



# Introduction to “A National Snapshot of the Material Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty in Composition and Technical and Professional Communication”

Lisa Melonçon  
*University of South Florida*

Mahli Mechenbier  
*Kent State University: Geauga*

Laura Wilson  
*University of Cincinnati*

---

Lisa Melonçon is a professor of technical communication at the University of South Florida. Her teaching and research focuses on the programmatic and professionalization dimensions of technical and professional communication, research methodologies, and the rhetoric of health and medicine.

Mahli Mechenbier teaches Technical Writing, Professional Writing, and College Writing at Kent State University: Geauga as a three-year-renewable Senior Lecturer. She was a member of NCTE's Committee for Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction and was an editor for the OWI's Open Resource (2013 – 2016). Her research focuses on how academic administrations manage distance learning and the intellectual property rights of contingent faculty.

Laura Wilson has an MA in English with a concentration in Scientific and Technical Communication from Bowling Green State University. She has worked as a technical writer and editor and has taught technical, professional, and business writing at the University of Cincinnati since 2005, where she is an Associate Professor Educator. Laura is passionate about her work and her students; beyond technical writing, she enjoys teaching courses on social media, rhetoric, and web authoring.

*“I love my job, but...”*  
Study Participant

**L**abor conditions in higher education continue to receive an enormous amount of attention because of the shifting nature of faculty jobs. Based on the most recent aggregated data from 2016, the U.S. academic labor force breaks down faculty by category as follows:

- 29% tenured or tenure track;
- 17% full-time, non-tenure-track (FT NTT);
- 40% part time; and
- 14% graduate students (AAUP “Data”).

In this special issue, we offer data and analysis from a national survey of contingent faculty specific to faculty who teach in different types of writing programs. To our knowledge, we have collected the largest set of data that is specific to (and confined to) contingent faculty who teach in first-year composition (FYC) programs and technical and professional communication (TPC) degree programs. This important point (that we expound on below) cannot be underscored enough. National surveys (see, for example, Coalition on the Academic Workforce; the Delphi Project; and the New Faculty Majority) have provided important information about contingent faculty, as have the statements prepared and distributed by national academic organizations (e.g., Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC); Modern Language Association; National Council for the Teachers of English; Rhetoric Society of America). However, position statements only show part of the picture. Sue Doe and Mike Palmquist point out that position statements are paradoxical in nature because they show that the overarching problems have yet to be solved (24). The number of statements and their recency indicate an awareness from national organizations that contingency needs to be addressed, but while these generalized statements can show support for contingent faculty, they often provide suggestions that are unattainable (e.g., the MLA recommendation for \$7000 per course), which limits their application in localized arguments to improve work conditions. The generalized nature also undermines specific arguments made by fields such as composition and TPC who rely heavily on contingent labor. That is, both national reports and organizational statements lack specificity about writing faculty, and, more importantly, they lack specificity about the material work lives of those same faculty.

Our primary question that drove this research project was: what are the material work conditions of contingent faculty in *writing*? We define material work conditions as “the day-to-day working conditions of

faculty, such as teaching loads and institutional support” (Melonçon, England & Ilyasova 209). Our aim with this special issue is to provide the methodology, results, and findings of the study to shed important light on the material realities; to provide focus for future research; and, most importantly, to move toward improving these work conditions.

In this introduction to the special issue, we set the groundwork with some important terminology distinctions and definitions, and then we discuss in more detail the two primary exigencies for this research project: the need for data and the need to listen to contingent faculty. We close the introduction with a detailed description of the methodology of the overall study and brief overviews of the articles in the issue.

### **Terminology and Definitions**

A primary tenet of TPC is definitional to make sure that all audiences start in the same place. To help readers navigate this special issue, it is crucial to define terms and orientations so there is no confusion. While composition scholars (e.g., Cox et al.; Bousquet et al.; Kahn et al.; McClure et al.; Scott) have been discussing issues of faculty labor for some time, TPC has only recently begun to examine these same issues (Melonçon & England; Melonçon; Melonçon et al.). A project that started out with only an orientation to TPC (see methodology below) ended up being a project that included contingent faculty from two distinct areas within the larger umbrella of writing studies: composition and TPC. Composition and TPC have distinct and separate identities, from journals and conferences to the material realities of administrative work. Therefore, we offer the following definitions and justifications:

- **Composition:** We acknowledge there are many competing names that are often conflated—rhetoric and composition, composition, composition studies, writing studies (to name a few)—for the field/discipline that administers first-year writing. We have settled on composition for ease of reading and to keep the focus on the administration and management of these programs as they are tied to labor.
- **Technical and professional communication (TPC):** The area of writing that focuses on workplace and organizational communication and writing.
- **First-year composition (FYC):** The designation for a course or a two-course sequence often required as a general education component for incoming freshmen.
- **Writing program administrator (WPA):** The accepted abbreviation, long used in composition, for those who administer an FYC program.
- **Technical and professional communication program administrator (TPC PA):** The abbreviation commonly used in TPC to identify program administrators and one that was

purposely created to distinguish the administrator of a TPC program from a WPA. While there is something of an equivalent to the first-year writing course within TPC, the field has, from its earliest days, also administered full degree programs, which makes their program administration unlike that of a WPA since they often tackle the administration of two distinct, but related, entities.

