

The Two-Year College Writing Program and Academic Freedom: Labor, Scholarship, and Compassion

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This article looks at faculty views of academic freedom and finds that the views of tenured faculty with programmatic responsibilities are significantly different from those of experienced contingent faculty.

The famous 1940 statement “Protecting Academic Freedom” by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) grounds much of the debate over academic freedom, at least among us academics. It has been revised numerous times, and in 1970 a comment to the statement was added. In it, the AAUP states that it has “long recognized that membership in the academic profession carries with it special responsibilities” (“Protecting”). The AAUP then offers a link to a second statement, the “Statement on Professional Ethics,” first drafted in 1966 and revised in 1987 and 2009. The first point of that statement reads: “Professors, guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge, recognize the special responsibilities placed upon them. Their primary responsibility to their subject is to seek and to state the truth as they see it. To this end, professors devote their energies to developing and improving their scholarly competence.” This is what makes academic freedom distinct from the rights of a private citizen or employee: it comes with responsibility *as* an academic to a subject.

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This is key to understanding how academic freedom functions. Mary Boland, in “The Stakes of Not Staking Our Claim: Academic Freedom and the Subject of Composition,” writes: “Academic freedom relies, at base, on the notion of a subject matter about which knowledge can be pursued. Developing in tandem with the American research university at the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of academic freedom allowed scholars to professionalize by forming self-regulating ‘communities of competent enquirers’ engaged in the pursuit of knowledge within those particular communities” (Boland, citing Haskell, 35). The phrase *communities of competent enquirers* implies a boundary,

however fluid—those in and those out of the community. As Matthew Abraham, in “Academic Freedom as a Rhetorical Construction,” writes, “Academic freedom is typically viewed as the defining feature of university life, providing *researchers* with the protection to do important work within an environment where knowledge production and truth—wherever these may lead—are valued above all else” (512, emphasis added). I have emphasized the word *researchers* because Abraham implies that without that activity, academic freedom is groundless.

So it’s clear that “the notion of a subject matter” (Boland) agreed upon by “researchers” (Abraham) is the basis for an academic community. Without a community, Boland suggests, there can be no meaningful self-regulation, which is the environment for academic freedom as it was first defined by the AAUP. She writes: “The importance of this concept of a subject cannot be overestimated. While disciplines are always evolving, the development of boundary-pushing knowledge is regulated by a communal system that evaluates both the knowledge and the knowledge makers. At any one time, then, a discipline, like a genre, has recognizable yet flexible boundaries” (35). Boland then concludes, “*In order to warrant the protections of academic freedom, a scholar must be working within or at those boundaries*” (35, emphasis added).

From my years working on program-related issues, both locally and nationally, I’ve had the sense that academic freedom is often not used in the way outlined above. Rather, it is used loosely to explain why some writing teachers choose not to participate in program-related work or, more troubling, choose to resist such work. I’ve had the feeling that academic freedom has become a god term, in Richard Weaver’s sense—vague and unassailable—useful to end a conversation or to pivot it to a different topic. And I’ve seen it work, shutting down or limiting disciplinary discussions. After all, no one wants to argue that a colleague doesn’t have academic freedom. And doesn’t academic freedom mean that a teacher has the right to decide how she teaches so long as she meets the course outcomes?

Three brief points have to be made here. First, in composition, unlike in most other disciplines, *how* one teaches and *what* one teaches are very nearly synonymous. As Richard Fulkerson made clear in his landmark 2005 CCC article, “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” each approach to teaching writing entails its own underlying value system. For example, *good writing* is defined, assessed, and learned significantly differently in a critical discourse pedagogy than is *good writing* in a multimodal, genre theory-based pedagogy. The “value” one promotes in a particular approach implicates what is read, written, and assessed in a class. Consequently, what we teach, whether we are conscious of it or not, is our own view of “the field of composition,” which may or may not bear any resemblance to the field as expressed more widely and publicly in scholarly publications and venues.

Second, without a coherent theory of teaching writing, a course can easily be disjointed. In the same article, Fulkerson says, famously, “It’s easy to create a course that is self-contradictory and thus baffling to students. We may teach one thing, assign another, and actually expect yet a third” (679). And finally, I think

most of us would agree that course outcomes, which are almost uniformly broad, can be used to justify nearly any activity and thus are insufficient to create a non-self-contradictory course.

So the question remains: Which more or less coherent approach shall we adopt? This question is, perhaps, even more pressing at a two-year college since, as Holly Hassel reminds us, “teaching and learning experiences at private liberal arts colleges and Research 1 institutions are very different from those at open access and associate’s degree-granting institutions” (5), where our widely diverse students come from so many different backgrounds and are on so many different academic tracks (TYCA, “Guidelines” 9–10).

