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The Indianapolis Resolution: Responding to Twenty-First-Century Exigencies/Political Economies of Composition Labor

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## **The Indianapolis Resolution: Responding to Twenty-First-Century Exigencies/Political Economies of Composition Labor**

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### **Indianapolis Resolution**

WHEREAS, most post-secondary teachers with primary responsibility for teaching writing are contingent, as are increasing numbers of Writing Program Administrators and Writing Center Directors;

WHEREAS, a caste system has emerged in the discipline in which the salaries and working conditions of most post-secondary teachers with primary responsibility for teaching writing remain (and have remained so since the Wyoming Resolution in 1987) fundamentally unfair as judged by any reasonable professional standards (e.g., unfair in excessive teaching loads; unreasonably large class sizes; salary inequities; lack of benefits and professional status; barriers to professional status; and barriers to professional advancement);

WHEREAS, the November 2013 revision of the Statement of Principles and Standards for the Post-Secondary Teaching of Writing failed to address labor substantively, removing all specific recommendations for class size and workload, and locating ambiguous references to working conditions at

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the end of the statement; and while we acknowledge that the March 2015 revision includes specific workload recommendations but does not change working conditions' location on the Statement's priority list;

WHEREAS the disciplinary status of composition/rhetoric/writing studies has solidified since 1987, resulting in the proliferation of independent writing programs, graduate programs, departments, and all the accouterments of disciplinarity including journals, conferences, and CIP Codes;

WHEREAS a long history of position statements and exhortations from CCCC, WPA, MLA, ADE, NCTE have not provided mechanisms that compel specific, concrete, demonstrable changes in working conditions;

WHEREAS, we contend that inquiry into the effects of insecure labor provides important data about teaching and learning;

WHEREAS, labor-focused research has the potential to improve both working conditions and teaching practices;

WHEREAS, currently, there exists a dearth of support for creation, publication, and dissemination of research into labor and its effects on teaching;

WHEREAS, in the spirit of both fulfilling the vision first announced in the 1987 Wyoming Resolution and preparing future writing studies professionals to be labor-responsible colleagues, advocates, and administrators, we call for reform and sustained action at the levels of institutional compliance, disciplinary pedagogy, and scholarly research.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that:

A. At the level of institutional compliance,

1. We call upon disciplinary and professional organizations such as NCTE/CCCC, ADE, MLA, RSA, and CWPA to consolidate and publicize the numerous extant professional standards documents on one user-friendly, accessible website; and where appropriate to revise or update those standards.
2. We call upon these professional organizations to contribute at least one board-level member to an interorganizational labor board.
3. We call upon this board to develop a seal of approval that would be issued to departments/programs that fulfill current disciplinary standards for reasonable and equitable working conditions.

4. We call upon this board to hear grievances from faculty who believe their departments/programs have violated the current standards as clearly outlined through the action of provision A.1.
5. We call upon this interorganizational labor board to establish and publicize clear protocols for investigating those grievances.
6. We call upon this board to establish a process for announcing the results to the grievants and to the accused in such a way that would first allow non-compliant departments/programs to work internally to remedy the situation before results are made public.
7. We further call upon this board to establish a process for making public a program/department's failure to remedy a violation of professional standards (A.1) for working conditions.

**B. At the level of pedagogy, we call upon our disciplinary and professional organizations to:**

1. Draw explicit attention to the reality that material conditions are teaching and learning conditions—that current labor conditions undervalue the intellectual demand of teaching, restrict resources such as technology and space to contract faculty, withhold conditions for shared and fair governance, and perpetuate unethical hiring practices—as the central pedagogical and labor issue of our times.
2. Recognize issues related to labor as central components of all pedagogy/training courses, professional development initiatives across the curriculum, and pedagogically focused conversations at national conferences, asserting that these topics must be a part of graduate and undergraduate teacher training, as well as professional development for current faculty.
3. Create a clearinghouse of information about how disciplinary professional statements such as CCCCs 'Principles for the Post-secondary Teaching of Writing,' NCTE's 'Position Statement on the Status and Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty' and CWPAs 'Portland Resolution' have amply codified best practices for reasonable and equitable working conditions, and where appropriate are in need of updating; how innovative teachers and administrators have made compelling, forceful, and successful arguments to help their institutions improve working conditions for all faculty.

