FORUM

INSIDE

Plagiarism and Contingency: A Problem of Academic Freedom
Sandra M. Leonard

Dealing with student plagiarism is never easy. The sheer number of articles, how-to guides, and official institutional policies taking hardline stances on every aspect of plagiarism can make the decisions about how to approach plagiarism difficult for any professor. However, for the contingent faculty member, plagiarism comes with particular risks and challenges. As a contingent faculty member at Kutztown University, I am lucky to work in a supportive department that respects faculty members' decisions on plagiarism and in a university with a well-defined plagiarism policy in place. But even the best plagiarism policies and informal supports often fail to account for the ways that contingent faculty are given mixed messages, discouraged from designing creative assignments and responses to plagiarism, and made to feel as though plagiarism is the result of their own pedagogy. This essay will outline a few difficulties in dealing with plagiarism that pose a particular threat to the academic freedom and dignity of contingent faculty by putting them in a no-win situation.

A Muddy Definition

Contingent faculty often struggle to have authority and legitimacy in the classroom. While there are many ways to establish that authority, one sure way to undermine it is by being forced to teach with faulty materials and definitions. Rebecca Moore Howard, a researcher with years of experience and scholarly credentials in com-

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position pedagogy and plagiarism and a
driving force behind The Citation Project,
demonstrates that "plagiarism" is overbur-
dened with meaning and "does far more
work than it admits to," as the term refers to
an extremely wide range of compositional
activities ("Sexuality" 474). For example,
the most recent MLA handbook includes
in its definition of plagiarism the buying of
term papers, reusing another student's work,
copying portions of online material, self-
plagiarism, and unintentional plagiarism as
small as a missing citation for "borrowing
just a few words" (7–8). Not only are all of
these labeled "plagiarism," there is no clear
differentiation of scale; in fact, the hand-
book suggests that they all be treated with
equal severity since plagiarism "is always a
serious moral and ethical offense" (8).

Often citing the MLA handbook, aca-
demic honesty policies in higher education
similarly lack nuance in their approaches
to plagiarism. Kutztown University's official
definition of plagiarism is fairly typical in
that it includes both verbatim copying and
possibly unintentional error, though, unlike
the MLA handbook, it does make some al-
lowance for differences in severity: "At its
worst extreme, plagiarism is exact copying,
but it is also the inclusion of a paraphrased
version of the opinions and work of others
without giving credit" ("Kutztown University
Policy ACA-027" 2). Even in policies that
allow for differences of severity such as this
one, the institutional policies and handbook
definitions still conflate intentional and
unintentional plagiarism, making both an
ethical offense.

There are some reasons why such an all-inclusive definition would seem desirable. In some professional cases, an all-inclusive definition of plagiarism helps to protect intellectual property and prevent fraud. In most cases, a professional writer is assumed to be competent enough to be held accountable for willful deceit as well as negligence, and one can argue that institutions should introduce students to these professional expectations. The MLA guide and student handbooks, written primarily for an audience of developing students, may also encourage some to be more careful in checking citations and more hesitant to commit outright infractions. Furthermore, it can be difficult for faculty to detect the difference between intentional and unintentional plagiarism. For all of these reasons, it might seem to be a safer call—one that protects the interests of faculty—to have a strict policy in place that treats intentional and unintentional plagiarism in the same way. However, doing so glosses over the real differences between these two acts, resulting in poor pedagogy and a suppression of faculty judgment which is felt most particularly by contingent faculty.

One result of plagiarism policies and guides treating plagiarism as an intentional misdeed are the related misapprehensions that plagiarism is rare and that it is able to be controlled through strict policies and warnings. However, many composition scholars note that certain forms of plagiarism are, in fact, extremely common. In her book *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators*, Howard describes a situation early in her teaching when she assigned a short essay prompt to first-year students and received cases of inappropriate paraphrase in a third of her students' papers (5). Current research studies support this amount of plagiarism as fairly typical. Using 500 undergraduate business students, a 2010 study in New Zealand found instances of plagiarism in just over a quarter of students for the first essay assignment (Walker 51). Of that, a majority of the plagiarism (15.7 percent) resulted from errors in paraphrase, which may have been unintentional (Walker 48). Despite this and many studies like it, academic honesty policies suggest that plagiarism is a rare occurrence and can largely be prevented by dealing with it as an intentional act. For example, a Penn State University webpage advises that "Faculty can help prevent academic integrity violations" by providing a series of warnings to students, first through a required syllabus statement, but also through a lecture or discussion on the first day of class and by having students sign an "integrity statement" ("Required Syllabus Item").

