



# *Shadows of the Mountain*

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## Prologue

A Chinese tale in a children's picture book by Arnold Lobel describes the quandary of Ming Lo and his wife, who live in the shadow of a huge mountain. Their house is dark and wet, rocks tumble from the mountain and make holes in their roof, and nothing grows in their garden. In frustration, they consult a sage who offers them various suggestions for moving the mountain: push at it with a huge felled tree; scare it away by banging on pots and pans; cajole it with fresh cakes and baskets of bread. To the dismay of the couple, all of these methods fail. The mountain doesn't budge. Desperate, Ming Lo once again consults the wise man. After deep thought, the wise man tells Ming Lo and his wife to dismantle their home stick by stick, pack it into bundles, carry these bundles in their arms and on their heads, close their eyes, and perform an odd, backward-stepping dance. Following his instructions at home, they load themselves with their belongings and, eyes closed, step to the dance of the moving mountain. After several hours, they open their eyes to behold that the mountain has moved far away. Elated, they reassemble their house and live out their years in sunshine and bliss.

As the title of our essay and this volume suggest, the problem of working conditions for many teachers of writing has cast a dark shadow across the landscape of higher education. Looming above the field of composition itself, the subject of staffing and

employment remains one of the most politically charged and educationally debated of all the issues in the huge industry of writing instruction. And with good reason: in record numbers, colleges and universities around the country are hiring itinerant workers to teach writing on the cheap, assigning them by the term to many sections of composition, without benefits, without training, and without material support for their work. Yet these lamentable practices go on in what may be the university's most important instructional domain: the development of written literacy.

Early proposals for improving employment practices in composition assumed that the problem could be pushed, threatened, or persuaded away. But the problem itself turned out to be much less monolithic for some members of the field than for others. People's opinions about working conditions are influenced by their own positions, experiences, and aspirations. An "exploited" part-timer may like the conditions of his job—a job free from the heavy committee work, student advising, and publication requirements that besiege many a tenured professor. Or a "boss compositionist," to use James Sledd's disparaging term, may fight constantly with her own higher administration to provide benefits and job security to her nontenured employees. Claims about the relationship between working conditions and quality of instruction may be equally specious: stunningly strong pedagogy daily graces the classrooms of badly paid part-time teachers, while some students must endure the dronings of uninspired tenured faculty who boast high salaries and excellent benefits.

This essay is our attempt to recognize the perceptual complexity that has characterized discussions about employment in the teaching of writing. In it, we aim to show how our job histories, and the broader personal and institutional dimensions of our work, have influenced our perception of employment standards and practices in composition. When we teamed up to write this piece, we were barely professional acquaintances. We had taught in the same department and knew its curriculum but had never worked together closely. Richard is currently an education specialist in the composition program at the University of Minnesota, a position in which he teaches multiple sections of writing classes on a yearly renewable appointment. He made a full-time job of working part-time for eleven years at St. Cloud State

University and in various community colleges, proprietary colleges, and community education programs. Chris was hired at the University of Minnesota in 1984 as a new assistant professor right out of graduate school, having never held a temporary or part-time teaching job except as a TA. He earned promotion and tenure in four years and became a full professor in 1996. He directed the Program in Composition from 1988 to 1996.

When the occasion for this piece arose, we decided to avoid the ordinary sense of collaboration and to collaborate in a different sense. We felt it important for each of us to first tell our own story about employment in composition and then to respond to each other's narratives about the issues they raised for us. As a result, our narratives became the context for a kind of response dialogue, whose pieces are interwoven throughout our stories.

In deciding on this structure for our essay, we were interested in mirroring the discursive practices that we believe should mediate our field's continued concerns about employment practices: attending to and respecting individual voices; responding to those voices in the spirit of negotiation and reform; and engaging in dialogues in which all stakeholders can participate openly, informing each other in ways that both reveal the complexity of the issues and move toward local and national consensus. In blending narrative and analysis, monologue and dialogue, the public and the private, we hope to suggest ways that discussion about crucial matters of employment can and should take place in many venues and through many kinds of discourse: conferences and coalitions; personal conversations; official and unofficial committees; and both sponsored and grassroots discussion groups and forums.

## **Adjunct Mountain Passes** **Richard Jewell**

Recently I was hired, along with eleven others, as an education specialist in the University of Minnesota English department's undergraduate writing program. Most of us teach five to six semester sections per year of first- and third-year composition and fulfill committee responsibilities. Most of us also have terminal degrees or are ABD. I have three master's degrees.

I started teaching composition part-time thirteen years ago at Minnesota's largest state university, St. Cloud State, which has about fifteen thousand students. The English department hired me immediately after I graduated summa cum laude from its master's degree program. Before starting my degree program at St. Cloud, I had been a free-lance writer earning four times the average free-lancer's income but still only enough to make half a living. I began teaching to increase my income, and during my first few years at St. Cloud, as a teaching assistant and then as a part-timer, I was content with my role: my children and I were eating, and I loved my work. The single father of three very young children, a happy innocent, little did I know of tenure wars or the insidious lines that separate the work of tenure- and non-tenure-accruing faculty.

My innocence continued longer than is normal for others, perhaps because I wanted to teach part-time, perhaps because the chair of the English department in which I worked was unusually supportive of me. I did not know then that the chair frequently called one or two full-timers who were flexible, told them he had a single-parent part-timer who needed a later class, and asked if they would be willing to exchange for my earlier one. I did not learn until much later that when this chair allowed me to teach a 300-level research writing class fifty miles off campus that no one else wanted to teach, some members of the department were upset because, at that time, no part-timer was allowed to teach advanced writing courses. Neither did I understand why when the chair allowed me—an instructor with more published short stories than all but one person in the department—to teach a 300-level creative writing class forty miles off campus that no one else wanted, a committee was appointed to examine my credentials before I was allowed to accept the chair's assignment.