C. At the level of research, we call on our disciplinary and professional organizations to support efforts to:

1. Offer more material and professional support and opportunity for the creation, publication, and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative research into the impacts of the labor system on the teaching and learning of writing.
2. Consider research into labor and its effects on teaching and learning with the same intellectual weight and scholarly respect as other subjects in our field.

## **Introduction**

Since the adoption and subsequent fade of the Wyoming Resolution, we have seen the political economy of writing instruction change remarkably. Certainly, composition studies' disciplinary viability seems more solid, but the proportion of contingent writing teachers has increased. In 2007, the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing found that almost 70 percent of composition courses housed within English departments are taught by contingent faculty (50). In June 2012, the Coalition on the Academic Workforce's survey of contingent teachers drew a majority (16.4 percent) of respondents from English language and literature departments, significantly outpacing history departments' 6.6 percent runner-up representation (21). This suggests that English departments enact the casualization of the teaching profession more than any other discipline, which means that students taking English classes may be the least likely to encounter full-time, permanent faculty.

These trends in the labor conditions of higher education are the result of neoliberal creep, an economic and political ideology that champions free market "private interests" over the collective resources of the "public" sphere (Chomsky). As it promotes the values of "efficiency, privatization and self-sufficiency" (Kotz), neoliberalism also carries with it a sense of inevitability, enormity, and isolation, posing individuals as powerless against its "destabilizing force" and subsequent "ecological degradation, cultural destruction and social inequality" (Scholte 7–8). In higher education, faculty have long lamented the effects of neoliberal ideology (the devaluation of the humanities and arts, the interpolation of students as consumers who must be prepared for the global workforce) but have offered little more than hand-wringing as we witness its direct effects, "a shrinking number of tenure-track positions and an expanding pool of part-time and underemployed

contingent faculty” (Goldstene). Faced with these contemporary conditions in the field—professional security for fewer tenure-track faculty amid both increasing precarity for the majority of faculty teaching composition and a more entrenched managerialism in English departments at large—the

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This defeatism gains traction in what Rachel Reidner and Kevin Mahoney term *the rhetoric of despair*, and further in Marc Bousquet’s and Donna Strickland’s discussions of *managerialism* explored in following sections. Yet the authors of the

Indianapolis Resolution are seeing, both inside and outside our field, a slew of responses to those forces, amounting to a level of academic labor activism unlike any we’ve seen before. Although much about our current material conditions appears bleak, a central contention in this essay is that the political economy of composition warrants more optimism right now than some recognize.

During a pre-convention workshop organized by the CCCC Labor Caucus at the 2014 CCCC Convention in Indianapolis, ten people representing a variety of academic roles and employment arrangements were moved by hope, frustration, and engagement to revive elements of the vision that drove the Wyoming Resolution. We discussed at length why the Wyoming Resolution didn’t achieve its explicit purposes even though each of its elements had been a crucial response to its historical moment. Setting the stage for what would coalesce into this argument and our work on a new resolution, we reflected on the increasing visibility of academic labor issues made possible by a variety of technological innovations that enable new forms of social organization. These factors suggested possibilities for forming alliances, sharing information, and imagining forms of resistance that weren’t available in the late 1980s. In that moment of convergence, we began drafting toward the Indianapolis Resolution, which both adopts and adapts the aims of the Wyoming Resolution within the broader contexts of our twenty-first-century political economy, attempting to solve some

of the logistical and political problems that have impeded its successful implementation. The Indianapolis Resolution taps into—and we think contributes to—a strongly kairotic moment, pressing for a wide-ranging, democratically impelled response to the neoliberalism that currently dominates higher education.

Put as directly as possible, the Indianapolis Resolution calls on our professional organizations and their members to commit actively to labor

equity. In this essay, we argue first that the current moment both invites and demands our field's participation in labor justice efforts. We describe the more-than-yearlong process of collaboratively drafting the Indianapolis Resolution and provide a rationale for its three-part call for institutional compliance, disciplinary pedagogy, and labor research. We situate those interventions in their historical, contemporary, disciplinary, and political-economic exigencies in order to both connect to the current upswell of efforts and to honor the work that has come before. We close by arguing that committing to and enacting the resolution constitutes participation in a robust response to neoliberal higher education, expressing a resolve that links individual, institutional, and organizational actions in a grassroots and coalitional push for equity.

