomes Statement, beliefs about what outcomes should be for composition still seem to vary widely. Should composition courses help prepare students for what they will write later? If so, what counts as “later”? School settings? Which school settings? Work settings? Personal settings? If transferable knowledge and skills are not the desired outcome, then what do we focus on instead? Self awareness? Cultural awareness? Artistic and creative enjoyment of writing?

One of the laudable aspects of writing studies is that it continues to ask what the goals are for writing courses and how the attainment of these objectives can be studied and monitored. Yet, even if a stronger consensus were reached in the field, the use of grad student instructors and part-time faculty would make it hard to implement the accepted practices.

Due to the temporary and transitory nature of academic labor in writing programs, administrators often fall back on prescribing simplistic and rigid syllabi: “Because labor is unstable, some programs attempt to ensure programmatic consistency by giving part-time teachers and graduate students (some of whom teach even their first semester as MA students) program syllabi and specific and fairly rigid assignments to teach.” Although it may seem like a unified theory of writing studies would enable this type of programmatic control, the reality is that it takes a great deal of study and practice to become an effective teacher of writing. In fact, once we see writing studies as a separate discipline with its own key concepts,

theories, practices, and bodies of research, a high level of professional development is required, and yet, the material conditions of these programs often prevent the needed focus on expertise and experience: “Many programs make efforts to provide ongoing professional development for adjunct instructors and graduate students, but these supports are in constant tension with material conditions related to pay and time constraints, including the fact that such underpaid adjunct instructors are often teaching numerous sections at multiple institutions, leaving them little time to participate in the life of any one department.” It should be clear from Wardle’s analysis that it will be hard for a writing studies agenda to be employed if current labor conditions continue. In short, we need to work toward a national agenda to promote full-time faculty with job security, fair wages, a career path, and professional development funding in order to secure a place for writing studies.

### Notes

1. For more on the labor issues facing composition, see Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola; Robertson and Slevin; Schell; Scott; Sledd; and Strickland.
2. For more on the hierarchies shaping contemporary higher education, see Kirp; Samuels; and Washburn.
3. This use of contingent faculty in courses from a wide range of disciplines is discussed in Eagan and Jaeger.
4. My use of binary oppositions in my argument seeks to clarify the general trends in higher education; of course, there are always exceptions, but these exceptions help to prove the rule.

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*Robert Samuels is the president of UC–AFT, which represents over 5,000 non-tenure-track faculty in the the University of California system. He teaches writing at UCSB and is the author of seven books, including Why Public Education Should Be Free. His forthcoming book is The Politics of Writing Studies.*

## **Toward an Investigation into the Working Conditions of Non-Tenure Line, Contingent Writing Center Workers**

Dawn Fels, Clint Gardner, Maggie M. Herb, and Liliana M. Naydan

For years, we have been concerned about the increasing contingent nature of writing center workers' positions. In 2014, Isaacs and Knight found that 71 percent of writing center directors held non-tenurable positions and 81 percent of writing centers were staffed by peer tutors (48–49). Isaacs and Knight's report illustrates a sharp contrast from the results of the 2001–2002 survey for the Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP). Of writing center directors who responded to that survey, 41.97 percent held tenured or tenure-line positions (Ervin 2). While the two studies took different approaches to data collection, the apparent decline in tenured or tenure-line positions among writing center directors over the past decade justified, for us, the need to investigate this shift and to speak directly to contingent writing center directors and tutors to learn more about their working conditions.

While our investigation focuses on contingent writing center workers, its significance connects with others beyond this group. Indeed, employment trends in the writing center field mirror those of the wider higher education workforce and the growing awareness of the precarity of contingent positions. In 2014, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) published a report on the "Employment Status of Instructional Staff Members in Higher Education, Fall 2011." That study illustrated the continued decrease in tenure-line positions: of all instructional staff employed in 2011, only 23.5 percent held tenured or tenure-line positions, 15.7 percent held non-tenure-line full-time positions, 41.5 percent held part-time "adjunct" positions, and 19.3 percent were graduate student employees (2). According to the AAUP, contingent faculty face a number of vulnerabilities that tenure-track faculty do not. Our study hopes to identify the vulnerabilities among writing center workers who serve in "insecure, unsupported positions with little job security and few protections for academic freedom" ("Contingent," par. 1).

