

## CHAPTER 9

# THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF PAST SUCCESS: MEMORY, NARRATIVE, AND THE DYNAMICS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

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Threads: Organizing Within and Across Ranks; Local Changes to Workload, Pay, and Material Conditions; Protecting Gains, Telling Cautionary Tales

Even a cursory look at my institution—the University of Colorado at Boulder—might suggest that the conditions of full-time instructors have been reasonably good. We have had for some twenty years renewable multiyear appointments, full benefits, and a reasonable course load to ensure effective teaching. Our free-standing Program for Writing and Rhetoric, among other units, has benefited from this environment. To be sure, the modest salaries of instructors, most with Ph.D.s, make it a tough go in expensive Boulder, Colorado. Nevertheless, given working conditions on the larger national landscape, our campus has fared better than many.

Until now. This chapter examines a moment of institutional change when many of these gains are perceived to be at risk. A recently arrived dean in his first year leading the College of Arts and Sciences proposed a controversial new workload and pay schedule for full-time instructors. And therein lies a tale that ties together four threads—a tale about faculty governance and administrative power, about the fragile quality of institutional memory, about narratives and counter-narratives of change, all set against the backdrop of changes in key personnel. This is a tale about the uncertain future of past success.

Prior discussions of contingent labor in the academy have focused, quite understandably, on calls for improved conditions to address the worst of practices. Central to this effort are broad and now classic studies of the changing academic workforce in the context of the neoliberal university (Bousquet; Bousquet et al.; Schell). Likewise, efforts to characterize the non-tenure-track workforce

have led to a number of important reports by key professional organizations (MLA, ADE, AERA, and AAUP) and special issues of disciplinary journals. And more recently, studies have turned to professional identities and fine-grained examinations of non-tenure-track faculty work (Bartholomae, Levin and Shaker, Penrose, and Lamos).

My contribution to the discussion addresses a somewhat different and often neglected issue: what happens when gains are made, and then risk being undone? Insights on this dilemma are no less important, and may reveal dynamics of institutional change bearing on institutional memory and competing narratives that may not become evident in situations where the focus lies on making important initial improvements to labor conditions.

## **FACULTY GOVERNANCE AND THE INSTRUCTORS' BILL OF RIGHTS**

Our campus owes its generally favorable environment for full-time instructors to an administrative and faculty-governance partnership that goes back over twenty years. In 1993, an activist group of both tenured professors and non-tenure-track faculty brought a "Motion of Intent," informally known as the "Instructors' Bill of Rights," before the Boulder Faculty Assembly, our campus-wide faculty governance group. The motion addressed the inability of part-time lecturers, hired by the semester yet working on campus for many years, to enter the ranks of full-time instructors. Working in conjunction with the then dean of Arts and Sciences (the largest campus college and home to most contingent faculty), the Boulder Faculty Assembly approved this motion by a wide margin. In 1999, the "Instructors' Bill of Rights," or "IBOR," as it is known on campus, received official approval by campus administration.<sup>1</sup>

Although the working conditions for part-time lecturers generally surpassed those at neighboring institutions, the Boulder Faculty Assembly nevertheless recognized that a professionalized teaching faculty at a research institution was in everyone's interest. Discussion about the Instructors' Bill of Rights provided a forum for considering the changing labor landscape in higher education, and the emergence of full-time but non-tenure-track faculty as a key element in the delivery of our institution's undergraduate education. Four decades ago or so,

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1 Although still part of our institution's historical memory, the formal document of the Instructors' Bill of Rights as approved by the Boulder Faculty Assembly in 1993 has disappeared some years ago from our institution's website. What remains is a 1999 document, approved by campus central administration and vetted by the campus legal office, which reflects many of the provisions of IBOR, but weakens the force of the original document: [colorado.edu/bfa/sites/default/files/attached-files/Instructor%20Bill%20of%20Rights.pdf](http://colorado.edu/bfa/sites/default/files/attached-files/Instructor%20Bill%20of%20Rights.pdf)

