

## CHAPTER 6

# STILL TRYING TO BREAK OUR BONDS: CONTINGENT FACULTY, INDEPENDENCE, AND RHETORICS FROM BELOW AND ABOVE

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Narratives of writing program independence are often driven by concerns about composition's contingent faculty (see Johnson & Lalicker, this volume). For example, in *Moving a Mountain*, Barry Maid (2001) describes how the problem of contingent faculty working conditions at ULAR was resolved by splitting the writing program away from the English Department. At Appalachian, we've struggled since 2008 to move our composition program out of English, a struggle motivated in part by a priority to improve contingent faculty's working conditions. However, we're still in English, in the situation Susan McLeod describes:

I still find departments that consist of two groups: literature faculty who teach fewer and fewer majors, and legions of contingent faculty and TAs teaching writing, with one beleaguered WPA running the show. Composition is the budget engine that drives the department, but the mandarins are still in charge. For change to occur in this still-common pattern, that departmental structure needs to change, or writing programs need to break away. (2006, p. 503)

Our departmental structure hasn't changed to accommodate the needs of the composition program or its legions of contingent faculty. Breaking away from English, in our case, promises the only alternative to the current structure (see Everett, this volume), which relies on contingent faculty without properly supporting or valuing their poor working conditions that undoubtedly negatively impact students' learning. While we seek independence for many reasons, we are largely motivated to fight for it because of the possibilities it represents for

non-tenure-track faculty, including more stable employment, a voice in their workplace, and a valuing of their expertise.

Scholars on independent writing programs cite composition's development of a strong non-tenure-track teaching faculty as a key factor in the move toward independence (Maid, 2001; Tingle & Kirscht, 2001). Similarly, we've built on the assumption that investment in non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty—through faculty development activities, expanding career opportunities, and improving working conditions—must be a central goal in creating a strong, sustainable composition program (see Schendel & Royer, this volume). A focus on the politics, perspectives, and concerns of NTT faculty guides our arguments and perspectives on independence, which we believe is necessary to support the interests of composition's faculty and students. As tenured composition specialists, we occupy positions far more secure than our NTT faculty colleagues; however, we believe our interests most often overlap and that our program is strengthened through solidarity with our NTT colleagues.

This orientation toward confronting the issues and supporting the voices and work of those with the least amount of institutional power can be understood through a framework Nancy Welch (2008) calls a "rhetoric from below." Welch theorizes this rhetoric as a set of principles and arguments focused on a grassroots form of organizing and change. Separating political arguments into two categories, rhetoric from above and rhetoric from below, Welch explores the tension between bottom-up and top-down solutions and arguments in any given struggle. Many arguments (from both contingent and tenure-track faculty) for improving working conditions for NTT faculty in composition programs can be understood as rhetoric from below, "not from official policy makers but from and to those who feel the daily effects of official policy" (Welch, 2008, p. 72). Welch suggests that rhetorical strategies from the academic labor movement, led by NTT comp faculty and TAs, provide generative models, "examples of concrete provocations by the growing ranks of contingent faculty asserting their rights to more certainty and control when it comes to working conditions and terms of employment" (2008, p. 72). At this historical moment, as unions are losing ground and full-time faculty positions in higher education are rapidly disappearing, contingent faculty organizing is producing some of the few victories in workplace struggles in higher education. These gains of the academic labor movement have not been handed down from above; they've been fought for and won from below. And though our state prohibits union organizing, we've found opportunities for rhetorical action from below through our struggle for independence, and we believe that our program's strength and future relies on our ability to hear the voices and support the needs of contingent faculty.

## CREATING A CONVERSATION ABOUT WRITING INSTRUCTION

The investment in NTT faculty in Appalachian's composition program has been intentional, based on the WPA's respect for their work in the classroom and willingness to learn about and in some cases contribute to the scholarship of the field. In 1998, when Rhoades became director of the composition program, there was no history of program meetings, and the coherence of the program relied on a series of required assignments given to TAs, NTTs, and tenure-track (TT) faculty teaching composition. The two-course sequence, taken by most students in the first year, consisted of a standard introductory course with no text other than a handbook and an introduction to literature course intended as a continuation of composition instruction, with a literature anthology. Those NTTs teaching in composition were limited to a maximum of five courses a year officially, a policy to prevent their being perceived as  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time and thus requiring benefits. In practice, many were given four courses in fall semesters as an emergency measure and two in spring, but the practice was not considered to amount to  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time assignments.