Anson: There's an interesting complexity in your early history at St. Cloud State. You clearly had a supportive chair who saw, and valued, your preparation, your energy, and your talents. He offered you opportunities (if the unwanted "dregs" of the department can be considered opportunities) against the protests of the

department. In a way, he was using his authority to resist the hierarchies that defined what was “allowed”—and for you, that was fortuitous. But the principle of a chair doing things in an unsanctioned way can be just as damaging to employment practices as reforming of them. It would be nice to think that the entire department could have collectively recognized the problems in their hiring practices and created more equitable positions for you and others with suitable preparation and strong evaluations. It’s only in that collective process, to my mind, that we will ever reform current employment practices.

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Jewell: Agreed. As I gradually realized how autocratic my first chair was, I became less comfortable with being a beneficiary. At my next school, an autocratic chair was very damaging to me. I also have seen highly democratic, functional departments: as a rule they seem to make an effort to support and treat their part-timers well.

Over time, I grew tired of formulating magazine articles, my principal source of free-lance income, and took increasing pleasure in teaching. Deciding to teach full time, I added to my university assignments additional part-time work teaching English, writing, and humanities at a nearby business college and in non-credit community courses. To my surprise, I was also almost hired by St. Cloud’s English department, after a national search for what was called an NTTR—non-tenure-track renewable—position: a full-time, indefinitely renewable job.<sup>1</sup>

Anson: A recent report from the Modern Language Association argues that “freeway fliers” (non-tenure-track and part-time instructors who teach at several institutions in order to make a living) often worsen the quality of undergraduate education because, among other things, “they cannot give [students] the kind of outside-the-classroom guidance that has traditionally been considered good pedagogical practice” (MLA Report on Professional Employment, 9). How were you able to balance your commitment to good teaching against the obvious time constraints of

teaching at several institutions (as well as keeping up with your freelance work)?

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Jewell: I'm a quick study. I've been able to adapt to different institutions' needs. And I kept my courses at several schools as alike as was reasonably possible. Many of the schools for which I worked also had strict requirements about my being present for students at least an hour per week per class, and I've always given students my home phone number. Unfortunately, at times there was no way to develop syllabuses creatively. In addition, in my one-course or "freeway" schools, I regularly lamented the fact that I was not able to interact with students to the extent that I think necessary for quality education. I do believe that freeway-flier teaching is as effective as the teaching tenured faculty do in extension courses at distant locations. That said, the best student services are provided by on-campus teachers to on-campus students. My experience suggests that such services are provided well both by tenured faculty and by part-timers who are given sufficient and steady work and pay to remain at one school for several years.

Unfortunately for me, the chair of the St. Cloud English department retired, and three others took his place in quick succession. My work schedule changed: I was assigned early morning classes or none; I encountered greater resistance when I wanted to teach anything other than what I had taught, and I was less protected from the hothouse politics of academia at the departmental level. At one point, when the mass communications department asked me to teach a 400/500-level course, *Writing for Magazines*, a few English faculty objected to my teaching a graduate course. I had no doctorate. However, mass communications was willing to employ me because it still maintained a two-track system (professional and academic), a system that, in retrospect, I consider excellent. Over the years, I have discovered that hiring based exclusively on a certificate of intellectual knowledge is as shortsighted in terms of gaining excellent teachers as is hiring based exclusively on race, gender, or class. In this particular situation, I found it was not only a few English faculty who were upset. A part-time colleague in English with training in journal-

ism, who had applied for part-time work in mass communications and had been refused, tore down posters about the course that mass communications hired me to teach and asked me to display. This taught me another lesson: part-timers competing for the same work often do not support one another.

Anson: It's clear that when competition increases for scarce resources, members of otherwise supportive, networked communities begin to distance themselves from one another. I've seen this happen regularly among the tenured professoriate, who can, in a bad climate, become jealous, competitive, wary, secretive, and calculating even while presumably working for the common good of their own department. How can administrators establish a supportive community among instructors at all levels? Hierarchies don't help. Marginalized groups can as easily prey on each other as those at the center prey on them. Including members of all employment categories in matters of departmental governance can help.

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Jewell: Access to open governance is of great importance, but it isn't the only solution. At one of my schools, my department gave all part-timers full voting rights (by percentage of workload with absentee balloting allowed), and full representation on working committees, and at one time moved many of its part-timers into full-time, tenured positions. However, the school's higher administration found these practices counterproductive to their purposes. They stopped hiring part-timers to full-time positions almost entirely and cut part-time workloads. My experience has been that functional and democratic departments left to their own devices will attempt to support part-timers, but this support is easily thwarted from outside the departments when pay and guarantees of workload and permanence are at stake.

During my years teaching at St. Cloud, I participated in a state university conference and in a Midwest Modern Language Association conference. Activities such as these were acknowledged and praised by my departmental evaluating committee. Although I would like to have presented my work at other conferences, the administration did not provide money for part-timers to travel. Like most of my part-time colleagues, I limited my

presentations to settings I could reach in round-trip car travel in one day. For economic reasons, with few exceptions, I was also unable to take advantage of opportunities for professional development. These opportunities were for teachers with extra money to spend in the summers or on sabbaticals, not typically for part-time faculty.

Professional development opportunities were not the only ones unavailable to part-time faculty. I received retirement but no medical benefits unless I had worked three-fourths time for three quarters. Often I would work full time in one quarter, two-thirds in the next, and be assigned just one course in the third quarter—keeping me just shy of benefits. No information about tracking such benefits was given to me, and the first time I qualified, no medical benefits were paid, even though they should have been, automatically. Later when I discovered the oversight, I requested replacement benefits and was refused. The administrator with whom I spoke offered me compensation for my medical costs during the previous quarter. I had none: like other long-term part-timers, I delayed all “yearly” medical checkups for my family for a quarter when I might qualify for compensation. When I asked my union representative about this problem, he said I could grieve it, but almost assuredly nothing would come of it. In addition, he said, my grievance might hurt part-timers by making the administration work even harder to cut their benefits and by making the union work harder to get rid of part-time positions.

