

FORUM

ISSUES ABOUT PART-TIME AND CONTINGENT FACULTY

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INSIDE

- From the Editor: Faculty Alliances and Local Change for Labor Equity** A1
Amy Lynch-Binieck
- Using Cross-Tier Collaboration to Support Professional Identity** A3
Casie Fedukovich and Megan Hall
- Contingent Labor, Commuter Students, and Placemaking in the Commons** A11
Benjamin Solomon

From the Editor: Faculty Alliances and Local Change for Labor Equity

Amy Lynch-Binieck

Another essay in the genre of academic “quit lit” made considerable rounds on social media in fall 2015: Oliver Lee Bateman’s “I Have One of the Best Jobs in Academia: Here’s Why I’m Walking Away” in *Vox*. A growing segment of this genre is penned by non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty, who often describe the cumulative effects of years of being treated as second-class citizens doing the lion’s share of teaching for a fraction of the pay and recognition enjoyed by their tenure-line peers. Bateman, however, is an assistant professor of history on the tenure track. He cites a range of reasons for leaving academia, including a perceived lack of student engagement and the rise of online teaching. But the statement perhaps garnering the most attention is this claim: “No matter how bad things are for the adjuncts, they’re effectively non-people to their ostensible colleagues. We won’t save you. It’s not that we full-timers don’t care; it’s that we can’t. The rules of the game for tenure are simple and terrible—‘do twice as much as you think you need to do’—and there’s no time to worry about the fallen when your own pay lags well behind the national average.” In an interview with *Inside Higher Ed*, Bateman tells Colleen Flaherty that “he hopes his essay . . . opens up a conversation about how to improve” higher education.

I admire his desire to stimulate conversation, yet I am hard-pressed to empathize with the tenure-line Dr. Bateman. He suggests that people can’t and don’t make systemic changes of any real significance on their campuses. Yes, the tenure

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About Forum

Forum is published twice a year by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The incoming editor, Amy Lynch-Biniiek, invites you to submit essays related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition. Of particular interest are impacts on the professionalization of the field of rhetoric and composition, the creation of best practices models in diverse academic environments, and the impact of accreditation standards on contingency. Administrators of writing programs and scholars in the field are invited to write about the issues from their perspective.

Essays should address theoretical and/or disciplinary debates. They will go through the standard peer-review and revision process.

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 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-Biniiek, Editor, *Forum*, at lynchbin@kutztown.edu.

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track can be a stressful place, and yes, some who inhabit it are ruthless or selfish. But too many examples exist of faculty who achieved tenure and promotion while also advocating for change for me to accept his no-way-but-out attitude.

Further, he implies that NTT faculty want or expect to be “saved.” That assumed dynamic is part of the problem, indicative of a lack of respect and professional recognition. If we are to bring labor equity to our programs, departments, and campuses, adjuncts and tenure-line faculty need to work together, and the insights, scholarship, and professionalism of NTT colleagues must be driving forces in our efforts.

Writing for *Diversity and Democracy*, NFM president Maria Maisto argues that higher education “must create conditions in which the community being studied and engaged is not outside the campus gates but within them, and it must promote collaborative and honest dialogue that models the practices it recommends to students and communities.” No, tenure-line faculty can’t save NTT faculty. But they can and do work together to design, implement, or advocate for better conditions, programs, and work spaces.

In English departments and writing programs nationwide, faculty from all tiers are making changes, large and small, that improve teaching and learning while also considering the professional health of contingent faculty. The essays in this edition of *Forum* examine two such efforts.

In “Using Cross-Tier Collaboration to Support Professional Identity,” Casie Fedukovich and Megan Hall describe a pilot in

the English department's master's-level graduate teaching assistant preparation program at North Carolina State University that utilizes "the professional experience and theoretical knowledge of NTT faculty, while providing them with opportunities for professional development and recognition." This program's results are promising; they demonstrate the ways in which tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty can have an impact on local working conditions as well as on the understanding and expectations of future faculty enrolled in their graduate program.

