

FORUM

NEWSLETTER FOR ISSUES ABOUT PART-TIME AND CONTINGENT FACULTY

13.1 FALL 2009

CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

INSIDE

- From the Editor: Defining the Material and Disciplinary Limits of Contingency** A1
Brad Hammer
- The Other Side of the Track? (De)Constructing Viable Professional Selves from a Border Pedagogy** A5
Vandana Gavaskar
- Corporatizing the Instructorate: Ceding Authority to the Administrative Class** A8
Bob Samuels
- Voice through Non-Belonging: Community Building and Writing Instruction** A10
John Poole
- Dual Tracks: Creating Tenurable Teaching Lines** A12
Leslie Frost

From the Editor: Defining the Material and Disciplinary Limits of Contingency Brad Hammer

In preparation for my inaugural letter in *Forum*, I've spent countless hours reading and rereading past essays. In this work, I've sought to understand the complex material, pedagogical, and disciplinary implications that contingency both produces and sustains. I've imagined that by pulling together this work, one could more complexly define the parameters (and perhaps root causes) of the growing uses and misuses of contingent labor. Like the thousands who teach voicelessly in these positions, I sought to make public the ways in which our work is both undervalued and serves to bolster a corporatized reformulation of the academy. In these articles, I read many stories of non-belonging, contextualized by poverty-scale wages and punctuated by endless calls for action. Yet, even as I write this, contingency remains vigorously on the rise.

When I began teaching 15 years ago, writing program administrators, instructor-theorists, and our professional organizations (CCCC, MLA, NCTE) were already deeply engaged in exposing this trend. National committees have been formed, position statements have been drafted, graduate programs gutted, and unions established at various institutions. In one rare case (<http://www.rabblepdx.org/>), when

A1

About *Forum*

Forum is published twice a year by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. As editor, I welcome your news items, book reviews, editorials, and/or articles related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses. Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than May 1; for the spring issue, the deadline is September 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned.

Submit your work electronically via email or an email attachment. Address your work to bhammer@unc.edu and put the words "*Forum* article" somewhere in your subject line. Submissions should include the following information:

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

For additional guidelines or information about *Forum*, contact Brad Hammer, *Forum* editor, bhammer@unc.edu, or phone 919-621-1000.

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy, where such endorsement is clearly specified. Similarly, opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

© 2009 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Printed in the United States of America. ISSN 1522-7502

tenured faculty and department chairs saw the causal link between contingency and teaching quality, entire institutions banded together to support their nontenured colleagues. But, as Evelyn Beck, the past editor of *Forum*, made clear with her reporting of national salaries for contingent faculty, we must advocate for minimum salaries to get even the paltry sum of \$4,000 per class (A3).

So, while much has been written about and advocated for, little has changed. Arguably, there are now well-funded and independent writing programs (George Washington University, Duke, Miami of Ohio, and others) that offer longer-term contracts, better wages, smaller classes, and relative intellectual autonomy. While these programs are few (and still don't offer tenure) they bear little statistical significance to account for the 83.8% of all instructors who now teach writing off the tenure track (Gere 4). Whatever the cause of this situation, our assertions have proven ineffectual. And before real change can occur, I would argue that one core understanding is still missing. That is, have we, as compositionists, adequately defined the limits and implications of contingency?

We pose this question at a time when our professional organizations, unions, theory, and research fail to adequately bridge the professional and disciplinary divide that separates insiders and outsiders within the academy. And we are therefore forced to ask if our institutions have so normalized the uses and abuses of contingent labor that fair employment and tenure are beyond the threshold of return for those focused on the teaching of writing?

While much has been written in the past regarding the state of employment, the overproduction of PhDs, the erosion of tenure, and the abysmal material conditions under which many teach, nobody knows the exact extent and definition of contingency and the reach of its implications within the academy. While the statistical data is being compiled (see the CCCC Initial Report on Survey of CCCC Members), these numbers, and the charge to understand their complex implications for disciplinary, remain powerfully unanswered. What we do know is that out of 44,173 sections of undergraduate writing surveyed, only 16.2% of these classes are now taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty (Gere).

