

## CHAPTER 15

# HITTING THE WALL: IDENTITY AND ENGAGEMENT AT A TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

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Threads: Organizing Within and Across Ranks; Professionalizing and Developing in Complex Contexts; Protecting Gains, Telling Cautionary Tales

Whatcom Community College (WCC) was among a handful of two-year colleges in the state of Washington that offered a three-course composition sequence, English 100, 101, and 102. At one point, WCC offered more sections of English 100 than English 101 even though the Intercollegiate Relations Council (ICRC), which brokers the transfer agreement between two-year and four-year colleges in the state, had deemed that English 101 would be the statewide first-year course, and no course numbered 100 or above could be a prerequisite for it. Faculty in English, well aware of the “politics of remediation” (see Shor and Wiener), had fought for years to maintain English 100 as a credit-bearing course, an unlisted elective that students could apply to their transfer degrees though not transfer directly. Designed as a stretch-model 101 and responsive to the work of Shaughnessy as well as Bartholomae and Petrosky among others, English 100 provided students with a rich curriculum not very different from the English 101 curriculum, but offering greater depth and time for reflection. English 100 also provided “protection” from what faculty viewed as an overly prescriptive developmental education curriculum, housed in a different academic division.

However, research coming out of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College of Columbia University beginning in 2011-12 raised serious questions about the efficacy of a three-course sequence built on top of a two-course developmental sequence (see Cho et al.; Jenkins et al.). At

the same time, common course numbering proliferated across the state, whereby courses with a “common number” (e.g., English 101, Sociology 101) were considered equivalent no matter at which campus they were taught; the result of this development was to highlight WCC’s difference: since over half of all incoming students were placed into English 100—not the more common “first-year writing course,” English 101—English 101 at Whatcom was arguably not the same. Thus, when in 2014, the ICRC enforced their ruling that English 100 be eliminated or numbered below 100, English faculty had no choice but to comply.

Nonetheless, everyone involved, especially department and program leadership, recognized that this would place undue hardship on the adjunct faculty who taught and continue to teach approximately 75 percent of all English classes and outnumber tenure-track faculty two to one. Moreover, the vast majority of adjunct faculty have taught at Whatcom for many years, some for over twenty. They comprise among the most experienced and dedicated teachers on campus. Department leadership recognized the potential loss to the college as well as the personal debt owed these faculty and sought innovative ways to meet the needs of students to gain access to college-level courses and the needs of faculty for continued employment.

In this chapter we focus on how a small, tight-knit community college English department dealt with a drastic change to its day-to-day operations, how that change affected the identities of two adjuncts within that department, and how, despite prior and continuing efforts made within the college and department to mitigate the professional gap between adjunct and full-time TT faculty, the realities of this two-tiered system cannot be eradicated. We reflect upon the events through a lens of “underemployment” as a means of accounting for and better understanding the impact of the announcement on the adjunct faculty’s sense of personal and professional identities, especially as the realities of class cancellations and staffing decisions were realized.

Part of our aim is to recognize the inherent disparity between one college’s efforts to ameliorate unjust working conditions for adjunct faculty and the unintended consequences of those efforts, not as a recommendation to end those efforts but rather to suggest that those efforts be placed in the larger context of personal and professional identity issues that continue to plague higher education, especially at two-year colleges, which rely even more heavily than other sectors of higher education on overqualified, underpaid, and underemployed faculty (see AFT “Survey”). What we argue below is that more aggressive efforts made by the college and English department—equality in proposing and teaching professional development workshops, equality in staffing of non-sequence courses, for example—in the absence of explicit acknowledgement of the reality of adjunct professional status actually *accentuate* the divide between “profes-

sional identity” of the college faculty member and the identity of the disposable laborer in the new corporate institution.

As a clarification to the discussion to follow, we are choosing to use the terms *adjunct* and *part-time faculty*. While many have already done work to complicate these terms and suggest new ones, such as *contingent faculty* (see Bilia et al.), *adjunct* and *part-time faculty* are the terms commonly used at our own college. Since WCC does not have full-time contingent positions, all adjunct faculty at WCC are “part-time,” a status rigorously enforced by WCC administrators and the faculty union, only allowing adjuncts to work a maximum of 80 percent of a full-time credit load.<sup>1</sup> This means, in our context, the terms *full-time* and *tenure track* or *tenured* are conflated, as are the terms *part-time* and *adjunct*, the latter carrying the connotations associated with the aforementioned older conceptions of contingent labor.

## DESIRÉE’S STORY

When I learned that English 100 would be removed from the composition sequence, I was worried about how this would affect me, my students, and the English program. However, I thought my employment would not be impacted because I had taught at Whatcom for six years and was significantly involved in department and campus work. In fact, I thought that my considerable contributions and apparent desire to obtain a full-time instructor position would secure stable employment; unfortunately, this was not the case, as other adjunct faculty members and I lost at least one class for the upcoming year and have continued to lose even more due to fewer course offerings, low enrollments, and the priority of full-time faculty staffing. The loss of these classes has illuminated the reality that I, as an adjunct faculty member, am in a precarious and contingent position which undervalues and disregards my professional contributions to the college in the sense that I am “disposable” labor.

When I started teaching at Whatcom and other community colleges, I did not realize the significant impact that working as an adjunct would have on my personal and professional identities and on my well-being, self-esteem, and over-

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1 As of this writing, the college administration and faculty union have negotiated an agreement whereby adjunct faculty can teach full loads of classes, equivalent to that of tenure-track faculty. At WCC, that means forty-five credit-hours of classes. While this development is lauded by some, responding to requests by many adjunct faculty for opportunities to teach more, others consider this simply a furthering of current exploitative practices as the full-time-equivalent teaching loads do not come with any raise in salary or improvement of employment security. Future union negotiations will likely seek to address these issues, possibly pursuing full-time lecturer positions similar to those available at other institutions which offer longer contracts and increased salaries.

all job satisfaction. I started my career as a hopeful recent college graduate with the intent to be hired into a full-time English position; I envisioned a future in academia where I would be hired as a tenure-track faculty member, recognized for my skills, qualifications, and expertise, and valued by my fellow colleagues. When I first started as an adjunct, I imagined that I would continue to work as part-time, contingent labor for two or three years at the most, so as I reflect on my current employment status, I can see now that working as an adjunct has deteriorated my confidence in my career plan and my goals for a future in this profession. My vision of a future that had once seemed limitless now seems uncertain, ambiguous, and especially restricting to my full potential. I once had a clear path in front of me, a specific plan to achieve my goals with obvious outcomes attached to my efforts, but since I have been unable to secure a full-time position, I am uncertain what the future will bring.