Studies consistently show that the most common form of student plagiarism is not necessarily intentional and is more a result of improper paraphrase, what Howard labels "patchwriting." Differentiated from plagiarism, Howard argues for patchwriting as a legitimate stepping stone in the learning process as students gain

familiarity with the writing patterns and concepts of a new discipline (*Standing* 7). Since these students are not necessarily aware of what they are doing wrong or how to correct it, it is less likely that warnings and integrity statements have much of an effect on this population. In a study of student attitudes surrounding plagiarism, Lori G. Power found that students introduced to plagiarism purely through official policies and warnings rather than hands-on instruction and discussion are likely to externalize them as an "arbitrary system of rules and consequences" and may not be able to effectively use sources and citation methods despite knowing the strict definition of plagiarism (653). To address the causes and possible solutions of student plagiarism, Howard advocates for "plagiarism" to be replaced with the categories "fraud, insufficient citation, and excessive repetition" ("Sexuality" 475). This adjustment would allow instructors and administrators to differentiate between intentional plagiarism, which may be treated as academic dishonesty, and potentially unintentional plagiarism, which may be remedied with instruction and practice before implementing a formal punishment process.

Unfortunately, instructors are not often at liberty to make such distinctions. Unlike most other pedagogical areas, the way instructors deal with plagiarism is constrained since institutions often have official plagiarism policies that allow for little interpretation or flexibility. The language surrounding plagiarism is often presented in very technical and legal vocabulary. In many cases, a statement is given to instructors to be repeated verbatim on course syllabi. All of this compels strict compliance from students as well as all faculty members.

Admittedly, in most cases, there would be nothing to stop faculty from covertly or overtly putting differentiated terms into practice in the classroom, and, in fact, some departments and professional academic organizations may encourage doing so. Drawing on Howard's work with patchwriting, the Council of Writing Program Administrators advises instructors to "Distinguish between misuse of sources and plagiarism," treating potentially unintentional plagiarism as an opportunity for revision rather than punishment ("Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism"). However, adopting different definitions of plagiarism or refusing to pursue cases of plagiarism often require resisting official institutional policy. Though contingent faculty have recently started flexing muscles in the formation of unions and other organizations, this group of more vulnerable instructors is not as likely to assert themselves in opposition to official institutional policy. Contingent faculty, with a high turnover rate, no job security, and often less familiarity with the culture of the institution, experience a unique pressure to follow what is often unambiguous institutional policy. Additionally, the legalese surrounding official plagiarism policy can seem like protection against potential lawsuits, employment conflicts, and other forms of retaliation.

Ultimately, the conflict between official institutional policy and pedagogical considerations can leave the contingent faculty member trapped in the middle, particularly when it comes to reporting these incidents.

Compulsory Reporting and Mixed Messages

The plagiarism policy at Kutztown University, like many institutions across the country, states that instances of "academic dishonesty" come with particular faculty responsibilities: "It is the responsibility of faculty members who become aware of acts of academic dishonesty to investigate, gather evidence, bring charges, participate in the resolution of cases that they initiate" ("Kutztown University Policy ACA-027" 2). Paired with a strict definition of all cases of plagiarism as academic dishonesty, the instructor is obligated to report even the most minor errors. Other institutions are even more explicit in extending the instructor's responsibility to report even minor cases. For instance, an Ohio State University FAQ on academic misconduct declares "instructors shall report all instances of alleged misconduct" ("Academic Misconduct Information for Faculty"). The use of "all" in this and many similar policies underscores the requirement for faculty to report, even when cases may seem like errors.

The importance of reporting accusations of academic dishonesty to a third party can make a good deal of sense in many cases. The use of a Committee of Academic Misconduct, like those used by OSU, Kutztown University, and many others, can promote fairness, standardize sanctions across an institution, and address repeated instances of academic dishonesty. These are very real benefits, but they only become so when they address actual cases of academic dishonesty rather than stylistic error. Additionally, the reporting of all instances of potential academic dishonesty has costs that are overly high, particularly for contingent faculty.

For all faculty, reporting academic dishonesty can be a lengthy and stressful process, requiring a good deal of time for the instructor to document the incident, fill out and copy forms, and arrange formal meetings. For contingent faculty—who now teach the majority of first-year writing courses—the stress of this process exacerbates feelings of powerlessness, and brings their precarity to the foreground. In a *Chronicle of Higher Education* forum on plagiarism, multiple instructors discussed their difficulties and stresses in dealing with plagiarism accusations (Ms. Collegiality). The thread author spoke of the dread she feels when approaching a student with a plagiarism accusation, and how this situation was further aggravated by the fact that she had no office in which to conduct this highly sensitive meeting. The plagiarism accusation process has particular disadvantages for contingent faculty who may have limited time on campus, no available office space, and, if the incident

takes place late in the semester, may not be under contract by the time formal hearings are underway. Aside from time costs, contingent faculty are often expected to act as prosecutors in these situations, providing evidence and arguing for sanctions, which is a pseudo-legal position often outside of the scope of academic training or job descriptions. Put in the situation of fighting for a sanction, however minor, also can put contingent faculty in conflict with those involved in their own rehiring process: the students whose evaluations often matter greatly and administrators who may see the accused student as an unhappy customer.