As we've known for some time, the vast majority of these courses are taught by adjuncts, part-timers, and other forms of contingent labor at an average annual salary of under \$42,000. What we don't know is how, and through what advocacy, to reverse this trend.

To be sure, the low-wage and generally exploitative realities of teaching first-year writing have already been well documented within our central literature. Our professional organizations have formed committees to address everything from economic inequities to the over-production of graduate students. Still, contingency grows. What is also clear is that none of that exposure, from the CCCC Committee on Part-time, Adjunct or Contingent Labor to the MLA Statement on Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members, has altered meaningfully the material and undemocratic conditions under which compositionists practice our trade. Further, even less has been done to address adequately the costs to both students and learning.

In This Issue

While we continue to read reports from the AAUP, adjunctnation.com, and other stakeholders, contingency expands. In the essays that follow, you will read about the material conditions and issues of faculty on the West Coast, the East Coast, and in the Midwest. And in three of these essays, your fellow teacher-scholars will call on *you* to make your voice public in complex ways.

During my recent week at the CCCC annual convention in San Francisco, I attended every talk I could find on contingent labor. In these meetings, the theme of exploitation dominated the public discourse. Again and again, I heard the charge for unionization overshadow the conversation. While I will not advocate for or against unionization in this context, in the essays that follow, you will read both a call toward and a charge away from this trend. In his essay, Bob Samuels, president of the University of California Union (UC-AFT) argues the need to "resist" "the corporatization of higher education." However, as others will charge, has any union (which reinforces our teaching as labor) provided parity (both intellectual and financial) for faculty not on the tenure stream? In her lead essay, Vandana Gavaskar,

a 15-year veteran senior lecturer from The Ohio State University, argues that “we need to be better rhetoricians of our work, its contribution to society, and the trajectory of critical thinking in our students.” In her text, Dr. Gavaskar does more than just draw attention to examples of best and worst practices: she begins to define the intellectual, material, pedagogical, and disciplinary costs of contingency.

As I speak with colleagues across the country and read the most recent *Forum* submissions, it is clear to me that:

1. The concept of contingency is still amorphous and undefined and fails to detail the complex and varied professional lives of thousands of compositionists. While pay scales, contracts, and teaching loads for contingent faculty are as varied as the institutions in which we teach, there is no clear understanding of the limits and costs of that contingency. Consequently, there has been no unified nor centralized voice and no central call (beyond minimum salaries) to reformulate the instructorate.
2. Contingent faculty are waiting patiently for our professional organizations to step in and demand change and censure programs that exploit on an ongoing basis.
3. Faculty demand a living wage and the support essential for promoting teaching excellence.
4. Teacher-scholars want to do more than gripe as they seek to extend their voices in our literature, conferences, and professional organizations to situate more complexly how contingency alters disciplinarity.

Before CCCC, NCTE, MLA, or any other organization can demand change, we must first define the limits of contingency in order to better understand the constraints under which we all labor. Consequently, I am asking our readership to come to voice in complex ways by logging on to the *Forum* website (<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/forum>) and answering a series of questions you’ll find there on how contingency touches your life as a teacher, researcher, administrator, or student. We invite WPAs, contingent faculty at every level, and even your students to write about the ways in which you struggle to teach, live, learn, and belong. Consequently, we will seek to make public your voices as we charge our professional organizations to support your labor in defined ways.

Works Cited

Beck, Evelyn. “From the Editor: What Is a Fair Wage?” *Forum* 12.1 (2008): A1–A3.
Gere, Anne Ruggles. *Initial Report on Survey of CCCC Members*. Squire Office of Policy Research, National Council of Teachers of English. 12 Jan. 2009 <<http://>

www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Groups/CCCC/InitialReportSurveyCCCCMembers.pdf>.

Modern Language Association of America. Statement on Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members. *Profession* 2004: 218–22. 30 July 2009 <<http://www.mlajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1632/074069504X26476?>>.