In "Contingent Labor, Commuter Students, and Placemaking in the Commons," Benjamin Solomon analyzes the successes and shortcomings of a program at Salt Lake Community College that endeavored to disrupt both the conventional writing classroom and the place of non-tenure-track faculty in it. He asserts, "Instead of isolating contingent faculty, [tenure-track and tenured faculty] can encourage and incentivize collaboration, and in the process they can help disrupt some of the traditional labor structures that have kept contingent faculty marginalized through the years."

Faculty alliances can make local changes for labor equity. Yes, much work needs to be done, and it can seem overwhelming. But if we give in to what Rachel Riedner and Kevin Mahoney call the "rhetoric of despair"—the belief that we can't effect change, so why bother?—then progress stops. We all lose. A small stone causes ripples in the largest of ponds.

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Using Cross-Tier Collaboration to Support Professional Identity

Casie Fedukovich and Megan Hall

In our department, a few tenured colleagues in programs outside of first-year writing have described WPA work as "keeping the trains running on time." Writing

Program Administrators (WPAs) are conductors, and non-tenure-track faculty (NTT) are the trains. All of our first-year writing courses are taught by either NTT faculty or master's students from programs in the English department—film, linguistics, literature, and rhetoric/composition—and this metaphor for mindless mechanization is supported by our colleagues' assumptions about the professional identities of these faculty. Recent inquiry into the development of professional identity and contingency (Penrose; Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf; Doe et al.) suggests that many NTT faculty seek working conditions that support "professional development and [opportunities] for building a better professional future with advancement and recognition," including recognition from their securely employed colleagues (Doe et al. 435). Yet too often, the perceived professional identity of writing teachers reinforces already-existing divisions between tiers.

Divisions may further exacerbate difficult local conditions, encouraging "non-tenure track writing teachers [to] consider themselves divorced from the institutions in which they teach" (Peckham and Hammer A3). Ann N. Penrose likewise argues that "the conditions of contingent employment interact with the nature of our discipline and with our program-based institutional structure to undermine our professionalism from within" (119). Her study of non-tenure-track faculty in first-year writing found that they feel removed from the discipline, despite their expertise in the classroom. This removal is exacerbated by the familiar litany of material deficits: low pay, precarious employment status, lack or restriction of adequate office space, and frequent reminders that professional resources like travel and technology funding are not allocated for them. Further, NTT faculty in first-year writing are typically credentialed outside of the disciplines of rhetoric and composition and may not yet participate in professional development in these fields. As Penrose asks, "What does 'professional' mean when one has neither the signifying position nor the signifying credential of the position?" (110). Penrose concludes her study by asserting that if we are to make inroads against exploitative hiring practices, we must first support the professional identities of those already in contingent positions, particularly in the areas of expertise, autonomy, and community.

We assert that while WPAs may not be able to immediately change the material conditions in their programs, they may be able to create opportunities for building professional identity through knowledge sharing and visible cross-tier collaboration.

The context described above framed revisions to our master's-level graduate teaching assistant (GTA) preparation program, since after graduation our GTAs may join the 75 percent of faculty who teach off the tenure track. Though program changes were the result of needing to accommodate rapidly growing GTA cohorts, we used them as an opportunity to create a visible partnership between a

tenure-track writing program administrator (Casio) and a non-tenure-track lecturer (Megan). Our collaboration included the creation of a new position, “mentoring co-coordinator,” filled by an experienced, full-time non-tenure-track faculty member (Megan) who supports the tenure-track associate director for graduate student support (Casio).

The partnership’s pilot year has been successful. We redesigned our GTA mentoring process to better capitalize on the professional experience and theoretical knowledge of NTT faculty, while providing them with opportunities for professional development and recognition. Further, our collaboration has proven to be an effective method for demonstrating complex cross-tier negotiations.

We hope to open discussion about the ways in which compositionists across academic tiers can work within the two-tier system to (1) encourage a rethinking of the role of NTT faculty as professionals within their field with valuable knowledge to share with GTAs and other faculty; (2) produce a vision of professional development that both acknowledges and works against divisions; and (3) distribute decision-making power in the absence of shared governance.