the faculty workforce on our campus was predominantly tenured or tenure-track (generally teaching a 2/2 load), and undergraduate classroom teaching was an integral part of their duties. Indeed, many tenured or tenure-track faculty focused wholly or in large measure on classroom teaching. Instructor-rank faculty were far fewer in number, and the positions were seen in temporary terms, or as way stations to tenure-track appointments elsewhere. Times have changed, at CU-Boulder as they have nationally. “Part-time” lecturers were laboring semester after semester teaching the equivalent of a full-time (3/3 or 4/4) load but with minimal job security, and little prospect for advancement into more stable positions. And full-time instructors (generally teaching 3/3 load) themselves were often seen as temporary workers, despite what is often a career commitment to the institution. Not only has our campus become far more reliant on instructors and senior instructors, faculty in those positions now often make career-long contributions to the campus that have deep and ongoing relevance to its mission.

This faculty-governance discussion yielded in the early 1990s the Instructors’ Bill of Rights, which provided for the following:

- Lecturers working for three years at 50 percent appointments or greater should be appointed as full-time instructors.
- Instructors should have multi-year, presumptively renewable appointments, ranging from two to four years, with three years being the default term.
- The typical workload for instructors was defined as three courses per semester (3/3 for the academic year), with a merit evaluation ratio of 75 percent teaching and 25 percent service. (Tenure-stream faculty generally teach a 2/2 load, with merit evaluations of 40 percent research, 40 percent teaching, and 20 percent service.)
- The floor for starting salaries for full-time instructors was set, at the time, at \$30K (instructors are merit-pool eligible).
- After seven years in rank, instructors would be eligible for promotion to senior instructor.
- Senior instructors are eligible for a semester of reduced teaching load after every seven years of full-time teaching for purposes of pedagogical and curricular research.

The provisions were impressive at the time, and in some respects still provide a benchmark to which many peer institutions would aspire.

Although forward looking in themselves, the provisions did not come with the budgetary resources to fully enact them. For example, an individual’s promotion from lecturer to instructor was by no means assured. An academic unit would

need to approve of the shift, and increasingly over the years had to come up with funds on its own to offset the higher salary. Over the years, this key provision was rarely acted on. Likewise, the promotion from instructor to senior instructor was initially designed to offer a \$2,000-\$3,000 bump in base salary, but, again, over the years that financial commitment atrophied, and now there is no increased salary, despite increased duties and higher expectations for reappointment.

On the other hand, the prospect of multi-year, renewable appointments changed the landscape for instructors on our campus. Although technically defined as “letters of agreement” (as Colorado is an “at-will” state in terms of labor law, and until just recently was not allowed to offer multi-year contracts), these appointments were honored by our administration: to its credit, at no time has the administration broken a letter of agreement in the middle of an appointment term. The 3/3 load ensured close attention to instructional quality, and the considerable service commitment became, over time, essential to many of our campus’s initiatives and the operation of many units, among them the Program for Writing and Rhetoric. Were it not for instructor service, residential academic programs in the residence halls and service-learning initiatives would not have been possible. Indeed, given that instructor appointments did not require (nor did they explicitly reward) research, service became the contractual space that permitted professional development, conference presentations, grant writing, and publishing. Thanks to this service component, instructors gained influence with administrators and began playing an active role in campus-wide faculty governance. Even the reduced teaching load every seven years was largely honored (the term “sabbatical” was eschewed). In a competitive process, some senior instructors were able to receive the opportunity to refresh their teaching and undertake curricular initiatives.

Despite the impressive public face of the Instructors’ Bill of Rights, its provisions have been unevenly implemented and sometimes ignored over the last two decades. Although instructor positions themselves were improved, the integration of instructors into departmental cultures continues to be an unfinished project. Nevertheless, this Instructors’ Bill of Rights has provided an ethical benchmark against which to measure the conditions of contingent faculty. Administrative power has been in some sense constrained by a shared willingness to observe—or at least give lip service to—this precedent-setting effort, accomplished through a partnership between faculty governance and campus administration.

## **A FRAGILE INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY**

The Instructors’ Bill of Rights was protected in good measure by a near constant effort to keep this document alive in our institution’s cultural memory. Budget

crises and occasional administrative indifference frequently set this memory at risk, but it was preserved by a cadre of activist instructors and tenured faculty who used institutions of faculty governance to promote conversation and action. Instructors themselves came to play increasingly prominent roles in the Boulder Faculty Assembly. They comprise roughly twenty percent of the assembly's membership (elected in open competition with tenure-stream faculty), and several instructors chair standing BFA committees. Instructors regularly win campus-wide BFA awards for both teaching and leadership/service.