Part-time salaries at St. Cloud when I was there, though better than wages for hand labor, were low. Part-timers were all on the instructor level of a union-bargained pay scale that fortunately did contain increases for up to ten years and slightly higher pay for those with doctorates. Our pay probably would have been worse had it not been for the union. After I left, salaries for English part-timers improved (a little more than \$500 per quarter credit for a four-credit course, the equivalent of \$750 per semester credit). However, in another part of the contract that set the higher pay rates, it was stipulated that if a part-timer did not teach more than three or four courses per year, pay would stay at the basic rate and contain no significant increases for years of service or for education. The union, I learned, had decided to

give up some part-time rights in order to bargain successfully for a larger percentage of tenure-stream positions. As part of this new policy, NTTR (non-tenure-track renewable) jobs throughout the state were bargained away: existing NTTRs have kept their protected status and are even able to rise to associate professor status, but no new NTTRs or replacements can be hired.

After I left St. Cloud State, the part-time program was largely dismantled. Tenure lines were better protected throughout the state by union contract—a wise move in light of the decrease of tenured positions as a percentage of all faculty positions nationally. However, part-timers were sacrificed to achieve this protection. Part-timers in the Minnesota state universities could no longer earn the protected positions that earlier part-time colleagues had gained. At this time, the St. Cloud State English department began to register, hire, and train as teaching assistants an increasingly larger contingent of graduate students—up to twenty per year. In my TA group seven years earlier, there had been three, and only one in the year before that. This increase in TAs was a boon to many tenured department members, who never enjoyed teaching Composition I and could now hand that responsibility to the students who filled the graduate courses they loved to teach. It was, however, unfortunate for these graduate students that the number of applicants for an advertised English position in community colleges in Minnesota—the only colleges in which a master's degree is sufficient for tenure-track teaching in English—increased to as many as three hundred.

When the union abandoned part-timers in the state university system, it established a new degree qualification for post-secondary teaching. Previously the line drawn between those with master's degrees and those with terminal degrees had been blurred. Many departments at St. Cloud State had older teachers and occasionally (as in mass communications) younger ones with the master's who were tenured, as well as non-tenure-track teachers (e.g., NTTRs) with either the master's or a doctorate who had tenure-like job security. In the new hiring environment, only those with terminal degrees could aspire to tenure; those without such degrees could expect no tenure, even though they were needed.

I did not stay long enough at St. Cloud State to see these new policies take effect. My soon-to-be wife had a tenured position at

a community college in Minneapolis, one hundred miles away, and so I, the untenured one, moved. During the next six years I taught part-time at two suburban community colleges. For the first four of those years, I was essentially a full-time, untenured teacher with a contract renewed quarter by quarter. In spite of the heavy workloads, I liked the community college system. Part-timers in it had many of the same rights and opportunities as tenured faculty in Minnesota. I participated fully in faculty development training projects both on campus and in state meetings, received a full travel allowance that helped me to present at several state and regional conferences and at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and I was on the highest step of the pay scale, equivalent to that of a person with a doctorate. (In fact, at one time the community colleges had a short-lived, union-bargained system in which after two years, part-timers with enough courses were automatically given part-time tenure. With additional courses, they were able to gain full-time tenure.) I received full benefits in a system in which deans, not department chairs, hire, fire, and often choose courses for part-timers. I grew substantially as a teacher with the support of deans who helped and sometimes even encouraged me to teach new courses in philosophy, religion, and the humanities (my other two master's degrees).

Unfortunately, I was not a good fit in my first community college English department. The department emphasized the teaching of composition as writing about literature. Unaware of the national struggles among composition pedagogies, I was trained—and preferred—to teach writing as an interdisciplinary study. In addition, the chair and several members of the department, supportive neither of my training and preferences nor of part-timers in general, felt special displeasure when an assistant dean created a peer-tutor writing center and hired me as its first part-time director. I made other political mistakes too, in a department that I gradually discovered was rich with intrigue. I had supporters, however, none among those who held power in the department. Two years after I was appointed director of the writing center, I was asked to leave. Neither my supporters nor the dean who had hired me could protect me. I learned a lesson familiar to non-tenure-track faculty: contingent faculty must

always have the support of the powerful factions in their departments to survive, and sometimes being as invisible as possible is the best way to avoid difficulties.

Anson: I find this part of your story especially unsettling. Because of your status, you were denied certain intellectual rights that tenured faculty don't even think twice about. Your choice was either to submit to curricular mandates and teaching methods to which you were theoretically opposed, based on current work in the field, or to risk your position by doing what you thought was best. Without a way to argue your perspective, you were held hostage by the system.

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Jewell: I had a very tough three years at that school. In all fairness, I must say that I was caught between the dean who hired me and liked my pedagogical approaches and members of the department who did not. The department should have had the opportunity to choose or reject me initially. On reflection, I wish that I had kept very quiet—and left as quickly as possible. The reality was that for a part-timer, I had become too emboldened by my growth as a teacher at St. Cloud.

I moved on to another community college more in tune with my training and preferences. I was embraced fully by this new department, and my new assistant dean was highly supportive. After one year, though, the dean left, and members of the department made it very clear to me that though they supported me, the college's administration—which often has the final word in hiring in this system—did not like to move part-timers into full-time positions. The system experienced money problems, enrollments dropped, and my college lost a tenth of its funding. Part-timers at our college lost about half our work and in some cases two-thirds of our income. In Minnesota community colleges, part-timers who teach only one course per quarter are removed from the normal salary scale (calculated as a percentage of what a tenured, full-time teacher earns), and receive instead a lower salary (at that time, \$350 per quarter credit, little better than the minimum wage at the time). Experienced teachers, those

who cost too much, were given smaller loads. The courses they normally taught were assigned to new teachers, who cost less.