Rabble. Supporting Faculty, Statement of Purpose. 30 July 2009 <<http://www.rabblepdx.org/>>.

The Other Side of the Track? (De)Constructing Viable Professional Selves from a Border Pedagogy

Vandana Gavaskar

Border Pedagogy is “an ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourses, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective—a view from elsewhere.” Henry Giroux (219)

Henry Giroux’s concept of border pedagogy situates contingent faculty along the margins, simultaneously occupying the spaces of outsider and insider. By deconstructing these institutional definitions of contingency, our scholarship can provide for a critical understanding of the larger cultural, historical, and pedagogical contexts in which we work. Our critical pedagogy is, more often than not, personal and interactive, not the least because we are easing students’ transitions into the complexities of academic life. Paradoxically, we do not want students to be limited or constrained by the rhetorical demands of the institution, encouraging them to struggle to redefine themselves against the grain, as argued by Min-Zhan Lu, who describes students (and surely their adjunct teachers) as “border residents.” I argue that the margin is significant to critical pedagogy and is a significant critical space for non-tenure-line instructors.

When we discuss the material, historical, and cultural conditions of the work that we do, it becomes clear to me that the readership of *Forum* is concerned about the viability and visibility of their professional lives along this border—choices made, paths taken and not taken. This critical literacy is both a process of construction and deconstruction as our professional lives exist in transit. Consequently, the path to professional development (and belonging) is not clearly marked.

Given the economic conditions in which many of us go to graduate school and pursue a home life, it is not statistically possible for the majority of us of us to tran-

sition from graduate school to a full-time tenured position; there are just not that many jobs. As presented in MLA's "The Worst of Times amid the Best of Times?" in 1997, posted online:

If present employment patterns continue *fewer than half the seven or eight thousand graduate students likely to earn PhDs in English and foreign languages between 1996 and 2000 can expect to obtain full-time tenure-track positions within a year of receiving their degrees.* (MLA, n.pag.)

Now, a decade later, we are also in "the worst of times," and contingent labor grows in response to economic trends and shrinking university budgets. A recent online article in *Inside Higher Education*, "Disappearing Jobs," makes the case that this lack of opportunities cannot be easily corrected by reducing the influx of graduate students admitted to graduate schools:

In fact: [t]he number of new Ph.D.s in English and foreign languages has dropped modestly in recent years—but in nothing like the percentages that jobs appear to have vanished for the coming academic year, so the reduction in the number of jobs won't be offset by a decline in the supply of new academic talent. (Jaschik, n.pag.)

In this essay, and in several others in *Profession*, *The Nation*, and *Salon.com*, the viewpoint presented is that of the establishment—concerned about tenure attrition and increasing teaching loads, the breakdown of the humanities, and the impact of the current economic crisis. Everybody has handy statistics: "From 1970 to today, the proportion of part-time teachers grew from 22 percent of all professors to 40 percent," writes Christopher Shea in "The Crisis in English" (*Salon* n. pag.).

Given the way that labor is defined at the university (scholarship/teaching/service), most university budgets do not allow for a large influx of scholar-teachers because they need a reliable and compliant group of people who can teach multiple sections of service and introductory courses (first-year writing, basic writing, survey courses) relatively inexpensively. These teachers are *contingent* upon enrollment, but not *contingent* in that the vast majority of courses will be effectively taught by adjuncts, lecturers, and other parallel appointments in the foreseeable future. These are the border perspectives that need to be included in the discussion about the state of intellectual and pedagogical labor.

Just as migrant labor needs a theoretical and sustained articulation, so too do contingent, migratory, and nomadic faculty need to explore how institutional language has defined us and what its limitations are. We have to ask ourselves if we accept the conditions of being contingent, or if we are capable *as rhetoricians* of describing the work that we do in powerful ways.