In an effort to develop professionally and to become a valuable candidate for a full-time position, I have made significant contributions to the English department and eLearning program at Whatcom. I have worked as the English 100 co-coordinator, helping with the administration of the English 100 Reading Panel process, a quarterly campus-wide assessment activity; I worked with English curriculum development and program assessment groups on various projects; and I served as a volunteer reader for the Whatcom *Noisy Water Review*, a journal which publishes student writing and art, and the Anna Rosemary Harris Scholarship Foundation, which awards funding for students to attend the Chuckanut Writers Conference, a local creative writing conference sponsored and run by Whatcom Community College. I have also developed my eLearning expertise by serving as a volunteer member of the eLearning Advisory Committee, which supports a successful eLearning program at Whatcom; I was a member of the eLearning Advisory Subgroup, which drafted an evaluation rubric to assess online instructors; I presented at the 2014 Assessment, Teaching, and Learning Conference, an annual statewide conference held by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges about evaluating online instructors; I participated in a one-year Faculty eLearning Community in which we studied and developed our online courses based on Quality Matters standards; I completed Quality Matters courses and other online certification programs; and I contributed to a professional development course at Pierce College about using Canvas for teaching. These are just a few of the professional and scholarly development opportunities I have accomplished while teaching as an adjunct and while seeking full-time employment.

Although I have often gone far beyond what is required of me as an adjunct, the precarious nature of contingent employment has become a discouraging reality for me. I have realized that my aspirations for full-time employment, as well

as my perceived job security and stability, have merely been a façade, inherent in the structure of the labor system at two-year colleges and elsewhere, which dangles incentives before adjuncts in order to keep them “on the hook.” I have come to realize that I have little hope of becoming a full-time faculty member at my college and that I am not protected from the unpredictable and unstable nature of working as a contingent faculty member. Unfortunately, regardless of the significant achievements and efforts I have made, I have yet to break free from an oppressive system which dismisses my value and expertise as I remain underemployed and working for what on average equates to less than minimum wage when the hours I *actually* work are factored into my salary. My “involuntary employment in part-time, temporary, or intermittent work” and the “low pay, relative to a previous job or others with similar educational backgrounds” that I receive places me in a saturated market which is overwhelmed with overqualified and underemployed adjunct labor (Maynard and Joseph 141). In an effort to combat the precarious and unpredictable nature of working in this position, and in order to remain financially stable, I often have to teach at multiple community colleges during the school year (sometimes teaching up to five composition courses a quarter—more than most full-time instructors teach) and frequently have to take on additional summer jobs as well, just to make ends meet. I do all of this in addition to spending time (often unpaid) developing professionally and contributing to other department and campus programs.

Unfortunately, my efforts to advance in my career have not succeeded yet (if they ever will). Although I have made substantial attempts to develop professionally and to secure full-time employment, my personal and professional identities have been compromised as I am left wondering: Will I escape this oppressive and underemployed position? And, will I achieve my personal and professional goals?

## AMANDA'S STORY

Like Desirée, I too am active in departmental projects and professional development opportunities. To increase my level of current disciplinary knowledge, I attend regional and statewide conferences about once a year and the CCCC when it is close by and hence more affordable. I served on the committee that edited the second edition of our custom English 101 textbook, published through the independent Fountainhead Press; advise an animation club; present at professional development days on campus; and attend various workshops concerning diversity, student-centered teaching, and new reading pedagogy. All of these activities are enthusiastically supported by my department and the college as a whole.

When the end of English 100 loomed I knew immediately I would not have the fairly stable expectation of six courses a year that would keep me financially solvent and allow me to keep the basic health and retirement benefits that Whatcom provides its adjuncts who work over 50 percent of a full-time credit load. I was an adjunct, and a relatively new one with only five years of teaching at the college. My father is blue collar; I know firsthand the unintentional but no less cold realities visited upon workers viewed as “the amorphous mass,” to quote Angela Bilia (Bilia et al. 387). Worst case scenario, I would lose classes starting in the fall of 2015, so I had to make contingency plans.

To provide a bit of context, MIT professor Dr. Amy Glasmeier’s Living Wage Calculator project, which calculates the average hourly and annual incomes an individual would need to earn to pay for basic yearly expenses in a particular area, reports that the annual salary for one person in Whatcom County in 2016 would need to be \$20,617 before taxes. For one person with a dependent child, that total would need to be \$45,644 (Glasmeier and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology). From 2012 to 2014, I averaged \$26,000 a year, teaching the same or nearly the same amount of credits as a full-time tenured faculty member annually. This means, at best, I manage to live just above poverty level, in the same bracket as restaurant servers and custodians in my area. If I had a child, I would almost certainly need a second household income from a spouse, partner, or family member. And I am not alone. Many of our college’s other “full-time” adjuncts, those teaching at or near the maximum credit load allowed in our contract and relying on WCC as their main or only source of income, make about the same amount (“Washington State Salaries”). At this level, a threat to employment produces a lot of anxiety, as it could affect an individual’s ability to meet basic expenses and to keep basic benefits like medical insurance. In displaying these facts I do not intend to dwell on the dismal state of funding for higher education, but to illustrate the precariousness of an adjunct’s economic status and ability to meet basic needs.