The most important, and likely the most contentious, term is **contingent faculty**. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) defines contingent faculty as including part-time faculty, full-time faculty outside tenure lines, and graduate student employees (Curtis and Jacobe 6). We have settled on following the AAUP and using the term contingent with an understanding that we are aware of the criticism of the term (see e.g., Bartholomae). Even participants in the research study let us know what they thought of the term, with one saying, “*I really hate the term ‘contingent’ [because it] makes me sound like I am a migrant worker.*” This participant was not the only one who expressed this type of concern with “contingent.” It is important to note, that in the one meeting where all three authors were together before starting this project, this was a main point of discussion. How faculty who work off the tenure-track are described and what they are called is important, as important as actual titles, because different terms are associated with many different connotations faculty cannot change. After a long discussion among ourselves, we chose to use contingent. However, it is vitally important to know that the final decision on this terminology was made by the two authors of this study, Laura and Mahli, who are contingent faculty. Mainly, this was because there are so many types of contingent faculty (as defined below) and identifying each in turn throughout the articles would weigh down the point of this research: that all faculty off the tenure-track have a story about how their material work life is affected by their contingency. Further, part of this decision to use contingent was to align this conversation with ongoing conversations in FYC and TPC, as well as with ongoing national conversations about labor conditions in higher education. Throughout, we do often use and conflate contingent faculty with faculty. If we are referring to faculty who are not contingent, that distinction is made clear in the language used.

Since language is an important implication of this project, we want to bring a carefulness and attention to definitions and terminology. Too often in trade publications (such as *Inside Higher Ed* or the *Chronicle of Higher Education*), in national social media (such as Twitter), on disciplinary listservs, and even in published scholarship, the nuances of labor and contingency are conflated where contingent and/or adjunct are a stand-in for all types of faculty not on the tenure track. However, as Mahli Mechenbier notes, “distinctions have developed among the stratifications

of contingent faculty.” We have slightly modified Mechenbier’s original definitions for the purposes of this project:

- **Full-time, non-tenure-track (FT NTT)** faculty with renewable contracts (that have few long-term restrictions—meaning there’s no limit on how many times their contract can be renewed) and often with benefits and some sense of job security;
- **Visiting assistant professors (VAP)/Visiting instructors (VIs)**, who have full-time contracts usually for one year but sometimes renewable for up to three years;
- **Part-time faculty/adjuncts**, who are term faculty with one-semester contracts and rarely have few long-term restrictions; and
- **Post-doctoral fellows**, who typically are limited to two or three years on contract (less common in writing) (226-227).

There are distinct differences between types of appointments, and all of writing would be well served to discuss, and even to highlight, these important differences. For example, Casie Fedukovich, Susan Miller-Cochran, Brent Simoneaux, and Robin Snead write: “Certainly there is a vast difference between full-time, renewable, benefits-bearing, contract positions and part-time, semester-by-semester, contract positions” (127). The differences in types of positions also amplify deeply embedded feelings about the entire labor system of hiring education. Christine Cucciarre explains:

I was persuaded to take the job because my university offers continuing non-tenure-track (CNTT) faculty the same benefits, salary, sabbatical opportunities, travel funds, voting rights, promotion possibilities, and other amenities that the tenured and tenure-track faculty enjoy. Yet, in spite of these generous perquisites, I know that in accepting the position I was doing a disservice to my field, and to college teachers. I am not innocent in the hypocrisy. And I am continually confronted by the implications of my decision. (58)

The type of FT NTT job that Cucciarre describes aligns in some ways with Laura and Mahli’s jobs in continuing positions. Cucciarre also captures the complicated feelings and complex systems associated with contingency that we will talk about through this issue.

Seeking more clarity about material conditions of contingency is a large part of the impetus for this project, that is, to encourage a more nuanced understanding of what it really means to work off the tenure track

in FYC and TPC. In addition, this project was designed to begin to understand the differences in types and kinds of contingent positions, and how those positions and differences affect the lives of faculty. Though the sensational scenarios (e.g., faculty who have been reduced to sleeping in their cars or teaching six different courses at three different institutions in the same semester) are often the most visible and thus discussed in national venues, the fact remains that many contingent faculty working in FYC and TPC programs are hard-working professionals who make valuable, meaningful contributions at their institutions with appointments that promise longevity and security. Both ends of the spectrum need to be highlighted so that a more nuanced and accurate picture of the material work lives of contingent faculty who teach in FYC or TPC programs can emerge. Ideally, we aim to show the gap between the two ends of the spectrum and hope this project illuminates the ways institutions influence this gap, and how we might start to bridge it.

Finally, we want to mention a stylistic, and political, note about writing. Composition scholarship often uses “we” as a stand in for both authors and the field. Like Marc Bousquet, however, we find this use of “we” too ambiguous. As Bousquet points out:

Who is the ‘we’ indexed by composition scholars? Who is meant by the term compositionist? Sometimes it means “those who teach composition”; sometimes it means “those of us who theorize and supervise the teaching of composition.” The movement between these meanings always has a pronounced tendency to obscure the interests and voices of those who teach composition... it imbues the ambition of the professional or managerial compositionist for respect and validity with the same urgency as the struggle of composition labor for wages, health care, and office space. (499)

Because of Bousquet’s excellent point, we follow the stylistic convention of only using “we/our” to indicate the authors of this work. In all other cases, the language will make clear whom the subject is.