Given this, when I read the call for this special issue of *TETYC*, I thought it would be a good opportunity to understand better how academic freedom is viewed relative to program development, which generally aims for coherency across class sections (Janangelo and Klausman; also see Klausman, “Mapping” and “Toward”). I sought out a half-dozen faculty who either are WPAs or are in WPA-related positions at two-year colleges and developed a set of questions to ask them (Appendix A). I also asked for referrals to adjunct faculty in their programs who might be willing to respond to a similar set of questions (Appendix B). My hope was that the adjunct faculty, who were dedicated and experienced teachers and who had participated in program-related activities, could provide a more focused view of how academic freedom intersects with program development from their perspective.¹ From the tenured faculty, I hoped to learn to what degree my views on academic freedom, as I’ve outlined above via the AAUP, Boland, and Abraham, and my views on program coherence I mention above were shared or, if not, in what ways they were different.²

I sent the questions to the six tenured faculty members and to eight of the recommended adjunct faculty members who agreed to respond to my request. I received responses from five of the six tenured faculty members within about two weeks and received the sixth after a reminder email. However, in spite of enthusiastic agreement to participate from the eight adjunct faculty, I received only one response within the recommended time period of thirty days, and then one more after the first reminder. I received no responses at all after the second reminder until much later, when one person explained that a family emergency made it impossible for him to respond. To get a better sampling, I then asked a long-term adjunct faculty member at my own institution, who I know is always curious about composition-related developments, is a highly dedicated and successful teacher, and has substantial experience, well over ten years of teaching in the program. He also has been hesitant about reform efforts and has been willing to voice that hesitation. In total, then, I received nine fairly detailed responses from faculty from across the country—from Massachusetts to Michigan to Washington; from an urban, a suburban, and a rural school; from a large and a small school.

I’m not pretending that my sampling is scientifically rigorous. Rather, my hope is that I’ve gathered enough representative samples to offer a glimpse into the

views of academic freedom from two different classes of employees who teach writing at the two-year college level. I had planned to conduct follow-up interviews by phone to clarify contentious issues or problematic uses of terms or concepts if the initial responses warranted. As it turned out, the initial responses were remarkably uniform, with a couple of exceptions, and did not warrant follow-up.

In reading the responses, I loosely followed the grounded theory method borrowed from sociology (see Grounded Theory Institute). In short, I read the responses carefully and prior to reviewing any literature on academic freedom or related issues. I noted key terms and phrases and coded them, and then I wrote up memos that pulled together the implications of the coded words and phrases. I did this for both groups of responses. Then, I repeated the process to deepen my understanding. Finally, I contextualized my findings with a review of the literature. Below, I'd like to offer a few of the insights I gained.

Adjunct Faculty Responses

I asked the adjunct faculty questions in three areas: How employment status impacts their ability to enjoy or express academic freedom. How curriculum design intersects with their views of academic freedom as an adjunct faculty member. And how departmental program work impacts their sense of academic freedom (Appendix B).

In general, the three adjunct faculty see academic freedom in very traditional ways, as protecting their right to discuss controversial topics in class and to design the curriculum for their courses. Michael³ summed up the feeling best by saying, "Academic freedom gives me the liberty to responsibly discuss [controversial] issues free from censorship and retaliation." Academic freedom also grants him "liberty to choose my curriculum, whenever possible, and the way I will teach the content."

At the same time, all seem to recognize that they should have the right to academic freedom equal to that of their tenured colleagues, yet all recognized that their rights are impacted by employment status. Michael adds, "Sometimes I feel as though any issues that may challenge students in some way might become a problem if the student reported to my supervisors." Michael imagined defending his actions to supervisors and saying to himself, "I wish I had tenure right now." Carol concurs, saying that though she has "total control" over her courses, in keeping with departmental philosophies, she has never yet felt the need to "push back" against some departmental decisions, though she imagined that if she did, it would be "unnecessarily risky" due to the lack of job security.

The adjunct faculty extended their views on academic freedom to the second set of questions, regarding curriculum design. They all believe they have the right to choose curriculum for their courses, though within the constraints of course outcomes, which all recognize are not theirs to determine and which, as Carol says, "may dictate some of the course content." Nonetheless, Carol says she maintains a lot of freedom to explore academic ideas and to create a syllabus: "I would expect that the outcomes could be reached via *any method best suited to any*

given professor” (emphasis added), a view supported by the other two respondents. Overall, and importantly, the adjunct faculty seem to see a clear division between course outcomes and both the “content” and “method” they design to help students meet those outcomes.

However, a tension arises over who determines the outcomes. Theo says: “Academic freedom suggests that all faculty members ought to enjoy reasonable latitude in content and delivery as long as it is relevant to the course. Frequently, however, these decisions [about content and delivery] are, to a large degree, being made by administrators and tenured faculty. Does this constitute academic freedom? Probably not.” Other responses support this concern, though not all the uneasiness is necessarily negative. Carol says that the impetus of new course outcomes and suggested curriculum has been “an opportunity to grow as an instructor,” noting that “there is a clear interest in a certain model of pedagogy in our department, and if I fell outside of this I might feel conflicted (though not restricted) in my choice to not follow it.”

All three respondents offered praise for their department leaders’ efforts to ensure and protect the academic freedom and professionalism of adjunct faculty, and yet all hinted at or stated directly that gaps persist. “My department has always been a fierce defender of my freedom as an instructor,” Michael says. “I feel very respected at this school, especially in comparison to other colleges and universities I have taught at.” He indicates positively that he has been “invited to teach themed courses in [first-year composition] aligned with my interest.” However, he goes on to say, “I’d love it if our departments would include adjunct faculty in textbook decisions as well as in sharing our class practices, what works, what doesn’t, etc.” Theo, perhaps, sums it up best: “Reasonable efforts are made to respect different approaches and styles. Nonetheless, the tiered system inhibits significant collaboration as the underlying power imbalance diminishes participation by many adjunct faculty members in important decisions.”