Anson: We badly need to examine the economics of higher education to ferret out discrepancies across different departments and disciplines. I think we would find, for example, that composition is among the worst areas for this kind of exploitation. At many institutions, low-cost part-time teachers are used to staff composition sections in order to generate profit for the university, which then channels its earnings into other areas. Achieving a better state of equilibrium between revenue and expenses in composition would go a long way toward pay equity, even if it didn't entirely eliminate the hiring of part-time instructors.

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Jewell: As we seek this equilibrium, a realistic and even laudable goal is not to eliminate part-timers, but rather to give them per-credit pay equal to that of full-timers. In fact, concessions in part-time pay negotiated by two unions in Minnesota have led to fuller hiring of part-timers: once pay on a per-credit basis became more equitable, part-timers were more likely to receive larger work oads and even full-time work.

I found additional work teaching nights in a proprietary business college where full-time liberal arts teachers were required to have a master's degree, expected to teach six to eight courses per quarter for forty-eight weeks per year, and paid about \$20,000 per year. At this business college I learned to grade quickly, to avoid innovation, and to spend a minimal amount of time with students individually. During these two busy years when I might have been teaching in as many as five different locations in a given week, I was one of the lucky ones among part-timers: few were as able as I to find sufficient work in teaching. I watched many excellent teachers leave college teaching, either temporarily or for good. During these lean times, I witnessed even more mistreatment of part-timers than I saw at other times, abuses no tenured faculty member ever suffered.<sup>2</sup>

In 1996, in the midst of these lean times, the University of Minnesota's English department advertised twelve "education specialist" positions. Reluctant to apply at first because of the relatively low pay (\$28,500), I finally did and was hired. Although raises of those in my position approximate the rate of inflation, there is nothing like tenure. However, we do have health benefits and can begin to earn retirement benefits after three years. And, after three years, we are eligible to compete for term-length research projects (the equivalent of sabbatical leaves). We have no power in the English department, for we are not faculty members; however, compared to other adjunct positions at the local and national levels, our working conditions are good.

Anson: My own story explains why in this same program (which is now newly controlled by the English department) I resisted hiring non-tenure-track and part-time instructors. Across the spectrum of your many experiences, this position looks good: you can focus your energies in a single department, your remuneration and benefits are reasonable, and there is some opportunity for advancement. However, having been a member of this department for fifteen years, I am convinced that many of the inequities you described in other settings will continue, albeit on different scales—inequities the worst of which is the fact that no matter how hard you work, no matter how stunning your record, your position is always at risk should the department or the university decide to change directions, whether for financial, curricular, or structural reasons. And your burdens are greater than perhaps among any other employed class in the department. Whereas you must meticulously account for your activities annually, teaching assistants with little or no experience in the classroom are not evaluated formally at all, and are guaranteed reappointment for six years of graduate school. In some ways, you are less protected than a first-year graduate student who may know almost nothing about the highly complex and demanding job of teaching undergraduates how to become more effective writers. These and other inequities and discrepancies in status kept me from opening the door to new classes of employees, even while I recognized that keeping the door closed meant fewer (if exploitative) positions for people like you.

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Jewell: I can understand your reasoning and agree with you on most points. I do think, however, that we, as a profession, have a tendency to try to solve the part-time problem simply by replacing part-time teachers with as many full-time, tenured positions as possible. This solution concerns me deeply. First, the reality is that part-time workers always will exist. Second, and much more important, when we focus so much energy on replacing part-time teachers with full-time positions, ongoing injustices are overlooked time and again. Part-timers are misused and underpaid. If justice is our goal, the reality is that more equal per-credit pay for part-timers and a ladder system allowing part-timers to rise to full-time and to tenured positions are at least as necessary as converting to more full-time, tenured positions. I might add that in my experience, equal pay and a ladder system also appear to contribute to collegiality in a department, just as collegiality often is improved when a respected faculty member—rather than an outsider—becomes an administrator in a department or college.

Over my years of work as a non-tenure-track teacher, I have experienced a mix of emotions. I have become cynical about the status and living conditions of part-timers; at the same time, I have become confident of my abilities. The unfairness with which part-time faculty live makes me cynical. Tenure-like systems and pay raises for part-time and other adjunct faculty are needed—now. Unfortunately, unions, faculty, and administrations are more often contrary opponents than collegial decision-makers in the current environment in which administrators are being asked to operate their units like efficient businesses. Nevertheless, I still love teaching in my discipline. My current role at the University of Minnesota is about the best one can do and not have tenure. I consider my job an acknowledgment of my skills, my record, and my willingness to keep trying. My students, my profession, and my work with my colleagues give me pleasure. If I had tenure or a similar guarantee and reasonable salary increases, I would be content to teach where I am permanently in spite of the low pay I receive.

## **Can Climbing the Mountain Move It? Chris Anson**

From 1988 until August of 1996, I directed one of the largest composition programs in the country, a budgetarily and administratively autonomous unit housed in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. In that capacity, I oversaw all personnel issues affecting the program, including the hiring, training, and supervision of its teachers and staff. Before that time, I had not given much thought to the principles of employment in the field of composition, except for the ones that directly affected my own livelihood. Then, in 1988, I had to face quite regularly decisions that reflected the ethos of the program and my own beliefs about employment in composition. It was a tough call.

The program I inherited had never employed part- or full-time untenured teachers except in evening courses. Every regular section of composition was taught by TAs, over one hundred of them, who were enrolled in graduate programs. The position paid a typical TA stipend and came with tuition benefits and some short-term health insurance. A dozen part-time instructors taught evening courses in our extension division, and most of them held permanent, full-time jobs at community colleges or in business and industry. Elsewhere, I have shown how the professionalization of graduate students (who freely opt into advanced degree programs) is enhanced by teaching classes and becoming involved in administration or teacher development (Anson & Rutz). Therefore, I have not viewed TA employment in quite the same way as I view the employment of adjunct instructors, although I know all too well how often TAs are also exploited for the financial gain of a department or institution.