This fear of retaliation based on plagiarism accusations is not merely hypothetical. Despite the feeling of protection that following the official policy may provide, the reality is that pursuing plagiarism can threaten careers. In a 2011 blog post entitled "Why I Will Never Pursue Cheating Again" tenured professor Panagiotis Ipeirotis wrote about his experience in following the university policy in pursuing plagiarism, which resulted in some failing grades for the 20 percent of students he had caught engaging in blatant copying and collusion (which, from the passages he provided would seem to would fall under Howard's "fraud" category). Despite the dean expressing outward appreciation for his response, Ipeirotis reports that doing so resulted in a hostile environment in his classes, hours of instructional time taken up with filing reports and meeting with distraught students, dressing-downs from colleagues, a marked drop in student evaluations, and a reduction in his annual raise as a result of those evaluations.

Ipeirotis was a tenured faculty member when he made his plagiarism accusations, but if he were a contingent faculty member it is likely that the response would have been more severe, though probably less overt. After pursuing a difficult plagiarism case in his composition course, adjunct professor Jere L. Crook III found that he was not offered any courses the following semester. Though the university denied that his lack of courses was a result of the plagiarism case, Crook was convinced that he was being punished for simply following university policy: "I lost my job because I did my duty" (Schneider).

Plagiarism accusations can also affect contingent hiring by negatively affecting student evaluations. Because student evaluations have become so important in the rehiring of contingent faculty, some may resort to ignoring plagiarism for fear of retaliation on a course evaluation. In a *Chronicle Vitae* article, Natalie M. Dorfeld recalls when she was an adjunct that, "Heads turned the other way with plagiarism cases. Some D's were bumped to C's and B's. Behavior that should have never been tolerated was considered old hat because it meant work next semester" (qtd. in Lewontin). Because institutions are not often under any obligation to justify why they fail to hire back a contingent faculty member, factors that could disrupt

evaluation numbers and cause student complaints loom large for contingent faculty members.

When it comes to plagiarism, institutions give faculty hopelessly mixed messages. Beyond faculty ignoring plagiarism and manipulating grades to preempt complaints, it is not unusual to hear about cases where administration will pressure faculty to drop plagiarism charges or alter grades themselves. Writing anonymously, an adjunct explains her experiences dealing with plagiarism at one of the institutions she works at: "When plagiarism charges are filed, I'm asked if I'm sure, and if I really want to do this for just X% of a paper" ("The Plagiarism Problem"). Asking if a contingent faculty member is sure that they want to pursue plagiarism charges against a student assumes that the faculty member has the power to make this decision, despite the fact that plagiarism policies often explicitly take this decision out of the faculty member's hands.

The question "are you sure?" also implicates the faculty's judgment in determining plagiarism. It is a question that partly relies on the ambiguity of the term *plagiarism,* encompassing both unintentional and intentional forms. In order to smooth over complaints, the administrator is able to use this ambiguity, giving the students who may not warrant it another chance, and unfairly deeming certain professors "harsh" for simply following the rules. Despite official policy with all-inclusive definitions of plagiarism, administrators are able to position themselves as givers of mercy, while faculty—particularly contingent faculty who are less likely to self-award themselves this power—have no such luxury. The message this sends contingent faculty is that their judgment is questionable: their job is neither to follow institutional policy nor to teach workable definitions of plagiarism, but to fall in line.

"Plagiarism-Proofing" and Other False Hopes

Many scholars, teaching guides, academic integrity offices, and commentators have proposed deceptively simple solutions to the problem of dealing with plagiarism. However, these so-called solutions for plagiarism most often provide false hopes or wholly ignore plagiarism as an opportunity for teaching. Besides syllabus warnings and integrity statements, the popular strategy of "plagiarism-proofing" promises to prevent both intentional and unintentional plagiarism in one fell swoop. This strategy involves designing assignments that have very specific guidelines, such as making students choose thesis statements from an instructor-generated list, incorporating personal or creative elements, requiring multiple parts (such as an annotated bibliography), and using contemporary or esoteric sources. Doug Johnson, a consultant on education technology and proponent of plagiarism-proofing, compares it to a "fence," referring to Joseph Malins's poem "A Fence or an Ambulance" and

suggests that when the instructor fails to put up fences in the form of plagiarism-proofing, he or she shares in the blame. However, the reality is that plagiarism—with its multiple causes and expressions—is a problem that cannot be fully solved by designing labyrinthine or multi-stage assignments. In even the most original and specific of assignments, students can find ways to inappropriately integrate source material to fill space, or simply disregard the assignment parameters.