To begin a conversation, Rhoades met with NTT faculty to ask about their practice and found that most taught in isolation and did not attend faculty meetings. In conversations with TT faculty, many of whom also taught composition, she found that the general attitude was that NTTs were paid too little to be expected to do service or participate in conversations about teaching and learning. Eileen Schell challenges us to "find ways to incorporate, value, reward, and develop the knowledge and contributions of part-time and nontenure-track faculty . . . to integrate scholarship and teaching in rewarding, productive, and meaningful ways for all who make writing instruction their livelihood" (1998, p. 70). In that spirit, Rhoades began two initiatives toward coherence in the program. The first was involvement of all faculty, who were invited to talk about good teaching ideas, and the second was inviting NTT faculty to join the Writing Committee. Since the department committee tradition was to allow only TT faculty to vote, the committee agreed to operate by consensus.

As these conversations helped to define practice, Rhoades developed a strong relationship with publishers such as Bedford/St. Martin's (since there was no budget for the program), providing their teacher resources as basis for conversation and inviting scholars to campus. In those first years, Hepsie Roskelly, Toby Fulwiler, and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater offered workshops to the faculty. As faculty interest grew in how theory informs practice, the program adopted *Community of Writers* and was able to work with both Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff on campus, solidifying the program investment in the theory of the field

and connecting it to the national conversation. At a time when over 90% of the composition faculty were part time, more volunteered for committee work and participated in end-of-year sharing of good ideas, supported each other's work in peer mentoring groups, and attended English Department faculty meetings. Peer mentoring groups took the place of the department practice of choosing two TT faculty to visit a class and evaluate the NTT faculty member based on that visit. In the peer-mentoring model, groups of NTTs teaching composition visited each other's classes and discussed syllabi and assignment design, producing not only evaluations but also classroom support, enlarging the conversation about practice.

### **CHANGES IN THE NTT WORKPLACE: BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

As NTT faculty became more active in these workshops and committee meetings, Rhoades, with support from her colleagues in the Carolinas Writing Program Administrators organization, began talking to Appalachian administrators about a shift to benefitted lines, multi-year contracts, and greater involvement of NTTs in decision-making. At first, discussions produced two major objections: that NTTs should not be exploited by being asked to do more, and that teaching four composition courses per semester would be too much of a load. As more TT faculty learned that NTTs usually taught more than four classes (to supplement their incomes through teaching at more than one institution) and that NTTs were already voluntarily investing in the program through professional development and program meetings, those perceptions were discounted. When North Carolina's governor requested a Board of Governors' report on NTT concerns in 2002, calling for benefitted lines and representation of NTTs in policy-making, Rhoades proposed creating benefitted lines dedicated to composition.

Responding to what they realized were unfair and unsustainable practices, in 2003 the English faculty voted to convert one TT line to a benefitted line in composition with a 4/4 load. Dave Haney, the chair of English, supported this transition and, as he became the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education, endorsed a university-wide NTT committee's call for more benefitted lines. In 2006, 39 NTTs were moved to ¾-time benefitted lines, eleven in the Composition Program. Since then, other NTTs have been moved to full-time and ¾-time lines in Composition or have held placeholder lines when TT searches could not be conducted.

Another major change in the department culture at this time resulted in Haney's shifting the TT load from four to three courses a semester with reassignment for research, which freed most TT faculty from teaching composi-

tion and necessitated hiring more NTT faculty to meet Composition's need. In effect, this shift created a more coherent faculty of composition, but it also provided the basis for a schism between faculty teaching composition and those who did not, in a department where conversations focused more often on the need to defend the interests of the traditional literature English degree. (Haney and Rhoades wrote about this shift in faculty attitudes in "Contingent Faculty Across the Disciplines" in *Academe*, 2006.)

During the time of these structural changes, the Composition Program was burgeoning, inviting more scholars to campus to work with the faculty, including Andrea Lunsford, Tony Petrosky, and Nick Carbone, and finding more NTTs each year investing in committee work. The NTT Concerns Committee became a strong voice for NTTs, with leaders emerging. Within the Composition Program, we succeeded in creating what Carol Lipson and Molly Voorhees describe as the goal at Syracuse: "the force of the new teaching culture was to emphasize the professional status of the part-time faculty, and to underline their value to the program and the profession" (2001, p. 121).