Toward the end of my directorship, beginning in about 1994, the dean's office began urging me to hire full-time untenured instructors at high section loads. The reasons were purely financial: TAs incurred extra costs to the university, including health insurance and free tuition, but taught a limited number of classes. Full-time nontenured adjuncts, on the other hand, could teach

nine or more sections of composition a year. The pay differences between the two groups seemed very small, but calculated over hundreds of sections of composition, they added up to several thousand dollars, a bottom line that did not escape the fiscally sharp eyes of our administration. In spite of the dean's urgings, I resisted opening the door to non-tenure-track instructors.

Jewell: I can't entirely agree with your initial resistance to hiring full-time adjuncts, however excellent your motives. I have observed resistance similar to yours in the two separate teachers' unions in Minnesota's state university and community college systems. In the 1980s, the state university union gave up a non-tenure-track-renewable position that virtually guaranteed indefinite renewal in order to bargain for more tenured positions. So did the Minnesota community college system in the early 1990s. In both situations, adjuncts did not significantly decrease in numbers but rather suffered more.

My experience suggests that individuals often choose part-time work purposefully as I did. Many teachers just out of graduate school take adjunct positions as a means of working their way into permanent teaching positions. My two years' experience, as one of a dozen full-time, annually renewable teachers in English at the University of Minnesota, has convinced me that full- and part-time adjuncts can provide a department greater quality and consistency in teaching, administration, and teacher training, than can TAs alone. In addition, excellent systems do exist to reward adjuncts with tenure-track positions. I saw one in the Minnesota community college system.

Unfortunately, there is a strong tendency in academia to assume that the grass is greener elsewhere; unknown teachers from other colleges are more attractive candidates for positions than a college's own known adjuncts, even when newcomers have no better credentials. Arguably, teachers whose excellence has been observed for several years and who are committed to local academic and civic communities are better-qualified candidates for positions than those who are found in national searches.

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Anson: In response to what many perceive to be a "crisis" in faculty employment, especially in English departments and writing programs, we are seeing more arguments in favor of hiring tenure-track faculty and cutting back on our over-reliance on part-

time and adjunct faculty. Now that you bring it up, I think that part of my resistance to hiring non-tenure-track adjuncts or part-timers may have come from my having argued year after year for new faculty positions in composition—exactly what you say led to the elimination of some adjunct positions in the state university system. If a college or university wants to hire well-prepared, committed faculty, it should try to hire them as permanent faculty. If the pay, benefits, and other conditions of work are roughly the same for an adjunct faculty member as for a tenure-track faculty member, there seems to be little reason not to hire the latter except for purposes of “flexibility” in times of financial distress. Nationally, if we don’t keep urging for full-time tenure-track positions, the abundant candidates in that pool will be forced to take part-time and non-tenure-track jobs, which only exacerbates the problem.

My colleagues and I were also mindful that, without a contractual system in place that would guarantee pay levels, benefits, representation, and the like, our ambitions to treat adjunct faculty well could be thwarted later by our college administration. Not creating another class of potentially exploitable employees to begin with meant we would not be pressured to increase the number of such employees for the sake of generating institutional profit that could be used elsewhere (as it almost always is).

Although the dean’s office never actually demanded that we hire non-tenure-track instructors, from their persistence I knew that they did not fully understand why I resisted the idea. After all, it was no more difficult administratively to assign adjunct instructors to composition courses than TAs, and might have even reduced the need for instructional development. Each year, we received half a dozen or more unsolicited résumés or letters of inquiry from seemingly well-qualified teachers in our metropolitan area, sent in the hope of teaching even one course in our curriculum. Everyone knew the market could provide us with a substantial number of teachers—why not exploit the labor potential? As my colleagues and I grappled with this question, I found myself exploring my own work history for answers. Did my background give me enough experience to help me understand the issues well? Did my position—a tenured professor with all the political and material amenities that title assumes—blind

me to the problems of differential status among instructors of the same courses? Or did it not matter—was hiring adjuncts simply a matter of filling sections and putting people on a payroll?

Nothing in my graduate experience predicted that I would find objectionable the hiring of many nontenured instructors. In my early graduate studies (an M.A. program in English at Syracuse University), I worked for a while as a part-time administrative assistant in the offices of an instructional-development project on campus. A semester later, I was hired as a TA in Syracuse's composition program, and after teaching for a year, I finished my M.A. degree by assisting the director of that program and teaching a reduced load. My work as a composition TA and assistant to the director of composition continued for the next five years at Indiana University as I completed my second M.A. and Ph.D. During summers, I picked up extra, mostly academic work, and was never without a job. My wife, a medical technologist, worked full-time during almost all of my graduate education, and her salary, though modest, provided the bulk of our income. Although we struggled financially, we were really broke only once, for a month or two, but managed to get by with borrowed funds.

During this time, I looked ahead to the job market with great trepidation. I knew that finding a good academic position would be very hard, and each year my senior graduate student colleagues made that fact plainer to me as they reported on their own job searches. I knew that my own area of composition studies was burgeoning, and that there would be more jobs for me than for my peers in highly competitive literary areas. Still, I began to seek any way I could to enhance my credentials, driving hours to give papers at small, regional conferences; teaching and tutoring in every venue I could find; writing and rewriting essays for publication in regional and national journals; seeking any and every opportunity I could to be involved in something related to my field. What I hoped for eventually was a job. Tenure was not foremost in my mind early in my graduate program, but my advisors soon convinced me that I should seek only tenure-track positions. In such a position, with hard work, I could secure life-long employment.