### **The Need for Data**

One will notice throughout the special issue that there is not an overabundance of scholarship cited. We deliberately confined our evidence and support to research by scholars in the field. Here we use “field” to mean scholars working in composition studies; writing studies; composition and rhetoric; rhetoric; and technical and professional communication. When we limited our research by this parameter, we were surprised at the paucity of research, which is the reason for the lack of citations throughout this special issue. We wanted to simultaneously bring contingent faculty material work conditions into the open, while also highlighting the lack of sustained, data-driven work across all of writing.

One can look at the topics graduate students and early-career faculty are researching as one marker of the scholarly interests of a field. In composition, for example, one place to find this sort of data is by looking at the proposals for the research network forum (RNF), which is an annual event held at the CCCCs where works-in-progress are discussed. Since many of the participants in the RNF are graduate students or early-career faculty, an analysis of that data is an important marker of trends and interest in research topics. Risa Gorelick, citing the work of Mark Sutton, noted “the presence of labor practices and working conditions in the research presentations” was 2.95% of proposals, which was only 20 proposals out of 677 studied (117). It seems that not much is changing in composition outside of the limited number of scholars who are the only consistent voices publishing on these issues. The problem is much worse in TPC, where no one outside of Lisa has picked up the call to learn more about contingent faculty and to advocate for better working conditions. Noting this deficiency in research data further supports our claim that composition and TPC need more research about material work conditions.

This need for data intersects with recent conversations in composition. For example, Randall McClure, Dayna Goldstein, and Michael Pemberton (“Strengthening”) attempt to provide a data-driven update to the CCCCs Statement of Principles and Standards for Postsecondary Teaching, but their use of “data” is problematic because their update relies on so little *about* contingent faculty *in writing*. The disappointment in labor issues becoming a subsidiary point in a national organization’s statement is also intensified when composition and TPC lack the necessary data specific to faculty teaching composition and TPC courses. It is true that organizational statements can help administrators to make local arguments, but what helps more than that is hard data (Doe and Palmquist 28). Composition and TPC cannot continue to make claims or advocate for change based on nationally-generated data about material working conditions because it obscures the differences in material realities.

We follow calls like those by Cox et al. that have argued for more data collection, and, more specifically, the calls by those like Brad Hammer, who advocate for research *by* contingent faculty, not just *about* contingent faculty. Much like Seth Kahn’s claim that “the ecological frame also helps to make concrete the interconnections that we otherwise often simply assume or assert,” a key part of that ecology has to be actual data (“Towards” 117). WPAs and TPC PAs need to know what the actual working conditions are, specifically for contingent faculty teaching writing. Without a level of detail specific to writing, we are left without a clear picture of what’s happening to contingent faculty in our writing fields. To help attain that clarity, we took myriad steps to ensure that our data was focused on including a range of contingent faculty (see definitions above); that our data come from a range of institutions; and that our data was from the voices of contingent faculty only in composition and

TPC. After defining those criteria, this study then explored material work conditions beyond just teaching load, salary, and benefits. The quality and quantity of this tailored, specific data, coupled with the voices and experiences of contingent faculty making up those “numbers,” gives much-needed insight into the lives and work of contingent faculty in composition and TPC that has never been published before.

Practically, we hope this data helps WPAs and TPC PAs with making local arguments. Ideally, we hope that it encourages conversations of more precision about contingent working conditions. Understanding the complexities of the issues, and the fact that sometimes the worst-case scenarios make the best “news,” our data paint a more nuanced picture of contingent faculty work conditions overall.

### **The Need to Listen to Contingent Faculty**

The most recent publications in composition focus on “institutional realities and cases” (Kahn et al.). While these individual cases are valuable, they can easily be dismissed because they make it easy for administrators and tenure-track faculty to adopt the “that could never happen at my institution” mentality. Much like Melonçon’s (“Critical”) call that field-wide data and perspectives are needed to make strong arguments for local initiatives or changes in TPC programs, the same argument is true for data about labor and working conditions. Along with the data, however, is the need for composition and TPC to listen to contingent faculty. By “listen” we mean to allow contingent faculty the space to speak up about what they want and need without fearing for their jobs. The precarity of contingency is an issue we explore at length in this special issue; it is our hope that the “listening” starts with this work. As Seth Kahn correctly states, there is a “problem of speaking for adjuncts.” Thus, in a deliberate turn to listening, the articles in this issue have a large number of quotes directly from participants in this research. By deliberately including more quotes than may be usual for academic articles, we hope to illustrate that composition and TPC need a multi-pronged approach where data is supported by narratives in context, while also spotlighting the thoughts and experiences of contingent faculty.

We approached this research project by listening to contingent faculty as carefully and thoughtfully as we could, and we encourage others doing this research to follow in this vein. Thus, this work aims to provide recommendations for implementing consistent programmatic assessments across the nation that allow contingent faculty to talk and administrators to listen, all without fear or defensiveness. We cannot enact true change while so many contingent faculty report feeling less than. As one participant stated, *“the instructor is the Bic lighter of teachers. Use it up and throw it away. If I quit my job tomorrow, they would be able to pick and choose for my job. I don’t think instructors are particularly valued.”*



By moving past the impetus to only gather individual case studies in hopes of trying to make more generalizable arguments, the purpose of our project was twofold. First, we wanted to ensure that we were gathering data, including stories, from non-tenure-track faculty (NTT). Outside of the “conjob” project (<http://ccdigitalpress.org/ebooks-and-projects/conjob>), most of the work in composition has been written by tenure-line faculty in composition. On the other hand, in TPC, scholarship has predominately consisted of data-driven inquiries with limited narratives to help provide a fuller and richer context (see Melonçon “Contingent”). Thus, while many tenure-track faculty are passionate allies and advocates for improving labor conditions, there remains a noticeable absence of listening to what contingent faculty say in the broader field. (See “Data Takeaways” in this issue for additional information on professional development for WPAs and TPC PAs.)