Description of Changes

Our GTA preparation program has relied on individual faculty mentorship, with each NTT faculty mentor working with a single GTA. (For a full description of our GTA preparation process, see Fedukovich and Hall, “GTA Preparation as a Model for Cross-Tier Collaboration.”) Though mentoring relationships often extend past graduation, the programmatically supported relationship begins in November of the GTA’s first semester on campus and ends December the following year, as GTAs complete their first semester as instructors of record. Because mentoring demands extensive commitments in time and energy, the department compensates NTT mentors with a stipend of approximately \$1,000.

Since 2010, funded graduate teaching assistantships have increased by 25 percent, from 15 students to 22, with administrators anticipating additional seats in the future, improving our recruiting competitiveness. Consistent with national trends, the English Department considers teaching an important component of graduate preparation, and GTA applicants often express career interests in teaching. Further, our university’s strategic plan to grow graduate seats intersects with our program’s status as one of the largest on campus: we teach approximately 100 sections of first-year writing each semester, serving almost 75 percent of all incoming first-year students.

Concurrently, declining overall undergraduate enrollments have resulted in a reduction of the number of students who take first-year writing. Between the academ-

ic years 2009–2010 and 2014–2015, we saw a loss of 1,110 students, or around 55 sections of English 101. The result is a reduction in our need for NTT faculty, from 39 full- and part-time faculty in 2009–2010 to 29 in 2014–2015. Fortunately, natural attrition of NTT faculty has meant that we haven't yet been forced to cut positions, even taking into account dropping enrollments and steadily growing GTA cohorts. Since GTAs in our program teach only one section of first-year writing per semester, the 25 percent increase in cohort size, from 15 students to 22, is the equivalent of absorbing two full-time NTT faculty positions. While faculty hiring has slowed in recent years, it isn't yet the case that we must displace existing full-time faculty to give classes to GTAs.

However, as GTA cohorts grew to meet declining numbers of NTT faculty, we were faced with the logistical possibility that eventually, every lecturer would be required to mentor. Our program's administrative philosophy is grounded in instructor autonomy, so we are cautious and would like to maintain a light touch with additional personnel requirements outside of teaching. Further, we recognize that mentoring GTAs is a demanding, emotionally complex, and time-consuming process. Some faculty have explicitly stated that they do not wish to serve as a GTA mentor, even with the financial incentive, because of personality preferences, time constraints, and—especially for new faculty—growing confidence in their teaching abilities. Some NTT faculty have expressed ethical conflicts with preparing future faculty who may be hired in at lower wages. Requiring NTT faculty to mentor GTAs would undercut our program's focus on faculty-supported decision making and our personal commitment to using program demands, such as the mentoring process, to create spaces that invite faculty to contribute in meaningful ways.

To stave off the possibility of required mentoring, in 2014, we replaced individual mentoring with a small-group model. NTT faculty mentors work with groups of two–three GTAs, and all groups follow the same teaching preparation plan. Once a month, mentors and GTAs participate in a full-cohort professional development workshop that focuses on both teaching praxis and professional identity. These workshops include small-group discussions with mentors reflecting on moments of development in their own professional practices before opening discussion to the GTAs' experiences. In our pilot year, Megan has served as both a mentor and the mentoring program co-coordinator.

Additionally, we have changed the way we approach the required teaching practicum. Traditionally, a tenured or tenure-track faculty member has taught this three credit-hour course. The co-authors now team-teach this course and the supplementary one-week pedagogy workshop. In addition to guiding GTAs through the day-to-day practices of teaching writing, we have also included a four-week unit on post-graduation possibilities, including teaching off the tenure track.

Megan's ethos—as both co-coordinator of the mentoring program and experienced lecturer teaching full time with an MA—empowers her to speak candidly to GTAs' employment fears. Her knowledge helps them be more prepared for a competitive academic job market that will potentially lead to insecure underemployment, and we cite the statistic that only 25 percent of academic faculty positions offer the possibility of tenure (Wilson para. 3).