What is interesting to me, in addition to what is stated explicitly in the responses, is what is omitted. The expectation of respect for adjunct faculty expertise and professionalism is stated explicitly more than once and implied in many of the other responses. However, only one of the respondents expressed any need to “stay abreast” of the field. Theo says that “no instructor is an island in this business, and it seems worthwhile to stay abreast of changes that occur in higher education.” However, he notes that for adjunct faculty, “professional development is a volunteer endeavor” since there’s little to no economic compensation or incentive. Consequently, departmental innovations “seem like an unpleasant mandate.” This tension is important and worthy of examination, though Theo’s response quickly resolves to a familiar refrain: “Regardless, we are all professionals deserving a healthy and inspiring workplace.”

In this response, I believe Theo conflates two important issues. The right to a “healthy and inspiring workplace,” I would argue, is undeniable, but the implication in Theo’s response is that the right to such a workplace is a consequence

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of being “professionals.” I would argue against that. Instead, I believe a healthy and inspiring workplace is a human right, regardless of employment status, but the status of professional must be determined by the community of professionals, as the AAUP states, which in our case are the scholars and practitioners who work within, at, or near the disciplinary boundaries of composition-rhetoric as expressed in the journals, presses, and conferences that disseminate the field’s research.

Tenured Faculty Responses

I asked the tenured faculty questions in three areas similar to those posed to the adjunct faculty: How employment status impacts their ability to enjoy or express academic freedom. How programmatic curricular design initiatives intersect with their views of individual academic freedom. And what role departments or programs have in promoting or protecting academic freedom. These questions were phrased differently to account for the difference in employment status and role as program leaders (Appendix A). For example, I asked the adjunct faculty, “To what degree do you feel you have control over the content and pedagogical practices of *your teaching*, as opposed to administration or departmental leaders?” whereas I asked the tenured faculty, “To what degree do you feel you have control over the content and pedagogical practices of *the writing program* as opposed to individual faculty preferences?” I received six responses, somewhat to much longer than those from the adjunct faculty (about 2,000 words versus 1,100 words, with the longest at 4,200); one respondent sent two fifteen-minute screencasts in lieu of a written response.

Just as for the adjunct faculty, for the tenured faculty, who are either WPAs or have WPA-like roles in their departments, academic freedom includes the right to teach controversial subjects without reprisal and evokes traditional calls to freedom of curriculum design. However, never far below the surface of their responses is a slightly different current. For the tenured faculty, academic freedom is deeply rooted in the exercise of scholarly expertise, which includes the responsibility to employ current theory and practices in curricular revisions without fear of reprisal. Anne writes, “I don’t think it is license to teach whatever I want, but more that if I can defend what I am doing in terms of *currency and professionalism*, it’s OK” (emphasis added). Bryan writes: “One senior colleague who is my mentor says that’s what the job of FT faculty members are [*sic*]. They’re trailblazers. It’s our job to try out new things in the classroom, bringing in *new theories and pedagogies and perspectives*” (emphasis added). Jenn is even more direct, stating that academic freedom ensures

the faculty member's ability to use disciplinary content and theoretical approaches that they believe are appropriate in the classroom. It's not necessarily "let me do what I want to do, let me teach what I want to teach," she says, but balancing "expertise in pedagogy." By contrast, none of the adjunct faculty mentioned constraints on academic freedom by disciplinary boundaries.

Do the tenured faculty feel they have more academic freedom than the adjunct faculty? Four of the six tenured faculty offered strong "yes" responses. They stated they were free to question curriculum, choose textbooks, and try out new approaches without pushback. Will explains that this sense of freedom came with his change in employment status: "As an adjunct, I would be afraid that some of these examples [of controversial topics] might be brought up in student evals or brought up out of context or mentioned by a disgruntled student to a dean. I feel like since I have gotten tenure I am granted more freedom, more trust, and legitimacy—which is problematic."⁴

But to say that "employment status" is the reason that tenured faculty feel they enjoy more academic freedom masks the underlying causes. The actual causes are multiple and not necessarily discrete. At one institution, adjunct faculty are not represented or protected by the faculty union. At another, only tenured faculty are "voting members" of the department. At still another, the administrative culture promotes division. Anne writes, "I often get the sense that what the administration would like is for me (whom they see as the expert, in large part because of my tenured status) to just set a firm curriculum for all the other writing faculty, especially the adjuncts."

The response of Anne also highlights another impetus of tenured faculty regarding the academic freedom of adjunct faculty: to protect it. After stating the implicit administrative desire to set the curriculum for adjunct faculty, Anne writes: "To me, that would violate their academic freedom, so I don't do it. Instead, I set guidelines, make up a default curriculum, but support their right to change things." This response is one of many that suggests a complex fault line that is highly troubling for tenured faculty. They see the need to guide the development of a writing program while simultaneously seeing the need to recognize and support the autonomy of writing faculty.