However, even if plagiarism-proofing can reduce cases of plagiarism, preventing plagiarism should not eclipse other pedagogical goals. Faculty should be permitted to design assignments that allow for open-ended and student-driven projects, as well as those that deal with well-known authors, even if plagiarism is more likely in these assignments. In an article arguing strongly in favor of plagiarism-proofing, Lynn Z. Bloom admits that the purpose of these assignments is more to allow students a bridge to insider engagement in the writing process, and that these types of assignments are "really not about plagiarism" (216). While requiring multistage projects that involve personal voice and other requirements is often best practice in assignment design, these tactics are not a panacea for plagiarism, nor should they become a way to tie the hands of instructors who might have sound reasons for developing other requirements. Putting the burden of preventing plagiarism on faculty forces them to justify their pedagogical tools when things go wrong and makes it seem as though preventing plagiarism is more important than teaching course material.

Additionally, plagiarism-proofing may actually undermine the goal of teaching students how to avoid it themselves. Composition scholarship has long recognized the need for process-oriented writing that allows for the student to make mistakes and experiment with writing style. This method has been largely adopted in the teaching of grammar, where students are usually permitted to make grammatical mistakes in drafting stages of their writing, are corrected without major grade penalties, and with the help of reflection and peer review, move on to recognize these errors themselves. Zero-tolerance plagiarism policies and plagiarism-proofing send messages that are antithetical to process-oriented writing pedagogy if perfection in source use is required at every stage. The term "low-stakes assignment" has no meaning if a student can be failed or expelled for it. Composition instructors, in particular, should have the academic freedom to design truly low-stakes assignments where minor or unintentional plagiarism may result, and students may be corrected in a process not entirely unlike that of grammar correction.

Another approach that is mentioned surprisingly often is simply to not care about plagiarism—not to pursue students who commit it, and not to support policies that attempt to punish any form of plagiarism. Sean Zwagerman and other scholars have suggested dropping plagiarism as a point of focus, proposing that "teachers should

put less—not more—energy into trying to catch cheaters and plagiarists" (686). He and many others also recommend the disuse of plagiarism detection software like Turnitin for a number of reasons, including that it fosters a hostile environment. Others, like the penalized professor, Panagiotis Ipeirotis, have also seen it as a blatant way to expose cheating that would be better (for the instructor, that is) left uncaught. While some universities require or encourage the use of Turnitin and other plagiarism software, the Conference on College Composition and Communication has passed a formal resolution against it. Rather than being a matter of choice for the individual instructor to determine its potential use or harm, plagiarism detection software is yet another area where contingent faculty can feel caught up in a fight of mixed messages where the best solution can seem to be to turn away and ignore the problem.

Most approaches to dealing with plagiarism originate from a false binary: that instructors can either be reactive or preventative, as Doug Johnson says, ambulances or fences. However, I would argue that there are ways to teach plagiarism that incorporate both reactive and preventative measures, making use of university policy in cases that warrant it but also employing truly low-stakes methods of teaching that allow students to internalize intellectual property expectations.

Empowering Alternatives

In his blog post "Why Plagiarism Doesn't Bother Me at All," adjunct faculty member Gerald Nelms writes, "I now expect plagiarism, I anticipate it, I even provoke it. I want it to happen." Nelms describes how he has found that treating plagiarism as an opportunity for revision and development is far more beneficial than punishing it outright.

Rather than treat all instances of plagiarism—unintentional and intentional—as academic honesty infractions, many composition instructors have designed effective techniques to educate students and address plagiarism "in-house" despite the fact that doing so is often against institutional policy. At the mildest, these interventions can include a meeting with a student, pointing out errors, and offering an opportunity to revise or rewrite, which is what the Council of Writing Program Administrators suggests ("Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism"). Instead of making this meeting antagonistic with the signing of formal documents, confession statements, and discussions of punitive action, this intervention can have a pedagogical and corrective tone, just as if the student were misunderstanding any other major aspect of the assignment. Instructors may also find assigning extra practice activities helpful, or might use workshopping so that students can correct and tutor each other.

Some instructors, like Nelms, have developed classroom activities that allow students to discover standards of intellectual property in a way that memorizing defini-

tions, signing integrity statements, and taking quizzes cannot do. Nelms has his students negotiate source use and their own writing style by assigning essays "that virtually require" plagiarism. In direct opposition to "plagiarism-proofing," Nelms's technique forces students to confront source use head-on, make choices, and learn from mistakes. Going a step further, first-year writing instructor Kate Hagopian describes an assignment where she has students plagiarize on purpose in order to prompt conversation about the definition of plagiarism. By "turning everyone into a plagiarist (at least temporarily)," Hagopian changes a typically externalized conversation into an internalized one, provoking personal reactions and deeper discussions (Jaschik). These are far from the only ways to deal with plagiarism, but can be highly effective methods that ought to be explicitly permitted under institutional policies. Faculty, particularly contingent faculty who teach first-year composition, should feel empowered to implement a successful in-house procedure for dealing with plagiarism that works for their own class culture.