Amy Lynch-Binieck and Holly Hassel’s recent issue of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TETYC)* on contingent labor and academic freedom points to an increasing need to examine contingency from a diverse number of perspectives. Their emphasis on agency and materiality are echoed throughout this special issue because it was these two terms that were the guiding and grounding factors for this project on contingent labor. Thus, we tried to avoid contingent faculty as objects of study and instead position this as a project where we’re aware of wanting to and needing to listen to contingent faculty. To that end, however, parts may feel disconnected as we try to relay what they said to us through both the quantitative survey results and qualitative interviews and comments in the survey. While we are advocating for their voices, there is no way to present all the data/voices and still protect their anonymity. Because of the way scholarship must be written, we feel that aside from just listing quote after quote in a list, we may lose the nuance of the actual people. So bear with us as we try to give agency to the faculty who generously and graciously participated in this project, while grappling with the limitations of academic writing.

### **Methodology, Methods, and Practices**

In this section, we provide a detailed account of the methodology, methods, and practices of this research project. These three terms are often conflated into either methodology or simply methods without a full explication of what they actually mean. As composition has started to publish more empirical research (e.g., Eodice et al; Jamieson) and data-driven research (e.g., Isaacs; Melzer), and TPC has called for more precision in research study design (Melonçon “Critical”; St.Amant & Graham) and terminology associated with research study design (Melonçon & St.Amant; St.Amant & Melonçon), we feel this attention warrants a detailed and descriptive overview of how we approached this research study. Here we take methodology to mean the disciplinary and ideological orientation to research; methods to mean the approaches to

gathering data; and practices to mean the work that took place, including the problems and pitfalls, while the study was ongoing (Melonçon & St.Amant). We offer many of the details that we encountered and the decisions that were made throughout the project as a way to provide insights into the promise and peril of messy research. This project was approved by the University of Cincinnati's (UC) Institutional Review Board # 2013-2133.

Methodologically, we approached the project from both a humanistic and social science orientation. Humanistic in the sense, as we wrote above, that we wanted to hear from actual contingent faculty about their material work conditions. Thus, the emphasis on experiences of the participants was a key concern. We also understood that methodologically our primary concern was contextual, that is, to understand those experiences from the different types of material work conditions and what that meant for contingent faculty. The method, or approach we took to data collection, can potentially make some of the claims generalizable—in a scientific sense—but many of the findings and narratives from participants instead underscore the impact of the material environment on the lives of faculty. While there is a level of objectivity in the data, we want readers to remember that each data point is directly connected to a particular individual with particular experiences. Even though experiences may share similarities, we include many direct quotes to ensure that individual differences are also highlighted. In sum, the methodological orientation we took provided a strong research study design that can be replicated and can be measured by levels of trustworthiness, but it also provided a way to highlight the participants and their experiences.

As we explain below, we had wanted to do interviews, but the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UC originally deemed contingent faculty a “vulnerable population.” By strict definition, children, pregnant women and fetuses, and prisoners are deemed vulnerable populations for research. However, the UC IRB felt that contingent faculty also merited “special consideration” because of their precarious employment situation. This distinction was significant, considering the point we’re trying to make with this research. Thus, the original pilot study (Melonçon, England, & Ilyasova) and follow-up studies (including this one) had to be done using an anonymous survey to protect the identities of participants and to ensure that there was no coercion or potential of repercussions.

A survey is traditionally a quantitative research method to gain large data sets from a sample of participants that can generate generalizable conclusions. However, in composition and in TPC, the survey is actually used more like a questionnaire (seeking more qualitative answers) that is delivered electronically because most data sets rarely generate large quantitative samples. While the survey was not the best method for the type of data we wanted to gather, it did provide the anonymity that was required by the IRB, and, in the end, the descriptive nature of the questions and responses provided important and revelatory

data. During the process of the research study, we continued conversations with the IRB, and we were allowed to add an “if you are willing to be interviewed” question, which did generate a number of interviews that added an additional layer of richness to the data set. And in the end, as described further in our discussion of practices, the survey data provides important information about the material work lives of contingent faculty, and, when paired with the interviews, we contend that we provide an accurate representation of the material work lives of contingent faculty at a field-wide level (both composition and TPC, together and separately).

This project initially started ca. 2008-2009 and directly came out of Lisa’s co-authored project with Peter England (Melonçon & England). That project gave TPC the first insights into the number of contingent faculty teaching the service course, which is a “course for non-TPC majors delivered primarily as a service to other departments or programs on campus” (Melonçon & England 398). This is TPC’s somewhat analogous course to FYC, most commonly titled technical writing, professional writing, or business writing. One of the outcomes of Melonçon and England’s study was a series of questions for TPC to consider and answer regarding contingent labor:

- What kinds of professional development (if any) are made available to contingent TPC faculty?
- How are these faculty supported in their efforts to stay current with pedagogical trends?
- What are the credentials of those teaching the TPC service course? More specifically, have those faculty taken a pedagogy course?
- What are the conditions of renewal for FT NTT faculty?
- Do FT NTT faculty have industry experience? If so, of what kind and duration?
- What aspects of their work are contingent faculty satisfied and unsatisfied with? (406).