To make matters worse, enrollments already had dropped for the 2015 academic year. In the spring of 2015, I was “bumped” from a humanities course I was scheduled to teach by a full-time tenure-track faculty member whose class was canceled. I was already adjusting to a shortfall, from having two courses in the spring of 2015 to one, but then I learned my section of English 102, which had run with low enrollment the prior year, had also been cancelled. This left me with no classes for the spring. Despite extensive efforts by my department chair to substitute my cancelled class for an unstaffed English 100, low enrollments struck again, and this class, too, was cancelled. For the first time in five years, I was left with no courses at all when I refused to “bump” a less senior adjunct faculty from an already prorated course, as I would not want this to happen to me if the roles were reversed.

While I was able to financially survive the spring by cobbling together an income from three different part-time jobs, the effects on my own identity are worth noting. For the five years I worked primarily at Whatcom, I identified myself as a “college instructor” to those who asked “What do you do?” But what do you say when that identity has been compromised, and not by your choice or abilities? While I appreciated all the efforts of my department chair, and did not blame her, the department, nor the college for my employment troubles, I was still faced with the sad fact that my ability to support myself and do a job I loved was not, in the end, solely dependent on my abilities or effort. Despite taking advantage of every avenue to be a “good” faculty member, I faced spring quarter beaten down and discouraged. Who was I? What did I want? Was all this effort for the “love of teaching”—a problematic term that makes poor working conditions somehow acceptable—even worth it?

## UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN THE COLLEGE SETTING

The over-reliance on part-time, contingent labor, at two-year colleges creates an environment in which many qualified professionals are chronically and permanently underemployed. Douglas C. Maynard and Todd Allen Joseph, in “Are All Part-Time Faculty Underemployed? The Influence of Faculty Status Preference on Satisfaction and Commitment,” offer a cogent overview of the nature of underemployment. They say that someone is “underemployed when he or she holds a job that is somehow inferior to, or of lower quality than, a particular standard” (141). This underemployment creates psychological stress due to an incongruence in either the fit of “job demands–worker abilities,” which is the “match between the requirements of the job and the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the employee,” or the fit of “worker needs–job supplies,” which is the “match between the employee’s desires or preferences for certain work conditions and the actual work conditions on that job” (142).

Put another way, underemployment is caused in the first model by the job demanding less than an employee can provide in terms of knowledge and abilities and, we would hazard to add, the mental and emotional demands of that particular job and/or its environment. In the second model, underemployment is caused by the employee demanding more in terms of mental challenge and/or physiological needs (i.e., food, shelter, and safety) than the job can provide. If there is no incongruence, then there is no underemployment, which led Maynard and Joseph to divide part-time faculty into two categories: voluntary and involuntary (142). Voluntary part-time faculty are satisfied with the job’s demands and conditions. Involuntary part-time faculty are not satisfied with the job’s demands or conditions, which, in the case of educated, experienced, and

motivated faculty, leads to underemployment. Currently, adjunct faculty across the United States are split, 50 percent preferring part-time, and 47 percent preferring full-time (AFT “Survey” 8), which allows us to suggest that at least 47 percent of current part-time faculty are underemployed.

Maynard and Joseph offer “five dimensions” of underemployment, citing Feldman:

- (a) more education than required by the job, (b) involuntary employment in a field outside of area of education, (c) more skills or experience than required by the job, (d) involuntary employment in part-time, temporary, or intermittent work, and (e) low pay, relative to a previous job or others with similar educational backgrounds. (141)

At Whatcom, many adjunct faculty members experience multiple dimensions of underemployment. For example, we have several faculty members with Ph.D.s from R1 or similar institutions with long careers of teaching in various institutions. They have more education and broader experience than required by the college to teach first-year writing,<sup>2</sup> experience and education underutilized in the first-year writing classroom. This is not to say that first-year writing as a specialty does not warrant the same highly educated and experienced instructors that other English specialties demand, merely that these adjunct instructors, whose specialties and experiences often encompass scholarship in areas outside first-year-writing, are not given opportunities to fully utilize all aspects of their knowledge and skills or encouraged to continue developing professionally in those directions. Moreover, these faculty are seeking full-time positions, and they are being paid less than other adjunct faculty at most other colleges in the state and certainly only a percentage of what a full-time faculty member makes. They are thus underemployed in four of the five dimensions simultaneously (a, c, d, e) and in the case of faculty trained in literature studies, five of the five (a, b, c, d, e). Other faculty, such as Amanda, with years of experience at multiple colleges, supplement their income with work outside of academia, in Amanda’s case as a PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) certified equine specialist in mental health and learning at Animals as Natural Therapy, as a freelance editor, and as a front-counter and marketing supervisor at a local deli. Amanda and others can be said to experience potentially three to four dimensions of underemployment simultaneously at the college (b, d, e) *and* at their other jobs (a, b, c, e).

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<sup>2</sup> The minimum requirements for adjunct faculty to teach English 101 is a master’s degree in English. Preferred qualifications include graduate coursework in composition/rhetoric and teaching experience in a post-secondary institution.



Perhaps what is so intriguing about this model of underemployment is that it makes conscious a mostly unconscious network of relationships that adjunct faculty work to resist and yet which, simultaneously, shapes their identity. In Desirée's and Amanda's stories, we see this compelling need to "prove" themselves capable and qualified for a full-time position. Certainly they knew, at some level, that they were underemployed—or else, why the desire to prove themselves? They knew they had more skills than the adjunct position gave them opportunity to use and that they were involuntarily limited to part-time work. What they did not quite know, perhaps, is the degree to which this underemployment played upon their identities as professionals, nor how much their professional identities impacted their personal identities.