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### **Complexities and Choices: Ready to Make Change**

Although nobody in Indianapolis said so directly, this resolution is clearly part of a zeitgeist of elevated academic labor activism transcending our discipline, much of which stems from contingent faculty organizing. Here are just a few examples. Formed in 1998, the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) meets biennially. Featuring panels and workshops for adjunct activists across disciplinary, national, and continental boundaries, COCAL saw record attendance in 2014. The New Faculty Majority (NFM) has become a strong presence since its founding in 2009, including lobbying and research on behalf of adjunct faculty who often can't unionize. In 2012, University of Georgia instructor Josh Boldt began *The Adjunct Project*, a blog and crowd-sourced database of adjunct pay and working conditions, which the *Chronicle of Higher Education* has hosted since 2013.

Those efforts, along with increasing union presence in the national adjunct equity movement, have led to substantial campaigns. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), deploying the “Metro Strategy,” is organizing adjunct faculty unions in Washington, DC, Seattle/Tacoma, the San Francisco Bay Area, Boston, upstate New York, and Chicago; the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is using a similar strategy in Philadelphia. SEIU, AFT, and other organizations cosponsored National Adjunct Walkout Day in February 2015 and its parallel National Adjunct Action Week; SEIU’s Faculty Forward campaign calling for \$15,000 in total compensation per section for adjunct faculty began in February 2015.

Likewise, local crises have drawn national outcry on behalf of contingent labor unlike anything previously seen, as in the ASU English adjunct workload restructuring (discussed in more detail below); the dismissal of ten full-time adjunct faculty from an English department in order to give more teaching opportunities to PhD students (at an institution we’d prefer not to name); and threats to academic freedom made clear by the dismissals of adjunct faculty like Sissy Bradford from the Department of Criminal Justice at Texas A&M–San Antonio, James Kilgore from Urban Studies at the University of Illinois, and Robin Meade, president of the part-time faculty union at Moraine Valley Community College.

Within our organizations, pro-labor developments have certainly contributed to this momentum. A CCCC task force published a statement on contingent faculty working conditions in April 2016. The Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) has formed a standing Labor Committee. A grassroots group of activists operating under the name MLA Democracy ran a slate of contingent and contingent-ally candidates (one of whom won) for MLA offices in 2014. The Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) has convened a Committee on Diversity and Equity, with labor equity well within its purview. These organizations collect and sponsor research, yet we believe much more can be done to effectively address the issues.

While these campaigns, developments, media exposure, and organizing moments all contribute to the sense of possibility driving us, they also presented the Indianapolis Resolution’s core working group with distinct challenges. Movement building often gets stuck in tension between optimism and anger, and that tension complicated the resolution’s drafting process, one of the major reasons we decided to open the document widely for discussion and revision at the 2015 CCCC Convention before advancing



it in any formal setting. In what follows, we offer a description of our collaborative writing process for the resolution dating to CCCC 2014.

### **Writing a Resolution for Twenty-First-Century Exigencies**

The story of developing and generating support for the resolution is an important element of our argument that the resolution reflects and responds to the current political economy. We believe that the collaborative nature and scope of its composition—written in the context of both our largest professional conference and a year-long asynchronous composing process involving more than two dozen writers from many different ranks, statuses, and institution types—indicates both the pressing need for and the grassroots impulse behind the resolution.

The 2014 Workshop where the drafting began was sponsored by the Labor Caucus and was attended, therefore, by a group of people who already identified as labor-interested, if not as activists.<sup>1</sup> The original agenda for the day focused on the collaborative development of materials that program administrators and other labor-conscious faculty could use in labor-related efforts. Maybe an hour into the morning, we started to talk about the then newly revised (and again revised since) CCCC “Statement of Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing.” The 2013 version (we are told accidentally) eliminated recommendations regarding class size and course load. Our shared frustration with the revision sent us back to the Wyoming Resolution’s failure, a conversation about the many changes to adjunct labor discourse since the original resolution, and a discussion about binary constructions in the field that often limit our ability to talk across contexts or to build grassroots coalitions.