However, not every moment is a teachable moment. While the majority of unintentional plagiarism cases might be able to be remedied with careful instruction and practice, there will always be students who cheat. As much as plagiarism policies should allow creative pedagogy and in-house correction, they should also uphold a faculty member's academic freedom to initiate disciplinary measures when needed. Rather than penalize and place blame on faculty, administration from the departmental to institutional level should adopt contingent-friendly plagiarism policies. These policies should include a recognition of the frequency of plagiarism in nearly any writing assignment, the impossibility of complete prevention, and the differences between intentional and unintentional plagiarism. These policies should also incorporate plans for documenting and disciplining plagiarism that do not draw on part-time faculty labor outside of contracted hours and that provide private space and administrator support for conversations of a disciplinary nature.

While composition scholarship has become increasingly sensitive to nuances in student errors regarding source use and creative in ways to address these errors, many institutional policies haven't caught up and often displace the stresses of academic dishonesty onto the most vulnerable faculty. First-year composition is often a course (or sequence of courses) focusing explicitly on research methods, including the avoidance of plagiarism and the discovery of a student's own unique voice. Now that it is a course taught primarily by contingent faculty, these instructors are in a position to make the most impact on preventing plagiarism in higher education. With such a key role to play in the development of student attitudes towards plagiarism and source use, contingent faculty should be supported, empowered, and trusted as the writing professionals that they are. In the prevention of plagiarism, writing faculty should have the freedom to professionally determine when

a student needs extra practice as opposed to punishment. And, while changes to institutional policy will vary based on institutional culture, there should be a greater awareness of the pressures that contingent faculty face. Official policies should not only provide the language of consequences, but also the structures of support to deal with the disciplinary issues that take contingent faculty outside of their scope of influence and require resources beyond the ones they are given. While dealing with plagiarism may never be easy, it can be an opportunity to reach out to the students that need it the most—but only if policies and institutional culture will also support the faculty who need it the most.

Notes

1. The Citation Project (citationproject.net) is a multi-institutional, empirical research project based on Howard's research, and designed to understand the causes and best methods of plagiarism prevention in higher education.
2. See studies from Walker and also Casey Keck for data on the frequency of improper paraphrase versus other forms of plagiarism.
3. See Thomas S. Dee & Brian A. Jacob for data on the effectiveness of "increasing student knowledge about plagiarism rather than by increasing the perceived probabilities of detection and punishment" (27).
4. To avoid threat of legal action, Panagiotis Ipeirotis took down his original post, though copies of it are available on multiple websites.
5. For a more recent, though more complex case, see Loye Young's article on getting fired from an adjunct position for punishing plagiarism.
6. See Resolution 3 of the "2013 Resolutions & Sense of the House Motions" for the CCCC's statement on plagiarism detection software, and Ry Rivard's article "Turning on Turnitin" for a brief overview of the argument.

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Academic Freedom, Contingency, and the Place of Professional Learning Communities

Alexis Teagarden

Seth Kahn's August 2017 *Inside Higher Ed* commentary, "Bad Idea about Writing: Anybody Can Teach It," lit up the *IHE* comment board and WPA listserv. He reiterated an argument he's often made, which he summed up as: "Management makes a circular argument about training: that adjuncts don't have it (and of course many if not most do, which I say explicitly in this text), and that the lack justifies the poor conditions, which then justifies hiring people without it, and so on." Public postings mostly supported the link between dismissed expertise and degraded working conditions. But working conditions remained a general term. Nowhere was it tied to academic freedom.

Yet we implicitly yoke the grinding down of professional identity to the erosion of the academy's foundational working conditions: tenure, shared governance, and academic freedom (Finkin and Post; Nelson). Within composition studies, this argument sometimes appears as a negative *gradatio*:

> Universities are restricting access to resources and professional development for contingent faculty, providing none in many cases to part-time faculty. On top of all that, universities are generally devaluing these teachers by silencing their voices when it comes to university governance, grievance policies, and curriculum development decisions. (Donhardt and Layden 183)

Tracy Donhardt and Sarah Layden's arrangement suggests that contingency labor ills, such as restrictions on shared governance and academic freedom in teaching, go hand-in-hand with cutting professional development.

Recognizing that the vicious cycle of contingency includes an erasure of professional development, I wondered if a commitment to professional development could help sustain the academic freedom of non-tenure-track faculty. For, while many labor issues arise from decisions beyond departmental control, professional development is a means within our grasp; writing programs regularly sponsor such events. The National Census of Writing reports 82 percent of four-year institutions and 83 percent of two-year ones offer some form of faculty professional development for first-year composition instructors, with similarly high percentages for other kinds of writing-intensive programs (Gladstein and Fralix). Work our departments already do could be intentionally crafted as one of our "concrete steps to fight both exploitation of contingent faculty and the denigration of composition studies" (Kahn et al. 7). In other words I'd like to build on what Ed Nagelhout has argued in these pages: "If faculty development affects working conditions, our initial point of departure is that we can improve working conditions [through faculty development]" (A14–15).