Roughly a decade ago, the actual working conditions of contingent faculty had deteriorated through inattention to some provisions of the Instructors' Bill of Rights and a lack of willingness to address the integration of full-time instructors into the culture of the institution. In many units, instructors still had no voting rights and could not even attend department faculty meetings. Through several controversial non-reappointment decisions, issues of academic freedom for instructors became a topic of concern. Discussion among some instructors turned to possible unionization, the campus chapter of AAUP took up instructor issues, and efforts began to highlight the need for a parallel tenure track for teaching faculty. Although the campus administration had recognized the Boulder Faculty Assembly resolution to create the Instructors' Bill of Rights and its various provisions, and had responded to implement many of those provisions, the administration itself never fully enforced it as official campus policy. Over time, the Instructors' Bill of Rights even disappeared from the campus website, although it lived on deep in the archives of the Boulder Faculty Assembly. Institutional memory becomes fragile indeed when such a key document becomes, literally, invisible.

Even as concerns mounted among instructors, the place of the Instructors' Bill of Rights in institutional memory still provided not just solace but also opportunities for engaged action. At the behest of instructors and a number of concerned tenured faculty, the Boulder Faculty Assembly formed a Task Force in academic year 2007-08 to address a range of instructor issues. These issues included salary, grievance procedures, status within units, the need to maintain currency in the field, and the possibility of tenure for instructors through the creation of a tenured teaching track. The Task Force commissioned a survey of instructors and then, having to work quickly, issued a brief five-page report. The recommendations that came out of this Task Force largely endorsed the then fifteen-year-old Instructors' Bill of Rights and added recommendations to improve the working conditions of instructors. The Task Force proposed that the salary floor for instructors be raised from \$30K to \$40K, a welcome move that directly benefitted some instructors but also created salary compression issues among instructor ranks, generally reasserted the academic freedom of instructors, and

pointed out the unequal treatment of instructors across units, with regard to participation in unit faculty governance and even such things as office space. The administration responded positively to some of the recommendations, among them raising the salary floor to \$40K. And it agreed in principle with other recommendations, but not, notably, with the creation of parallel tenure track for teaching faculty. Although the Task Force brought renewed attention to the plight of instructors, and activated our institution's memory of and commitment to the Instructors' Bill of Rights, the tangible outcomes of the Task Force, apart from salary, were negligible. The integration of full-time instructors into the faculty culture of our institution remained a problem.

As a barometer of the ongoing issues facing instructors, and the limited success of the 2007-08 Task Force, the same Boulder Faculty Assembly felt the strong need to address the issue once again, and in September 2009 created a high-profile, campus-wide ad-hoc committee whose charge was to create a major report, with pragmatic recommendations that could address the status of instructors on campus. Asked to chair this committee, I was aware of a reservoir of good will toward instructors from some prominent tenured faculty and also from some in administration, but also quite cognizant of the pushback from some tenured faculty worried about the growing power and numbers of instructors and, more generally, the institutional inertia that was proving to be a very considerable impediment to change. In March 2010 our committee issued a major forty-page report, whose recommendations were approved by a wide margin in an April 2010 vote of the Boulder Faculty Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

Building on the Instructors' Bill of Rights and the work of the 2007-08 Task Force, our committee generated eighteen specific recommendations. Seven recommendations concerned the clarification and enforcement of current policy, ten additional recommendations addressed contractual issues in employment and career management, and a final recommendation urged the exploration of a parallel tenure track for teaching faculty (a system-level change which would involve the several campuses of our university and require the approval of the Regents). That eighteenth and final recommendation has never been acted on.