In sheer numbers, we are in the position to take up the work of serving as public intellectuals by archiving and naming our experiences in Op Eds, journal articles,

blogs, and websites. Publishing narratives and critical articles about our teaching, the literacies of our students, and the changes being brought about by economics, technologies, and diversity may help us to create professional visibility and intellectual dignity. We need to charge NCTE with the creation of an academic journal to interrogate contingency—not just a “newsletter”—where we can articulate our *subaltern* consciousness about the institution and our roles in augmenting its work—the **rhetorical education of students**.

Some methodological starting points for the contingent instructorate to demand voice as our numbers continue to grow:

- Collecting teaching narratives in blogs and other Web spaces that chart how contingent faculty, no less than tenure-track faculty, are negotiating their public/private lives and seeking professional satisfaction, better working conditions, and the means for career advancement. I am arguing that this is a viable history of English studies as a discipline.
- A larger conference and print presence, as well as formalized CCCC position statements on contingent faculty issues.
- Discussion groups within and across institutions. Can we gain a collective and comprehensive understanding of how different institutions define and incorporate non-tenure faculty?
- Research based on the history of contingent faculty, conducted while seeking widespread advocacy from CCCC and SWR to sponsor ongoing studies which seek viable solutions. We must charge CCCC with convening committees (so that we have more than just MLA's definitions and descriptions of contingent labor) and extend *Forum* as a venue for gathering archival material that can be contextualized into critical book studies.
- Additional venues. We can utilize the organization of CCCC to create channels of advocacy and communication as per their bylaws.

Put simply, as compositionists we need to be better rhetoricians of our work, its contribution to society, and the trajectory of critical thinking in our students. Finally, contingent faculty need to enter the public discourse (outside of brown-bag lunches and marginalized local settings) and define the parameters that will create viability/visibility for a professional career.

Works Cited

- Giroux, Henry. “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism.” *Critical Issues in Education: An Anthology of Readings*. Ed. Eugene F. Provenzo. New York: Sage, 2006. 210–228.
- Jaschik, Scott. “Disappearing Jobs.” *Inside Higher Education*. 30 March 2009 <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/12/18/jobs>>.

Lu, Min-Zhan. "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?" *College English* 54 (1992): 887–913.

Modern Language Association. "The Worst of Times amid the Best of Times." 30 March 2009 <http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep_employment/prof_employment/prof_employment2>.

Shea, Christopher. "Crisis in English." Salon.com. 30 March 2009 <<http://www.salon.com/it/feature/1998/12/24feature.html>>.

Vandana Gavaskar taught at The Ohio State University as a Senior Lecturer for 15 years. She has recently relocated with her family to Virginia and will be teaching as a Lecturer in English at Old Dominion University.

Corporatizing the Instructorate: Ceding Authority to the Administrative Class

Bob Samuels

Universities and colleges across the country have been letting go of contingent faculty because of budget cuts and the reduction of state support for higher education. In fact, the University of California president, Mark Yudof, recently affirmed that due to state budget cuts, the UC will be forced to reduce new enrollments, and "[w]ith fewer students, the savings would come from offering fewer classes, hiring fewer lecturers, leaving faculty and staff vacancies open and other measures" (Hewitt, n. pag.). Yudof's statement should make compositionists in particular stop and question the real motives and priorities of the UC and other higher education institutions.

At the same time that the UC has been limiting enrollments, raising tuition (called student fees in the UC system), cutting course offerings, suspending requirements, limiting student services, and eliminating the jobs of non-tenure-track lecturers teaching undergraduate courses, the *San Francisco Chronicle* has reported how several exceptions have been given to bypass a new salary freeze for top management in order "to retain top people" (Doyle, n. pag.). For example, "the governing Board of Regents appointed two executives at salaries of more than \$350,000 a year and authorized paid administrative leaves to two former campus chancellors—one receiving \$402,200 a year and the other \$315,000" (Doyle). Other *Chronicle* studies of the UC budget show that the system constantly breaks its own compensation rules by granting exceptions and by hiding the real salary of top earners through secret bonuses and executive slush funds.