Two other changes provided some NTTs with professional development opportunities, in the University Writing Center and the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, the latter created as part of General Education reform. Until 2002, Rhoades had been the only WPA on campus, but with the hiring of Beth Carroll to direct the writing center, the writing culture on campus changed dramatically. Carroll proposed moving the center out of English into the new library and information commons and expanded the professional preparation of the staff, with the result of doubling the traffic in the center in the first year. She trained and hired NTT faculty as well as undergraduates and TAs and created undergraduate and graduate courses in writing center theory and practice. NTT faculty were able to take that expertise to a new context, working with students from all over the university. Carroll and Rhoades also proposed one-hour courses to accompany TA teaching and a graduate certificate in Rhetoric and Composition, which attracted not only graduate students but also NTTs who wanted to add a credential in teaching composition.

Another shift in the program began with the institution of peer group evaluations in which small groups of contingent faculty visited each other's classes and reviewed each other's syllabi and course materials (for similar practices, see Davies, this volume). Rhoades had asked Composition NTTs to form mentoring groups to meet the administrative need for assessment but also to strengthen the program with further and more intense conversation. One flashpoint occurred when an NTT committee at Rhoades' request presented a plan for peer evaluation criteria to the English department faculty. Response to that proposal suggested that some TT faculty lacked respect for the work of NTTs and were

growing concerned that evaluation of their NTT colleagues represented a threat to tenure. Some TT faculty expressed dismay that NTT faculty were presenting scholarship and becoming central to the work of some committees, saying publicly that NTT faculty should not be allowed to shape policy in this way. This was one of the first faculty meeting conversations in which we began to be aware of backlash against NTT achievements and engagement, which became clear during our later Association of Departments of English (ADE) review.

## GENERAL EDUCATION AND WAC

In 2007 the WPAs and Rhetoric and Composition Committee proposed a new second course in English, which Carroll had designed with a group of over 20 NTTs reading WAC theory and investigating course models. For years, Rhoades and Carroll had been dissatisfied with the second course, which was a combination of literature and composition, and students had complained to advisors that it repeated high school courses. This new course, ENG 2001, Introduction to Writing Across the Curriculum, with a prerequisite of 30 hours, would provide the scaffolding for a vertical writing curriculum. This course was accepted in English after some debate, as there was concern from some literature faculty that foregoing the traditional literature and composition course would result in fewer English majors.

In 2006–2008, the General Education Task Force endorsed Rhoades' proposal to create the vertical curriculum and a university WAC program to support it. In this curriculum, students enroll in a dedicated writing course each year, the first two in Composition and the third and fourth in the disciplines, a WID course introducing them to the discipline through writing, and a capstone experience in the major. Every program in the disciplines proposed WID and capstone courses for approval by the WAC Program and Gen Ed, according to Gen Ed guidelines voted on by the entire university faculty (details about the curriculum are on the WAC Program website, [wac.appstate.edu](http://wac.appstate.edu)). At first, Rhoades encountered some resistance on the interdisciplinary Gen Ed Task Force to a strong investment in the NTT faculty's delivery of composition, as some task force members were unfamiliar with the level of professional development of NTTs in the field, and the task force had agreed that a successful Gen Ed program should be delivered primarily by TT faculty. Rhoades demonstrated that the NTT faculty in Composition was extraordinarily invested in the work of Gen Ed and promised further professional development.

The formation of the WAC Program, with Rhoades directing and five NTTs from Composition serving as WAC consultants, was key to establishing a vertical writing model. The consultants engaged in what was essentially a course

of Rhetoric and Composition theory with a focus on WAC scholarship. Each consultant took responsibility for specific research in several areas: portfolio teaching, assessment, website development, genre knowledge, and community engagement. In addition, each began primary and secondary research in the writing of certain disciplines: for example, the portfolio specialist worked with faculty in Theatre and Dance, Geography and Planning, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Communication. For these NTTs who did not have degrees in Rhetoric and Composition, the level of preparation was intense and aided in helping them gain the confidence necessary to assume a university role. Consultants are available to visit WID faculty classrooms to provide support for writing instruction, and they form relationships each year with WID faculty who work with WAC. They conduct workshops for faculty in all disciplines, and their level of expertise as writing specialists must be respected regardless of their rank.