To understand why, we have to look at the local situation, which allows and encourages underemployment in a particular way. Whatcom is one of only two two-year colleges in the area and is located only four miles from Western Washington University. Western graduates a dozen or so people each year with a master's degree in English, nearly all of whom have completed coursework in composition and have taught in a writing program with a well-known mentor. Thus, there is an endless stream of hopeful post-graduates who are optimistic and excited to begin teaching college courses at Whatcom. This pool of ready labor allows or even encourages a cycle of consumption (see Hammer). This in turn privileges underemployment at the expense of the well-being of adjunct faculty members.

Because adjuncts are essentially disposable labor, they are often marginalized from the institution in which they serve. As Jeff has said in "Not Just a Matter of Fairness: Adjunct Faculty and Writing Programs in Two-Year Colleges," adjunct faculty are "often invited to join full-time faculty in program work but have very little incentive to do so" (363). The main incentive for Desirée's and Amanda's involvement has not been the tiny stipend WCC's English department offers for meeting and project hours out of its own small WPA and department budgets, but the idea of long-term recognition and rewards.

But while such work and service to the college and department is dutifully recorded on annual evaluations for tenure-track faculty as evidence for promotion, this is not the case for adjunct faculty, whose only incentive is an often unstated and implicit "love of teaching" (see AFT "Survey"). But "love" or doing the job because adjuncts "enjoy teaching" may be slowly starting to lose its romanticism: 64 percent of adjuncts over 50 claim they teach not for the compensation but for the enjoyment, but only 49 percent of adjuncts under 50 make this claim (AFT "Survey" 9-10). While these statistics are more suggestive than conclusive, they may reflect an increasing disillusionment of adjuncts, like Amanda and Desirée, who have recently entered the adjunct pool or a situation where disillusioned adjuncts leave the profession.

As Desirée and Amanda have both discovered in those short six years, no amount of program work or administrative responsibilities can change a person's employment status, which in turn defines them more rigidly than any intrinsic desire. This long-term marginalization leads to resentment and creates a poor work environment (see Eagan et al.; Harris; Maynard and Joseph). Jeff recognized that many experienced or long-term adjunct faculty "feel marginalized in their own campuses and are somewhat to very resentful at teaching so much of a program's courses while receiving so little in terms of pay and benefits" (Klausman 363). As Maynard and Joseph note, this marginalization is the inevitable consequence of underemployment and is a key cause of dissatisfaction in the workplace (141).

Interestingly, while some articles written by academics point towards being respected and sharing governance as the largest issues affecting faculty satisfaction and thus underemployment (see Bilia et al.), the 2010 AFT "Survey of Part-Time and Adjunct Higher Education Faculty" indicates that the largest issues for adjuncts are, in order of importance, salaries, access to full-time positions, access to healthcare benefits, and job security (12). In the context of the survey report, one could deduce that "full-time positions" might be more closely linked in the minds of adjuncts to job security and its corresponding reliable income and benefits, rather than the political status such positions may carry. Maynard and Joseph conclude that the desire to have a full-time position and a livable wage connects closely to feelings of underemployment. They recommend that institutions might benefit from focusing on initiatives that attempt to increase the proportion of part-time faculty who prefer not to teach full-time, such as the targeted recruitment of professionals with full-time positions elsewhere who might find value in applying their expertise to the classroom, and for whom the typically meager compensation is less problematic (150).

As a recommendation, Maynard and Joseph do not take into account that *teaching* is also a professional skill, and those that know how to work in their profession may not be the best at teaching that profession. This would also skew toward part-time STEM faculty, a majority of whom already prefer to teach part-time (AFT "Survey" 9), and not those teaching in the social sciences or humanities, where there are limited lucrative opportunities to work in those fields outside academia.

Perhaps in tacit acknowledgement of the realities sketched above, we discuss below how WCC attempts to make part-time status feel like enough of a fit, to give it the voluntary status that leads adjuncts to be more satisfied with their jobs and institution, and hence to end underemployment. For example, adjunct faculty members are often encouraged to contribute to or participate in professional development in their department or on their campus (Bilia et al.; Klausman), and many do so eagerly and enthusiastically. Yet in Desirée's and Amanda's cases,

there has been very little recognition of their contribution and participation in real terms, in the terms that make up underemployment, as their stories show.

Angela Bilia sums this phenomenon up well: “I have never viewed myself as contingent to the production and delivery of academic knowledge; yet, the power to construct my own identity has been in the hands of others. I have become ‘other’” (390). Bilia expresses what Barbara Ehrenreich helps us understand as a paradox at the heart of the identity conflict inherent in the adjunct position. Ehrenreich has identified the professional middle class as “all those people whose economic and social status is based on education, rather than on the ownership of capital or property” (qtd. in Harris 47). As Joseph Harris notes, adjunct faculty are trained to believe they are, and invited to behave as, members of a professional middle class; yet as we and others have found, adjunct faculty are in a disposable labor situation that too often becomes permanent. The effects of this disjuncture between the promoted and the real identity are the basis of what we believe is a progression of disengagement that reflects the dissatisfaction inherent in underemployment.

## **THE PROGRESSION OF EMPLOYMENT DISSATISFACTION AMONG ADJUNCT FACULTY**

This frame of underemployment helps explain a progression of professional disengagement that many adjunct faculty members seem to experience. Years of working in a system which both marginalizes and encourages, both offers opportunities for professionalism and withholds them, plays out in a person’s professional identity and wears on the resilience of the person’s personal identity. While scholarship on resilience has mostly fallen under the purview of child development, mental health, and K-12 education (see Boss; Doll et al.; Masten), it is worth defining briefly and in its simplest form for our context. The American Psychological Association defines *resilience* as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress.” Many factors contribute to a person’s level of resiliency, including having caring relationships in which the individual feels supported, encouraged, reassured, and trusted. Several additional factors are (1) the capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out, (2) a positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities, (3) skills in communication and problem solving, and (4) the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses (APA). According to the APA, ways to build resiliency pertinent to this discussion include the following: making connections with people and groups that support and listen to the individual, moving toward the completion of realistic goals, taking decisive action in challenging situations, looking for opportunities of self-discovery and self-actualization through managing

challenging situations and ideas, nurturing a positive and confident view of oneself, keeping situations within a long-term (“big picture”) perspective, maintaining a hopeful outlook focused on what one wants not what one fears, and taking care of oneself physically, mentally, and emotionally (see APA).