Influenced by Penrose's call to encourage master's-level GTAs to consider their teaching preparation “as a beginning rather than an end point” (121), we use the practicum to address job market fears and answer the GTAs' many questions about the process. We review sites like *The Adjunct Project* and discuss emotional topics, including health care access and pay. We discuss the realities of “freeway flyer” faculty, who piece together living wages by working at multiple institutions, and we collaboratively calculate work schedules based on teaching loads. (As novice teachers leading one four-credit-hour section of English 101 a semester, the GTAs often find it unfathomable that most non-tenure-track faculty teach at least twelve credit hours a semester.) We browse publications like *Forum* and read work from the New Faculty Majority (Street, Maisto, Merves, and Rhoades). We host discussions by recent graduates who have taught or are teaching at local institutions, and we explicate job advertisements. The purpose for these many discussions is to make more transparent a variety of decision-making paths and rationales.

The written products for the course include teaching philosophies, peer observations, and a teaching dossier. These documents are common assignments in teaching practica, but we frame them in terms of construction of professional identity and rhetorical awareness of the teaching situation: the teaching positions to which they will apply will require significantly more teaching, and they are expected to inhabit a professional identity long before they have achieved it.

The reflective mentor workshops, course readings on contingency, and Megan's leadership in the practicum are intended to prepare GTAs with a better understanding of what it means to teach off the tenure track. In addition, our partnership presents a model for collaboration between faculty teaching at different institutional ranks, modeling different but successful paths through academia. By providing two examples of professional identity, we illustrate that teaching writing demands a constellation of knowledge and practices far beyond mechanized delivery.

Misunderstandings about the administration of writing programs—and about teaching writing in general—may be passed down to graduate students as a part of departmental culture. By including administrators representing both tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty in GTA preparation, we hope to counter negative narratives about first-year writing and the status of its faculty.

Problems and Benefits of Visible Cross-Tier Collaboration

We recognize that our collaboration, as it is presented here, may not be practicable for many programs, particularly in terms of financial support. In our program, we have secured funding for the co-coordinator for the current year (2015–2016), but there is no guarantee for future funding. We risk establishing a process we can't support without uncompensated NTT labor. The necessary investment of time could also prove problematic, as NTT faculty are generally short on time.

We also consider the ethical problem of helping create new NTT faculty who may replace their mentors in times of austerity. Marc Bousquet writes, "The system prefers to employ graduate students or former graduate students [...] who cashed out with an MA or ABD" because they may "consider themselves failures or less qualified and therefore 'deserving' of the low wages and systematic degradation" (34). We offer no solution to this conundrum other than transparency in discussions of hiring and systemic ethical problems in higher education, as well as acknowledgment of our uneasy institutional relationships as compositionists teaching one of the few courses required for graduation.

Also, specific to our program, there are potential relational challenges created when a non-tenure-track faculty member works closely with program administrators. Because of perceived proximity to administrative decision making, NTT faculty may misunderstand the relationship between the mentoring co-coordinator and program administration, in turn complicating the co-coordinator's status as a "colleague." During the pilot year, NTT faculty have come to Megan with questions about contracts, promotions, summer teaching assignments, and future mentoring assignments, indicating that faculty may see her as a safe intermediary between program administrators and lecturers.

While this model creates opportunity for complications of interpersonal relationships amongst colleagues, there are also significant material and professional benefits worth noting. For Megan, participating in this collaboration has positioned her to be more favorably considered for travel money—an important commodity that grows increasingly scarce for all faculty, particularly NTTs—and to be additionally compensated for time spent preparing the GTAs over the summer. Further, Megan receives a course release from first-year writing for co-teaching the practicum, since she invests a great deal of time preparing for the course, teaching, and counseling GTAs.

