Introduction from the Guest Editors

Bruce Kovanen
North Dakota State University

Andrew J. Bowman
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

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Bruce Kovanen is the Director of Upper Division Writing and an Assistant Professor of English at North Dakota State University. His research and teaching interests include literate activity, labor studies, and cultural-history activity theory. His work has appeared in *Spark: A4C4Equality Journal*, *Across the Disciplines*, and *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies*.

Andrew Bowman is the staff organizer for the Campus Faculty Association, the organizing committee representing faculty on the University of Illinois campus working toward unionization. Before stepping away from academic work, his research focused on the intersection of critical university studies, labor studies, and genre studies. His work has appeared in *Spark: A4C4Equality Journal*, *Xchanges*, and *Composition Studies*.

This special issue of *Academic Labor: Research & Artistry* examines intersections of poverty with academic life. From worsening working conditions to increasing food and housing insecurity to pressures on major selection and career trajectories, poverty's impact on higher education cannot be overstated. Such changes in the academic workforce have been traced by labor unions like the American Federation of Teachers who estimate in recent reports that 75 percent of faculty are non-tenure track, a dramatic shift from early decades when those percentages were reversed. These changes have ushered in what Adrianna Kezer, Tom DePaola, and Daniel Scott refer to as the "gig academy," which they define as "a university that has become fully dependent on a patchwork of loosely connected contingent workforces to service both its central missions and its day-to-day operations" (36). These contingent workers labor in poor working conditions that include "subsistence wages; lack of benefits, retirement funds, and vacation time; no influence over conditions of work or structures of advancement; and constant anxiety over the possibility of arbitrary termination" (Kezar et al. 36-37).

Poverty and austerity aren't just problems for faculty; 58 percent of students were experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness in the year 2020, according to Temple University's Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. Kezar, DePaola, and Scott's analysis points to the depth of these changes across academia—faculty, students, administrative staff, and building/food service workers—all feel the pinch of contingency, the pressure of just-in-time labor (Watkins), and the precarity of these neoliberal economic

policies. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these trends by pushing thousands out of the profession early in the pandemic's onslaught, increasing the workload and responsibilities of the faculty and staff still working at universities, and leaving both faculty and students with increased levels of burnout (McClure et al.). Our authors helpfully expand our understanding of poverty's effects on academia. Below we'll provide a brief overview of our authors' research, surfacing common themes through and across the articles.

Article Summaries

In Harvey J. Graff's article, "The Causes and Consequences of Poverty & Impoverishment in Academia, Past, and Present," Graff carefully notes patterns of both change and continuity in discussions of "poverty in academia." Complicating the rosy picture of academia's halcyon days of yore, Graff notes that "there were no 'good old days'" (12); instead, Graff points to inequities ever present in universities (for both faculty and students) and the gap in the study of "universities in the marketplace," which rarely address issues of labor or poverty. Even as Graff complicates the history of academic labor, he singles out the current moment, "almost all matters have worsened. That is inescapable" (14). Still, there is opportunity for universities to chart a better course, and Graff suggests that it will take the communication, cooperation, and collaboration of the full cast of characters that make a university work/run/be to move in that direction.

In Bethany Hellwig and Alex Evans's article "The Culture of Poverty in the Ivory Tower," they blend autoethnography and institutional ethnography to articulate their experiences of poverty and contingency in higher education. Through their experiences and drawing on Gramsci's work, they articulate the notion of a "culture of poverty," which they define as "the ways that individuals within institutions of higher education sustain beliefs and practices that cement poverty as central to individual and institutional identity within the academy, limiting our collective imagination for more just and equitable systems and interventions" (30). Their autoethnographic vignettes further articulate how these cultures of poverty are socially maintained and the affective wreckage they leave in their wake.