Adjunct faculty who have not already been scared away or discouraged from pursuing an academic career may start out hopeful of building a professional identity around a personal identity that already proved resilient by surviving the emotional, mental, and physical burdens of the education system and initial hiring processes. As in Desirée and Amanda’s cases, however, as these identities repeatedly encounter a wall that was not supposed to be there, at least according to the encouraging words of graduate school professors and the overt statements and practices of progressive colleges and writing programs, these identities get compromised, and a capacity for resiliency may decline.

Consequently, we can sketch out the progression of faculty identity, with its related effects on faculty engagement and resiliency, in this way: Adjunct faculty members who seek full-time teaching positions tend to:

1. begin their professional careers with enthusiasm, hope, and some naïveté;
2. become professionally engaged, developing their professional identities while anxious about the realities of the position;
3. experience setbacks that arouse disillusionment, bitterness, or suspicion;
4. become resolved to the reality of permanent adjunct status; often become resentful; disengage from the profession and refocus personal and sometimes professional identity elsewhere while continuing to teach classes.

There may be an interesting correlation between this progression and the amount of time an adjunct has been in her position. While 59 percent of adjuncts with five years or less of teaching experience preferred full-time, this number shrinks to 49 percent at six to ten years, and shrinks further to 39 percent at eleven or more years of teaching (AFT “Survey” 8). This correlation suggests the above identity progression may be especially stark for those 60 percent of younger faculty members with about five years of teaching who hope to garner a full-time position (AFT “Survey” 8) from an ever-shrinking tenure-track pool. This last demographic is the one to which Desirée and Amanda belong, both on the cusp of that first decrease in desire for a full-time position at six to ten years.

We have seen in Desirée’s story how she moved through the first two stages and is, perhaps, in the third. She is suspicious and becoming disillusioned; she may not yet be bitter, yet there is evidence of disappointment and a sense of betrayal. Desirée knows that she is at a crossroads. The elimination of English 100 not only cost her at least one class per year, a financial hardship, but excluded her from teaching online classes, where she has developed her expertise as part of her pro-

fessional identity. That expertise, when it came to staffing, was not acknowledged, and the online classes were offered to a full-time faculty member to better accommodate her needs. It's clear that her identity as a professional based on her professional accomplishments is not acknowledged because of her employment status.

Desirée knows she has a choice to make. She can rededicate herself to finding a full-time position most likely elsewhere, which might include leaving the state, as a colleague of hers has recently done. She can seek employment outside academia, as did another of her adjunct colleagues with a Ph.D. Or she can resign herself to permanent adjunct status, as many do, and accept the relative stability and relatively good benefits as sufficient and give up her potential power as a decision-maker and leader. This is not to say that adjuncts cannot be leaders, and some institutions allow adjuncts to contribute to decisions about curriculum, as WCC does, but the reality is that no major policy change or curriculum decision can be made *only* by adjuncts. A tenured faculty member and/or administrator will always have the last word.

Amanda's story reveals that she, perhaps in light of her prior and current work experiences, falls farther along the scale, somewhere between the third and fourth stage of the progression. Her desire for a full-time position is perhaps diminishing as she redirects her energies into other career paths outside academia, specifically her professional role as a PATH-certified instructor and equine specialist in mental health and learning, and her work as a freelance editor, both of which provide a good person–job and demand–ability fit (see Maynard and Stephen). Increasing her relationships and professional options with WCC, with local organizations, and with local businesses speaks to the history of “flexible identities” Mendenhall claims have sustained composition faculty since the birth of the “specialty” in the 1970s, both in terms of an interdisciplinary and pedagogical asset, and in terms of perpetuating “unfair or exploitative practices,” as “flexible” employees are shuffled to the less-desired general education classes (27). In some ways, diversifying herself has made Amanda less marketable for specialized tenure-track positions, identifying her instead as just another “flexible” adjunct, capable only of “fill[ing] the holes,” a “[mechanic] in the assembly line, plugging in little parts” that keep the day-to-day “service” courses operating at maximum capacity (Bilia et al. 387).

## **WCC EFFORTS TO LIMIT THE IMPACT OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT**

WCC has made many of the more obvious efforts toward creating a more inviting, supportive, and inclusive work environment for adjunct faculty members. At WCC, our faculty union welcomes and represents all faculty, adjunct and tenure-track, in an effort to encourage faculty equality and job satisfaction.

Many of our tenured faculty in the English department have taken leadership roles in the faculty union and support efforts to ameliorate unfair labor practices. The same can be said generally for all faculty at our institution. In fact, during the last faculty contract negotiations in 2014-2015, increasing adjunct pay with the college's own resources, in response to six years of stagnant state funding for community and technical colleges, became one of the main priorities of the joint faculty union. Moreover, the Adjunct Affairs Advisory Committee, made up almost exclusively of adjunct faculty across the college, seeks to bring adjunct-specific issues and concerns to the attention of top college administrators.

At WCC, adjunct faculty are always invited to participate in various committees and programs across campus, encouraging them to have a campus voice and allowing them to take part in important projects and decision-making processes. Adjunct faculty members serve on textbook selection committees, serve as faculty mentors for the creative writing and literature clubs, and edit the annual journal of student writing. Adjuncts also receive support from the college or specific departments to complete professional development opportunities through applying for professional development funds or stipends. For example, adjunct faculty can receive funding to attend or present at academic conferences; they can receive funding to attend professional development courses; they are invited and paid a small stipend to attend opening-week activities or other campus events; and so on. Adjuncts are also provided with designated office spaces and personal computers (albeit shared whereas nearly all tenure-track faculty have private offices). Adjunct faculty names are listed on a plaque at each of their office doors as well, which confirms that they have a designated space in which they "belong" on campus. Additionally, adjunct faculty names appear in the list of faculty in all departmental and college web pages and catalogs, further enhancing the professional recognition of adjuncts on our campus. Adjuncts also have access to campus email, our learning management system, and so on, so they have access to official forms of campus communication. These are obvious and essential first steps toward inclusion that WCC has implemented (see Heller et al.).