I posed this purposefully provocative question: "To what degree do you feel you have control over the content and pedagogical practices of the writing program as opposed to individual faculty preferences?" All of the tenured faculty found the word *control* problematic. "This is a touchy subject," said Will, and Anne concurred: "This is something I grapple with." Still, having the power to control the development of a program—shaping, guiding, influencing—is something that all recognize as necessary given their positions as tenured faculty with departmental coordination responsibilities. And that seems to be key: their scholarly expertise has made clear to them the need to continue to reform curriculum, revision, and placement. Anne says, "You hit the nail on the head with your discussions of how lots of CC writing programs don't have a coherent theoretical frame; I grew to understand that to be a major problem." She adds that she did not see that problem

prior to moving more deeply into comp-rhet research and, especially, taking her position as a WPA.

This need to guide program development is offset for all of the tenured faculty by the need to respect colleagues' authority. Will says, "I would argue we need to avoid standardization of curriculum and the idea of the 'one' (and best) approach to teaching composition—this is where individual input and individual faculty expertise, creativity, etc. comes in to making a great class." However, there's a limit. Bryan says, "The problem is when certain folks consistently follow their interests rather than engaging in the complex work of co-administering our departments, degree, programs." And Anne clarifies the disciplinary home of those interests: "The frank truth is that our department is comprised of people with very different histories teaching *and different disciplinary understandings, and many folks aren't really up to date*. If I let that fly in the name of academic freedom, I'd be letting down our students" (emphasis added). Such a realization makes the job challenging. Anne concludes: "So we need some sort of framework while still allowing for faculty flexibility. Where is that line?" Will concurs: "When do we cross the line of imposing curriculum versus giving some basic overall guidelines of collective outcomes for a course for the program's legitimacy and for the good of students and quality?"

All the tenured faculty discuss ways to respond to the tension that arises when some faculty members, who do not share their disciplinary knowledge, resist programmatic reform. Whether "getting buy in" or "seeking consensus," all of the respondents talk about the efforts to foster climates of agreement and of shared goals. That involves both learning—talking with people about their needs and desires—and teaching—whether presenting a cogent summary of current research, presenting programmatic data, or clarifying the goals, scope, and limitations of program initiatives. Jenn writes, as WPA, "you have a responsibility to bring comp-rhet theory to all faculty." Bryan notes the implicit demand as well: "While I don't feel like I have control, I understand that every time I interrogate one of my colleague's assumptions about FYW or writing in general, it may seem like I'm controlling when all I'm trying to do is reveal new and arguably more expansive and productive ways to think about writing." He concludes, "The faculty owns the curriculum but it's my job to facilitate critical discourses about writing that can lead us to new understandings and new curricular possibilities."

While this may seem that the tenured faculty responses stem from a central authoritative position, one respondent, Josh, was adamant in his desire to challenge any authoritative measures that inhibit faculty freedoms, especially those that come from administration. Yet, even he evokes the responsibility of scholarship as a basis for such freedom. He writes, "I consider it my privilege and duty to stay as informed as I can and to strive against those who would enforce questionable practices or who cannot explain what they are enforcing in relation to *current and past articles [in] composition theory*" (emphasis added).

Overall, the tenured faculty believe that neither they nor their departments nor their institutions do enough to ensure academic freedom, especially what one

calls an “informed academic freedom.” However, all talk about their efforts to do what they can. This is laudable, I believe, since the tenured faculty, in spite of misgivings surrounding the use of academic freedom as, at times, a “trope” evoked to defend whatever anyone wants to do, as one respondent said, all go out of their way to include adjunct faculty in all decision-making processes as much as possible. For example, one respondent changed meeting times so that more adjunct faculty could attend. Several offer stipends for professional development activities especially tailored to adjunct faculty. One institution offers each adjunct up to \$750 for conference registration and travel each year and stipends for professional development—admittedly, a situation many of us can only dream of. Across the board, the aim is inclusion. One respondent encourages working to build “safe places” that support “democratically inclusive ecologies,” where the question of academic freedom versus professional responsibility can be addressed. Another states that “transparency” and “inclusion” are essential to her efforts. She says, “I believe program leaders need to build trust with part-time faculty and facilitate the inclusion of adjunct faculty in every aspect of program/departmental decision making.”

Overall, the greatest challenge the tenured faculty face is how to work constructively with faculty with widely diverse interests and backgrounds. Bryan states this directly: “The #1 PROBLEM FACING COMPOSITIONISTS ENTERING 2 YEAR COLLEGES: Harnessing the diversity that marks two year colleges, from students to faculty to admin to . . . How do you use the diversity to advance rather than hinder the program?” (emphasis in original). Two of the respondents offer sage advice: address the question directly. Josh says to specify the rights and responsibilities of academic freedom in a faculty handbook. Bryan has gone further. He reported that his department held a professional development meeting, titled “Curricular Coherence and Academic Freedom,” in which the need for programmatic coherence was presented as a given, and then the question was posed of how academic freedom plays out in this context: “Coherence was defined as a necessary and good thing in this presentation. Then, we explicitly asked: What about academic freedom?” A discussion followed, and “the session basically ended like this: Freedom comes in many forms and to varying degrees. [We said,] ‘Here’s what we need from you as teachers in this program to ensure our department can keep meeting institutional expectations. We are norming theoretically. If you work with us during these development sessions, we can help you tailor your courses to feel like your own, from creating new assignments that are “yours” to reimagining new possibilities for the course entirely.’” While we may worry over the us-them divide, the effort is notable since four of the six respondents said that their departments lack any clear mechanism to address this tension at all.