This major faculty governance initiative to improve the status of instructors has had a positive impact in many respects. Appointment and reappointment processes for instructors have been regularized, and unit by-laws are being reviewed to determine the extent of instructor participation in unit-level faculty

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2 The full report of the 2009-10 BFA committee can be found at: [colorado.edu/bfa/sites/default/files/attached-files/bfainstr\\_finalreport\\_040210.pdf](http://colorado.edu/bfa/sites/default/files/attached-files/bfainstr_finalreport_040210.pdf)

The motion to approve the report's recommendations, which carried by a wide margin, can be found at: [www.colorado.edu/bfa/sites/default/files/attached-files/bfa-x-m-022210\\_endorse\\_recommendations\\_of\\_the\\_ad-hoc\\_cmte\\_on\\_instructor\\_status.pdf](http://www.colorado.edu/bfa/sites/default/files/attached-files/bfa-x-m-022210_endorse_recommendations_of_the_ad-hoc_cmte_on_instructor_status.pdf)

governance. The Boulder Faculty Assembly also realized that sporadic efforts—such as task forces and ad-hoc committees—were insufficient, and therefore created in fall 2011 a standing committee dedicated to Instructor-Track Faculty Affairs. This committee is comprised half of instructors and half of tenured professors, and includes several prominent senior faculty on campus, including a physics professor who won the 2013 national “Professor of the Year” award. Moreover, this Boulder campus report spurred the Denver and Colorado Springs campuses of the University of Colorado to undertake initiatives that would improve the lot of their own instructors. If nothing else, the report and its recommendations contributed to an institutional memory about instructors, their working conditions, and their positive contributions to the campus. But concrete progress on many other fronts still leaves much to be desired. Indeed, looking back on this report from a distance of roughly six years, I am troubled by how much has remained unchanged, and how perceived gains can quite easily be set at risk.

## NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF CHANGE

Cultivated and preserved through institutional memory, these modest gains in the professional working conditions of full-time instructors represent a narrative whose broad arc, stumbles apart, is one of positive change. Yet memory is fragile, commitment can waiver, and budget crises can loom large.

In spring 2010, just as our campus-wide Boulder Faculty Assembly committee was nearing the completion of its report and amidst budget crises brought on by the Great Recession, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences proposed changes in instructor workload and pay. For over fifteen years, thanks to the Instructors’ Bill of Rights, the default workload and salary arrangement for instructors in the College of Arts and Sciences was a 3/3 teaching load, a 75/25 percent teaching/service merit evaluation ratio, and what had become a starting salary of \$40K. The dean of the College of Arts and Sciences was proposing a 4/4 teaching load, a 95/5 percent merit evaluation ratio for teaching and service, and a starting salary of \$42K. This proposal for a (largely) uncompensated workload increase was addressed in the 2010 Boulder Faculty Assembly report, and a key recommendation, approved by the Assembly, argued quite strongly against uncompensated workload increases. The dean’s proposal has proven to be a source of considerable contention since 2010.

With this proposed workload increase, two narratives collided. The first narrative speaks to the improving conditions of instructors and the growing awareness on campus of their contributions to undergraduate education. If this first narrative is aspirational in nature, the second narrative is grounded in fear. The

second narrative speaks to grim budget cuts brought on by the Great Recession and the perceived need to make those cuts at the expense of instructors. In the perception of some tenured and tenure-track faculty, those instructors, after all, were getting a bit uppity, and didn't know their place. The proposed workload increase was an effort to wring more productivity out of instructors, while leaving tenure-stream faculty workload issues largely untouched. The sad, indeed tragic, outcome of this collision in institutional narratives is the perception, voiced by some faculty in a variety of venues, that any progress in the working conditions of instructors necessarily comes at the expense of other faculty and larger institutional well-being. Indeed, one can make quite the opposite argument: improved conditions for instructors contribute to overall institutional success, especially with regard to undergraduate education and student retention. But thanks to a budget crisis that had departments circle the wagons to protect their own interests, one narrative was met by a counter-narrative.