What WCC and our English department has done that is, perhaps, a bit more than the obvious is to offer adjunct faculty the opportunity to lead professional development workshops for the entire campus, sending the invitation to propose a course to all faculty, regardless of employment status. Similarly, when the English department needs work done that adjunct faculty are best qualified for, there's no hesitation to call upon them. Currently, several "master courses" are being developed for our Canvas learning management system to support the curricular development of new courses. Two of those master courses are being developed, for a stipend, by adjunct faculty who have the expertise in those areas.

Also, adjunct faculty have been asked and paid to coordinate our English 100 Reading Panel, a quarterly campus-wide assessment process. There are currently efforts within our department to replace this effective assessment tool with an English 101 Reading Panel, and adjunct faculty are heavily involved with that.

The English department also seeks to provide adjunct faculty equal access to teaching a variety of courses. Since we're a two-year college, our course offerings are nearly all composition. We have a small number of what we call "non-sequence courses," including various literature offerings as well as creative writing. These courses are highly sought after by all faculty, since most of our faculty are trained in literary studies or creative writing. However, we made a decision several years ago to distribute equitably the assignment of these courses, with all faculty submitting an application to teach a course and no faculty member getting more than one non-sequence class per year, unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g., no faculty members applying for the course, limited expertise, etc.). This policy is changing as the department diversifies its offerings to fill the educational gap for students that the elimination of English 100 left behind. Without English 100 and the "soft landing" it provided for first-year and at-risk college students, and in light of recent scholarship reviving the idea of reading as a process and essential skill across disciplines (see Carillo), our department is also experimenting with offering more diverse first-year literature courses that do not have prerequisites. This triply benefits, as students get more opportunities for college-level reading and writing with faculty experienced in both literature and composition studies, more English courses get offered per year, and faculty with literature experience have more chances to utilize their skills.

Similarly, adjunct faculty have the same opportunity to propose and teach courses in our honors program, and many do, which allows some to teach within their specific area of expertise, which is unique at the two-year college level where the primary focus is on offering general education courses. For example, one of our adjunct faculty members has a Ph.D. in medieval literature. She has few opportunities to teach in her field except through honors courses and the occasional 200-level literature course that has been made available to her in a process that treats her the same as tenured faculty.

Although significant efforts have been made to provide a more inclusive and equal work environment, adjuncts are still frequently faced with divisions in labor equality, value, and recognition. For example, when Amanda submitted a proposal to teach a professional development course for a campus-wide workshop, she was asked by an incredulous adjunct faculty member, "Why would you do that?" intimating that as an adjunct, she really shouldn't be putting herself forward as an expert in the field. When Desirée volunteered to serve on the eLearning Committee, she found that her qualifications and expertise were

overlooked in favor of what full-time faculty members preferred, even though her expertise in that particular area far exceeded that of her full-time colleagues. In this case, her analysis of an issue related to online teaching was ignored, even though she had taught numerous online classes and studied online teaching extensively. The administrator-faculty member who ignored her insights had never taught an online class.

In some ways, part-time friendly practices, which have been populating the recommendation sections of articles on contingent labor since at least the 1980s (see Eagan et al.; Harris; Heller; Maynard and Joseph; Torgovnick), made the situation for these two adjuncts worse in terms of demands on their resiliency. They know logically that a small community college does not have the budget to support many TT faculty, and that it does not make good business sense to run a low-enrolled class. But they felt cared about and supported by their fellow full-time and part-time faculty members, by the clerical staff, and to a limited extent by other administrators. They believed that surely those who helped them build their resiliency would not also be the ones to test it, to put up an insurmountable wall? And yet that is exactly what happened.

This “bait and switch,” promoting a professional middle-class identity while simultaneously relegating to a disposable labor class, threatens an adjunct’s constructed professional identity and spurs an adjunct’s progression toward disillusionment and disengagement. Other scholars (see Bilia et al.) also allude to the bitterness and resentment that arises when the reality of their extrinsically enforced identities as contingent, part-time, non-tenure-track, *adjuncts*—all just another term for “outsider,” “other,” or worse, “appendage”—become apparent, as it must in an institutional structure built upon a two-tier system of labor made essential by a near constant threat of financial shortfalls (see Harris; Mendenhall; Hammer).

This is *not* to say that colleges should abandon practices that are friendly and supportive of adjunct identities. In fact, adjuncts such as Amanda and Desirée may feel more confident about critiquing the system that threatens them, as we do in this chapter, *because* they have been supported in the past by full-time faculty and the college, making their resiliency stronger relative to adjuncts without such support. Therefore, they may be more likely to confront issues rather than run from them (see APA).

Still, though adjunct faculty members at WCC and in the English department often receive the message that they may be separate by employment status only but in all other ways are equal, this does not necessarily mitigate the deep-seated inequities that permeate the contingent labor system that has been so widely documented (see Flaherty; Gavaskar; Mendenhall). This explicit message of inclusivity, as we’ve seen, masks the implicit inequality of the contingent



situation and further encourages the substantial divide between adjuncts and full-time faculty members.

## **PROFESSIONAL COLLEGE ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBERS ARE ENTICED BY THE “BAIT AND SWITCH” PROMISE OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: DESIRÉE’S ANALYSIS**

I recently completed a required Faculty Professional Plan and Report, which serves as a part of the five-year cyclical evaluation process at Whatcom. In the report, I was asked a series of self-evaluation questions, which focused on my current teaching and professional development effectiveness as well as my future goals. What was especially challenging to me about this self-evaluation process was that I was asked to identify what my goals were for the following academic year, and yet I am not sure if I will have work for next quarter let alone next year.