Like AIG, it appears that the university can always find money for executive compensation packages but cannot find enough money to hire faculty to teach undergraduate students. Moreover, the UC claims that it must increase tuition and cut classes in order to make up for the lack of state support, yet the state only funds less than 15% of the total UC budget.

In pushing the university to make undergraduate education more of a priority, our union (UC-AFT), representing all of the contingent faculty in the UC system, has used the media to expose many of the hidden aspects of the UC budget and to shame the university into funding both needed classes and teachers. For example, last October when the university threatened to cut 20–40% of the UCLA Writing Program's budget, investigative articles in the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Daily Bruin* pressured the campus to restore full funding to the department.

The lesson here is that contingent faculty can fight for their jobs by forcing institutions to make undergraduate education a high priority and by letting constituencies know how public monies are being squandered and why classes are being cut. After all, according to a recent AAUP report, over 65% of all teaching in our institutions of higher education is now done by contingent faculty, and in the case of composition, almost all of the teachers of undergraduate courses are working outside of the tenure system (AAUP). By exposing administrative compensation scandals and by protecting undergraduate education, contingent faculty can help protect the quality and course offerings of undergraduate education.

Ultimately, contingent faculty and other concerned stakeholders have to resist the corporatization of higher education, which replaces the commitment to a public good and contextualized learning with a competitive, capitalistic model. In the case of the UC system, this push for corporatization is evident in that over 73% of the tenured faculty are off the salary scale. The main cause for this disjunction is that faculty are renegotiating their salaries to make private deals with individual administrators. This form of negotiation not only subverts the peer review process, but it also turns every faculty member and administrator into a free agent, which undermines collegiality and the sense of a shared purpose.

While some administrators and tenured faculty members are renegotiating their salaries every year, nontenured faculty are not considered part of this competitive market system, and thus are funded primarily out of the leftover funds. Moreover, administrators claim that during times of budget cuts, they cannot get rid of tenured faculty, and so the only people they can cut are the untenured teachers. It is time for us to ask why faculty do not push their institutions to cut their administrative expenses. The centralized role for administrators in determining curricular and hiring issues has been growing even as we see reductions in faculty autonomy and decreases in faculty funding.

One reason we do not see more of the tenured faculty resisting administrative bloat is that they have lost much of their former power. Since most of the faculty now hired are outside of the tenured system, they usually do not have the right to participate in shared governance. Also, many tenured faculty members have chosen to concentrate on their own particular careers and have ceded much of their power to the administrative class. In the past, faculty members handled such things as setting budget priorities, advising students, hiring staff, and negotiating contracts, but now a class of paid “professionals” deals with these administrative functions. Furthermore, administrators see that the solution to any problem is to hire more administrators, further gutting the instructorate and creating more administrators and more students, but fewer faculty members.

NCTE should:

- Circulate best practices for the treatment of contingent faculty
- Highlight contingent faculty issues at conferences and meetings
- Support the unionization of contingent faculty
- Censor institutions that mistreat non-tenure-track faculty

Bob Samuels teaches writing at UCLA and is president of UC-AFT. He has published several books on composition, cultural studies, and academic politics.

Works Cited

- AAUP. “Trends in Faculty Hiring, 1975–2005.” March 1, 2009. <<http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/9218E731-A68E-4E98-A378-12251FFD3802/0/Facstatustrend7505.pdf>>.
- Doyle, Jim. “Even in Recession, UC Spends Big on Top Brass.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. 25 March 2009. 1 April 2009 <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/03/25/BAL116MDSL.DTL>>.
- Hewitt, Alison. “UC regents cap freshman enrollment for fall, leave UCLA mostly unaffected.” *UCLA Newsroom* 14 January 2009. 9 April 2009 <<http://newsroom.ucla.edu/portal/ucla/regents-cap-uc-enrollment-for-78481.aspx>>.