It didn’t take long to realize we were imagining a new resolution. When somebody actually said so, the energy in the room changed. We opened a Google Doc and began to compose with a sense that we were picking up the work of a previous generation, carrying a neglected mission forward. The opening lines of the document came easily, drawing on a shared sense of purpose and agreements about our failures as a discipline: We are a field still largely staffed by contingent faculty. Tenure lines have decreased (even for Writing Center Directors and Writing Program Administrators). A caste system has emerged that separates the researcher and the tenure-track administrator from the rank and file of writing instruction. The disciplinary status of composition studies had solidified while at the same

time the conditions we sought to address are worsening—an ironic twist in the stories we often tell about the proliferation of independent writing programs, graduate programs, departments, and other trappings of recognition. Even so, we had failed in our efforts to mobilize our organizations toward sustained and substantial action. As a field, we also lack data, especially deeper research-driven understandings of how the conditions we face affect teaching and learning and how that information might help us improve working conditions.

With this understanding, we shared an enthusiasm for calling for renewed and sustainable reform, action, and research. Many have noted (Laurence; Charlton and Rose) that not all people working on a contingent basis care to be employed full-time, and we certainly considered this issue as we organized the Indianapolis Resolution. Our group noted that such a line of argument cannot become an excuse to ignore that too many writing instructors are still precarious and desire full-time, or even part-time, secure employment. We also noted that these dynamics remain raced and gendered every bit as much as they were when Eileen E. Schell published *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers* almost twenty years ago. Thus, even that small percentage of instructors who “do it for the love” and “don’t need the money” would benefit from an organizing approach that leaves no instructor behind. Who wouldn’t want better compensation and job security?

Soon, however, we encountered tensions we could not resolve in a single session—questions we needed to think on and discuss, positions that needed negotiation. We realized we couldn’t complete the document quickly, which encouraged us to open the process to more people. We posted an open invitation across our social networks, and when we opened the workshop doors that afternoon, new people joined our efforts.

Questions borne of differences in professional standpoint and purposes arose as we drafted the actual text of the resolution: what tone to strike; what strategies to use; how we might persuade resistant supporters to action; the possible rhetorical impact of our work; and more. Would the structures and internal politics of our national organizations render our efforts moot? Would our national organizations respond? How might we make a case for them to become responsive in areas that these organizations had previously resisted?

Some of us strongly identified as activists and supported calling for immediate structural responses from our organizations. These participants

contended the resolution should call for sanctions and censure against egregious institutions. Others, particularly a few of us in administrative positions, felt strongly about the need for action, but cautioned the group to temper language and strategy or risk alienating potential allies and the undecided. This group preferred pursuing pedagogical and research actions.

These very complex problems, along with minor points that were more about logistics, occupied long stretches of our conversation. The only concrete decisions we made by the day's end were to keep working asynchronously and to think about who to invite into the process. After a few weeks of post-CCCC recovery, we determined to propose a session on the resolution draft as the Labor Caucus Sponsored Panel for the 2015 CCCC Convention in Tampa.

During summer 2014, we engaged in deeper conversations with the group who had begun to collaborate in Indianapolis. We identified three areas that the collaborators agreed should appear in the document: 1) a statement about and process for developing investigation and possible censure protocols for institutions that do not conform to disciplinary standards for fair working conditions; 2) a statement that supported the pedagogical necessity of discussions about the material conditions of composition in all courses that prepare new composition teachers; 3) a call for further research support and a center for research on contingency in composition. We broke into work teams to compose these statements.<sup>2</sup> After two weeks, the workgroups compiled a single document and conducted a final round of discussion.

At the Labor Caucus-sponsored panel in Tampa in March 2015,<sup>3</sup> we came very close to finalizing publishable language. Some of the same tensions were still in the room; the most difficult debate, unsurprisingly, focused on the language for institutional compliance. We talked for quite a while about whether the censuring proposal should precede the "seal of approval" or vice versa, and even returned briefly to the question of calling for censure at all. By the session's end, though, we believed we had a document very nearly ready for the next step—opening it publicly for sponsors and endorsements.

In summer 2015, the Indianapolis Resolution was posted online and opened to signators. Seth shared the document at the WPA Conference in July. The other writers and our allies shared the resolution via social media, professional listservs, and blogs. As of July 23, we seem to have 372

endorsements, and we hope that you'll add your name to the list, if you haven't already.

At the 2016 CCCC Business Meeting, the membership approved a resolution calling on the leadership to enact three of the Indianapolis Resolution's central provisions: appointing a member to the board charged with

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developing grievance procedures; providing mentoring and instruction for graduate students about the realities of the labor market; and asking journal editors and conference organizers to actively encourage more labor-oriented research. While progress on these provisions is necessarily deliberate, the vote represents a commitment

to working explicitly for labor equity.