These questions then formed the basis of a pilot study. Because of the lack of knowledge around contingent faculty’s work lives, we settled on a pilot study. Since TPC had no understanding of the material work conditions of contingent faculty, the study was designed to provide rich and detailed information about this issue. In other words, we wanted depth rather than breadth. While somewhat rare in composition and TPC, pilot studies are a useful and common part of the research process in the sciences and in some of the social sciences. van Teijlgen and Hundley confirm that pilot studies are often used to test the feasibility of a full-scale study and to develop and test the adequacy of research instruments (34), while Polit, Beck, and Hungler argue the pilot study affords researchers the opportunity to conduct a “small scale version, or trial run, done in preparation for the major study” (467). We felt we needed the pilot study to test the feasibility of a larger national study. The pilot study also allowed

us to craft a solid survey instrument and refine questions that were initially confusing. We started with the questions posed by Melonçon and England (noted above) and then compared those to other national surveys on contingent faculty (see Melonçon, England, & Ilyasova 209-210 for full details). The results became the original survey questions we piloted. The recruitment process for the pilot was cumbersome because of IRB stipulations, which meant we could not contact contingent faculty directly. The limitations of and arguments against national and organizational listservs as a recruiting mechanism (Melonçon “Critical”) proved to be true in the pilot, but it gave us useful information to craft better arguments for an amendment to the IRB application. This allowed us to contact contingent faculty directly and add a question that asked for those interested in being interviewed to contact us. The difference in the pilot study survey and the one included as Appendix A is the shifting in wording of several questions and the addition of a series of five questions related to online writing instruction. The final survey had 41 questions, including 11 open-ended questions. The italicized quotes contained throughout this special issue are from these open-ended questions or from the interviews we conducted.

With lessons learned around clarity of questions from the pilot study and an amended IRB that allowed us to contact contingent faculty directly, we had to make decisions about our sampling method for participants and recruitment approaches. As Daniel J. Murphy so aptly puts it: “To have confidence in your inference, it is important to ensure as much as possible that you have used a representative sample for findings to be reliable and valid with respect to the ‘true’ nature of the population” (98).

The survey was distributed to a stratified sample of faculty who work at institutions with TPC programs (from minors to PhDs). Institutions were drawn from the program list found in *TechComm Programmatic Central*, which is a database being created to house comprehensive information related to programs in TPC. For each institutional category (R1, R2, etc., see <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/> for additional information), 25% of programs were proportionally selected to represent all types of institutions where TPC programs are housed. This percentage seemed reasonable in that it would allow for generalizable data across the field, and/or it would indicate what differences there may be based on institutional type.

The selection of the specific school (within the 25%) to locate contingent faculty is not as easily explained. We knew recruitment was going to be a problem, since other studies (such as Coalition on the Academic Workforce) have discussed how difficult it is to contact participants. Our primary approach was to use publicly available data, such as faculty listings on departmental websites and schedules of courses found most often through the registrar’s office. Collecting information became a torturous and difficult task because of the lack of consistency

across institutions' websites and more so because of the poor user interfaces. Thus, in some cases the programs and faculty were chosen simply because the institutional website was easy to navigate, and contingent faculty were actually visible, that is, listed clearly on the website with contact information. Sometimes we abandoned a school simply because the task became too onerous to try and figure out who was contingent and then how to contact them. Once contact information from the "easy" schools was collected, we then just went down the list of institutions to locate as many contingent faculty as we could. This process was necessary because of our intention to contact faculty directly.

In the "difficult" cases, it meant comparing faculty lists (from department websites) to the institution's official schedule of classes to cross-check and verify who was teaching TPC related courses and not on the tenure track. To ensure we were actually contacting active contingent faculty, we looked at the schedule of classes and looked for courses that contingent faculty usually teach (such as the "service course" or lower level undergraduate courses). Scrolling through the schedule, we made notations of faculty and compared it to faculty lists on department websites. In other cases, we called or emailed the TPC PA to determine who was a contingent faculty member. In many cases, names may have been listed or identified, but then there was another step of locating contact information, which often meant using the institution's main directory and searching by faculty name or, when all else failed, using a general web search of the person's name to locate an email address.

The work doubled when we began collecting the same data for composition faculty. Since the initial findings from the TPC pilot study (Melonçon, England, & Ilyasova) suggested that material work conditions may be different between TPC and composition, Lisa enlisted Mahli and Laura's skills to not only complete the TPC study but also complete a similar study with composition instructors. This process of simply finding the appropriate "recruitment" sample took upward of 200 hours. And we do not claim that the created list is 100% accurate of all contingent faculty at the schools chosen. In fact, we feel confident that it is not because contingent faculty are often invisible in public-facing information that would be available to those looking for information (including students). This issue of visibility is more acute for adjunct faculty (those teaching on term-to-term contracts) than it is for FT NTT faculty. So at the very start of our research, we knew that simply being "invisible" at their institution would be a main factor affecting contingent faculty work conditions. As one survey participant wrote, *"I enjoy teaching very much, but as I imagine most part time and adjunct faculty do, I have a number of issues. For example, my name and contact info doesn't appear on the department website, they took my office computer to give it to a lecturer without telling me, and the pay is absolutely abysmal for the effort I put in and the feedback and respect I get from students."* This fact only underscored the necessity of the project and emboldened us to move forward.