The Gen Ed vertical writing curriculum is supported by an Information Literacy program as well as WAC and required a major investment by the NTT faculty of the Composition Program: these instructors had not taught a course that introduced students to different documentation styles, writing formats, or rhetorical situations. Many had not taught rhetorical analysis. In order to qualify to teach the new WAC course, all Composition faculty were paid to attend a three-day institute and later workshops with Chris Anson, Nancy Sommers, Kathy Yancey, John Zubizaretta, Frank Farmer, Lisa Ede, and other theorists as well as continuing theme-based workshops as part of an ambitious professional development project for the new course. New NTTs who want to teach ENG 2001 are prepared through mentoring by WAC consultants. As professional development, WAC is a sustainable program providing new areas of career development for NTTs and has been a particularly rich opportunity for NTTs going on to Rhetoric and Composition doctoral programs. In addition, WAC sponsors conversations between ENG 2001 instructors and faculty in the disciplines, the first such university conversations about writing instruction.

## **THE CHALLENGES OF BACKLASH**

As NTTs became more active in department life as well as the Composition Program, particularly through University Writing Center and WAC Program activities (programs housed in University College), they began to speak in faculty meetings and through their NTT Concerns committee. WAC invited Eileen Schell to Appalachian to help organize NTTs across campus, and it became increasingly clear that Composition's dependence on NTT labor demanded political action. Kim Gunter, who was hired as the Composition director in 2008, brought with her a strong concern for the welfare of NTT faculty and

advocacy for their work in the program. With three WPAs, a growing Rhetoric and Composition graduate certificate program, a vocal NTT faculty, and continuing interference with proposals for a revision of placement, hiring, and curriculum policies, Gunter, Rhoades, and Carroll began to discuss Composition Program independence. Though half the department was represented by Composition, primarily a program of NTTs and three WPAs, the program had no budget and often found that a vocal minority of TT faculty in English blocked the program's initiatives and in particular seemed threatened by NTT voices.

In "Not Just Teachers: The Long-Term Effects of Placing Instructors in Administrative Roles in Writing Intensive Programs" (this volume), Laura J. Davies points to institutional flexibility as key in the move toward independence at Syracuse: at a time when our Composition Program was at its most creative and flexible, we met with inflexibility in the larger program and university context. Composition Program proposals were often blocked or ignored in committee and faculty meetings, and in response to a request about NTT status from the Arts and Sciences dean's office in 2007, the Department Personnel Committee voted to designate all NTTs as adjunct, a move which denied them the right to vote in department meetings. Before that date, voting rights had been murky but practiced by benefitted NTTs. The choice presented to the department by the college allowed for several alternatives, but allowing NTTs to vote just on those matters relevant to their program, a solution that would have been accepted by most parties, was not included. The personnel committee was concerned that NTTs would be allowed to vote on TT personnel matters and removed the vote entirely, a drastic shift that would not have been likely to pass in the full faculty. As a result, NTTs were disenfranchised in a program they had invested in and in whose success they had been instrumental.

This history of NTT presence in Appalachian's Composition Program could also include some individual stories. One NTT faculty member who graduated with the literature MA in 2006 has since worked as a WAC consultant, developing a specialty in website management and community college writing programs. While teaching Composition courses, he has worked with faculty across campus through WAC, particularly with faculty in Art, History, and Music. He served as assistant director to the Composition Program and organized a university-wide Celebration of Student Writing, and this year has entered a doctoral program in Rhetoric and Composition. Another long-time NTT has become a writing center consultant and a respected peer mentor to her colleagues, leading the NTT Concerns Committee and offering sessions on effective pedagogy at workshops. Another recently announced that she felt ready for more responsibility in the program and clearly sees this as a natural career move: after years of teaching, she is ready to work with her colleagues in a different role or to begin new training.



These opportunities are often seen by new NTT faculty as one of the advantages of working in our program: we understand that careers should have trajectories and that years of teaching composition produce valuable experience that should be shared.

This level of engagement by NTT faculty in the Composition Program has been possible through many years of investment. At several points in program growth, WPAs have been made aware that our relationship with NTT faculty has not been valued by some of our English TT colleagues, who do not understand the nature of WPA work. In addition, some have suggested that it would be more productive to hire postgrads for three years rather than invest in long-term program development, not recognizing the professional development of NTT faculty in such programs as the UWC and WAC as good for individual careers and the university. In particular, it has been disheartening that some of our department colleagues do not see the department as connected to the goals of the university, with benefits from cross-disciplinary projects and General Education. Two major differences in our perceptions of our university work convinced us that continuing to work in the English department was unsustainable: first, our investment in NTT faculty and their growing engagement in the department resulted in their disenfranchisement and devaluation of their role, and second, the interdisciplinary nature of writing instruction and the ability of our discipline to develop new degrees and programs was not accepted as consonant with department goals.