My job search in the last year of my doctoral program yielded over two dozen interviews and several strong offers. I accepted

an entry-level, tenure-track position as a composition specialist at the University of Minnesota, my first and, at this writing, only job after completing my Ph.D. Although I was involved immediately in the administration of the composition program, issues of employment did not really concern me until after I simultaneously earned early tenure and became director of composition in 1988. My confidence describing and defending my philosophy of employment to the dean and associate deans of my college came in part from the tenure system. They could think me a poor administrator, or force me to go against my own beliefs in my hiring practices, or even replace me with another writing program administrator who would enact their wishes, but they could not fire me for my views. Ironically, this protection was one reason why I was opposed to hiring full-time adjuncts: I knew that it would create inequities of involvement, speech, and representation between groups of people who were expected to teach the same courses equally well.

When the suggestion to hire adjuncts first arose, I had served as a member and then as co-chair of the CCCC Committee on Professional Standards for the Teaching of Writing. This committee, with strong representation from part-time teachers, was continuing to grapple with employment issues on the heels of the “Statement,” the CCCC document outlining principles and standards for the postsecondary teaching of writing. I had read much of the literature surrounding this document, and had talked to many administrators as well as to part-time, adjunct, and nontenured teachers of writing. What struck me most about the arguments in the field was the relationship between the desire for disciplinary respect and the desperation I sensed in the lives of many part-time and nontenured teachers. The more composition leaders urged the “elimination” of itinerant workers for the sake of establishing disciplinary legitimacy and “cleaning up” the teaching of writing, the more worried some part-timers became. At the same time, many composition directors knew that no matter how hard they tried to eliminate part-time and adjunct instruction on their campuses, their administrations would win the day. Leaders of coalitions representing part-time and nontenured instructors, in contrast, critiqued not their own existence but their lack of fair treatment.

My colleagues in composition understood the problem well. Literature professors I consulted at Minnesota, however, often saw the issue in terms of economic models of supply and demand, or even framed it in the ideology of social Darwinism. If there were qualified candidates willing, eager, even desperate to accept nontenured jobs, why not take advantage of them? This argument troubled me. I knew of half a dozen highly qualified people who would be happy for such a position. For most of them, work, any work, was better than nothing. Shut doors represented a more chilling fear than even the lousiest of teaching jobs.

Jewell: I'm as troubled as you are by these supply-and-demand and social Darwinism arguments that many administrators and tenured faculty members use to justify the poor working conditions of adjunct faculty. I find such arguments about as valid as when they are used by third-world police states to justify the economic enslavement of children, women, and the poor, and when such arguments are used to justify no limits for the sale of drugs, sex, weapons of war, or for that matter, human beings. Our social contract in this country requires not just economic worth, but also ethical fairness.

But even if we use arguments of supply and demand or social evolution, how is economic and social worth really to be calculated? I know of one excellent part-timer who, during an economic crunch at his college, couldn't pick up enough part-time work to survive, so he became a prison guard to feed his family; another who, after winning a coveted best-teacher award given by the student body of a college and praise from a majority of people in his department, was forced out of his college by an insistent tenured teacher who disliked him. He turned to work in construction. I know yet another teacher who, when she followed the suggestion of an administrator to develop a new advanced course, so upset the more traditional members of her department that she was given the choice in the following year of teaching developmental courses or none at all. The pay of another teacher I knew was so low that in the summers he received unemployment compensation.

How are these teachers and thousands like them serving our country's best interests economically when they do not have the protections, pay, or benefits granted to the great majority of people in business and the academic world who have similar or less edu-

cation and skills? In fact, my experience and observation of part-time workers in academia has shown me that on average, part-timers who are regularly rehired generally work as hard and long per class, offer as many teaching innovations, and create results as good as do tenured teachers.

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Anson: When faculty argue the supply-and-demand view of academic labor, they open the door to precisely the sorts of inequities you describe. How is it possible for a tenured faculty member to get a hard-working adjunct instructor fired? Such stories are common, of course, even within groups of tenured and tenure-track faculty, but it's much more difficult for a single person to wreak political or personal vengeance when there is equal status within the group. Part-timers who need to moonlight as prison guards are not being given the sort of regular appointments, adequate pay, and job security, in one institution, that I believe teaching in higher education requires. It's because tenured faculty and administrators exploit the desperation of some un(der)-employed teachers that you and I have heard so many unsettling stories. Just because there exists a ready-made labor force of writing instructors doesn't mean they should be exploited, especially if that exploitation is designed to advantage those in power by lessening their own responsibilities.

Part of my resistance also owes, I think, to various experiences I had in my high school and college years in which I either witnessed or directly experienced the atrocious treatment of workers in factories and on construction sites where I often held temporary positions. My resentment of exploitative employers and supervisors had a profound effect on the development of my attitudes toward fair treatment on the job. Forms of oppression and exploitation exist in all work situations, at all levels, across all professions. When the means are possible for a business or institution to improve the working conditions of its employees, there are few excuses for not doing so. Not many administrators in higher education will admit to violating OSHA standards, discriminating against minority employees, or riding herd on workers to the point of destroying their morale. But more subtle inequities can be found in dozens of college and university lit-

eracy programs across the country—inequities of course assignments, scheduling, and sensitivity to personal situations; inequities of representation in decisions about class size or workload; pay inequities between people doing the same jobs with the same expectations; inequities in access to equipment, phones, office space, lounges, computer labs, and libraries; inequities in performance assessment; inequities in the advanced scheduling of course assignments; and inequities in curricular and pedagogical freedom. Any employer—in a warehouse, a manufacturing firm, a country club, or a composition program—has a responsibility to treat employees fairly and equally.

As the pressure to hire nontenured teachers increased at Minnesota, I knew we were fighting a losing battle. The foreign languages had, from the dean's perspective, successfully hired dozens of "teaching specialists" (a euphemism for full-time, nontenured instructors assigned by the term or year to many courses). Resistance had now become futile.