I found this self-evaluation process to be disingenuous and misleading. Although I am expected to have plans to develop the quality of my teaching and professional experiences now and in the future, the college is still not committed to me in any professional or legal way. When asked on the evaluation what the college could do to support my “professional growth needs,” I wrote

The lack of pay, recognition, and appreciation for what adjuncts do to promote the success of the college and our students is significantly overlooked, which is disheartening. From my own experience, I find it becomes disappointing to contribute so significantly to a program or college that does not seem to value or appreciate my contributions or my expertise. If the department and administrators made more effort to acknowledge the significant work that adjunct faculty members do to contribute to the college and to develop professionally, it would provide incentive for these faculty to engage more thoroughly and actively.

As I suggested in my self-evaluation report, the paradox of this situation seems to exemplify and even exaggerate the underlying issues of the underemployed professional labor forces. Although the college expects adjuncts to develop professionally and advance as more effective instructors, this expectation contradicts the very nature of the contingent position in which the college is not legally bound to adjunct instructors beyond the limitations of the quarterly contracts. This self-evaluation process then places the full responsibility of developing professionally on an instructor who is systematically barred from full participation in the system. By placing the expectation for development on faculty

who are already undervalued and underemployed, adjuncts are further burdened by the pressures of committing to a system which is not committed to them.

Although there are efforts made at Whatcom and other community colleges to deflect the inequities or instabilities that adjuncts encounter, these efforts do little to change the effects of a contingent workplace that is saturated with overqualified and underemployed faculty members (see Bilia et al.; Maynard and Joseph). So while these opportunities to contribute professionally might seem inclusive, they also encourage the kind of “bait and switch” mentioned above, in which adjuncts who want to develop their résumés will agree to take on additional responsibilities in hopes that this will establish credibility with and recognition by their tenured colleagues. This rarely happens. Instead, the message I have received from the three colleges where I have worked is “build up your résumé here and apply elsewhere.” As Bilia et al. note:

We can begin to see that the isolation and exile of contingent faculty common across the disciplines and across institution types create a body of faculty who are likely to see themselves as outsiders and outcasts, taking on and expressing all of the psychological traits thereof. The ultimate result of this movement toward increasing contingency, then, is in every sense a “disbanded professoriate.” (381)

Unfortunately, this “disbanded professoriate” is the result of adjunct faculty members experiencing the Progression of Employment Dissatisfaction among Adjunct Faculty we outlined above. The saturated and endlessly consumptive work environment is a system that will ultimately fail adjunct faculty members because this career path is not sustainable for those who desire to achieve more than contingent labor.

During an informal discussion about the nature of adjuncting, Jeff posed an intriguing question to Amanda and me. He asked, if we had known what we know now about the lack of full-time position opportunities and the lack of recognition or incentives for development when we first were hired as adjuncts, would we have still chosen to accept the adjunct job offer? I had a hard time answering this question. While part of me feels completely discouraged and hopeless about my professional future, I cannot help but feel that maybe my passion, expertise, and commitment will eventually be valued and recognized by my full-time colleagues somewhere, some time.

I think that my refusal to settle into the idea of working indefinitely as an adjunct and my refusal to move on to another career are the result of many factors. First, I think that this contingent labor system is one that encourages adjuncts to remain hopeful or optimistic for the future, regardless of the lack of real

opportunities available to them, by providing incentives and implicit promises. Second, I and many other adjuncts have resiliency, which has already motivated me to achieve what I have. I do not give up easily, I do not like to accept “no” for an answer when something is important to me, and a part of me knows I deserve to be hired for a full-time position, even if I am competing with other equally qualified and well-deserving candidates.

Perhaps these are the characteristics of the adjuncts who stick around until they burn out. These are the hard working, committed, persevering, and motivated instructors who form the core and foundation of the two-year colleges. These are the professional adjunct faculty members who will likely endure a discouraging and relentless cycle of disappointment as they become “homeless, silenced, and abandoned to the margins of academic life” (Bilia et al. 380). These “silenced” and “homeless academics” who are unable to break away from the cycle of underemployment and adjunct labor consumption “are in a utopia—literally a no-place; what [they] do does not have a legitimate place to exist” (Bilia et al. 388). As I have progressed through the stages of developing my own faculty identity, I cannot help but wonder: Will anyone hear my voice? Where do I belong? And, will my efforts ever find a permanent home?

## THE NEXT QUESTION: AMANDA’S ANALYSIS

It is job security, an oft-cited factor in job satisfaction (see Bilia et al.; Eagan et al.; Maynard and Joseph) and therefore underemployment, that has the biggest impact on my own relation to my job as a part-time instructor. But while I desire job security, I also must forward a caution to the proposal made by fellow scholars that more full-time *non*-tenured positions are part of the answer to underemployment (see Murphy). While they will provide another stepping stone to advancement, they may be no more than more bait to adjuncts desiring recognition and respect. The end of that path may still be the same: your position is still not secure (see Bilia et al.). To paraphrase another adjunct in WCC’s English department, introducing a three-tier system might just increase the hierarchical relationships among faculty, placing a “middle class” of full-time contingent faculty as a buffer between the “rabble” of the part-time contingent faculty and the elite full-time tenured faculty (Spaich). Such a system may simply keep part-time faculty competing for full-time non-tenured positions while ignoring the disparity between those at the bottom and those at the top.

I still enjoy working for Whatcom and its English department, mainly because they have done all they can, within the limiting factors of policy, budgets, and enrollment, to handle creatively and compassionately the precarious position of contingent labor through personal communication, summer courses

(for those of us who lost our spring classes), and opportunities to be involved in curriculum building and restructuring that will potentially help mitigate the loss of English 100 and enrollments.

