

THE

Writing Center Journal

International Writing Centers Association | An NCTE Assembly

500 Oval Dr., West Lafayette, IN 47907 | writingcenterjournal@ou.edu

Contingency and Its Intersections in Writing Centers

Walk into a writing center and you'll see workers of diverse social identities engaging in culturally charged and challenging writing-centered work alongside one another. Yet despite differences that consultants, faculty, and administrators in writing centers have in terms of intersectional identities, many of them share one, often ignored, identity in particular: contingency. As data about writing centers show, 71% of writing center directors are non-tenure line (Isaacs and Knight, 2014). And although no concrete numbers exist, as the Writing Centers Research Project suggests, many writing centers primarily hire undergraduates in their tutoring staff, followed closely by graduate students, and professional staff, all of whom are contingent ("Tutors," Writing Centers Research Survey 2018-2019).

Scholars in Writing Studies have, to varying degrees, explored the politics of the corporate university and contingency of the kind that Isaacs and Knight spotlight. As Marc Bousquet (2008) puts it in his critique of the corporatization of higher education, contemporary academics have witnessed a "return of the sort of dizzying inequalities formerly associated with the Gilded Age" (1). And, in turn, scholars in Writing Center Studies have engaged in similar explorations. For instance, Anne Ellen Geller and Harry Denny (2013) have explored how writing center professionals have navigated their careers, concluding that they find satisfaction on different tracks and their situations are "inherently local and contingent to the moment and the individual (123-124). Nicole I. Caswell, Jackie Grutsch McKinney, and Rebecca Jackson (2016) have investigated the experiences of new writing center directors in different kinds of institutional contexts. And Neisha-Anne S. Green (2018) has spotlighted the politics of the experience of performing writing center labor as a black woman and her lived experience in the field at large.

Still, we have a responsibility to continue to expand our scholarship on and understanding of contingent writing center workers and their labor, particularly in the disruptive context of the "Great Resignation" that COVID-19 has produced. But how? How do we further address the concerns of racial identity in writing centers as represented by Neisha-Anne S. Green (2018), Talisha Haltiwanger-Morrison (2018), Richard Sèvre (2018), and others through a lens of contingency? How does discussion of contingency come into conversation with scholarship on decolonization, for instance by Romeo García (2017)? How does it come into conversation with scholarship on queer identity in writing centers, most recently represented by Travis Webster (2021)? How does contingency inform our approaches to developing more accessible learning experiences for writers of diverse identities, among them those that involve "bodily, sensory, neurological, and mental differences," which Sharifa Daniels, Rebecca Day Babcock, and Doria Daniels (2015) address? And how does contingency intersect with gender to produce the sense of writing centers as "cozy homes," to reference Jackie Grutsch McKinney's (2013, 25) work on the grand narratives we produce about writing centers?

This special issue of *The Writing Center Journal* homes in on contingency as the defining worker identity of our field. We see contingent employees as fixed-term, multiyear contractual, yearly contractual, temporary, interim, adjunct, clinical, visiting, instructional, staff, and affiliate employees. And we see them as belonging to a social class that intersects with race, gender, sexuality, nationality, language, ability, faith or secularism, other classes, and other identities. We need to study the lived experiences of people who make up the majority of workers in our field. More expansively, we need to include in these conversations the most contingent of all contingent employees: the peer and professional tutors who work in our centers. The reliance on these contingent workers renders writing centers themselves as contingent and thus precarious spaces within an already precarious academic context.

For this open-access issue, we welcome works that explore contingency and its intersections in different modes and media from diverse writing center scholars and practitioners (including peer and professional tutors) who work on both contingent and tenure lines. Scholarship that mixes genres and/or methodologies is welcome. Contributors should consider the problems, possibilities, and/or power dynamics of their own, their centers' or the fields' contingent identities and/or the intersections with other identities. For example, contributors might propose...

- articles reporting on the results of data-driven, IRB-approved research;
- articles that draw on writing center and writing studies scholarship as well as scholarship from different disciplines;

- autoethnographies and histories that draw attention to the changes in writing center labor brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, unionization, engagement with other kinds of social movement organizing, or other issues;
 - narratives about the interplay of personal and professional aspects of contingent writing center workers' lives around the world;
 - multimodal essays that incorporate images, videos, and/or audio of contingent life; and
 - multilingual pieces that spotlight the linguistic diversity of our field.
- Manuscript submissions and brief bios are due by **December 31, 2022** at digitalCommons: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj/>. We look forward to reading, viewing, and/or listening to your work!

Clint Gardner, Salt Lake Community College
 Maggie M. Herb, SUNY Buffalo State College
 Liliana M. Naydan, Penn State Abington

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