In the fall and spring of academic year 2016-2017, we sent the survey link to 653 TPC faculty and 467 composition faculty. The response rate was 26%. This rate, while lower than we had hoped, is within the standard ranges of external, email response rates (Fryrear). Several factors probably contributed to the response rate. First, the IRB limited the number of follow-ups or reminders that could be sent, which also impacts response rates. After each reminder, there was a large number of responses received, but the IRB allowed only two follow-ups. (The reasons for this are myriad and outside of the scope of this essay, but the overriding concern was coercion.) Second, research suggests long surveys may be abandoned by respondents (Chudoba), and this survey was long, taking around 15-20 minutes (longer if participants answered the open-ended questions). One potential respondent emailed to say, *“I apologize for not participating in the survey, but I can't squeeze a half hour out of my schedule. Ordinarily I'd be happy to, but teaching technical and business writing is only one of several jobs I put together to make a living. I won't have even a little breather until the semester ends... your research sounds fascinating.”* Third, response rates are typically higher for populations in which there is a relationship. Many contingent faculty are not actively engaged outside of their departments or institutions because they simply do not have time, which may have made them reluctant to participate because they had no idea who we were. Finally, participants could simply be afraid—no matter how clear it is that the information is anonymous. For those of us on the tenure track, this concept of fear, concern, or hesitation may not be easy to understand, but what we have learned during this project is that fear is real, and it has to be respected; this reality became clearer through the survey responses and even by one person who contacted us to ask whether their department would find out if they completed the survey and whether the data would be used to make arguments for universities to *“fire teachers.”*

We set a survey response rate target of 25%, and we agreed that the moment we went over this number we would stop the study. This was for practical reasons more than anything else such as time involved, other work commitments, and simply having a set benchmark for an end to data gathering.

The last survey question asked participants if they would be willing to consent to a follow-up interview. We conducted a total of 20 interviews over the academic year 2016-2017 and during the summer and fall of 2017. We did not reach interview data saturation with the interviews because each was a unique story based on individual histories and priorities. However, there were common themes among all interviewees around the overarching concerns, problems, and even joys of working off the tenure track, which led us to a quasi-saturation point. Here we use quasi-saturation to mean the point in qualitative data analysis where there is data saturation around key themes or concepts even if one is still gaining unique information based on participants' experiences. Because we

reached this quasi-saturation point that aligns with the quantitative data, we feel that some generalizable conclusions can be drawn from the data. (See “Results and Findings from the Survey” and “Data Takeaways” in this special issue for more information on the data.) To ensure the protection of interviewees, we refer to them—as well as to the qualitative responses from the survey—simply as participants or faculty. We chose to approach their inclusion in this way to ensure their anonymity. All quotes used by those interviewed have been reviewed by participants, and all quotes from the qualitative, open-ended survey responses are included as they were written.

### **Limitations of Methodology**

Survey creation is a rhetorical act that must consider and balance the research questions with the audience and the selected research method (Rife). This important aspect of survey development is both a strength and limitation. Thus, no survey will provide comprehensive data on any subject. The contingent survey was no different.

One limitation of surveys is that they contain self-reported data, which can be incomplete and unreliable (Paulhus & Vazier). Those who complete surveys tend to self-select into a study for a variety of reasons that may bias their responses. Even with the potential self-reporting dilemma, surveys remain a valuable method for acquiring responses from wide, diverse populations (Murphy).

The data in this survey was limited because it was garnered primarily from faculty at four-year institutions and are more representative of FT NTT faculty than term-to-term adjuncts. The latter is likely due to our sampling method and the inability to locate names and contact information of more part-time/adjunct faculty.

The final limitation is that we purposefully did not include graduate students in the study even though, per the AAUP, they are considered contingent faculty. In large part, that decision was made because graduate students exist in a liminal space that is distinctly different from other types of faculty. Graduate students are a unique teaching population due to their dual roles as teachers and students, and we think they deserve their own study in regard to issues of material work, and how the material work of teaching (and administration) may or may not align with their own intellectual work as scholar-students. The recent report released by the Writing Program Administration Graduate Organization outlines data regarding this important group.

### **Overview of Articles in this Issue**

The contents of this special issue include five articles that can be read as individual entities or as a coherent whole. They are:

- Results and Findings from the Survey
- Data Takeaways

- Affective Investment
- Politics of Service
- Looking Forward

### *Results and Findings from the Survey*

Since the survey (Appendix A) was quite lengthy and included a number of qualitative questions, this article focuses primarily on the quantitative questions. Through a series of visualizations, we explain what the data is and why it is important. This article and the corresponding data (Appendix B – TPC Data; Appendix C – Composition Data) can help TPC PAs and WPAs make data-driven arguments locally. We present the data as a stand-alone piece without an in-depth analysis of it because of its length. We presumed readers could make more use of the summary data points in this format.

### *Data Takeaways*

Here we provide more an analysis of the data around a set of key issues specific to the material work lives of contingent faculty, issues that were revealed as being some of the most important to contingent faculty in how they experienced their jobs both materially and affectively. In this essay, we discuss:

- heavy teaching load;
- significance of titles (instructor vs. lecturer vs. professor);
- importance of professional development;
- questions of quality and qualified.