But these efforts still carry no guarantee, and cannot change the overall precariousness of the adjunct position. Having to rely on other jobs, to put more effort into other professional identities that can meet my needs and build my resilience, has in some respects weakened my ties to WCC. For instance, I had been co-advising a student animation club for the past two years, unpaid, with another adjunct. With no classes in the spring, it was not economically feasible to make the trip to campus one time a week for two hours when I could leave that time open for paying jobs, every hour of which I needed. Reluctantly, I told the students that I could not advise them in the spring. And, admittedly, I felt a smidgen of that bitterness from stage three of the Progression of Dissatisfaction directed toward a service that had been offered to two adjuncts, who did not have governance included in their salaries, because there was no full-time faculty member interested or able to advise the new club, according to the students in the club. What was unpaid service then fell to one adjunct during a time when the club was going to have its biggest and most complex event, a city-wide comic-con. I could not even get the day off work to attend the conference.

For an institution that professes to be student-centered, this example stands in direct opposition to its mission. And it resulted at least in part due to my position as an adjunct. Adjunct labor *does* affect student performance, but it is not because of lack of knowledge or professional identity. Job security for adjuncts equals learning security for students. I cannot support students when I am not at the college or when I need to squeeze in extra hours at another job to meet my basic needs. An instructor for PATH once told me that PATH instructors “come for the horses but stay for the people.” To adapt this phrase, I think adjuncts come for the disciplinary knowledge but stay for the students. As Desirée noted, we adjuncts are resilient; we can take a fair amount of abuse and still come back for more. But when the precariousness of our position and the conditions under which we work affects our *students’* resiliency—that is a larger problem.

When survival and lower order needs are made paramount, when an adjunct’s sense of self and carefully cultivated professional identity are threatened, boundaries are drawn, and contingent faculty start making contingencies of their own. Hitting the wall in the college setting, unavoidable for part-time and non-tenure-track faculty, takes power away from the individual, partly by denying her the ability to construct her own positive identity (see Bilia et al.). Whatcom may try to hide its wall behind inclusive practices and efforts to give growth opportunities to its 75 percent part-time labor force, but disparities persist in terms of resources, pay, benefits, and advancement, and an adjunct’s voice

is still relatively small and undeniably vulnerable in the larger college context. As much as WCC tries to grow its part-time faculty into something “bigger” and more professional, the reality is that systematic marginalization will always counteract these efforts (see Bilia et al.; Klausman) and make adjuncts feel like the inconsequential, easily-replaceable accessory the term *adjunct* implies, and may eventually encourage them to take their energies and skills elsewhere. And as much as large professional organizations like the NCTE and MLA might wish it, and have been wishing it for the past fifteen odd years (see Bilia et al.), the demand for cheap and easily disposable adjunct labor shows every sign of increasing (AFT “Tenure by Rank”). If this is the case, as many have already argued (see Bilia et al.; Hammer; Harris), we will need to rethink the terms “adjunct” and “contingent labor.”

I was asked by a representative for the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges at its 2015 annual Assessment, Teaching, and Learning Conference what colleges could do to increase the engagement of adjuncts in their schools’ service and governance. I told her she was asking the wrong question. The question that might help us unravel why a myriad of good recommendations made over the past thirty years have gone largely ignored is, “What are the historical and political conditions that have led adjuncts to be systemically marginalized, economically exploited, and treated like second-class citizens?” In *Forum: Issues about Part-time and Contingent Faculty*, the editor, Vandana Gavaskar, asks, “Can the [adjunct] subaltern speak?” (A1). The next question should be, “Will anyone listen?”

## CONCLUSIONS

Underemployment provides a valuable lens to understand Desirée’s and Amanda’s situations and that of many adjunct faculty. They have sought to develop themselves professionally while working in a system of labor that precludes recognition of their professionalism. This disjuncture between a personal identity—identification with the perceived professionalism within a system—and the realities of that system leads to a sense of betrayal, anger, and resentment, which affects the personal identity: “Unfortunately, regardless of the significant achievements and efforts I have made, I have yet to break free from an oppressive system which dismisses my value and expertise,” as Desirée says. This movement, from hope to disillusionment, seems to follow a progression, leading to resignation of professional identity and disengagement from the profession. A permanent “subaltern” class is created, as Gavaskar has noted.

At a two-year college, where “equality” and “open access” are key terms and where all faculty are qualified to teach nearly all classes, the disjuncture between

what is offered, what is promised, and what is delivered is even more egregious and difficult to accept. After all, neither Desirée nor Amanda, both with an M.A. in English and postgraduate experience, would expect a tenure-track position at a university. However, they might expect a full-time teaching position. But no such opportunities exists at Whatcom and the tenure-track positions, like the carrot on the stick, are only dangled, never achieved. The English department ostensibly works under an egalitarian mindset and yet the realities of the divide in labor is absolute, as made evident when classes had to be cut, other classes assigned. It's not too much to say that the promises implicit in these egalitarian efforts at inclusion have actually exacerbated Desirée's and Amanda's disillusionment.

We do not want to argue that WCC nor any other college stop offering opportunities for adjunct faculty. To the contrary, all colleges in our state and across the country must recognize the need for and put into practice better employment standards (see Heller et al.). In fact, we join Joseph Harris in calling for a greater awareness of class consciousness in hiring and promoting all faculty. And with Michael Murphy, we call for full-time teaching positions, ones commensurate with faculty experience and expertise, and compensated appropriately, though we remain cautious about its effects.

But just as importantly, especially to the personal identity of the people involved, we call for explicit acknowledgement of, and communication about, the working conditions a person is hired into as adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty must be made aware from the moment they begin their employment and even in graduate school that teaching is a service, that it is labor in a tiered system, and while it can be intrinsically rewarding, it is not likely to be a stepping-stone to a tenure-track position without making significant personal sacrifices and without some luck. It is time for all faculty to acknowledge what bell hooks calls the "dominator culture" (75) that maintains this system of inequality and to stop pretending that laborers are of the professional middle class. Then, the perils of underemployment can at least be mitigated and the cycle of consumption and the progression of disengagement can begin to be undone.

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