Nagelhout offered general principles, but our field recognizes professional development takes many forms, forms not always helpful or even benign. For professional development to shore up academic freedom against contingency's pressures, it requires careful design. I see promise in a particular model—the professional learning community (PLC). A PLC's very structure rebuffs some of contingency's eroding forces, operating instead to sustain professional identity and legitimacy, and therefore supporting contingent faculty members' claims to academic freedom.

Gold Standards

Studies on tenure frequently connect academic freedom to professional standing: "Academic freedom is grounded in professional training and expertise," summarizes Carey Nelson in *No University Is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom* (25). Matthew Finkin and Robert Post's history of academic freedom reads the AAUP's 1915 *Declaration* as premised on "professional expertise . . . which can only be acquired through rigorous study" (40). Thus the concomitant responsibilities of

academic freedom include accountability to scholarly norms and disciplinary col-leagues—to an academic field rather than, say, university trustees or donors (Finkin and Post; Nelson). Campus recognition of expertise becomes a necessary precursor to the granting of academic freedom.

But the hallmarks of contingency undermine disciplinary identity. Lack of re-search support (or even departmental interest) limits contingent faculty members' ability to participate in the academy's most recognized forum—published scholar-ship (Colby and Colby). Nor can teaching college writing be assumed to confer disciplinary standing; as Kahn and others note, problematic hiring practices in composition undercut our field's claims that writing pedagogy requires a definite expertise (see also Colby and Colby). Unsurprisingly, then, previous work has noted how contingency wears down non-tenure-track faculty's standing and with it, their claims to academic freedom (Anson and Jewell; Murphy "Head to Head").

Increasing professional development opportunities might help reverse course on the marginalization of contingent faculty and the discipline of which they form the majority (Bilia et al.). To do so, the programs would have to demonstrate to their campus community that compositionists work from a dedicated body of scholarship and practice a specialized, professional expertise. When professional development effectively publicizes composition research and ensures all writing faculty under-stand and apply field expertise, it can make visible the disciplinary responsibilities that in turn confer the rights of academic freedom.

All That Glitters

Caution is required, however. Previous composition research on contingent fac-ulty and professional development argues how such programs can further weaken claims to academic freedom. Margaret Marshall describes education's broad historical failure: "Efforts to professionalize teachers have actually denied teach-ers professional status because they have not included the kinds of education that would allow teachers to make independent, informed judgments" (10). Ann Pen-rose emphasizes how contingency further mutates such efforts: "'Professional devel-opment' can easily be interpreted as a euphemism for brainwashing or remediation, […] intended to regulate and regularize and thus present a clear challenge to an experienced faculty member's autonomy and professional identity" (116). Eileen Schell and Patricia Stock highlight yet a third problem: "the potential to exploit already overworked and underpaid non-tenure-track faculty when departments and colleges 'up the ante' for professional development without improving salaries or contracts" (30). Professional development designs must avoid these pitfalls.

Further complicating professional development programs is the overlap between

graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and contingent faculty instructors. GTAs and contingent faculty often teach the same courses; professional development programs can approach them as a singular audience. Merging GTAs and contingent faculty development programs can collapse their roles, however, encouraging the view that contingent instructors are more like students than colleagues. As Angela Bilia puts it: "You never fully experience accomplishment as a professional when you are constantly treated as an apprentice who needs supervision and direction from those on top" (388). Contingent faculty can be simultaneously positioned as being in "permanent apprenticeship" (Murphy "New Faculty") yet held to higher standards than GTAs (Anson and Jewell). Thus professional development must be thoughtfully established; poor design can reify the problems it seeks to ameliorate.

From Workshops to Communities

Which designs work? I see promise in the professional learning communities (PLC) model. PLCs originated in US K–12 school reform efforts, but composition studies has begun attending to the model's affordances and successes. Elizabeth Allan and Dana Lynn Driscoll's study of a first-year writing program's self-assessment briefly touts PLC benefits: "Including faculty in a collaborative effort to assess learning outcomes as a research-based activity and to respond to key findings as a professional learning community has strengthened our departmental culture" (49). Erinn Bentley's dissertation reports success using a PLC model to train new GTAs. And panels on PLCs have recently appeared at various field conferences (Russell et al.; Yoo et al.).

For example, at the 2017 Council of Writing Program Administrators annual conference, George Mason University faculty reported on the initial results of a PLC program facilitated by the associate and assistant WPAs; contingent writing program faculty who volunteered to participate received a $1,000 stipend. During the semester, these PLCs met regularly to discuss foundational articles and peer-review course syllabi in light of them. Participants found the PLC work was challenging but ultimately beneficial for themselves as teachers (Matthews et al.). Jessica Matthews, who led the pilot, elaborated on the positive outcome, noting how participants reported an increased sense of professional identity (Matthews).

