



PART 2: PART-TIME FACULTY

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BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE:

Towards a Blueprint for the Professional Treatment of Disempowered Faculty

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Ending Abuse: Treating Part-Time Faculty as Professionals

This presentation explores what tenured and tenure-line faculty can do to help transform the institutional position of part-time faculty. While it suggests what we can do to end the exploitation and abuse of our colleagues, it is not about the legitimization of these colleagues. They are already legitimate, they are already professional. My concern is with the role of the tenured and the tenure-track, of academic administrators and others with institutional authority, in the empowerment of colleagues who are an indispensable part of UMKC. It is about how "we" might become more professional in the treatment of colleagues who can teach "us" a thing or two about professionalism.

Much has been written about empowering students, most notably by Ira Shor in *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*. Shor, and a number of so-called "critical teachers" including Alan France, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh dedicate their lives to the development of student-centered teaching. The explicit purpose of these Freirian theorists is to transform the political structure of American society, first in the classroom, then in the university, then in the "real world." Henry Giroux gives a clear sense of the priorities of empowering education:

my overriding pedagogical project [is] rooted in an attempt at majority democratic education, that is, an education whose aim [is] to advance the ideological and lived relations necessary for students at least to interrogate ... schooling as a site of ongoing struggle over the 'social and political task of transformation, resistance, and radical democratization. (*Left Margins*, 11).

Giroux and other critical teachers develop pedagogical theories designed to change and heighten student consciousness of political oppression. But they typically assume that the teachers stimulating students to address schooling "as a site of ongoing struggle" are themselves in a position stable enough to withstand any degree of student-centered critique. While there is much discussion of techniques for empowering students, there is little discussion of the situation of teachers whose institutional authority is relatively precarious, who are, themselves, sites of an ongoing struggle. Indeed, when the status of part-time faculty

is discussed, the overriding assumption is that "they" are somehow deficient.

In a rather gloomy essay on "Composition Studies" in *Redrawing the Boundaries* (1992), Richard Marius, then director of the Harvard Writing Program, argued that "the critical, intractable problem [with college level writing programs] is that the teaching of composition in four-year schools is still relegated to part-time adjunct faculty whose pay is lousy, whose institutional loyalty is nil, and whose shifting ranks make it almost impossible for any writing program to develop a stable and trustworthy core of mentors" (467). Marius is right about the pay. But he is wrong about the loyalty, the stability, the level of trustworthiness: many of our part-time and non-tenurable full-time faculty have been teaching at UMKC as long as many of our senior, tenured faculty.

Part-time faculty are paid so little because it is convenient for those with power in the institution (like Marius and others I could quote) to regard them as temporary, shifting, unstable. Furthermore, the work they do is held in low esteem. The general attitude is that almost anyone can teach English Composition. If you can read and write, hey, go get 'em (this was exactly the attitude of the Professor of English Literature who gave me my first teaching assignment at Rutgers University in 1985). The assumption is that composition teachers teach "basic" reading and writing, spelling, comma-use, etc. Many Composition theorists perpetuate this assumption through the use of offensively simplistic grammar handbooks and textbooks. It is convenient for colleagues to ignore that we actually teach essayism, perspectivism, relational, mediation-based thinking, and negotiations between personal, academic, and cultural ways of thinking.

But, back to the issue of stability. Academia has different attitudes about coming and going, depending on who is doing the moving. It is about the difference between those labeled "professionals" and those labeled "workers." When tenure-line and tenured faculty come and go, we see them as taking part in the national and international exchange of expertise that is one of the most celebrated aspects of academic culture—when part-time faculty are forced to come and go, commuting between UMKC, Park University, Johnson County Community College, and so on, in order to piece together a living wage, we regard them as jobbers, as a mobile work-force that will travel at our convenience, at times convenient to us, at a wage that is as low as we can get away with. And we get away with it, in the collective conscience of the institution (which has allowed us to establish a long tradition of paying fast-food wages), because we regard their work as almost beneath the mission of the university. While part-timers fulfill functions that are intrinsic to our profession, to the work of the academy as a professional institution, they are treated as workers, as laborers who are interchangeable, as so many warm bodies to stand behind the teaching podium. Unfortunately the history of Composition supports this attitude.

Since the rise of Composition studies in the American academy in the mid-nineteenth century, English departments traditionally have treated the teaching of Composition as an afterthought. When I studied the history of Composition teaching at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, in order to figure out why the relationship between tenure-line faculty and non-tenure line faculty was so unprofessional, I discovered that the first teacher of English Composition at UND was a faculty wife who refused to accept pay for her services. She was called in to teach Composition because her husband and his colleague, the two professors who constituted the University's English department in 1882 (at the time the student dorm was a row of abandoned rail-cars) were appalled by the reading and writing skills of their students. They were not, however, willing to stoop beneath the teaching of Shakespeare and Milton, so they enlisted Ms. Merrifield as a volunteer. It wasn't until 1910 that we have a record of someone being paid a nominal fee for teaching students to write academic prose in a way that was acceptable to the tenure-line faculty.