Voice through Non-Belonging: Community Building and Writing Instruction

John Poole

At Brigham Young University-Idaho, 49% of courses within the English department are now taught by contingent faculty. And, over the course of my six years teaching as an adjunct, I have found that regardless of pedagogical trends and budgetary

concerns, the instructional methods of contingent faculty vary greatly from their full-time counterparts. That is, within my own teaching and that of the many contingent colleagues I queried, there is an expressivist pedagogy that pushes against the instrumentalist or “service” agenda typically sought by the institutions we support.

Unlike many of my colleagues across the US in positions similar to mine, I receive formal invitations to all university activities and key decision-making meetings. However, because of my dual career role (necessary due to the economics of contingency) I also work as an alternative high school principal during the day and cannot leave to attend these meetings and events. Hence, my contingent status reduces my voice in the decisions that our English department makes and produces a sense of marginal connection to the department. Consequently, my investment in an expressivist pedagogy is not defined by the administration’s drive toward a service economy but rather by my central contribution to the university as a critically engaged instructor through my ability to teach and mentor students.

My contingent identity is emblematic of the students in my first-year composition classes. I find that many of them, like me, share an after-hours approach to education. Most of these students are nontraditional, meaning that they don’t attend school during the day, are not really involved in university activities or leadership, and often find themselves voiceless in a university that doesn’t represent their interests.

While teaching first-year composition over the past six years, I have pondered the instructional purpose of this class. In a recent CCC article, Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle ask the same question, but conclude that “we have not yet imagined moving first-year composition from teaching ‘how to write in college’ to teaching *about writing*” (553). Many faculty members and especially the administration look to first-year composition as the “service” course. For my students, this is their first chance to experience college-level writing and the expectations that go along with it. Yet, during discussions, my students suggest that university conventions are about proper grammar and never fully articulate a desire to learn “about” writing.

From the margins, these nontraditional students (like myself) are very apprehensive about expressing themselves, feeling that they have nothing important to add to the discourse on relevancy within college composition. I find that their writing is much more cautious, much more reliant on authority to validate their voice and their writing. T. R. Johnson states this problem succinctly: “Our students cultivate this keen dislike of writing because they have picked up innumerable indications from us that it is nearly impossible for them to win a place in the professional conversations of the academy” (643). The writing process, as a methodology to inculcate “quality” has robbed my students of the ability to have an important voice.

As a contingent faculty member, my allegiances are to pedagogy over institution.

Consequently, I see the value of writing instruction much differently from most of my full-time colleagues.

Because I teach for a three-hour period, one day a week, I have more flexibility in my curricular design than a traditional instructor. Each time we meet, the classroom becomes a writing community, where each person comes to write and learn about writing, both as a skill and as a powerful tool for critical learning. To be sure, contingency creates non-belonging within the university. However, within the contexts of my charge, my contingency allows me to centralize my agenda within the classroom as we seek contextualized learning through composition.

Contingency has allowed me to bring into question the institutional, pedagogical, and disciplinary limits of service. By working from the outside, I've given myself license to spend much less time on the traditional "skills-centric" approach to writing. Of course, many contingent faculty are operating further outside the box than I, working in powerless roles with nontraditional students. Many of them teach longer class sessions, work with underprepared students, and have to explore writing from the viewpoint of their charge—dealing daily with the realities of contingency. For me, contingency has become a political act—a construction of empowerment to help students understand that writing is about voice and belonging. And, in a tiered world of educational disenfranchisement, giving students that power offers them a sense of self and articulates their contingent place within the academy.

Works Cited

- Downs, Douglas, and Elizabeth Wardle. "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies.'" *College Composition and Communication* 58 (2007): 552–584.
- Johnson, T. R. "School Sucks." *College Composition and Communication* 52 (2001): 620–650.

John Poole is an adjunct English faculty member at Brigham Young University-Idaho. He has taught English/language arts for the past 13 years.