Perhaps most importantly, we've engaged a broad number of colleagues and constituents in the process of drafting this resolution. We contend that more people mobilizing for labor equity are better than fewer people, and if one of the impacts of the Indianapolis Resolution is that its existence catalyzes more labor activism, for us, that's a win.

### **Professionals, Workers, and Our Long Retreat from Laramie**

We find the process of drafting and organizing support for the Indianapolis Resolution important for many reasons; perhaps most weighty is our field's long, tenuous relationship to labor organizing, crystallized in a deep tension between teachers' will to professional status and our reality as workers. Since the early days of composition instruction in the 1880s, tensions around our professional status reemerge anytime we collectively seek to address working conditions, whether in education writ large (Marshall) or English studies in particular (Strickland). Indeed, Margaret Marshall's *Response to Reform* argues that public educators in North America have always been caught in the paradox between professionalism and bureaucracy, and that their well-meaning arguments about material conditions have served to further deprofessionalize teachers. Within composition studies, Donna Strickland traces this dichotomy to Harvard in the late 1880s when the teaching of composition was split from the teaching of literature for the

sake of administrative efficiency. For our purposes, though, let's fast-forward from the 1880s to the 1980s, from the lit-writ split at Harvard B to the labor line-in-the-sand drawn at Laramie. It was the group in Wyoming, after all, who finally sought to unite our pressing concerns as professionals with our pressing concerns as laborers.

Arguably the founding document of labor justice in the field, the Wyoming Resolution was built on a tripartite approach to reform anchored in both professional recognition and institutional censure. Specifically, the authors demanded that CCCC act in the following ways to 1) establish expectations for working and salary conditions; 2) establish a process for grievance; and 3) enact a

process of censure for noncompliance with these standards (Secretary's Report 371–73, qtd. in McDonald and Schell 366–67). Items 2 and 3 took a hard-line stance in tandem with item 1's push for professional recognition and standards. In doing so, it provided a path to navigate some of the intricate

and often delicate relationships between our identity as disciplinary professionals and our identity as workers. Although Marshall contends that using labor language has the adverse effect of deprofessionalizing teachers, the framers of the Wyoming Resolution sought to position compositionists as both professionals *and* workers. Echoing them, we submit that these identities need not conflict, although they all too often have throughout composition's past.

But maybe we're too hopeful? Maybe Marshall was speaking a truth we just didn't want to hear? After all, when it came time to affirm the Wyoming Resolution, CCCC approved a version that excised the agitating (labor) language while preserving the stoic wisdom of professionalism. James Sledd's scathing critique of the metamorphosis between the two documents claims that parts 2 and 3 of the Wyoming Resolution "posed a threat to the system of exploitation without which English Departments in their present state could not exist, a system from which administrators, literati and compositionists all profit" (qtd. in Carter and McClelland 83).

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Rather than holding institutions accountable to organized workers, we sought to build our individual power as disciplinary professionals, just like Marshall reports the AAUP did upon its founding (109–10). Interestingly, drawing on interviews from those who drafted the Wyoming Resolution and the CCCC “Statement,” James C. McDonald and Eileen E. Schell note that AAUP lawyers played a huge role in excising censure from the “Statement” (369). Sharon Crowley reportedly told McDonald and Schell: “some attorney with AAUP talked about schools that had been censured and nothing happened,” and thus, after “long, hard arguments,” CCCC ultimately decided against censure as “impractical” (369–70). Whatever the intentions behind this move, removing censure from the table effectively solidified our field’s urge to disciplinary professionalism while minimizing the broader labor concerns that animated the drafting of the Wyoming Resolution. As McDonald and Schell put it, this move “took the teeth out of the Wyoming Resolution” (370).

The distinction of laborer/disciplinary professional was crystallized further in the CWPB Portland Resolution (Hult et al.), drafted three years after the “Statement” was ratified by NCTE/CCCC. What we needed to enforce the “Statement,” went the wisdom of Portland, was not strengthened solidarity as workers, but more empowered, secure professional program managers. As Carter and McClelland put it, who else can enforce the “Statement” but an institution’s writing program administrator? Rather than full-fledged colleagues with pedigree, protection, and professional recognition, 1992 WPAs were more likely to be institutionally located as “97 lb. weakling[s], ill-equipped to kick sand in anyone’s face” (80).