Published work and anecdotes demonstrate that PLCs inevitably differ across institutions, but share a core set of features. PLCs' primary aim is to create "a learning community that would strive to develop collaborative work cultures for teachers," and they operate from two key assumptions: (1) "Knowledge is situated in the day-to-day lived experiences of teachers and best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experience," and (2) "actively engaging teachers

in PLCs will increase their professional knowledge and enhance student learning" (Vescio et al. 81). More specifically, PLCs bring together small groups of instructors, usually from similar teaching contexts, such as the same course. PLCs that closely follow the K–12 model also meet regularly, focus conversation on teaching practices, measure success via student work, and manage the difficult work of collegial critique and assessment with discussion protocols.

PLCs also intentionally decenter authority and flatten academic hierarchies. Rather than relying on workshop or mentorship models, where a recognized expert is granted authority, PLCs focus on collaboration and equitable exchange. Animating the PLCs is a philosophy that all kinds of experiences and expertise matter and teaching problems are best solved when considered from diverse perspectives (Popp and Goldman 347; see also Yancey).

Such features align with previous work on promoting academic freedom, especially for contingent faculty. For example, Nelson hints at the power of communal, curricular conversation: "If you believe part-time faculty have academic freedom, you should talk to them and learn how they design their courses so as to avoid controversy and the potential loss of their jobs" (90). Nelson also calls for "level, non-hierarchical models of subdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research communities that encompass the whole range of teaching and research activities" (104). Judith Hebb, arguing from a contingent faculty position, similarly claims, "We need interaction and collaboration with tenure-line faculty and with one another" (Bilia et al. 390; see also Anson and Jewell). And Jan Clausen and Eva-Maria Swidler point out the mutuality inherent in cross-rank community: "We adjuncts," they write, "are not enclosed in the standard categories of academic thought, which—for all their frequent virtues—are also inevitably tainted by the strictures of the contemporary academic class system." Thus "[t]he broader faculty should not simply acknowledge the intellectual vigor and creativity of adjuncts (though that would be welcome) but embrace the fact that these free, unenclosed aspects are key to helping everyone advance" (19). All PLC aspects—the professional, the learning, and the community—cultivate the conditions that support academic freedom.

Any meeting of teachers risks devolving from intellectual inquiry into something else, be it polite but uncritical support or shared but purposeless complaint (Hendricks; Popp and Goldman). PLCs, however, directly engage this problem by instituting a formal approach to discussions. They frequently rely on trained facilitators (drawn from the participating faculty themselves) and can use pre-established discussion protocols to promote participant interaction. The popular consultancy protocol, for instance, involves a PLC member briefly presenting a teaching dilemma, followed by timed intervals for asking factual or probing questions, engag-

ing in discussion, and sharing takeaways. These protocols are not magic; they do not guarantee PLCs will create virtuous circles of reflection, discussion, action, and assessment. Nevertheless, research analyzing PLCs' outcomes demonstrates their strict format helps faculty engage in difficult discussions and remain focused on purposeful conversation (Popp and Goldman).

PLCs need more than protocols and facilitators, however. Needed, too, is hope and trust. Yet contingency often replaces hope and trust with wariness and worry. Contingent faculty members report anxieties provoked by professional development sessions, such as how the programs can create the sense of a "semester-long job interview" (Donhardt and Layden 186). Interview performances hardly facilitate the trusting exchange needed in order to reflect on teaching issues. On the other side, development programs lacking explicit assessment measures can trouble WPAs and others tasked with evaluating faculty. What if, at the end of term, one of my students told me, "I'm not turning in the required papers, but have faith, I learned a lot." That student would fail my class. Professional development programs without direct checks can feel the same.

But participants in professional development programs are students only in the Burkean parlor sense or in a life-long learner model—in the way we all are. To design professional development programs along the lines of a class is to close ranks rather than promote expertise. Such framing too easily shifts the inquiry from finding solutions that resonate with individual instructors to finding those that align with what faculty evaluators want to hear—and in so doing constrains rather than sustains the practice of academic freedom. Hence a central PLC benefit: the design explicitly works to destabilize such hierarchical frameworks.

A Conclusion in Progress

Approaching professional development as a way to sustain academic freedom for composition's contingent faculty members requires a determined optimism: "To call ourselves *hopeful* is perhaps imprecise. *Resolute* is better," explain Kahn et al. Moving professional development out of a surveillance or remediation frame neces-sitates letting go of oversight and requires trusting in faculty to make good use of their time.

Emphasizing the professional—rather than remedial—aspects of faculty devel-opment does not, however, require surrendering all methods of review. Instead it embraces the "slow agency" approach defined by Laura Micciche. Changes aris-ing from professional development are likely incremental—changes in classroom practice and student work that blossom over time. Nor will PLCs alone guarantee academic freedom's permanence; they cannot sweep away the deep structural injustices of higher education's labor practices.