When Gunter joined the department in fall of 2008, she found a faculty that was balkanized in clichéd ways. It was difficult to ascertain whether the polarization fell along literature/composition or tenure-track/non-tenure track lines. What was clear, though, was that some department members (most of whom were literature colleagues in tenured or tenure-track lines) viewed Composition as a program run amok while most Composition faculty (nearly all of whom were non-tenure track or WPAs) welcomed the changes that had occurred in recent years. Some Composition faculty embraced those changes purely due to material interests. For instance, Appalachian's Composition Program moved from no benefitted NTT lines in 2003 to 29 benefitted NTT lines in 2013. Others embraced the program's growth for disciplinary reasons. The Composition sequence, from both curriculum design and classroom implementation perspectives, aligned far more fully with best practices of the field. For example, the program adopted portfolio evaluation, implemented a vigorous assessment program, and ceased asking students to write about imaginative literature, instead asking them to focus on how rhetoric changes depending on discipline and genre.

This split among the faculty, though, continued to deepen because, while some colleagues thought Composition had grown quite enough, the Composition

faculty remained dissatisfied with what they perceived to be unfair constraints. While the Composition Program grew to account for approximately 55% of the student credit hours generated in the department of English, for example, only a handful of Composition faculty members could vote in department meetings. Moreover, many Composition faculty found themselves in the odd position of serving on committees in which they couldn't vote. These faculty, then, who had become excited about their professional lives, experienced dissonance when their participation in faculty governance was denied. Many Composition faculty members could not even attend department meetings as observers since the meetings were purposely scheduled at a time when they could not attend.

We continued to face other challenges as well. NTT faculty were hired on one-year contracts that were often not provided until very late in the summer. In many departments, these contracts might have been viewed as standard operating procedure and might not have raised concerns. However, at that time, the Department Personnel Committee was the body that recommended reappointment and promotion into and demotion from benefitted lines for NTT faculty. This committee was the same body that had renamed all NTT lecturers as adjuncts in order to disenfranchise these faculty members. Additionally, NTT faculty were disallowed from sitting on this personnel committee; thus, given that tenured/tenure-track Rhetoric and Composition scholars constituted only about 3% of the department's membership, there was no guarantee that anyone involved in the Composition Program would sit on this important department committee.

The department also required that all NTT faculty formally reapply for their positions every year. This reapplication process was not simply institutional red tape. Instead, each year, it was as if all employment were terminated, and all NTTs had to honest-to-goodness reapply. Faculty who had taught at the institution for 20 years and who had been in benefitted lines for 10 faced the prospect that they could lose their jobs, even if they had received stellar yearly evaluations, and in fact, as the split in the department deepened, some NTT faculty did lose their jobs or were demoted. This lack of employment security for NTTs led to the lack of retention of some of the strongest teachers in the program as these were the very faculty who could go on the market and obtain more secure employment elsewhere. Composition administrators were then faced with the unnecessary and expensive reality of hiring new and often less qualified teachers who then underwent extensive training. Given our rural location, finding qualified teachers is not easy, and these inefficient and costly hiring and employment practices led to a revolving door of Composition faculty, negatively impacting students' experiences of our classes.

Additional challenges existed. While Gunter now directed the Composition Program and had been hired through a national search due to her previous

experience in writing program administration and scholarship, she still lacked administrative authority, a well-documented problem in the field. She often wasn't consulted or even notified regarding a number of composition matters including placement, scheduling of composition courses, granting of credit to transfer students, and setting course enrollment caps. The Composition Program had no budget of its own and did not receive funding beyond faculty salary lines from the department of English. The Composition Program's faculty resided in office spaces that were technologically antiquated, cramped, overcrowded (at one point, 16 people shared one office), unsafe, and noisy, impeding composition pedagogy and likely violating FERPA and OSHA laws. Computers and printers remained unavailable or nonfunctioning, and there were no classrooms designated for the Composition Program that were capable of and soundly designed for the teaching of composition with computers.