Dual Tracks: Creating Tenurable Teaching Lines

Leslie Frost

In its 2008 Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature released online in February, the Modern Language Association

recommends four broad changes to the structure of undergraduate programs in language and literature. It urges the development of:

- a coherent program of study;
 - teamwork among the instructional staff members;
 - interdepartmental cooperative teaching;
 - empirical research to assess the successes and shortcomings of the program.
- (5)

The key to instituting these changes can be summed up in the report's insistent focus: the creation of a new model of interaction and cooperation between faculty members. "Faculty members rarely work together in the way that we propose and often know little about their colleagues' course contents and methodologies," the report notes (5). Yet in an interactive world, and in the face of an "explosion" of new technologies and disciplinary knowledge, the report argues, "the work of curriculum demands collaborative teamwork among faculty members to give the major coherence and structure and administrative support to sustain points of articulation with other fields of study" (5).

The report ruefully acknowledges the context in which its recommendations take place: the era of the apparent decline of the major. "We know that today's students are less likely to choose language and literary study as majors than they were thirty-five or even fifteen years ago," the authors state, "and we wanted to explore ways to strengthen majors in our fields and attract new generations of students to what has been the traditional core of liberal study" (3). Yet missing from the report is a discussion of faculty whose teaching is least integrated in English departments and who most interact with students who *would* be English majors: the fixed-term faculty members who, with graduate students, teach composition and introductory literature classes.¹ English majors do not spring forth fully formed from the forehead of an administrator; while they may enter college decided on the major, they in many cases make a connection to a professor in an introductory course—or not—and decide to become a major—*or not*.

The introductory courses taken by large numbers of undecided students are thus potential gateway courses to the major. Instructors of these courses, by our teaching and interaction with students, invite students into the major. Often with contingent quasi-faculty positions, we are crucial to the recruitment for the major and, by virtue of our contracts, focused on teaching and not research. Yet our role in English departments is not recognized in the report.

While the elision of contingent labor's responsibility for recruitment of majors creates a significant gap in the report's discussion, its centralized focus on "instruc-

tional cooperation” offers an opportunity for contingent faculty members to reimagine (and argue for) our role within the department. So what precisely do we want?

As long as composition remains a “service” instead of a discipline, it will both require large numbers of instructors and be shunned by tenured and tenure-track research-oriented professors. As long as research remains the only pathway to tenure, there will be a need for the teaching of some to subsidize the research of others. And as long as the teaching staff is recognized as an interchangeable pool of short-term labor, the vast majority of first-year students will be introduced to university and college-level English by poorly paid teaching staff sharing offices (if they are lucky), often carrying their work from job to job, and thus embodying the lack of respect their position affords them. (It is not a stretch to argue that in its own disrespect for its PhDs the profession has modeled for students an accepted low valuation of English.)

In the new professional world imagined by the MLA Teagle Report, teaching undergraduates is valued in departments’ instructional practices. Thus, it seems to me that the clearest way for departments to strengthen the major, outside of abolishing contingent labor, is to institute tenure-track “teaching positions” and normalize long-term fixed-term contracts, thereby offering “teamwork” to teaching-intensive positions. The development of tenurable teaching lines would give institutional approval to the value of undergraduate teaching in university English departments. And if we agree that students may decide on a major based on their initial classroom experience in the field, then the development of improved norms for contingent employment in English is crucial to increasing the numbers of English majors. However, contingent faculty dependent upon short-term contracts cannot alter appreciably the material conditions under which they labor. Consequently, I charge MLA, CCCC, and NCTE to support both teaching and scholarship by asserting a new and strong voice on contingent labor through their publications, conferences, position statements, and policies.

Even with our growing numbers and the concern they arouse within the tenure system, the opportunity to develop a collective voice is truncated by our tenuous sense of belonging. While the UC system and others have unionized, I would argue their numbers of contingent labor are still growing, exploitation persists, and tenure is further eroded. Our professional organizations are, in fact, our intellectually based unions and, as such, need to agitate for the strengthening of our position so that we can join our forces with tenured faculty and argue collectively for collegiality and the continuity of the field. I disagree strongly with those who believe that contingent faculty should unionize. I think we should struggle to create teaching-centered positions, minimizing fixed-term employment and maximizing, through

reconceptualization, the tenure stream, to recentralize the value of the English PhD. As noted by the MLA's 2008 report *Education in the Balance*:

Non-tenure-track faculty members have been part of US English departments from the very beginning; to this day, they play a major role in undergraduate instruction. Sometimes, however, their distinctive characteristics and contract conditions—and even the teachers themselves—remain invisible. (10)

Invisible colleagues do not help to create a strong faculty position campus-wide.