I realized that once we had made the first hire of an adjunct, we would be opening a door we might never be able to close. The practice of hiring particular classes of employees does not change easily, but the specific treatment of the class might vary considerably over the years. How could we avoid exploiting teachers by hiring them at low pay and expecting them to teach brilliantly in multiple sections of composition day after day? How could we bring them into the management of our program in ways that would help them to feel part of our enterprise when so much was at risk for them? What would stop us from hiring and firing such teachers by the term just because they gave us a new kind of flexibility in course scheduling? How could we avoid a system in which adjuncts were more "accountable," in terms of performance assessment, than TAs, whose transgressions were almost always understood developmentally and excused?

In the spring of 1996, I decided to work out a plan for exploring the adjunct question on a "pilot" basis. My plan allowed for the hiring of two full-time, nontenured instructors who would be assigned the equivalent of eight sections of composition per year on the quarter system. But at least two of these sections would be released in exchange for collaborative involvement in administration and the training of TAs. There would also be a

special fund set up exclusively for the continued professionalization of the two adjuncts. They would have access to (and be strongly encouraged to use) money to give papers at regional or national conferences. They would receive an entire year's teaching schedule all at once, highly responsive to their preferences, before the fall quarter. They would be eligible for the program's teaching award, which I had established several years before. They would have full, year-round medical and dental benefits with university-supported extensions to their families. They would have special office space and access to phones, faxes, copy machines, and other supplies. They would be given full representation on our core staff, the administrative governing unit within the program. They would receive a contract for at least three years, preferably five, subject to a standard year-end assessment of their accomplishments and teaching. And finally, they would have quarterly meetings with me to discuss their work and their progress toward a permanent, tenure-track position at another institution (my department hadn't hired any tenure-track faculty in composition in almost a decade, a fact that persists even now, after the recent loss of two of four faculty who claim composition as a specialty). While we knew that in this model, we would be investing a lot of time and expense in people we were only helping to move into better jobs, it was the only really responsible way I could imagine to do what we were being asked.

Jewell: The plan you developed for the hiring of full-time adjuncts is admirable, and some of it (not all) has come to pass. Unfortunately, as you note, you didn't have the chance to enact it. After the shift in leadership in 1996, twelve full-time, annually renewable specialists were hired. At this writing eight new part-time specialists and lecturers also have been hired on quarterly contracts, and all eight of them have been told (five of them only after they started their jobs) that there would be no work for them next year. I don't blame the current administrator, who is making every effort to give annual contracts to all adjuncts who request them; rather, I do blame a system of higher education in which people's lives are so little valued.

Security exists only as long as does my job. How long will I last? How innovative or political dare I be? And why must I re-

ceive such a low salary with increases amounting to no more than adjustments for inflation each year, no matter how wonderful a teacher I may be, how much I contribute to my profession in publication and presentation, or how much credit I bring to my university? For too many years when I was on quarter-to-quarter contracts, I felt panic every three months, wondering if I would have enough work to survive a bit longer as a teacher. About once a year on average some administrator at one of my part-time locations would make a mistake that would significantly change my income by forgetting to complete paperwork for it, or worst of all, forgetting to tell me of a canceled assignment in time for me to find a replacement for it somewhere else. Apologies, much less replacement work, were rare.

Now that I have an annually renewable contract and am married to a tenured teacher, I feel almost expansive in my relative security. But I see my old panic, fear, courage, and will to teach reflected in the faces of part-timers and friends around me who still live a hand-to-mouth existence. All of us are impoverished by the demeaning manner in which we treat these fellow teachers. Solutions to these problems exist. How many more decades must we wait before they are adopted?

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Anson: I was dismayed when the new composition administration, populated by literary scholars in the English department, hired a dozen education specialists and then, on their heels, eight individuals in an even more vulnerable category of instructors (teaching specialists and lecturers) who are being hired and fired by the term. While you don't blame the current administrator (your boss), he is no more at the mercy of the higher administration than I was—and is willing to enact and tolerate what it suggests. You and the other education specialists are more involved in running the program than any faculty in the English department, and you do this alongside heavy teaching loads. In a way, that involvement has given you a special sense of responsibility, and has built a community from your ranks, that makes your overall employment at the University seem bearable, perhaps even desirable. But your uneasy security comes from a system in which the tenured literature faculty deliberately abrogate their responsibility to the program by giving you the administrative and training work that they ought to be doing. In so doing, they also shift some of the accountability from themselves and place you at greater risk than if you were only teaching classes.

This “distancing” of the tenured administrators from the inner workings of the program represents, for me, an especially dangerous move. Good writing programs not only treat all their employees with fairness and respect but also create a climate in which people of all ranks and employment categories work together in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration, sensitive to each other’s needs and working for each other’s good, for the good of the program, and for the good of the students it serves.

For me, the unresolved tension in our stories comes from knowing that you have found a position in which you feel some degree of security, but also knowing that had I continued as director, you might not be working for us at all. Thanks to the hiring concessions of the English department, you now have what you consider to be as decent a position as you’ve found in the last two decades. The faculty administrators who hired you also have the knowledge that, during a budget squeeze, you are expendable so that they can be guaranteed lifelong employment yet never teach more courses per year than they can count on one hand.

The merger of our once-independent composition program into the English department led to many changes in employment practices, not the least of which was the sudden hiring of many contingent faculty in at least two new ranks. The department also chose to keep me as uninvolved as possible in its new composition wing, a move that at first affected me strongly in light of what I considered to be a host of questionable practices in employment, teacher development and assessment, and curricular management. The experience, however, has left me realizing that reform will not occur if we rely on individuals to do the right thing in writing programs. In the past two or three years, several writing programs around the country have experienced administrative takeovers, political coups, and unprincipled mergers resulting in steps backward in the struggle for better working conditions for writing teachers. The writing program administrators on these campuses, even with the backing of many colleagues, were not able to prevent the worst from happening to, or in, their own programs. New technologies that support distance education and telecommuting also pose a major threat to

the status and legitimacy of composition instruction as a whole, as I have argued elsewhere (“Distant Voices”). Much of this cost-saving technologizing of writing instruction is being urged and sponsored by higher administrations, potentially turning the industry of composition into a kind of piecemeal enterprise with a labor force of exploited reader-responders paid by the hour.