The proposed workload increase became the lightning rod for all discussions related to instructors, and as a consequence, a number of initiatives that would have improved instructors' working conditions and lives were left unaddressed. Most of these initiatives would involve no expense whatsoever. For example, instructors brought to the attention of the Boulder Faculty Assembly and various administrators the extent to which instructors could not participate in the intellectual and faculty lives of their departments and programs. Some instructors had no voting rights whatsoever in their units, and could not attend faculty meetings, despite being able to vote in and for the campus-wide Boulder Faculty Assembly. In one department, nine instructors had to share amongst themselves one vote in department meetings, rendering these instructors as 1/9 of a faculty member. In spring 2013, the Boulder Faculty Assembly passed, by an overwhelming margin, a resolution that established consistent minimum voting rights in departments and programs on campus. Yet the resolution met with no interest from campus administrators, who fear treading on departmental prerogatives to craft their own bylaws. Although several departments did revise their bylaws in response to this resolution, the response of nearly every department chair and dean was an apathetic shrug. (The BFA instructor committee is currently reviewing all unit bylaws on campus, in the hope of shedding the light of day on the worst practices.) But the controversial instructor workload proposal had taken all available oxygen out of the room, leaving little possibility for other initiatives, even those that had no financial expense attached to them.

For several years, there was sufficient pushback from faculty governance groups, well placed tenured faculty, and some department chairs that this proposed uncompensated workload increase was tabled and never fully implemented. Many regarded it as ill-conceived. The cost savings were modest at best,



but the loss of service commitments from instructors meant that many key campus initiatives would become unviable. These initiatives included residential academic programs in the residence halls and service-learning programs, all of which were central to the campus's very own "2030 Strategic Plan." Many faculty pointed out that key campus initiatives and many core departmental functions could not be implemented or performed were it not for the service of instructors. Moreover, the workload proposal would turn full-time instructors into a more costly equivalent of overworked part-time lecturers.

Such arguments kept the proposed workload increases at bay—for a while. Sheer fatigue in fighting such battles can set in. What's more, in a battle of contending narratives, instructors literally did not have the voice to articulate their narrative; the dean of Arts and Sciences, the largest college on campus, had by comparison a megaphone. Just months before his departure after ten years in his administrative office, the dean announced, virtually by fiat (and with the apparent acquiescence of upper administration), that the plan he had proposed several years earlier was now policy. The departing dean of Arts and Sciences had been bedeviled by budget deficits for several years, and saw this new policy as a way to improve his legacy and to provide the incoming dean with something closer to a balanced budget.

## **NEW LEADERSHIP AND THE CHALLENGES OF AGENCY**

In summer 2012 the new dean of Arts and Sciences took office (having previously served as an associate dean at a major public research institution in the Midwest), only to find on his desk a policy on instructor workloads that many agreed didn't make sense. Even campus administrators urged him to modify it, among them vice provosts. Nevertheless, during his first year in office instructor appointments were being written in conformity with this new workload policy. Faculty on campus, and most especially instructors, awaited signs of what kind of leader the new dean would become. And on the matter of instructor teaching loads, concern was palpable.

Despite being overwhelmed, I am sure, by his new duties and the need to learn about a new institution, the dean set about addressing the controversial instructor workload policy that the prior dean had left in his lap. In putting forward a draft plan for discussion, the new dean saw himself as responding to and improving the former dean's plan. Although the new dean maintained the 4/4 course load in the plan he inherited, he did acknowledge that some "instructionally related activities" might be able to count as equivalent to a course. He likewise modified the merit evaluation ratio from 95 percent teaching/5 percent service to 85/15 percent. He raised the starting salary for the 4/4 teaching load

from \$42K to \$48K. His initial plan also sought to eliminate teaching overloads altogether, as the new dean preferred to have the shadow economy of course overloads become part of ongoing full time appointments.

Although supported in some quarters, the plan generated considerable criticism and, most especially, confusion. Would the new plan go into effect mid-appointment? Would it apply to new hires only, or to all instructors at the point of their reappointment? Would those instructors earning above \$48K be teaching more courses without being compensated, or if compensated, what would that compensation be? What, exactly, might count as an “instructionally related activity”? As instructors teach more, who would pick up the service duties, upon which tenure-stream faculty and the institution as a whole depend? And how does the policy requiring a 4/4 teaching load fit with a separate policy limiting teaching on overload to a total course load of four courses per semester? These may seem operational details that could be worked out or made clear, but communication on the draft plan was quite poor. Months went by once the plan was verbally announced without a full, public draft. The dean discussed the plan with tenured faculty, but refused for months to meet with the Boulder Faculty Assembly standing committee on instructors. It would be a “conflict of interest,” said the dean, if instructors were to “negotiate on terms related to their own appointment.” Instructors replied that, by that logic, shared faculty governance itself would become impossible, as tenure-stream faculty routinely interact with administrators on a range of matters dealing with the nature and structure of faculty appointments and faculty work. Rumor circulated, and suspicion was rampant.