The number of available tenure lines has remained steady amid rocketing student enrollment increases of more than 22% in the decade between 1995 and 2005 (MLA, *Education in the Balance* 3). The elephantine problem of contingent faculty offers the opportunity for an open discussion about the direction of the English major and graduate studies in literature and composition. While research is crucial to the mission of the university, to the major, and to the training of graduate students, undergraduate teaching serves the department (recruiting majors through teaching excellence) and the university (through the service course) as well. And while the specialized research model currently serves to strengthen departments in the sciences and social sciences, where much money is available for research and the results of that research are broadly socially desirable, the fact is that the production of knowledge within the humanities needs to include emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates who will carry the value of the major—in their writing, their cultural knowledge, and the intellectual skills they develop in literary analysis—into the corporations, publishing firms, lawyer's offices, film studios, and grant-writing institutions where they will find jobs.

The MLA report calls for "... new ways of organizing English languages and literatures within the general parameters of liberal learning" and for a concerted effort on the part of faculty and departmental administrators to give coherence by instituting clear changes in teaching practices, advising, and course structure (1). The coherence called for in the major isn't simply a response, however, to declining numbers; it is situated within an argument that constitutes a justification of the English major within the liberal arts degree. This argument was echoed in a recent *New York Times* article describing the state of the humanities:

With additional painful cuts across the board . . . the humanities are under greater pressure than ever to justify their existence. . . . Technology executives, researchers and business leaders argue that producing enough trained engineers and scientists is essential to America's economic vitality, national defense and health care. Some of the staunchest humanities advocates, however, admit that they have failed to make their case effectively. (Cohen)

It may be that the state of alarm about the undergraduate major and the change in departmental practices catalyzed by this alarm creates systemic improvements in the material conditions of contingent labor faculty.

However, we can make that case by working collegially and non-hierarchically together as teachers, advisors, and researchers. Quite frankly, without this central change, I do not see cause for optimism, cautious or otherwise.

Leslie Frost is a lecturer at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Notes

1. As Gerald Graff notes in his presidential column in the Summer 2008 issue of the *MLA Newsletter*, "Now that contingent faculty members compose a shocking three-fourths or more of the teaching staff at some campuses, even upper division courses are increasingly being taught by temporary employees" (3).
2. See *Education in the Balance: A Report on the Academic Workforce in English*. See also *The Committee on Professional Employment: The Final Report*, particularly "The Job Crisis and Graduate Studies."

Works Cited

- Cohen, Patricia. "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth." *New York Times Online*. 24 Feb. 2009. 12 April 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/25/books/25human.html>>.
- Egan, Timothy. "Greed and Need." *New York Times Online*. 25 Feb. 2009. 15 April 2009 <<http://egan.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/11/greed-and-need/>>.
- Graff, Gerald. "President's Column: Bringing Writing in from the Cold." *MLA Newsletter* 40.2 (Summer 2008): 3-4. 17 April 2009 <http://tigger.uic.edu/~ggraff/graff_articles/mla_summer2008.pdf>.
- Modern Language Association. *2008 Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature*. Feb. 2009. 2 April 2009 <http://www.mla.org/pdf/2008_mla_whitepaper.pdf>.
- . "The Job Crisis and Graduate Studies." *Committee on Professional Employment: The Final Report*. 10 April 2009 <http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep_employment/prof_employment/prof_employment7>.
- Modern Language Association ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing. *Education in the Balance: A Report on the Academic Work Force in English*. 10 Dec. 2008. 12 April 2009 <http://www.mla.org/report_aw>.