Nonmaterial benefits include professional visibility in the program and the opportunity to publish and present scholarship on GTA preparation. Given Megan's leadership in the GTA preparation process, a process Casie is tasked to supervise, Megan's work has become linked to Casie's in a way that increases the visibility of

NTT contributions to the program. Because the university has pledged to continue to grow graduate seats, our GTA preparation program has become a focus for departmental tenure-stream and tenured faculty discussion. As a result, our cross-tier collaboration has been elaborated on in faculty meetings and made known to other institutional stakeholders, such as deans and provosts. We have coauthored a program profile for *Composition Forum*, in order to make more transparent the context and decision making that led to these programmatic changes.

With the creation of the co-coordinator position, there is an opportunity for NTT faculty to participate in program administration in ways that were not previously available. There now exists a positive space to maintain a teaching position within first-year writing, while also being given an opportunity to influence the professional identities of future NTT faculty. The inclusion of NTT leadership in a way that is visible to GTAs and NTT faculty could help energize a base of support by moving professional identity to the forefront of program discussions.

Conclusion

We set out to solve a logistical problem created by rapid increases in GTA cohorts and declining NTT faculty numbers, but we were granted the opportunity to model a partnership that has led to the following: greater inclusion of NTTs in program administration decision making, a method to more ethically deal with increased graduate cohorts, and greater visibility for professional contributions of NTT faculty. We are heartened by Ann Shivers McNair and Amy Lynch-Bieniek's exploration of the "in-between-ness" and "complicated ethics" of writing program administration across academic tiers (A11, A6). By providing opportunities for NTT faculty to build ethos as colleagues, mentors, and co-learners, we may simultaneously create spaces for "advocacy, empathy, and self-reflection" (A11) for both present and future NTT faculty.

Though the mentoring co-coordinator is only a single position constrained by local contexts, it may help us work against the material conditions of contingency by publically recognizing the role of NTT faculty as professionals in their field, with valuable knowledge to share with graduate students and fellow faculty. Further, if we are able to continue this partnership, we plan to build outward to provide more opportunities for collaborative partnerships between tenured and non-tenure-track faculty, perhaps bridging from our GTA mentoring program. Finally, this collaboration has led to more NTT faculty participation in regular professional development workshops and more faculty interest in serving as GTA mentors. Because Megan has taken the lead for much of the decision making, other NTT faculty may feel more comfortable working closely with administrators and other tenured and tenure-line faculty.

Making NTT faculty expertise visible by way of shared leadership has moved WPA work, teaching writing, and contingency to the forefront of many faculty discussions. We seek to leverage these discussions to illustrate that NTT faculty who teach writing aren't mechanizable things but, instead, are experts with valuable knowledge to share with all teachers.

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Casie Fedukovich is an assistant professor in English and associate director of the first-year writing program at North Carolina State University. Her work explores the intersections of labor politics, writing program administration, and graduate teacher preparation.

Megan Hall is a senior lecturer and the assistant director of program development in the first-year writing program at North Carolina State University.

Contingent Labor, Commuter Students, and Placemaking in the Commons

Benjamin Solomon

In the spring of 2014, while working as an adjunct at Salt Lake Community College, I was invited to participate in the English Department's redesign of an intermediate writing course.¹

The new course featured a studio model that reorganized instructional labor, shifting it away from classroom meetings and toward online work combined with weekly in-person conferences with students. The redesign also aimed to improve working conditions for contingent faculty by compensating them both for teaching the course *and* for their time conferencing. The result was a semester pay increase of about a third, but perhaps more significant to me than the raise was the fact that the course would be taught with a team of full- and part-time faculty who met with one another's students and also convened weekly to collaborate. For an adjunct with little chance for meaningful interaction with my colleagues, the model struck me as a significant step in the right direction. And while it certainly didn't resolve the ongoing problems of contingent labor, it called attention to them, and it sought to address them in ways both social and material.