What Follows

The responses of adjunct and tenured faculty with program-development responsibilities exposes a fault line in the shared concept of academic freedom, that *it is*

generally understood by scholars as being coupled with professionalism. In two-year college writing programs, the contention seems to be over what *professionalism* means. We know that for most faculty who teach writing, composition is not their professional home. However, the responses from adjunct faculty suggest that most composition

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instructors lay claim to professional status as the basis of their academic freedom. I believe this happens in one of three ways: by having a degree in a related field, such as literature-based English or education; by demonstrating scholarship in a different area, such as film or creative writing; or by years of experience teaching composition. None, I would argue, meet the criterion of scholarship or expertise *in the discipline* that an application of AAUP

guidelines would suggest. Consequently, the claims to professionalism and to the academic freedom as writing instructors that follows are unconvincing.

However, I do not want to suggest that this state of affairs has much if anything to do with personal responsibility. And here's my second point: *The material realities of two-year college English departments militate against professionalism, and thus any legitimate use of academic freedom for most faculty and especially for adjunct faculty.*

I believe that this is no accident. In fact, I would argue that this is exactly how the system is designed: to disempower and de-professionalize the faculty as the academy is more corporatized, as Keith Kroll forcefully warns in "The End of the Community College English Profession" (also see Klausman, "Not Just"). Similarly, you may remember Joe Harris's controversial 2000 CCC article, "Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss: Class Consciousness in Composition," in which he addresses then-MLA president Cary Nelson's use of the term "comp droids," graduate students and adjunct faculty who teach the vast majority of first-year writing courses but do not engage in the discipline. Harris states, "Our field has long been torn by the competing interests of researchers and teachers, of tenure-stream professors and tenure-less staff. We have been reluctant to talk about these tensions, though, preferring instead, as Julie Drew has pointed out, to speak in the voice of a 'universal teacher-subject' (10) that elides real differences between academic ranks and working conditions. *We need to admit to these conflicting interests in order to begin to negotiate more fairly between them*" (45, emphasis added).

I would argue that in the nearly two decades since Harris wrote, the situation has deteriorated even further and that we have not addressed the realities but rather resisted them ineffectually. What's even more disheartening is that we have long known the situation. Indeed, the Wyoming Resolution is over thirty years old, though probably few of us recall the source of that resolution, passed by the executive committee of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). John Trimbur and Barbara Cambridge wrote in 1988, "The resolution was drafted

at the Wyoming Conference in the summer of 1986, following *a remarkable release of the anger and bitterness so deeply felt in the rank and file of writing teachers—anger about the poor conditions that make it difficult to teach properly and bitterness about the insecurity and powerlessness of so many who teach writing*” (13, emphasis added). In the late 1980s, perhaps, it was justifiable to say that the release was “remarkable”; it is impossible to do so now.

And while the Indianapolis Resolution was adopted at the 2016 CCCC Convention (to the credit of the organization and those who worked hard on it), its call for, among other things, an “interorganizational labor board” to promote equitable working conditions, including certifying those institutions that meet “current disciplinary standards,” has been slow to be realized (CCCC, “2016 Resolutions”). And as the recent WPA-L discussions on adjunct issues and the continuing challenges have suggested (Perelman), successes are more likely to occur at the local level and incrementally—if at all. In fairness, such things take time, but as the example of the Wyoming Resolution above suggests, as time passes, even the best of intentions can slip away as other pressing issues demand our attention.

So, little has changed—certainly not the material conditions. What has changed definitively, I think, is that more of us have come to accept, however reluctantly, the new status quo, which includes a “new faculty majority”—adjunct, contingent, undoubtedly exploited—though we may be having more trouble accepting the class differences that this effects. That is, few of us may be willing to accept the title of “boss compositionist” as Harris describes it or even less the situation Mark Bousquet describes with “disposable teachers” (I know that I certainly resist it). And yet it’s hard not to see that the responses the tenured faculty offer in their interviews line up with exactly that. It’s as if we want our cake (there’s a “we” of faculty, the imagined “universal teaching-subject”) and to eat it too, however reluctantly (only some faculty are professionals in the field of composition and thus have the capacity and responsibility to shape writing programs). Or not to eat it, out of fear of breaking the illusion of the universal teaching-subject cake in the first place. The result is programmatic paralysis.

This brings me to my third point. *This materiality is the reason that our efforts to define ourselves as “teacher-scholars” have failed.* The field of composition-rhetoric has developed over the last half century into a legitimate discipline. I think that debate has been settled. In the past quarter century, the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) has grown up into a professional organization, with regional conferences, committees, white papers, position statements, and a journal (see Jeff Andelora’s excellent four-part series on the history of TYCA published in *TETYC* from September 2007 through May 2008). Part of that effort has been TYCA leadership’s work to redefine two-year college writing teachers as “teacher-scholars.” By attaching “scholars” to the role of teachers, it was hoped that the knowledge that two-year college faculty produce could be seen as legitimate (Andelora, “Forging”; Hassel and Giordano). That work has been codified in TYCA’s “Guidelines for the Academic Preparation of English Faculty at Two-Year Colleges.”