The story gets better, but it took some creative thinking. In 1994 the Director of Composition at UND convinced the Department, the Dean, and the Chancellor to create eight full-time positions (with a 4/4 teaching load) with benefits, job security, and a salary of \$24,000 a year (i.e. \$3,000 per course). This

was Grand Forks, North Dakota in 1994. When I arrived in the summer of 1995, the situation of some of the non-tenure line faculty led me to convince the Dean that we should create two more positions and that we should allow part-timers to share positions: two part-timers could each teach a 2/2 load, earn \$12,000, have job security from year to year, and (here's the tricky bit) they could decide who would get the benefits. Not an ideal solution, but it opened an era during which part timers (first six, then as many as twelve) who wanted to remain part time could work out deals with the administration at their own convenience.

Why the Professional Treatment of Part-timers is Essential to UMKC's Pursuit of Academic Excellence

By treating part-time faculty at UMKC as professionals, we would achieve national recognition as one of the rare academic institutions that is genuine about "celebrating a community of learners", "celebrating a campus without borders", "celebrating human potential", and "celebrating academic excellence" (to quote from the first page of UMKC's 1999-2000 Annual Report).

Academic excellence is achieved in the three-way relationship between research, service, and teaching. A university that pursues national recognition as a research institution must support faculty who have, or are attempting to achieve, sufficient national and international prestige to be highly marketable. It must also support teaching faculty who are deeply familiar with local conditions. Some tenure-line faculty pursue excellence in teaching, research, and service not because, or not solely because, they are part of their job descriptions, but because they recognize the necessity of dynamic interactions between and among the different parts of academic culture. It is also why they celebrate and teach dynamic interactions between and among personal, academic, and sociopolitical cultures, philosophies, beliefs, theories, practices. A healthy academic institution encourages and rewards not only those who engage actively in this dynamic game, but also those who make this game possible. A healthy university recognizes that its workers fulfill a range of crucial, interdependent functions and that the abuse and neglect of one part of the workforce impacts all parts of the institution.

Our non-tenure-line teaching colleagues, both part- and full-time, lessen the burden on tenured and tenure-line faculty whose functions are more evenly divided between teaching, research, and service. Our colleagues are here because they are good teachers, some of the best that the institution employs. Often they have experience in pre-college education (a rarity among tenure-line faculty) and are experts at helping students negotiate the difficult transition between high-school (and junior colleges) and the four-year research institution. They are willing to teach classes that meet at inconvenient times and that come up at the last minute due to fluctuations in enrollment. And they step in when colleagues go on leave. Part time faculty also provide informal and formal mentoring for new faculty and GTAs. They are full of invaluable institutional memories. They are dynamic members of committees. They are profoundly responsive and dependable. What more could we ask? That they increase profit margins? Well, so they do! And they would continue to do so if they were paid \$4000 instead of the current \$1800 per course.

While a number of part-timers teach introductory courses required for English majors, the bulk of their teaching is in composition. In Fall 2000 non-tenure line faculty taught forty-six sections of English composition including fifteen writing-intensive courses (Theory and Practice of Composition; Writing and Technology; Writing and the Academy; Writing in Cultural Contexts). In Winter 2001 they are teaching forty-five sections. With an average of twenty-three students per section, non-tenure line faculty in English teach more than 2,000 students a year. Add the number of students per semester in PACE (Program in Adult Continuing Education) courses and in summer courses and the number approaches 2,500.

Despite the nineteenth-century beginnings of composition instruction, which suggest composition teachers did the job out of obligation and love, part-time faculty are now professional teachers of college-level reading and writing. As I have suggested, they are disempowered by the institution's lack of professionalism. It is not my job to professionalize my colleagues. I can, however, influence the culture of academia so that institutions treat part-time faculty with the respect and compensation appropriate to professional employees who teach the bulk of courses that are essential requirements for all college graduates. While GTA's and tenure-line faculty are fulfilling the requirements of a program of study or a promotion-process, part-time faculty and full-time instructors are teaching, teaching, teaching. And, when they are not distracted—by medical bills, heating bills, computer glitches, car payments, telephone systems that interrupt five people in order to contact one, and meetings that extend the hourly commitment while reducing the hourly wage—they think about, and work with, individual students. Many of these students will not stay at UMKC if they can't figure out how to read and write an academic essay. Many of these students tell us repeatedly that English 110 and 225 made them feel welcome at UMKC. Many of these students get paid more than their part-time teachers by working at McDonald's.

Let me conclude by asking a question and proposing an answer. What does UMKC gain from the part-time faculty? In many cases these teachers are the mainstay of our academic programs. They teach the bulk of our required courses. They allow tenured and tenure-line faculty to take research leaves and to teach reduced loads. They ensure that we have time for community service. They provide models of what it means to dedicate a life to teaching. Even though they are treated like dispensable fast-food employees and are hired semester to semester without the protection of health care, job, office-space, private telephone lines, and other "privileges," part-time teachers provide a deep, complex tapestry of historical and cultural memories that rival those of our most distinguished senior professors, staff, and administrators.

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