The Portland Resolution certainly helped improve the position of WPAs but had a curious byproduct: positioning Writing Program Directors as “lower-level managers,” despite benevolent attempts to guide other instructors or because of outright misrecognitions of their positioning within the corporate university (Miller). Composition became tied to an “expertise in pedagogy, rhetoric, or writing theory that is applied in ‘administrative settings’” as the means of raising our work’s intellectual standing, with the hope of increasing our disciplinary status (Strickland). Marc Bousquet further argues that the primary product of composition’s disciplinary apparatus became a form of “management science,” noting that, “the very terms of its intellectual evolution intertwined with the university’s accelerated

move toward corporate partnership, executive control, and acceptance of profitability and accumulation as values in decision making" (23).

Furthermore, despite their professionalization, directors of writing programs are limited in what they can achieve on behalf of those they manage, providing the exigency for the compliance provisions of the Indianapolis Resolution. Bousquet puts this bind "in blunt terms" (16): "It is not clear that lower management as a group has ever figured in any substantial transformation of

society or its institutions or that lower management represents a particularly strong stand point for individuals advocating change to upper management" (14). It neither *can* nor *should* be the sole province of WPAs to produce labor justice in their own programs; WPAs and those

who support their work should recognize that the Indianapolis Resolution does not put external demands on WPAs so much as it provides support to demand better from departments and campuses.

In the three years between the "Statement" and the Portland Resolution, then, our will to disciplinarity helped the field to forget that another path was possible. Rather than the path from "Statement" to Portland that entrenched lower/middle management, we could have chosen Wyoming's vision of a unified web of workers at all ranks. But since our professional organizations had already dismissed the possibility of holding institutions accountable, we opted for what amounted to a labor economics of *trickle-down job security*.

We are not arguing that the protections for WPAs outlined by the Portland Resolution were regressive; establishing professional standards for hiring, evaluating, and tenuring of WPAs has been a crucial plank in the field's platform for professionalism, especially the ways Portland codified our discipline into a functioning, complex, identifiable space previously widely overlooked in English departments and in the academy. Any untenured (pre-tenure or non-tenure-track) WPA can explain the power that Portland and "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of WPAs" can wield as rhetorical tools to protect WPAs in precarious settings. What's more, we

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can point to successfully reformed and invented writing programs wherein professionally protected Writing Program Administrators have won more equitable labor conditions in their programs for *all* writing teachers, not just those on the tenure track (e.g., University of Central Florida and Elizabeth Wardle; Syracuse and Louise Phelps; University of Denver and Doug Hesse).

Yet, we can't let these successes distract us from the growing contradictions that our will to professionalism has created. Undoubtedly, most institutions recognize composition studies as a discipline. PhD graduates in literature are, more frequently than not, trained in some aspects of composition as a means to employment (contingent or otherwise) within English departments where specialized literature degrees have become risky professional choices. Still, the precarity that those off the tenure track experience in many institutions highlights the glaring shortfalls of our professional vision.

These problems led McDonald and Schell to call for us to hearken back to Wyoming in 2011. Less than two years later, though, with our disciplinary status challenged by the will-to-assessment sweeping the nation, our leading professional organization updated the CCCC "Statement" to defend our professionally defined best practices for writing instruction. It's a powerful statement of disciplinary expertise in the best practices for the professional teaching and assessing of postsecondary student writing. It might even serve as a solid and renewed inartistic proof for writing programs seeking to retain local control over their programmatic design and assessment, and it preserves language, but not specific recommendations, about professional teaching conditions from the earlier statement about class sizes, course loads, and professional conditions for writing teachers.<sup>4</sup> Yet, locating particulars about labor conditions so near the end was provocative given the "Statement's" origin as a representation of the field's best practices for labor conditions. In 2013, labor standards were unmentioned until point eleven of twelve. Although members of the task force who produced the revision have explained that their intention was not to denigrate labor concerns, it is difficult not to read the 2013 update as a step even further away from attention to labor standards under frequent threats to our professionalism.

What Strickland calls the "managerial unconscious," a "managerial imperative" (an unintended offshoot of what Lynn Worsham named the field's "will to pedagogy" [96]) is now inextricably integrated with our work



and sense of disciplinary professionalism. This shift may reflect the exigencies we face, such as state and private industry attempts to prescribe and profit from canned writing curricula and assessment initiatives that will likely deaden writing students' learning experiences. Indeed, some have described these conditions as an indicator that the stakeholders who matter today don't recognize our disciplinary expertise as particularly relevant (Scott and Brannon; Gallagher). In the face of such disrespect, some will claim that it's natural to redouble our efforts with louder rhetorics of professionalism, especially given Marshall's argument about the shortcomings of labor rhetorics in past historical moments.