Despite a recent increase in activism and awareness on behalf of contingent instructional faculty in the larger composition field, the labor conditions of writing center workers specifically remain under-represented in our scholarship and under-investigated. Although the National Census of Writing Database (formerly the WPA Census) does report data concerning the status of writing center director positions, we know the data was not necessarily provided by the writing center directors themselves. Moreover, the database does not appear to have solicited data on peer tutors from peer tutors. Isaacs and Knight (2014) also reported on the number of students who staff writing centers but not on their working conditions. In fact,

there has been no comprehensive study of the working conditions of peer tutors. Most research on peer tutoring is either about training or focuses on the long-term educational/learning impact of working as a peer tutor, not on working or material conditions. Our study is gathering insights from all levels of contingent writing center workers—directors, staff, and tutors—about the realities of their material and working conditions.

Before launching our study, we looked to professional organizations for guidelines on the material and working conditions of contingent faculty. We started with the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA). They are located on the Position Statements page of the organization's website ([writingcenters.org](http://writingcenters.org)). We looked there for a statement on the working conditions of writing center directors and did not find one. We later discovered that one exists. Thirty years ago, when the IWCA was a fledgling national organization, Jeanne Simpson published "What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concerns" in the *Writing Center Journal*. The statement appears on the IWCA's website as a resource for those who wish to start a writing center. In the statement, Simpson acknowledges the professional strides made by the writing center field during the previous decade and urges the organization to take up the professional concerns of writing center directors to preserve the increasing professionalism that some directors enjoyed and to alleviate the "dreadful conditions" under which others labored. The result was a position statement that "explains [to administrators and supervisors] the need for appropriate preparation for writing center directorships, asks for clear job descriptions, outlines the ideal conditions of a directorship, and suggests guidelines for directing a writing center" (par. 7). The statement goes on to assert the organization's opposition to hiring unprepared and part-time directors and offers several recommendations to those who hire and supervise writing center directors.

We then looked to the larger organizations to which many writing center directors belong. The IWCA is an Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Writing center directors have been long-standing members of NCTE, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). All of these organizations have statements that offer guidelines for working conditions for contingent faculty, but we wonder how often and to what degree those statements are used. We are not alone. Before our study launched, a group of concerned members of the composition field authored the Indianapolis Resolution (2015), a statement that advocated for ethical labor practices in writing programs. The Resolution does make mention of contingency in the writing center field, but only in the first paragraph. It does not, however, list the IWCA among the organizations on whom the authors of the

Resolution call to share their respective statements on contingency. Because we contend that these statements should lead to substantive change in the material and working conditions of contingent faculty, we plan to use findings from our study to revise Simpson's original statement. Our hope is that the IWCA and other organizations use the statement in the way that Simpson first envisioned.

Because our study will rely on self-reported data from contingent writing center workers (administrators, staff, and tutors) and focus squarely on the risks and benefits tied to their contingent positions, our findings will provide a valuable and much needed dimension to writing center scholarship. Those findings could reinforce concerns already brought to our attention about writing center program sustainability and writing center workers' professional and personal well-being. Prior to the launch of our study, we collected early information about the risks of contingency among writing center workers through informal means: surveys; Special Interest Group (SIG) discussions at two IWCA conferences; and conversations with directors who lost their centers, lost their jobs, or both. What we learned from that early exploration reinforced the need for a more substantial, national study of the conditions under which contingent writing center workers worked. Those early findings include increased concerns about the following:

- Directors' job security and academic freedom
- Exploitation of directors, tutors, and other writing center staff
- Writing center program development, philosophical direction, and longevity
- Advocacy and supportive action within the field

These issues and our concerns about the employment trends and conditions in which writing center workers labor prompted us to propose a more formal study. We wrote and received a research grant from the IWCA, and in the fall of 2015, we launched our study.