The Guidelines, ratified by the TYCA Executive Committee in 2004 and then revised in 2016, is a remarkable document. It's likely that if you've looked at the expansive recommended qualifications that the Guidelines lists—some expertise in everything from non-Western literatures to higher education policy—you've felt some inadequacy. No one, realistically, even the most active among us, could claim to have that broad a degree of knowledge. And now think about the vast majority of two-year college faculty who teach composition—contingent, with little training in comp-rhet and almost no incentive to develop professionally, and, in fact, subject to forces that work against their professionalization. The Guidelines bear very little resemblance to the actual expertise most who teach writing actually have.

But Patrick Sullivan goes further, and appropriately so, I would argue, though not for the majority of faculty. In "The Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar-Activist," he writes, "I suggest that we deliberately frame our professional identity, in part, as activists—accepting and embracing the revolutionary and inescapably political nature of our work" (327). This is a laudable goal, one we may be nearer to achieving, at least among those of us who are doing programmatic work and ground their professional identities in the discipline (see Christie Toth's work for a broader discussion of two-year college professional identities: Toth; Toth et al.; as well as much of the September 2017 special issue of *TETYC* dedicated to preparing two-year college faculty). But the sticky point, as it is with the "teacher-scholar" disconnect I mention above, is who the "we" is.

You may remember Doug Hesse's 2005 CCCC Chair's address in which he argued that "we" own writing studies, suggesting that the "we" are all those involved in teaching writing. In actuality, he was addressing those in the ballroom in San Francisco and later the readers of *CCC*, where his address was published. We could question legitimately whether those who were not in San Francisco for his speech and those who do not read *CCC*—undoubtedly the majority in my department—are members of the "we."

If you're reading this article, it's likely that "teacher-scholar-activist" is something with which you can identify. But for the permanent majority of our faculty? Isn't it too much to ask that they, without the protection of tenure, without job security, with heavy and fluctuating teaching loads, and often without union representation, take on the role of activists? Wouldn't that be a better job for those with tenure and those who have the responsibility of guiding a writing program, the "boss-compositionists," in Harris's admittedly troubling terms? We may not like that distinction, but the realities, I believe, force us to recognize that there's no universal teaching subject, no "we" as Sullivan is using it. Rather, elided with that "we" is a division that the responses to my little questionnaires expose: those who have the time, security, and inclination to read Sullivan's article (and this one) in the pages of a professional composition journal and are rewarded for it—and those who don't and aren't. I have to believe that the former would be a very distinct minority of writing teachers.

This brings me to my final and, I promise, last dismal point. Ultimately, *it may not matter that we resist the claims I'm making about the working conditions of most*

writing faculty or whether we wish to argue against them, since the two-year college is swept up in broader economic changes and thus is embedded in a discourse system in which terms like “academic freedom” have no real value.

This may seem harsh and counterintuitive. After all, we see stories in higher education publications nearly every day about challenges to academic freedom and the work individuals and groups do to safeguard it. But I would argue that most of these disputes—while vitally important to individuals and our sense of what higher education is all about—are not about academic freedom

as I describe it in the opening of this article but about civil liberties and the freedom of speech all citizens should have, though played out on college campuses, which is why the AAUP gets involved. For example, the contingent faculty member who is afraid to write an op-ed article about a controversial speaker on campus for fear of losing her job (Swidler)? This is a matter of freedom of speech and civil liberties. Or the adjunct faculty member purportedly fired for challenging what he saw as a violation of his control over curriculum revision (Schmidt)? This is a matter of shared governance and due process. I repeat, these are vitally important issues—but they are not academic freedom issues, per se. Perhaps a better way to think of them is as potential violations of “freedom for academics.”

In the corporatized college, by contrast to the press, we hear little about *academic freedom* because, I believe, it can’t be measured in monetary terms and so does not really exist. Talk to any administrator. As a person involved in higher education, he or she will sincerely support notions of academic freedom and faculty autonomy, including shared governance. But as an administrator, he or she can only talk about efficiency. What are our success rates? How is our budget? Even discussions about the college’s image—as a provider of educational opportunities, as a protector of academic freedom and inquiry—come down to how that impacts enrollment, endowments, and other funding sources.

Moreover, at that bottom line, we in English aren’t doing too badly, and so no change to the labor situation is warranted. Why? Even a “bad program” or a “complacent program,” as Charles I. Schuster describes it (see Klausman, “Mapping” 239), can get students through the system at an acceptable rate, so there’s no financial impetus. And that rate can be really low—60 percent success in online classes? Well, let’s work on that. A 75 percent success rate in first-year writing? We can live with that. It’s only when the rates are too low to be acceptable or are too visible, such as those of the pipeline numbers that the CCRC and Peter Adams revealed (Bailey et al.; Adams), that changes are warranted since the cost in lost

It may not matter that we resist the claims I’m making about the working conditions of most writing faculty or whether we wish to argue against them, since the two-year college is swept up in broader economic changes and thus is embedded in a discourse system in which terms like “academic freedom” have no real value.

revenue can be measured in budget lines. And for the most part, we've fixed those problems or are in the process of doing so, though not always necessarily in the way we had anticipated or hoped. That is, rather than creating new systems that help all students succeed, we may have simply shunted the problem elsewhere or disguised it in different forms (see the WPA-L discussion, "Big News," about the changes to the developmental programs at the California State University system and the potential unintended consequences to at-risk students).