I now believe that moving the mountain will require major organizational intervention. In a contribution to a published symposium on the 1991 “Progress Report from the CCCC Committee on Professional Standards,” Greta Gaard and I argued that reform in composition employment should ideally begin locally; “most major reforms in higher education,” we wrote, “succeed contingently, directed in diverse ways at different institutions where they are put into motion” (172). We ended our essay on a note of optimism: “At Minnesota, where the [CCCC] Committee’s involvement may be our next step, our hopes are high” (175).

Today, my hopes are still high for reform; but my convictions about local, grassroots efforts have given way to skepticism from seeing the efforts of principled but vulnerable units get thwarted by powerful institutional structures and hierarchies. Political and economic realities in higher education—cutting costs, taking a “free enterprise” approach to the labor force, and creating two- or multi-tiered instructional staffs based on missions of teaching and scholarship—will no doubt continue to loom above the field of composition. However, if many major organizations can join forces and collectively create and endorse strong positions on the principles of part-time and nontenured employees, administrations would be more likely to avoid the publicity and scandal that major deviations from these positions might yield. Accrediting boards and agencies, for their part, could begin by endorsing such principles as reflecting conditions of programmatic, departmental, or collegiate strength.

I am not alone in my belief that employment reform will best be accomplished through strong, national-level lobbying, the involvement of major national organizations, and perhaps even the threat of institutional censure. In the “Statement from the Conference on the Growing Use of Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty,” published in the January–February issue of *Academe*, representatives of ten major higher-education organizations propose that

a coalition be formed to include universities and professional, scholarly, and higher-education associations. Among almost a dozen suggested actions, that coalition should formulate statements of good employment practices that could be endorsed and acted upon by high-level government bodies; define the appropriate ratio between full- and part-time faculty appointments; “and collaborate with accrediting associations to secure the implementation of good practices regarding the use of part-time and adjunct faculty appointments *and the exercise of enforcement mechanisms where such practices do not occur*” (59; emphasis added). Far from being draconian measures insensitive to our local contexts, these mechanisms will pressure administrators and faculty leaders to find solutions to financial, curricular, and pedagogical problems that lead them to take advantage of teachers for whom the urgency of employment makes them easy targets for exploitation and oppression.

Jewell: It is said that a society can be judged by how it treats the least of its members. Nontenured teachers are the least in the higher education community. Ultimately the use of tenure or similar job security is the only way that administrations, unions, and tenure-accruing faculty will accept their non-tenure-track colleagues as equal, valued, and empowered. Tenuring the untenured—creating a system of steps leading to virtual or real tenure for all teachers who serve their students, colleagues, and schools responsibly and intelligently—would work in the best interests of teaching and learning. It would also serve as an example of ethical responsibility toward individuals from which other professions might learn. We should, in short, find specific methods of moving those who have earned it from the shadow of the teaching profession into the sunlight.

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Anson: The system of tenure itself almost daily endures greater public scrutiny and uninformed criticism from those who believe no job should come with a guarantee of lifelong employment. In this milieu, the increasing replacement of tenured professors with part-time and contingent faculty will continue to undermine all of higher education. Providing a system of guaranteed employment for the latter (based, as is tenure, on proven excellence in teaching

and service to the institution), and ensuring them equality in pay, benefits, representation, and material support, will go a long way toward reversing what has become a dangerous trend.

That trend has its origins, however, in practices that have led to an overabundance of qualified individuals who encourage institutions to profit from their eagerness for employment. Just as we work toward equity for all teachers, we also need to be more responsible stewards of our graduate programs, producing new faculty in proportion to the opportunities and need for them as tenure-track hires. While there will always be teachers who do not want full-time employment, and while such teachers can provide excellent instruction and valuable support to the institutions that hire them, the quality of our colleges and universities depends crucially on full-time, tenure-track faculty whose time, commitment, involvement, and expertise are focused on their single place of work. At the same time, public respect for tenure, and for the faculty it supports, must be earned. Across higher education, we need to place much greater emphasis on excellence in teaching, perhaps even establishing programs that certify faculty as teachers (thereby ridding ourselves of the great irony that, unlike pilots, surgeons, attorneys, or tax consultants, professors need no certification or even prior experience to do what they are mostly hired to do: teach students). This stronger emphasis on teaching, especially in research institutions, will most certainly result in a rebalancing of work priorities, but the result will be a less easy division between scholarship and pedagogy, the latter now too often relegated to teachers who live and work in the shadows of our colleges and universities.

## Notes

1. NTTRs were created in Minnesota in the 1970s and 1980s, when the state university teachers' union developed a strong protective system for non-tenure-track teachers. NTTRs have permanent, annually renewable positions. Although the positions are usually full-time, they carry a guarantee of at least three-fourths time and full benefits. NTTRs, most of whom do not have doctorates, may rise, after a requisite number of years and some publication, from instructor to assistant and associate professor status, and they may be granted sabbaticals. In times of cut-backs, NTTRs are released before tenure-track teachers; otherwise, they enjoy the full benefits of tenure.

2. In the 1980s, the union negotiated successfully a simple but powerful series of stepping-stones that charted a path from part-time temporary to part-time tenured, to full-time positions. Unfortunately for part-timers, the state community college system dismantled much of this structure. Since then, part-timers' job security and to some extent their pay have been determined by individual colleges. The union has been supportive of part-timers but unable to offer them a complete umbrella of protection.

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