The irony is that during this time Composition worked in more synergistic and exciting ways with partners across the university. For instance, Composition collaborated on staffing and the drafting of contracts with the UWC, WAC, and the First-Year Seminar Program. We collaborated on assessment with WAC, the General Education program, and Academic Affairs. We linked some Composition classes (with classes in Biology and Theater, for instance). We collaborated with the Appalachian Studies Program on a cluster of Appalachian Studies-themed Composition classes. We worked with faculty across campus in imagining a system of eportfolios that would be adopted across disciplines. We partnered with the Library and Information Commons staff on information literacy initiatives. We collaborated with our Appalachian and Community Together office in piloting service learning initiatives. Because we experienced such positive, productive relationships outside of the English department and because of the transition from a one-year horizontal model to a four-year vertical model, we came to believe that this was a time when our program had to reconsider and clarify its identity as an independent unit on our campus.

## **PROPOSAL FOR INDEPENDENCE**

Thus began our onslaught of reports, and not just our original proposal for independence, exhaustively compiled by the Rhetoric and Composition Committee, which was itself comprised of everyone from adjunct faculty to full professors. Afterward came participation on a university task force that considered our proposal and issued a 60-some page endorsement of it. We also wrote a 70-some page contribution to the department's self-study for a visiting Adult and Developmental Education review team. We drafted, at the request of the College of Arts and Sciences dean, a dollar-by-dollar budget demonstrating that a move of

the Composition Program could initially be accomplished for zero additional monies from the university. We compiled lists of independent programs and noted that two of our university's peer institutions (Georgia Southern University and James Madison University) had independent writing programs. We wrote white papers for three separate deans and three different provosts (one old, one interim, one new), and memos and emails too many to count. In all of these documents, we thought we had anticipated folks' objections to Composition's independence (especially the objections of some skeptical English department colleagues).

We were wrong.

For instance, we knew some in the English department would have concerns about funding. If Composition left the department, we acknowledged, we *would* take some operating monies with us since operating funds in our university are allocated for each benefitted line. However, we reasoned, English's need for these operating dollars would drop in direct correlation to the resources it would "lose." The same was also true in regards to salaries. Moreover, the argument for new faculty lines on our campus is made in part as a result of the ratio of student credit hours (SCH) per full-time equivalent (FTE), and as composition classes are relatively small, it was unlikely that English would face any significant change in this area and might even be helped. Reason, though, was not enough to win agreement on this point, and English faculty remained concerned about losing resources should a split occur.

We also anticipated concerns, narrowly speaking, about physical space and, more broadly speaking, about our future relationship with English. We live on a campus that, in part due to its mountain location, has run out of space. Thus, it was likely not feasible for the Composition Program to relocate from our current building. We also believed doing so wasn't a necessity as our building currently accommodated both Composition and the broader English department as well as other disciplines. Instead, we suggested simply shuffling the space, giving Composition one of English's three floors, for example. We also made clear that we hoped to retain a close, collaborative relationship with the English Department. We imagined this relationship growing around localized, genuine, and specific matters of common interest as that had been our experience with other partners across the university. For instance, we acknowledged that we would need to collaborate on the scheduling and evaluation of the few faculty who taught both literature and composition. We especially wanted to protect the English department MA students who served as TAs in Composition and enrolled in Rhetoric and Composition seminars and one-hour TA mentoring workshops. It became clear, though, that this would not be a collegial divorce. Many colleagues declared that if we left the English department, they did not

want to continue to work with us in any way. They wanted us out of their building (where we would go was not clear), and what's more, we had better not try to steal any stationery when we left.

Third, probably nothing else had inspired us to make this move more than the goal of achieving better working conditions for our faculty (for instance, their immediate enfranchisement in faculty meetings, as is dictated in our faculty handbook). We strongly believed that more respected faculty would ultimately make for more effective composition teachers. It had not occurred to us that many of our colleagues would oppose better working conditions for non-tenure track faculty, that they would specifically feel that non-tenure track faculty receiving a greater voice within the programs they keep afloat would equate to less power for tenure-track faculty. Some of our department colleagues shared with us that we were not only misreading documents from NCTE, CCCC, the AAUP, and the MLA, but that we were attacking tenure itself and naively did not understand how the university works.