This is important because you'll note that the labor conditions have not changed during these reform efforts but have actually grown worse, at least from our perspective (see ADE Ad Hoc; Laurence; Worthen). As two-year colleges across the nation have been reforming developmental education courses, placement processes, and curriculum, the proportion of adjunct faculty continues to climb: the Center for Community College Student Engagement estimates that 70 percent of new hires are adjunct and that adjunct faculty teach 58 percent of composition classes (TYCA 10), though I think those numbers are low. Moreover, workloads for many of them continue to get worse. From my discussion with adjunct colleagues at the CCCC Convention in Portland, I learned that "temporary full-time positions" with *seven-seven* loads is the new norm, though many are teaching *eight* sections per semester (Calhoon-Dillahunt 121). How can this be happening in spite of all our calls for class load and work load limitations? (see Horning; CCCC, "Principles").

The answer is not hard to fathom. So long as there are people willing to take these positions—and our graduate programs continue to pump them out—and so long as the level of preparation required to teach the courses remains very low, due to a kind of "cyclical forgetting" that leaves graduate programs mostly oblivious of two-year college faculty needs in spite of forty-five years of efforts (see Toth and Jensen), the trend will continue. Perhaps we'll soon reach the 100 percent contingent faculty makeup Kroll fears since there simply doesn't seem to be a mechanism available in our current system to prevent it. We, as teacher-scholar-activists (to whatever degree) may push back on these trends of hiring and increased workload—and I encourage us to continue to do so (see Griffiths on faculty autonomy)—but for administrators who face ever-tighter state and local budgets, or declining enrollment that spurs radical reorganization such as that in Wisconsin (Seltzer), there's simply no reason to change the path we're on. Phrases like *academic freedom* as well as ethics and equality are lovely in the ear, but they do not have a budget line, and they do not show up in accreditation reports, at least as anything more than decorative language in introductory sections that present an idealized version of the college, augmenting the images of grassy quads, smiling and diverse students, and sun-splashed clock towers (see Klausman, "Out").

Acceptance Does Not Mean Acquiescence

A difficult concept in the current mindfulness movement is acceptance. To resist mentally what already exists in the present moment is the creation of suffering. It suggests a fixation on what is not real but only imagined, a misidentification: that

is, it arises from one's identification with the egoic mind, the mind of language and narrative and images. However, to accept rather than resist what already exists in the actual world—a supervisor treating some employees unfairly, a loved one engaging in self-destructive behavior—does not mean to allow it to continue. That is, acceptance does not mean acquiescence. What it means is to accept that what already exists already exists. To resist it is futile. The question that follows, then, is, “What, if anything, must I do?”

As I hope has become clear, I am arguing that we have fully entered an era in which education, for the vast majority of students at open-access institutions, means training in an economic system (see Carlson, “Educational” and “Future”). Unlike education in the tradition handed down to us from the ancient Greeks, with the idealized teacher-scholar enlightening the individual student, training can be standardized and performed by workers properly trained themselves. There is little need at two-year colleges, especially in composition programs, for “teacher-scholars,” who think independently and


But to accept this reality is not to acquiesce. We need not go quietly into that good night. We can make changes. We can take action. We can be activists at the local and national level.

question methods and aims, beyond a very small minority to design and conduct the training. In this scenario there is little if any legitimacy to the concept of academic freedom because, in a very real sense, we in two-year colleges are no longer part of an “academy” but rather simply one facet of the corporatized labor market.

But to accept this reality is not to acquiesce. We need not go quietly into that good night. We can make changes. We can take action. We can be activists at the local and national level, as both Sullivan and Linda Adler-Kassner call for. We can, perhaps, make changes to the economic base system that may, in our most idealized fantasies, ripple “up” to the larger culture of higher education. To make that even a remote possibility, though, the first course of action we have to take is to make the unconscious conscious, to bring to our awareness the discourse that is speaking through us.

By unconscious, I do not mean hidden or submerged. Years ago I studied poststructural psychoanalytic theory, and one of the lessons is that the unconscious is right here in front of us, written large in the pattern of discourse, if we can only step back and see it. Jacques Lacan, in “Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” writes, “The unconscious is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject's disposal in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse” (214). What this means is that the individual is subject of the discourse, not the other way around. For us, this means that the economic system that defines social roles—labor, management, and so on—is the “concrete discourse qua transindividual.” We think we are speaking as individual academics, but in fact we are the spoken of the discourse of the system, as laborers or managers, professors or “staff.” And even if we resist it and argue against it out of frustration,

positing a different discourse (such as the teacher-scholar or the universal teaching subject “we”) in an attempt to write our text over the other, unless we are conscious of it, we do nothing substantial to dislodge it. What we must do is make it available to ourselves and our colleagues—put it at the disposal of all of us—in order to dislodge ourselves from it.