In Anwesha Chattopadhyay's article "Paternalism and Penury of the POC PhD Student," Chattopadhyay traces the historical trajectories regarding the intersectionality of marginalization experienced by persons of color, both international and domestic. Noting how conceptions of international graduate students often homogenize their experiences, Chattopadhyay pushes readers to consider the long-term economic impact of graduate student poverty and ends the article with concrete suggestions that institutions could take to alleviate poverty for graduate workers and make their working conditions more equitable, humane, diverse, and inclusive.

In Sheri Rysdam's article, "Precarity, Political Economy, and the Accommodated Classroom," Rysdam articulates a vision for the "accommodated classroom" as a new norm for learning in precarious times. Based on her experience of pregnancy in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Rysdam draws from the works of bell hooks and Victor Villanueva to articulate a liberatory pedagogy of accommodation. Rather than treating accommodation as exceptional, Rysdam offers a model that asks, "how can I better hear you," with the

understanding that accommodations are not fixed needs but a deeply contextual and ongoing negotiation between student and teacher.

In Cathryn Molloy's article, "A Framework for Embracing Interdisciplinarity in the Context of Job-Readiness Imperatives in College Curricula," Molloy articulates the pressure of direct-to-industry pipelines in academic programs as tuition costs rise and economic conditions worsen for many. Asking "how can we create curricula that allows for passionate exploration, play, and self-discovery—keys to the development of an enlightened, judicious, and thoughtful citizen and soft skills—while also helping students to unambiguously see the future careers and selves they might inhabit? How can we teach courses that students, internship providers, and potential employers will interpret as valuable while also honoring students' rights to exploring areas of interest for their own sake?" (60), Molloy proposes a framework that could be employed in the development of such curricula by "embracing interdisciplinarity," "leaving ample room for play, vulnerability, exploration, and self-discovery," "including opportunities for reflections on a wide variety of potential futures," and "having clear, career-oriented student learning outcomes (SLOs) that map to current job ads and follow key industry trends" (63). Molloy's work urges those engaged in curricular development to consider the whole student—noting their complex needs and motivations for being in the classroom—and to consider both the economic and social factors that may influence them.

Central Themes

Reading across the articles in this issue, two key themes stood out to us: the additional demands placed on faculty and students and how they experience these struggles, and the economic considerations—justified or not—that shape (and have shaped) academic and curricular policy across time. Our authors showed the emotional consequences of poverty by sharing their personal stories of life in the academy. These narratives demonstrate the human costs of low wages and poor working conditions in a way that a purely economic analysis cannot. The fact that everyone from one of the most senior faculty in our field to the newest graduate student has a personal story of precarity highlights the scale and depth of the problem and its continuing significance for higher education. We thank our authors for sharing these (often deeply personal) stories which demonstrate the costs of our current way of doing things and offer visions for a more liberatory path forward.

In addition to these affective framings of poverty at the university, our authors examine the economic histories of higher education as well as current economic realities to illustrate the long history of academic disinvestment and how we can shift such trajectories. From classrooms to departmental learning outcomes and institutional cultures, authors across this special issue consider the economic ramifications of poverty and its pressures on students, faculty, and administrators. Many authors advocate for collective action and increased collaboration to address precarity and develop cultures of abundance and access.

The Path Ahead

Finally, we are sharing a report by Thomas Miller and Charles McMartin that examines the employment trajectories of early-career faculty in composition, rhetoric, and writing studies.

Based on thirty interviews of recent graduates, Miller and McMartin center their discussion on leadership and its challenges and opportunities in the current moment of shifting employment and working conditions. Miller and McMartin distill their findings into ten key lessons. Three of these lessons especially resonate with themes discussed in our other contributions. These are:

1. The wellness of early-career faculty and staff is a collective concern and not just an individual accommodation.
2. The leaders in place in departments need to be recognized and supported as part of such collaborative efforts.
3. Such efforts must recognize and support nontenure-track faculty as vital contributors to the leadership in place in departments.

This report will prepare readers for Issue 9 of ALRA, which invites proposals regarding the future of labor in the academy.

Works Cited

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