That first semester we met with students in a basement area of our campus library called the Learning Commons—a large, open computer lab with rows of closely spaced workstations. It was here at the computer tables that I conferenced with students for three to five hours a day, usually for fifteen or twenty minutes each. I was initially taken by the idea of teaching in a “commons,” which David Bollier defines as not just a shared space, but “a social system [. . .] that preserves shared values and community identity.” As an adjunct, teaching in a commons meant more than simply using a space along with other instructors and students. It suggested a non-hierarchical space, a space that belonged to everyone who used it, a public space where writerly practices like conversation, invention, and research could flourish. Here in the Learning Commons, without a private office or lectern to signal authority, I met with both my colleagues and my students on literal “common ground.” Meeting here also encouraged a dynamic that was more public than an office, but more intimate than a classroom. I sensed that the open atmosphere of a shared space was helping me to build community, rapport, and connection.

But while the move to the commons had improved my own working conditions as an adjunct, it didn't seem to be having the same effect on my students. For one thing, despite the open desk space and free computer stations, few students stayed in the commons after their twenty-minute sessions were over. Despite my invitations to use the commons, they often arrived and left in a hurry. Gaps in the conferencing schedule occasionally left me alone in the space, and it was during these empty hours that my vision of a bustling commons, alive with the sounds of writing, collaboration, and learning, was replaced by one of a quiet, underused study hall. Meanwhile the cafeteria in the building next door was consistently packed with students throughout the day, eating, studying, and hanging out. There had to be a middle ground, I thought, between the loud, busy public space of a college food court and the silent, individual study spaces of a library.

Torin Monahan has used the term "built pedagogy" to describe the ways that the architecture in learning spaces reflects an underlying educational philosophy. In choosing the Learning Commons, we'd situated ourselves in a more democratic space, but as for a collaborative, generative, and social space that invited participation from students? Not so much. The rows of computer workstations didn't signal community or conversation. They were more like office cubicles (though less private), designed to encourage silent, individual work. Here was a place where students could breeze in for a quick meeting, or bust out an essay in a single draft, but as for sticking around and using the space when they might be *able* to—but didn't strictly *have* to—there was little about the built pedagogy of the Learning Commons that invited them to stay.

I'd experienced a similar reaction to institutional spaces the previous semester while teaching in conventional classrooms as an adjunct. As many teachers have observed, college classrooms are difficult to inhabit. Derek Owens calls classrooms "temporary holding tanks" (364). And Nedra Reynolds describes talking, learning, and writing in college classrooms as far more an "act of encampment than [one of] placemaking" (157). These spatial realities affect contingent faculty and commuter students in similarly magnified ways. Both contingent faculty, who often lack offices and social connections on campuses, and commuter students, whose schools generally have less of the social and living spaces associated with traditional residential campuses, are required to make and break camp repeatedly throughout the day, moving from one temporary space to another. Add to this the far-flung commutes that both groups are likely to make, combined with other work and family obligations, and the result is a cohort of students *and* faculty who have both become effectively dislocated from the academic environments they labor and learn in.

In 2003 Jonathan Mauk characterized this experience—for students—as part of an “emerging spatial crisis in academia” (370), and suggested that more and more, students’ lives have become “unsituated,” “transient,” and “placeless” (369). Mauk’s response, in part, was to suggest that writing teachers should embrace fragmentation and “smear ourselves across the new spatialities of student life” (385–86). But for me, as an adjunct whose own rootlessness mirrored that of my students, fragmentation was hardly a choice. It was an inescapable material condition.

Our college had just finished constructing a new building, and full-time English faculty had been relocated to comfortable new offices with high ceilings and tall windows. And while the college had also designed a workspace for adjuncts in that same new building, they’d situated it in the middle of a small, open foyer that was surrounded on all sides by full-time faculty offices. Two narrow tables, each with a two-foot-high divider down the center, were laid out parallel to one another, creating workspaces similar to the ones in the Learning Commons. I’d used the space a couple of times, but the open office doors around me and the frequent banter of my full-time colleagues made me feel both self-conscious and a little resentful. I was experiencing what Reynolds and others have called “geographies of exclusion” (9). In my case, it had to do with not only the built environment, but also what the environment suggested about my position at the college. Space was provided, but mostly as an afterthought, and while it may seem quibbling to interrogate the placements of tables and chairs, to me it was obvious that *someone* had chosen them—presumably guided by an understanding of what contingent faculty needed—but also, more importantly, what they *didn’t* need. The signal was clear. This space was for adjuncts to work quietly—as they should—getting their grading done or planning their classes. But for anything else—for *everything* else that goes into the practice of teaching—look elsewhere.