But operational details apart, most instructors and a considerable number of tenure-stream faculty were concerned with the plan on philosophical and pedagogical grounds. For twenty years, the campus had had a commitment to the Instructors’ Bill of Rights, which had at its center a 3/3 teaching load and robust service, which made it possible for instructors to contribute to unit and campus initiatives and maintain currency in the field. Although research was explicitly not part of instructor expectations, many instructors had developed serious scholarly, curricular, and pedagogical projects and had national reputations. The dean’s plan overturned this twenty-year commitment. Moreover, many criticized the dean’s plan as making an all too facile and traditional distinction between teaching and service, and as such did not recognize how teaching and service come together in co-curricular activities, civic engagement and service learning efforts, and residential learning initiatives. Still others on campus saw the dean’s plan as nothing less than a slap in the face to instructors. Virtually overnight, hard working instructors with sometimes decades of service, saw their 3/3 full-time appointments transformed into what would count as a 75 percent

appointment. Central to the worries of many on campus was that the new dean failed to appreciate the larger institutional narrative of improved conditions for instructors, and was largely oblivious to the institutional culture regarding instructors and the institutional memory of the Instructors' Bill of Rights.

Perceiving himself as—and hired to be—a change agent, the new dean felt bound to act, given that an ill-conceived policy was left on his desk by the departing dean. The exigence requiring a response to that plan did not give the new dean the opportunity to listen to faculty sentiments and better understand institutional history. What's more, the new dean saw himself as wanting to do right by instructors, and he viewed his plan as raising salaries and bringing the shadow economy of overload teaching into regular appointments that would be eligible for merit-pool raises.

The new dean wanted to create a narrative of positive change, and by his lights that was what he was doing. But without having read or appreciated the prior chapters in our institution's story about instructors, he was writing a new chapter that would radically change the story line. What instructors heard were tales of discontinuity and broken promises, and those tales threatened to overwhelm his intended tale of improvement. The dean's agency was clear, and it was his own, but it was not grounded institutionally in ways that might have lent it broad support. Instructors, in turn, struggled to find fresh agency in reviving an institutional commitment to contingent faculty as memories dimmed and narratives were being rewritten.

During the academic year 2013-14, the dean set about to revise his plan. By December 2013, although no new official revision had circulated in print, conversations suggested that the dean had softened his outright ban on overloads, and he had broadened somewhat his understanding of what might count as "instructionally related activities," leaving much to the discretion of individual units. After roughly a year of refusing to meet with instructors serving on the Boulder Faculty Assembly Instructor-Rank Faculty Affairs Committee, he relented in October 2013. At that meeting he acknowledged the confusion around his plan (as no written update had been circulated), discussed the current state of his plan, and agreed to the instructors' suggestion that both they and the dean jointly author a "frequently asked questions" document that would accompany his policy, once released, to allay the confusions that had plagued the policy for months.

At the end of February 2014, the dean announced and began acting on a revised policy for instructor appointments. Instead of an inflexible one-size-fits-all policy that instructors had feared, the plan offers three options, with course workload ranging from 3/3 to 4/4, and merit evaluation ratios for teaching and service ranging from 75/25 to 85/15. Courses that were once taught on an over-

load basis and are now part of a higher full-time workload are being fully compensated. The plan leaves a good deal of discretion to department chairs and program directors, which can be either a positive or a negative development, depending on how supportive the chair or director is of instructors within the respective unit. This new plan is generally seen as workable, a benign and in some quarters positive development, given the plan left in the incoming dean's lap some two years earlier. Through intense lobbying by instructors and their tenured and tenure-track allies, the campus avoided the wholesale destruction of prior gains in instructor workplace conditions. Yet the preoccupation with workload increases has left other important aspects of instructor life unaddressed. And the very troubling and unnecessarily contentious process by which this new policy came into being has frayed relationships.