Throughout what stretched into years of conversations, we repeatedly invoked best practices as determined by the field of Rhetoric and Composition. We wanted to control our program—its placement, its goals and outcomes. We wanted acknowledgement of our successes—the scholars that had visited our campus and endorsed our program, the growth of our graduate certificate in Rhetoric and Composition. We pointed to the support our move for independence was receiving from scholars around the country—Barry Maid, Darsie Bowden, Nancy Sommers. Most recently, we pointed to receiving a 2012 CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence. When it came down to it, though, we had wrongly assumed that it mattered what the field endorsed—as it had at places like Grand Valley or West Chester, described by Schendel & Royer and William Lalicker, respectively, this volume. Quickly we learned, on the department listserv and in open campus forums, that Rhetoric and Composition was not a discipline, that portfolios are not effective pedagogy and are simply a vehicle for grade inflation, that everybody teaches writing, and that Barry Maid got it wrong.

Little by little, it seemed that we had ironically worked ourselves into a catch-22. At first, we seemed mostly to hear disrespect for the field of Rhetoric and Composition (what field?), disregard for the theoretical and scholarly work of writing program administration (a literature colleague could run the Composition Program as well as any of us), and attacks on our teaching (we were purportedly only having a Celebration of Student Writing so that we didn't have to assign another paper). Despite the ADE report not taking a position on Composition's independence, it did criticize the practice of hiring our MA graduates to teach in the program. The report also failed to recognize how dif-

difficult it is to recruit teachers in our rural location and, mirroring the rhetoric of the department backlash, failed to recognize the excellence of these NTT faculty. Increasingly, it was our success that led some to believe we should not gain independence. Our students were overall, some admitted, good writers. Our faculty were rigorous. Our non-tenure track faculty, though they did not have to, were traveling to conferences, publishing, and attending *and leading* faculty development events in droves. We began to wonder if our success had been a misstep. If our students couldn't write, if our faculty were incompetent, perhaps then the administration might have taken us away from English, would have blamed the landowner for the sharecropper's poor harvest. But because our faculty were inspired, read the journals and attended the workshops, won campus-wide teaching awards and led half-day workshops at CCCC and participated in our campus' Scholarship of Teaching and Learning initiatives, some administrators would argue that no change is necessary. While NTT faculty have continued to teach at a level of excellence and to participate in program activities, morale and engagement of NTT faculty have declined. Our program has been in a holding pattern as we've waited for new administrators. We've learned through our experience that we can't rely entirely on rhetoric from below; rhetoric from above, from supportive administrators, is essential for us to reach our goal of autonomy. Rhetorics from above are not always oppressive. Now, under the leadership of a supportive new provost and department chair, who value the contributions of NTT faculty and our field, our administration has this year moved us closer to independence by having us explore autonomy within the English department.

## **BALANCING RHETORIC FROM ABOVE AND BELOW**

Scholarship on independent writing programs is not always oriented toward rhetorical action from below. In some cases, arguments for independence (even those rooted in concerns over contingent faculty) take the form of a rhetoric from above: in developing a disciplinary identity, for example through a writing major, the case has been made to rid the field of NTT faculty and to establish independence as a way to move beyond the service role of composition in the university. To be treated as an equal, some argue, composition must act more like other disciplines, for example, by hiring only Ph.D.s to teach composition, even if they are professionals in other disciplines (Harris, 2000; McLeod, 2006). The solution to the problem of contingent faculty, in these cases, is seen as removing NTT faculty from the scene of teaching. This is a clear example of a rhetoric from above, a set of arguments from scholars about establishing the legitimacy of composition through a distancing from contingent faculty.

Given our focus on NTT concerns, our move toward independence at Appalachian has relied primarily on a rhetoric from below, but, along with Welch, we see a productive tension between rhetorics from above and below: both rhetorics are necessary and might be understood as complimentary instead of oppositional. The story we tell about our struggle for independence begins with a rhetoric from below but ends with a call to incorporate both rhetorics in our arguments. As Welch (2008) explains,

If we can push against the segregationist divisions, there is a potentially tense and productive discussion that can take place here: a tense and productive discussion from which most of us in this field, regardless of the (increasingly dubious) privileges of rank, would benefit as we consider the daily antagonisms—including bosses, bills, layoffs—from which a life in school is no escape. (p. 72)

The professionalization of NTT faculty is a priority, and so is gaining a disciplinary identity through a writing major; both are goals for us at Appalachian. Because we've approached our goals as complementary, solidarity among TT and NTT composition specialists has been one result of our struggle.

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