But where?

I think studio-model and blended-delivery writing courses that eschew traditional classrooms can meaningfully respond to geographies of exclusion in academia, as they impact both students *and* contingent faculty. While on one hand teaching in the Learning Commons made it clear to me that we needed to reexamine our course’s built pedagogy, it also provided me with the most collaborative, inclusive, and connected teaching arrangement I had yet to experience. A big part of this was due to the labor model of the redesign itself, which paired full- and part-time faculty together in a curricular *and* a physical space. But the evolving idea of the Learning Commons also contributed to that experience by supplying the possibility of an open, social, inviting academic space where writing, research, and ideas

could flourish. At the same time, I saw clearly how the Learning Commons' built pedagogy had sent messages to students about the limitations of its space—especially its social limitations—messages that shut down the likelihood of significant placemaking on their part, just as the built environment of the adjunct workroom had shut down the possibility of placemaking for me.

Despite the rough start in the Learning Commons, I still see great potential in academic libraries. Over the last twenty years, academic libraries have become the most dynamic, adaptable common spaces on college campuses—and often their cultural epicenters (Turner 232). They tend to feature large, open areas that can be readjusted to suit the people who use them most. Depending on the local needs of a particular studio program, library common spaces can be designed to emulate writing centers, Internet cafés, lounges, galleries, art studios, ateliers, makerspaces, or hacklabs. In other words, they can draw inspiration from the sorts of social and intellectual spaces people seek out and actually want to inhabit.

This semester we've asked the library to remove the long banks of computers from our section of the Learning Commons and to replace them with small, moveable tables and chairs. Next semester we'll add magnetic whiteboards and post multimedia work and student writing on the walls. Most importantly, we'll begin conversations with students about how they'd like to use the space. These acts of place making reflect our evolving understanding of what our studio space should be and who should shape it. They invite participation, collaboration, and dialogue between the "commoners" (i.e., *all* of us) who inhabit the studio. And they demonstrate that we can shape our built environments to reflect the kind of learning and labor we value. Diana Oblinger reminds us that "space [. . .] can bring people together; it can encourage exploration, collaboration, and discussion. Or, space can carry an unspoken message of silence and disconnectedness" (1.1). The same is true for course redesigns. Full-time faculty can respond to programmatic calls for course redesign with projects that rethink compensation models, learning spaces, and instructional time. Instead of isolating contingent faculty, they can encourage and incentivize collaboration, and in the process, they can help disrupt some of the traditional labor structures that have kept contingent faculty marginalized through the years. When inclusive groups of faculty decide to teach together in the commons and commit to place making that addresses both learning and labor, the unspoken messages begin to shift—from distance and disconnectedness to conversation and common interest.

Note

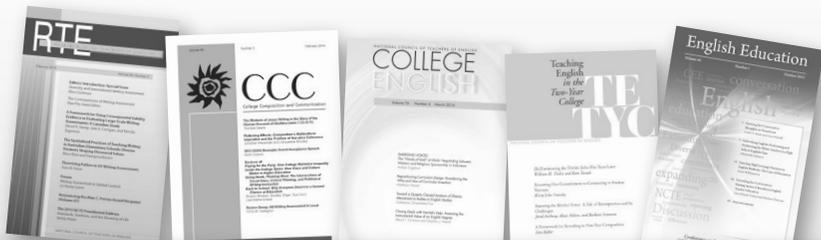
1. Lisa Bickmore and Jennifer Courtney created most of this redesign, building on a model created by our colleague, Brittany Stephenson, who in turn borrowed elements from an early version of the Arizona State Writers Studio.

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Benjamin Solomon teaches composition and creative writing at Salt Lake Community College. He's interested in online learning environments, flipped classrooms, studio spaces, and community-engaged teaching through service learning. His own writing—mostly fiction—can be found in One Story, Diagram, and the Bad Penny Review.

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