Our qualitative study has received IRB approval and seeks to answer this central question: What are the personal, professional, and programmatic risks and benefits of contingent writing center positions? Among our participants are writing center workers over the age of 18 who currently hold a contingent position (administrator, staff, or tutor) or did so within the past 5 years. To vet participants, we started with an initial survey to gauge interest for participation and determine qualification to participate. We distributed that survey via social media networks (Facebook and Twitter) and to subscribers of the WCENTER listserv, to which many writing center directors and staff belong. A call for participants was also posted on the IWCA's website. Because we recognized that we might find participants outside of those venues, particularly those no longer in writing center positions, we also asked for help in sharing word of the survey. Those who completed the survey and met our

criteria were selected for interviews. To date, we have received an overwhelming response that surprised even us: over 100 participants have agreed to an interview. In addition to interviewing participants, we plan to complete document and Web source analyses of materials they provide, such as contracts, job descriptions and policy statements.

We have preliminary observations to share from the interview data. While these observations stem from only a small percentage of participants, those we interviewed spoke eloquently and at length about the challenges associated with contingency. One person weighed those challenges against the benefits of a contingent position. Acknowledging that this may be a minority view, the participant described how his part-time, contingent position benefits his family and enables them to live according to their values. Having created the center he now co-directs, the participant admitted that he is grossly underpaid for his work but felt that the low pay was balanced by the considerable autonomy and healthy, collaborative, supportive relationships he enjoys with colleagues and supervisors.

Still, most participants spoke starkly about professional challenges that accompany their contingency. We spoke to a participant who described how she “shut myself down” when talking about writing center management and its relationship to her department because of a lack of perceived academic freedom. She felt disempowered to make any controversial comments about academic policies or even the status of her writing center because she and her job were under threat if she did. Another participant indicated that she was only apprised of her institution’s academic freedom policies because of contractual negotiations with adjunct faculty on campus; there was no information about academic freedom provided when the person was hired. Yet another participant indicated that non-tenure-track faculty (and presumably staff) are not afforded any academic freedom. Academic freedom policies have a direct impact on the management of writing centers. A contingent director may be disempowered to establish policies and procedures developed from writing center theory and practice, with which their bosses may have little experience. That disempowerment can affect anything from guiding philosophy to session length to tutor training, thus impacting student learning. Further, one participant noted that despite having a degree similar to other full-time, tenure-track professors in the department, he was not given any respect by colleagues in discussing the writing center as an academic, theorized space.

Although many participants spoke of the way they are treated as a result of their contingency, we also observed that some of the challenges with contingency can come from within. When questioned about the risks involved with a contingent position, another participant referred to the risks that her contingency held for her students. Certainly a job loss would affect the participant’s family’s ability to make

ends meet. But instead of focusing on that risk, the participant noted that her contingent position put students at risk of not receiving the best possible educational experiences; consistency was key to providing the help students received. Despite feeling exploited, the participant felt that the primary risk of contingency was and is the quality of education provided by the institution.

A similar theme emerged when we asked participants the question, “Do you believe that you are adequately compensated for your work?” Some participants expressed a reluctance to state outright that they are not adequately compensated for their work, even though they mentioned completing hours of unpaid work each week or performing tasks that are outside of their job description. In fact, one participant attributed her hesitancy to characterize the compensation as inadequate to the fact that she chose to accept the position, knowing the compensation was low.