We bring with us, then—as in psychological transference—an old narrative of academic freedom rooted in disciplinary scholarship but misapply it to this new setting that has as its overarching terms not education or liberation but training and job creation. As one of our respondents, Bryan, has done and as Desirée Holter, Amanda Martin, and I argue (Holter et al.), we should bring all of our faculty together and make clear exactly what the job of adjunct faculty entails in labor terms. It may not be pretty, but to do otherwise would be unethical; it would be disingenuous to act via one discourse while those who are affected by our actions function through another. We can then raise the question of what academic freedom may or can mean given the needs of programmatic work in a corporatized college setting that carries with it, like an echo of old song, principles of “the academy” with its inherent communities of scholars. In other words, let us set aside internal departmental resistances and understand the reality that exists—labor and management—and the discourse that is writing us. As Stephen Batchelor, a secular Buddhist scholar, says, “The question is not ‘What is the right thing to do?’ but ‘What is the compassionate thing to do?’” (48). To accept the moment and to make conscious the previously unconscious discourse is the compassionate thing to do. We can then accept that this new reality exists and ask, “What, then, must we do together?” 

APPENDIX A: TENURED FACULTY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Academic Freedom and Employment Status

1. What is your definition of academic freedom and how does it pertain to your teaching and professional activities?
2. Do you feel that your status as a tenured/tenure-track/FT faculty member affects the degree to which academic freedom extends to you? In what ways? Can you describe a time when you felt that most acutely?

Curriculum and Academic Freedom

3. To what degree do you feel you have control over the content and pedagogical practices of the writing program as opposed to individual faculty preferences? Is this consistent with your views of academic freedom? To what degree *should* you, in your role as department or program leader, have? Please explain.
4. Have you or your department or program ever promoted curricular changes you knew were questioned or disagreed with by some of the writing faculty? If so, how did you respond to the resistance? How was your response related to your sense of academic freedom and individual faculty member rights, if it was?

Department Role in Academic Freedom

5. What efforts do you and/or your department or program make to ensure that the academic freedom of adjunct faculty is respected and/or ensured, if any? In your view, in what ways does your department or program inhibit and/or fail to protect adjunct faculty academic freedom, if it does?
6. What advice would you offer other department chairs or program administrators regarding adjunct faculty and academic freedom? What advice would you offer adjunct faculty about academic freedom?

Scenario

Imagine at your college that the department or writing program leadership (department chair, writing program administrator, a committee of tenured faculty, etc.) has determined that first-year composition will focus on “21st-century literacies,” in this case meaning multimodal composition and genre analysis (with an emphasis on using podcasts) and have updated the course outcomes to reflect this. However, several adjunct faculty, with many years of experience, continue to believe that an emphasis on argumentation, careful analysis of written texts, and analytical essays should remain the priority for students.

At your college, what would and/or should the program or department leadership do and why?

APPENDIX B: ADJUNCT FACULTY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Academic Freedom and Employment Status

1. What is your definition of academic freedom and how does it pertain to your teaching and professional activities?
2. Do you feel that your status as an adjunct faculty member affects the degree to which academic freedom extends to you? If not, why not? If so, in what ways? Can you describe a time when you felt that most acutely?

Curriculum and Academic Freedom

3. To what degree do you feel you have control over the content and pedagogical practices of your teaching, as opposed to administration or departmental leaders? And is this consistent with your views of academic freedom? To what degree *should* you have control and why?
4. Has your department or program ever promoted curricular changes you have questioned or disagreed with? If so, how did you respond to those changes and how was your response related to your sense of academic freedom and/or your status as an adjunct faculty member?

Department Role in Academic Freedom

5. What efforts does your department or program make to ensure that your academic freedom is respected and/or ensured? *If* your department or program inhibits and/or fails to protect your academic freedom, how does this happen?
6. What advice would you offer department chairs or program administrators regarding adjunct faculty and academic freedom? What advice would you offer other adjunct faculty about academic freedom?

Scenario

Imagine at your college that the department or writing program leadership (department chair, writing program administrator, a committee of tenured faculty, etc.) has determined that first-year composition will focus on “21st-century literacies,” in this case meaning multimodal composition and genre analysis (with an emphasis on using podcasts) and have updated the course outcomes to reflect this. However, several adjunct faculty, with many years of experience, continue to believe that an emphasis on argumentation, careful analysis of written texts, and analytical essays should remain the priority for students.

At your college, what would and/or should the adjunct faculty do and why?

Notes

1. I use the term *adjunct faculty* to refer to all faculty who are not on the tenure track or in a similar full-time, secure position. See Seth Kahn’s article in *Inside Higher Ed* for a discussion of working conditions of adjunct or contingent faculty and the effects on professionalism.

2. I use the term *tenured faculty* to refer to the respondents who either have tenure, are on a tenure track, or hold a similarly secure position. The faculty I interviewed also happen to have programmatic responsibilities. I do not mean to imply that all tenured faculty hold these views, only that this select group and, by extension, others in similar positions do.

3. All names are pseudonyms.

4. Of the two “no” responses, one tenured faculty said that no one at her institution enjoys academic freedom; the other said, unhelpfully, that academic freedom was ensured in the faculty handbook.

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