The coming chapters of this narrative have yet to be written, and it is not at all certain what the arc of that narrative will be. Can instructors find and maintain an institutional voice, even as new contracts are written and the wheels of administration churn on? Is there some modest hope that the narrative about instructors at the University of Colorado at Boulder will have some joint authorship? What is clear is that past success has an uncertain future.

## **LOOKING FORWARD, LESSONS ON THE DYNAMICS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

Although this tale, like many others, has as of yet no final ending, we can find relevant lessons that speak well beyond the confines of our campus—lessons about partnerships forged and broken, memories cultivated and forgotten, narratives written and rewritten, and agency enacted with both opportunity and peril.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

Some twenty-three years ago, the Instructors' Bill of Rights came into being precisely because of a partnership between faculty governance and campus administrators. Although that partnership has occasionally fallen into neglect and disrepair over the subsequent years, it was only directly challenged two times. The first was when the prior dean, in spring 2010, advanced the aforementioned policy on instructor workloads without any consultation with instructors or faculty governance, even as a major campus report was being written on instructor issues. The second instance occurred when the new dean arrived and developed policy proposals without consulting with faculty governance or drawing on institutional history, in ways outlined earlier. The recent willingness of the dean

to work with instructors in crafting an FAQ sheet represents a potential positive signal, but any true collaboration or new partnership has not yet emerged. A shared article of faith has been broken, and it remains to be seen whether it can be mended or revived.

In order for contingent faculty to have a consistent presence in faculty governance, it has been quite helpful to have a standing committee in the Boulder Faculty Assembly devoted to this issue. Regular meetings of this committee with campus administrators, precisely when a crisis did not loom, provided an opportunity to foster trust and ongoing communication that could then be drawn upon during moments of crisis. The darkest moments in this long history occurred when communication failed, trust was questioned, and joint efforts were eschewed in favor of lone action.

Partnerships are by their nature mutual. A key lesson learned was that the new dean needed and deserved to be part of a new partnership. He was at the table and his voice needed to be acknowledged. On his part, the new dean made a damaging and easily avoided misstep in refusing to meet with Boulder Faculty Assembly instructor representatives, and thus quite visibly expressed little interest in forging a new partnership. After roughly a year, the dean did relent and agreed to meet with instructors serving in faculty governance roles. Maintaining continuity in partnerships between faculty governance and administrators is especially challenging when changes in key personnel occur.

## **INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY**

Partnerships occur over time, and the memory of those partnerships, and the advances those partnerships made possible, must be nurtured and kept alive. But institutional memory is fragile indeed. Witness the fate of the Instructors' Bill of Rights, the motivating document in this twenty-three-year history. It is no longer on the institution's website, nor even easily found on the website of the Boulder Faculty Assembly. Some instructors and tenured faculty who were instrumental in its passage may have copies in their desk drawers. But they themselves are nearing retirement.

To maintain institutional memory, it is vital that documents detailing initiatives and successes be seen as living documents. Those documents need to serve, as did the Instructors' Bill of Rights, as a kind of ethical benchmark, one that could initiate new action. This was the case when the Boulder Faculty Assembly convened its Task Force in 2007-08 and its high-profile, campus-wide ad hoc committee in 2009-2010. New efforts and timely reviews can breathe wind into the sails of a prior commitment. Institutional memory is also best kept alive when efforts are shared among all ranks of faculty. At no time during this twen-

ty-three-year history were instructor issues seen merely as the pleadings of one narrow interest group. Many tenured faculty have consistently advocated for instructors, and have voiced the argument that better conditions for professionalized instructors at a research university advance the undergraduate institutional mission for everyone.

Yet keeping institutional memory alive is no easy task. If one insists on the purity of the memory, it can easily become dated and ossified, and voices for its support can readily seem shrill and out of touch. On the other hand, if memory becomes all too malleable, and all too willing to accommodate new views, it ceases to serve as memory at all. Should instructors at CU-Boulder insist on the “purity” of their workload arrangements, as articulated in the Instructors’ Bill of Rights, and in so doing do they run the risk of being ignored altogether? Or should instructors be willing to accommodate new arrangements that reflect new realities and new players, and in so doing run the risk of surrendering hard fought gains? Institutional memory may seem, quite literally, to be a thing of the past, but its presence invariably guides, in one way or another, future action.

## NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Institutional memory has an arc, and in that arc lies a narrative—or more properly, a range of possible narratives—that can be voiced with varying degrees of success. The narrative of improved professional conditions for instructors on our campus was widely shared for fifteen years. And many actors on the stage that is our campus voiced that narrative, and thus kept it alive and made additional chapters to that story possible. Competing narratives can arise, however, at moments of institutional crisis or doubt when commitments and values can lend themselves to counter-narratives. A major budget crisis and the perception that the self-interests of tenured faculty were somehow at odds with those of instructors made it possible in 2010 for the then dean to announce a break with what had become a shared article of faith on campus—the Instructors’ Bill of Rights. This new narrative had for several years little traction on campus, as many faculty across all ranks found it ill advised. However, if one tells a new story often enough, it can become a reality. That 2010 proposal, although tabled at the time, was never withdrawn, and it acquired the force of policy when that dean left and the new dean entered his position in summer 2012. For this new dean, perhaps unaware of the prior narrative, this new policy was part of the now institutional narrative of instructors, not a moment of aberration. And so a new tale begins, largely untethered from its origins, with its own force and logic.

It is too facile to suggest that the answer to this dilemma lies in “controlling the narrative.” Institutional narratives are far too complex and multifaceted for

any one person, or group of persons, to control and articulate. Nevertheless, narratives, if they are to exist, must be told. By virtue of their contingent and at-will status, instructors are not the ideal group to tell and thus enact a narrative of progress. Such a narrative requires the voices of tenure-stream faculty and administrators. It matters who tells the story. When just enough of them turn silent, and just enough new faculty enter the institution without being schooled themselves in this institutional narrative, the story can turn. Narrative requires, and is itself a product of agency.

## **AGENCY AND CHANGE**

The power to tell an institution's narrative is not equally shared. The voices raised by deans and administrators can well outweigh those of tenure-stream faculty, what to say of instructors and contingent faculty. Yet instructors are not without agency. The Instructors' Bill of Rights and its subsequent history are themselves a testament to the agency instructors have found, and to their ability to invite other, more powerful voices, to speak on their behalf, and on behalf of the interests of the institution at large. The most powerful agency occurs when voices are raised in a chorus.

But full-throated support voiced at one moment, or even over several years, does not guarantee that the same song will always be sung, or that the singers themselves don't come and go. Issues of agency are intertwined with those of continuity and change. Transition in the office of dean was central in the crisis that has unfolded on our campus over these last four years. When leaving his position, the prior dean was unconstrained by institutional consequences and had the agency to simply enact a proposal that was heretofore tabled. And when entering his new position, the current dean was surely accorded some deference to see things his way and to enact change. Thus, transitions in a key position of power amplified individual agency at a crucial moment in a narrative that had otherwise been about improved professional conditions for instructors. A new narrative was being voiced even as instructors tried to find a renewed voice of protest. And leadership among the ranks of instructors will itself change over the coming years, as those who themselves advocated for the original Instructors' Bill of Rights retire and the cause is taken up by others, who will inevitably inflect the desired narrative in new ways.

## **PRACTICAL LESSONS**

This tale about the uncertain future of past success holds many lessons. But perhaps the foremost lesson is that gains are always at risk. The dynamics of in-

stitutional change described in this history could not let it be otherwise. Among the practical lessons that emerge from this tale:

- Leverage the power of faculty governance, and ensure that instructors can play a role in faculty governance.
- Forge alliances with tenure-stream faculty, who can advocate for instructors in ways that instructors themselves can't.
- Keep regular lines of communication open with administrators, especially when a crisis does not loom.
- Favor backchannel communication over more overt confrontation, unless absolutely necessary.
- Revisit and review prior moments of accomplishment or progress in order to build a widely shared narrative.

As new actors enter onto the institutional stage, work to educate them about the institutional narrative regarding non-tenure-track faculty and invite them to help write new, productive chapters of that narrative. For each institution there remain opportune moments for positive change—moments to forge partnerships, sustain memory, voice a narrative, and in such moments to find agency. We cannot afford to let such moments pass by unrecognized.

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