The implications of these responses trouble us. Contingent faculty are often blamed for their own “willingness” to take a low-paying job, especially if the job offers something of value to students. We reject that mentality, and so do others who advocate for and act on behalf of contingent workers. Kahn sees the comparison of “willingness to work for low pay with their moral character—a move we see constantly applied to teachers at all levels, ranks and statuses” as an “accusatory version of the emotional wages argument . . . which says that teachers are expected to find the internal payoff of teaching so high that the financial payoff isn’t relevant. Nowadays, the argument seems to be that anybody who doesn’t find the emotional payoff sufficient is morally bankrupt” (110). Like other contingent faculty, each of us have felt a sort of selfless dedication to the labor of teaching and tutoring writing. We have felt a sense of meaning in our own lives by dedicating ourselves fully to the needs of our students, and we imagine that these participants attain a similar sense of meaning from their work. But the fact that these participants are putting their students’ needs over their own needs as professionals—before their own self-interests—brings to light the degree to which we as professionals are complicit in our own exploitation. Yes, the needs of our students and our own “internal payoff” exist as a central concern to educators, but so, too, should the needs of educators exist as a central concern to administrators who set the terms for how the contemporary American university works. By meeting the needs of educators, administrators can meet the needs that students bring with them, and educators—both contingent workers like this participant and those working on the tenure track—need to learn how to articulate their own value in order for institutions to fully address the array of risks associated with contingency. Part of the project of addressing labor issues in writing centers, therefore, involves fostering conditions for contingent writing center workers to acknowledge and appreciate the ways in which they are integral to institutions of higher education. It involves fostering conditions for writing

center workers to embrace their own value enough so that they can consider the risks to their own well-being as being just as important as risks to the educational experiences of their students.

We would like to conclude our observations with comments that a number of participants made—not in response to our interview questions themselves but in conversations that took place after the interviews, when we invited participants to add any comments or observations not covered by our questions. Several participants mentioned that they chose to participate in our study because they were curious about whether their working conditions are unique to them or their center or whether others are experiencing similar situations. In fact, one participant speculated that their working conditions *must be* unique, that it was hard to imagine other writing center administrators facing a similar set of challenges. Our perception, though, was that the challenges this participant spoke of—inconsistent reporting lines and lack of control over the center’s budget, for example—were certainly not unique to this particular writing center worker or their center. This theme, then, of participants wondering, “Am I alone?” or feeling isolated from their field by their working conditions is notable, especially if we consider how their contingency might affect and compound this feeling. We hope that perhaps one outcome of this study will be to allow contingent writing center workers to learn more about the challenges faced by their peers, perhaps lessening the feeling of isolation that contingency can breed.

We look forward to learning more about the realities that contingent writing center workers face. What we share here are only preliminary findings, and we have nearly 100 more interviews to complete. That number may increase, since we just placed a call for more tutor participants on PeerCentered, a blog for peer tutors. We are currently in the process of arranging more interviews and plan to conduct those online or at conferences. Though we hope to move through the interviews as quickly as possible, we anticipate that it may take us two years to complete, transcribe, and analyze them. We will also analyze the supporting documents that participants provide, as well as their writing centers’ websites, for additional insight about the participants’ working conditions. Clearly, we have a lot of work to do and look forward to sharing the final report.

We wanted to do this study because we care about our writing center colleagues, their tutors, and the scores of students whom they collectively serve, year after year. For some of our colleagues, our research comes too late. We already know that, over the last several years, renowned writing center directors lost their jobs, their centers, or both—for reasons that had nothing to do with their performance. We know that tutors continue to do the bulk of the labor in writing centers across the country, yet they are grossly underpaid for the valuable work they do for

their institutions. We also know many directors have been replaced by less experienced and qualified candidates. We know successful directors who have to reapply for their jobs year after year and who work well beyond their contractual duties. We know that the entire writing center field relies on the labor of student workers. Those conditions should cause deep concern in the writing center and composition fields. We know that our study will fill a void in the current scholarship, but we also hope that, by elevating the voices of contingent writing center workers, more will be done on their behalf.

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*Dawn Fels teaches composition at the University of Pittsburgh. Before teaching at Pitt, she taught a range of composition courses and directed writing centers at the high school and college level.*

*Clint Gardner is the program manager of College Writing and Reading Centers at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) Student Writing Center in Salt Lake City, Utah.*

*Maggie M. Herb is assistant professor of English and assistant director of the College Writing Program at SUNY Buffalo State College. Her research focuses on the institutional positioning of writing centers and writing center workers.*

*Liliana M. Naydan is the writing program coordinator at Penn State Abington. She researches writing centers as well as contemporary American fiction.*