

Theme 3. Advocacy Successes

Although the prior section examined precarity, there are many ways in which writing center administrators and writing center professional staff advocate successfully for better working conditions. Advocacy—often not in the job description but absolutely necessary for a functional writing center—is perhaps the most visible and identifiable form of metalabor. One of the most important points that demands advocacy centers on tutor pay. In this section, several pieces talk about the importance of shoring up tutor pay (Whiddon’s “. . . at least for now”; Tirabassi’s “Advocating for Equitable Pay”; and Anonymous’ “From the Archive”). Writing center administrators are often tasked with a difficult moral calculus: every increase in tutor wages can often mean fewer tutor hours, which, in turn, results in fewer students able to access writing center resources. For Whiddon and Tirabassi, better tutor pay is critical because they both staff their centers with student labor and struggle with profound staff retention issues because of low on-campus pay for student workers. Both share ways they have advocated through collecting data on pay across the region and across the country. Tirabassi also details a collaborative campus-wide effort to organize different student learning offices to increase pay for workers. These examples of advocacy and tutor/worker-centered approaches anticipate and provide useful examples of the forms of anti-capitalism we describe at length in Act III. There is astonishingly little published research on the topic of tutor pay. These stories invite further conversation and advocacy on this topic.

In “From the Archive of a Tutor Representative’s Email Correspondences (Summer 2022),” Anonymous provides a different take on advocacy related to union representation, professional tutor pay, hazard pay, and additional support for workers during the pandemic. Through everyday documents like email, Anonymous shows us how critical it is to both aggregate and share information about working conditions and union benefits and regulations. Without this kind of advocacy, workers can be adrift in the changing landscape of higher education. Even with this kind of advocacy work, however, upheaval tends to dominate the workplace. The emails not only share important information about pandemic pay; they tell the story of a director leaving their position and the writing center being moved. In this way, the union representative becomes a point of continuity in an otherwise chaotic moment in the workplace, highlighting the importance of labor organizing. Here we affirm and extend compositionist James R. Daniel’s (2022) assertion that “Unions are the most effective means of securing stable faculty positions, improving salaries, defending intellectual labor, and combatting the university’s privatization in ways that offer to provide contingent faculty the foothold they need in the academy” (p. 174). We feel Daniel’s (2022) claim is applicable to writing center staff due to stories in this collection, such as Anthony’s,