What PLCs offer is a concrete program of professional development, one that fosters cross-faculty conversations and grounds claims of expertise in shared disciplinary knowledge. The design foregrounds problem solving, where everyone's perspective is valued. It resists ranking faculty by academic hierarchy and instead encourages a communal sense of professional identity; it brings contingent faculty into conversation with the whole of their department and with the larger field. These moves break from the apprentice model and break through contingency's isolation. PLCs cultivate a community of experts, which can, in turn, support all members' claims to academic freedom.

PLCs are a relatively new idea in academia, but the idea that universities should commit to teaching and to their teachers is not. In reading previous works on academic freedom, I frequently came across John Dewey's response to early infringements on faculty self-determination. Among the points in his "Academic Freedom" essay was a lament: "The great event in the history of an institution is now likely to be a big gift, rather than a new investigation or the development of a strong and vigorous teacher" (11). Scholars usually underscore how Dewey's concern about donors still resonates. But I find similarly striking Dewey's preferred markers of university achievement, which place teacher development on equal footing with scholarly research. What might it mean for our field if we fully committed to the developmental aspect of a teacher's career-long work, aiming to sustain "strong and vigorous" teachers and in doing so cultivate the ground in which academic freedom thrives?

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Contingent Faculty and Academic Freedom in the Age of Trump: Organizing the Disenfranchised Is the Key to Success
Bob Samuels

Now that more than 75 percent of the instructors teaching in higher education in the United States do not have tenure, it is important to think about how the current political climate affects those vulnerable teachers. Although we should pay atten-

tion to how all faculty are being threatened, non-tenured faculty are in an especially exposed position because they often lack any type of academic freedom or shared governance rights.

This new higher education faculty majority often relies on getting high student evaluations to keep their jobs or earn pay increases. The emphasis on pleasing students not only can result in grade inflation and defensive teaching, but it also places the teacher in an impossible situation when dealing with political issues in a polarized environment (see Trout; Benjamin; Langen; Jacoby).[1] While some students want teachers to talk freely about politics, many students will turn against an instructor who does not share their own ideological perspective. This type of political disagreement can appear in student evaluations as vague complaints about a teacher's attitude or personality, and when a contingent faculty member is denied a raise or even a job, we never know if there was an infringement of the teacher's academic freedom. In other terms, the reliance on student evaluations may render the issue of academic freedom invisible for contingent faculty.

In this fraught cultural environment, practically everyone feels that they are being censored, silenced, or ignored. Some of my conservative students have told me they feel like the real minorities on campus, and even though Donald Trump won the US presidency, they still think they cannot express their true opinions. Conversely, some of my self-identified progressive students believe that political correctness makes it hard to have an open discussion: From their perspective, since anything can be perceived as a microaggression, people tend to silence themselves. Moreover, the themes of political correctness, safe spaces, trigger warnings, and free speech have become contentious issues on both the right and the left.

While tenured faculty often do have their academic freedom protected, I found that many non-tenure-track faculty feel that they cannot say what they think inside or outside of the classroom because it is so easy for students and administrators to punish them in a hidden way. This creates an educational environment where almost everyone is afraid to speak. Non-tenured faculty members fear losing their jobs, conservative students see themselves as a censored minority, and progressive students are afraid of being called out for their privilege or lack of political correctness. Making matters worse is that students are often socialized by their large lecture classes to simply remain passive and silent.

While we appear to be facing a perfect storm where free speech and real debate are no longer possible, one obvious and readily available way of countering this is to stop relying on student evaluations to assess non-tenured faculty. If we change how non-tenured faculty members are evaluated and rely much more on the peer review of instruction, teachers will not have to be afraid that they will lose their jobs for promoting the free exchange of ideas in the classroom.

Non-tenure-track faculty should be empowered to observe and review one another's courses using established review criteria, with experienced faculty having expertise in pedagogy involved in the peer-review process of teaching. All faculty members can and should examine and discuss effective instructional methods. For example, new inventories of effective teaching have been developed by Carl Wieman.[2] My argument here is that if there were a more objective way of evaluating faculty, then the use of student evaluations could be reduced or even eliminated, and this particular threat to academic freedom would be removed.

Unfortunately, during the last round of contract bargaining for the University Council-AFT lecturers, our team was unable to win a reduction in the role of student evaluations in assessing the performance of non-tenure-track faculty. Although we presented solid evidence that these assessment tools often undermine education and are sometimes based on racial, gender, and age discrimination (Freeman; Marsh and Roche; Radmacher and Martin; Riniolo et al.; Stark and Freishtat),[3] the university administration told us that it would be too costly and time consuming to develop a different model of performance evaluation. When we asked them why they did not support the peer review of instruction, they responded that tenured faculty did not have the time to perform these reviews.

To really safeguard academic freedom, non-tenure faculty have to organize together to replace the use of student evaluations with more objective forms of measuring pedagogical effectiveness. As I have argued, the current reliance on these evaluation forms functions as a hidden way of controlling what faculty members say while they are teaching.

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