### *Affective Investment*

In this article, we introduce a theoretical framework, affective investment, as a way to understand an important contradiction expressed by contingent faculty. We wanted to understand how to make sense of the fact that contingent faculty expressed satisfaction in their jobs but still carried a weight of negative emotions. The concept of affective investment is defined and then discussed in light of the material dimensions of how affective investment impacts contingent faculty in three critical areas: salary and contract; workload and autonomy; and value.

### *Politics of Service*

Closely related to the idea of affective investment is a concept we call politics of service. This is another extended definition that we created to help understand the conflicting nature of the data. While affective investment is more centered on the faculty themselves, politics of service provides insights into the complex relationship between faculty and the departments and institutions in which they work. After defining politics of service, we discuss it in light of the material dimensions of service to the institution, evaluations, and intellectual property.



### *Looking Forward*

In the final essay, we “look forward” by providing some practical, achievable suggestions on how to address some of the issues and concerns brought up by the data. We frame these suggestions through the conceptual framework of change management and institutional infrastructures, which flips existing scholarship on the “managerial unconscious” (Strickland) and managerial discourse into more positive and productive alternatives.

We do not see contingent faculty as a problem to be solved. Rather, contingency is a structural issue beyond the control of most departments, and it is a material reality for *all* faculty in composition and TPC. Our approach to this project has been one of gaining an understanding of material work lives of contingent faculty. We share that now so that, collectively, faculty and program administrators can work toward improving those work lives, while simultaneously working toward changing institutional infrastructures armed with data and evidence.

### **Acknowledgments**

We want to thank Sue Doe and the entire team of *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry* for believing in this project and giving us a creative, welcoming space for what we feel is important work for all of us who teach writing in higher education. Lisa needs to thank Samantha McGilvray, who diligently helped with organizing the data and provided much support with her thoughtful questions and positive, encouraging attitude. Mahli would like to thank her student research assistants, Mary E. Elliott and Marcy Irene Bodnar, who collated data and categorized survey questions. But our biggest debt of gratitude is to each of our participants. This project would not have been possible without your generous gifts of time, honesty, and commitment. We dedicate this work to you and to all contingent faculty in writing.

### **Works Cited**

- Ad Hoc Committee on Contingent Faculty. “RSA Statement on Contingent Faculty.” *Rhetoric Society of America*, 2018, [https://rhetoricsociety.org/aws/RSA/pt/sd/news\\_article/179482/PARENT/layout\\_details/false](https://rhetoricsociety.org/aws/RSA/pt/sd/news_article/179482/PARENT/layout_details/false).
- American Association of University Professors. “Data Snapshot: Contingent Faculty in US Higher Ed.” *AAUP*, 2018, <https://www.aaup.org/news/data-snapshot-contingent-faculty-us-higher-ed#.XLzEeKYpBTZ>.
- Bartholomae, D. “Teaching On and Off the Tenure Track: Highlights from the Ade Survey of Staffing Patterns in English.” *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2010, pp. 7-32.

- Bousquet, Marc. "Composition as Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA." *JAC*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2002, pp. 493-526. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20866508>.
- Bousquet, Marc et al., editors. *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2004.
- Chudoba, Brett. "How Much Time Are Respondents Willing to Spend on Your Survey?" *Curiosity at Work*, n.d., [https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/survey\\_completion\\_times/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/survey_completion_times/).
- Coalition of the Academic Workforce. "A Portrait of Part-Time Faculty Members: A Summary of Findings on Part-Time Faculty Respondents to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce Survey of Contingent Faculty Members and Instructors." *Coalition of the Academic Workforce*, 2012, [http://www.academicworkforce.org/Research\\_reports.html](http://www.academicworkforce.org/Research_reports.html).
- Committee on Contingent Labor. "Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions." *Modern Language Association*, 2011, [http://www.mla.org/pdf/clip\\_stmt\\_final\\_may11.pdf](http://www.mla.org/pdf/clip_stmt_final_may11.pdf).
- Conference on College Composition and Communication. "CCCC Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure-Track Writing Faculty." *CCCC/NCTE*, 2016, <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/working-conditions-ntt>.
- Cox, Anicca. "Collaboration and Resistance: Academic Freedom and Non-Tenured Labor." *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*, vol. 22, 2018, pp. A4-A13.
- Cox, Anicca et al. "The Indianapolis Resolution: Responding to Twenty-First-Century Exigencies/Political Economies of Composition Labor." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2016, pp. 38-67.
- Cucciarre, Christine et al. "Symposium: Off Track and On: Valuing the Intellectual Work of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty." *College English*, vol. 77, no. 1, 2014, pp. 55-72.
- Curtis, John and Monica F. Jacobs. "Consequences: An Increasingly Contingent Faculty." *American Association of University Professors*, 2006.
- Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success. "Non-Tenure-Track Faculty on Our Campus: A Guide for Campus Task Forces to Better Understand Faculty Working Conditions and the Necessity of Change." *Pullias Center for Higher Education, USC Rossier School of Education*, 2012.
- Doe, Sue. "Opportunity and Respect: Keys to Contingent Faculty Success." *Rewriting Success in Rhetoric and Composition Careers*, edited by Amy Goodburn et al., Parlor Press, 2012, pp. 51-68.

- Doe, Sue et al. "Discourse of the Fire Tenders: Considering Contingent Faculty through the Lens of Activity Theory." *College English*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2011, pp. 428-449.
- Doe, Sue and Mike Palmquist. "Evolving Uses of Position Statements." *ADE Bulletin*, vol. 153, 2013, pp. 23-34.
- Eodice, Michelle et al. *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education*. Utah State University Press, 2016.
- Fedukovich, Casie et al. "A State of Permanent Contingency: Writing Programs, Hiring Practices, and a Persistent Breach of Ethics." *Labored: The State(Ment) and Future of Work in Composition*, edited by Randall McClure et al., Parlor Press, 2017, pp. 130-151.
- Fryrear, Andrea. "Survey Response Rates." *Survey Gizmo*, 2015, <https://www.surveygizmo.com/resources/blog/survey-response-rates/>.
- Gorelick, Risa. "The Missing Piece: Where Is the Labor Related Research at the Research Network Forum?" *Labored: The State(Ment) and Future of Work in Composition*, edited by Randall McClure et al., 2017, pp. 115-125.
- Isaacs, Emily. *Writing at the State U: Instruction and Administration at 106 Comprehensive Universities*. Utah State University Press, 2018.
- Jamieson, Sandra. "The Evolution of the Citation Project: Developing a Pilot Study from Local to Translocal." *Points of Departure: Rethinking Student Source Use and Writing Studies Research Methods*, edited by Tricia Serviss and Sandra Jamieson, Utah State University Press, 2018.
- Kahn, Seth. "Towards an Ecology of Sustainable Labor in Writing Programs (and Other Places)." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2015, pp. 109-121.
- Kahn, Seth et al., editors. *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*. The WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado, 2017.
- Lynch-Binieck, Amy and Holly Hassel. "Col(Labor)ation: Academic Freedom, Working Conditions, and the Teaching of College English [Special Issue]." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2018, pp. 333-337.
- McClure, Randall et al., editors. *Labored: The State(Ment) and Future of Work in Composition*. Parlor Press, 2017.
- . "Strengthening the Statement: Data on Working Conditions in College Composition." *Labored: The State(Ment) and Future of Work in Composition*, edited by Randall McClure et al., Parlor Press, 2017, pp. 268-284.

- Mechenbier, Mahli. "Contingent Faculty and OWI." *Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction*, edited by Beth L. Hewett and Kevin DePew, WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, 2015, pp. 226-250.
- . "Putting the 'Temp' in Template: Molding Contingent Faculty into Uniform Online Course Shells." *Conference on College Composition and Communication, NCTE*, 2015.
- Melonçon, Lisa. "Contingent Faculty, Online Writing Instruction, and Professional Development in Technical and Professional Communication." *Technical Communication Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2017, pp. 256-272.
- . "Critical Postscript: On the Future of the Service Course in Technical and Professional Communication." *Programmatic Perspectives*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 202-230.
- Melonçon, Lisa and Peter England. "The Current Status of Contingent Faculty in Technical and Professional Communication." *College English*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2011, pp. 396-408.
- Melonçon, Lisa et al. "A Portrait of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty in Technical and Professional Communication." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2016, pp. 206-235.
- Melonçon, Lisa and Kirk St. Amant. "Empirical Research in Technical and Professional Communication: A Five-Year Examination of Research Methods and a Call for Research Sustainability." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2019, pp. 128-155.
- Melzer, Dan. *Assignments across the Curriculum*. Utah State University Press, 2014.
- Murphy, Daniel J. "Surveys and Questionnaires. Research Methods in Technical Communication." *Research in Technical Communication*, edited by Mary M. Lay and Laura Gurak, Praeger, 2002, pp. 93-110.
- NCTE College Section Steering Committee. "Position Statement on the Status and Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty." *National Council of Teachers of English*, 2010.
- New Faculty Majority. "Back to School Survey 2011-12." *New Faculty Majority Foundation*, 2012, <http://www.nfmfoundation.org/ProfStaffFinal.pdf>.
- Paulhus, Delroy and Simine Vazier. "The Self-Report Method." *Handbook of Research Methods in Personality*, edited by Richard W. Robins et al., Guilford Press, 2007, pp. 224-239.
- Polit, D. F. et al. *Essentials of Nursing Research: Methods, Appraisal, and Utilization*. 5th ed., Lippincott, Williams, & Wilkins, 2001.
- Rife, Martine Courant. *Invention, Copyright, and Digital Writing*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2013.

- St.Amant, Kirk and S. Scott Graham. "Research That Resonates: A Perspective on Durable and Portable Approaches to Scholarship in Technical Communication and Rhetoric of Science." *Technical Communication Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2019, pp. 99-111.
- St.Amant, Kirk and Lisa Melonçon. "Addressing the Incommensurable: A Research-Based Perspective for Considering Issues of Power and Legitimacy in the Field." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2016, pp. 267-283.
- Strickland, Donna. "The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies." *Conference on College Composition and Communication of the National Council of Teachers of English*, 2011.
- van Teijlgen, Edwin and Vanora Hundley. "The Importance of Pilot Studies." *Nursing Standards*, vol. 16, no. 40, 2002, pp. 33-36.
- Writing Program Administration Graduate Organization. "Graduate Student Instructor Labor Conditions in Writing Programs." *Council for Writing Program Administration*.