But we're convinced that the deepening grip of neoliberalism on higher education policies and institutions means that professionalism alone is not an adequate response. While earlier iterations of this debate occurred under conditions where the myth of meritocracy was more believable, our current historical moment exposes contradictions of professionalism more clearly than ever.<sup>5</sup> While Marshall is partially right—we *should*, of course, be tying conversations about contingent labor to concerns as professionals (139)—the zeitgeist both suggests and demands that any conversation about professionalism must necessarily begin from our solidarity as workers. Rhetorics of professionalism cannot solve contingency. But our crisis of profession can be fixed if we *all* speak a rhetoric of labor.

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### **The Indianapolis Resolution's Provisions: Explanations and Justifications**

While McDonald and Schell urge us instead to embody Wyoming's "spirit" (373), we argue that we must revisit Wyoming's letter as a starting point and site of instruction as we negotiate composition's political economy. We no longer have to declare our professionalism as teachers and scholars like the Wyoming charge that ultimately bore fruit in the CCCC "Statement." Instead, we now call upon our organizations (leaders *and members*) to support more labor-conscious *enactments* of our professionalism through demands for institutional compliance with disciplinary recommendations/standards; more labor-conscious disciplinary pedagogy; and support for

research into the material conditions of teaching writing in the twenty-first century. In the following sections, we justify these three calls in greater detail. The provisions are *kairotic* in two senses of the term: both responsive to *and* constitutive of conditions that demand action (Poulakis).

### ***Institutional Compliance***

The first call, institutional compliance, is for professional organizations to update statements regarding working conditions when necessary and to make those statements very easily available to both administrators and faculty. We further urge our organizations to rethink the casting of those documents. Instead of offering them as *recommendations*, we ask our professional organizations to issue them as *standards* to which units should expect to be held. Additionally, locating those standards in a public space that doesn't belong to any specific organization should encourage the organizations to bring those standards into alignment.

Like Sue Doe and Mike Palmquist, we recognize that position statements are paradoxical creatures. On the one hand, their very proliferation signals an inability to solve the problems they're taking a position against (24). On the other, people often use them to make successful arguments for better conditions at their institutions (28). We echo their caution to carefully limit how we understand the power of position statements; we also share their optimism that such statements can help once we don't expect too much of them. We assert that having them compiled and very visible makes them not only more available when people need them, but also helps them accrete power by being propagated together.

Once statements are updated and collectively publicized, the Indianapolis Resolution then calls for developing a protocol to make those standards matter. Crowley, reflecting on the lessons she learned from drafting the Wyoming Resolution and the "Statement," tells us that anyone working to reform the system from within must know that our professional organizations can only do "symbolic work" ("Personal"; also qtd. in McDonald and Schell). We submit that both censure and our proposed seal of approval comprise symbolic work required of our professional organizations. Though we know we can't compel institutional compliance, we maintain that censure is a mark of opprobrium that institutions will seek to avoid as labor activists bring bad press to administrative bloat and other problems.

We know we aren't the first people to grapple with the decision to

renew Wyoming's call for censure. When issued, those calls have generally produced three distinct forms of resistance or opposition: 1) organizational bylaws mandate *support* for members, which thus excludes censure; 2) censure has no force and is therefore not worth bothering with; and 3) censure is too radical, thus violating the ethos of professionalism the field has cultivated so carefully. Understanding these forms of resistance—organizational, practical, professional—is crucial to moving forward with the resolution.

We have dealt at length with objection 3 in the previous section, so here we focus on 1 and 2. These objections are manifestations of what Rachel Riedner and Kevin Mahoney, in *Democracies to Come*, call the *rhetoric of despair*. As they put it, “Despair works to close off the ability to *think* or *feel* alternatives. . . . Yet, in the very same move, neoliberalism seeks to posit its naturalness and to reduce resistance or hope for alternatives, to an issue of coping” (70). Notice the interwoven concepts: the squelching of alternatives and the equating of hope with the more defensive and pathologized notion of *coping*. That is, we can’t hope for anything better; we can only manage (pun intended) or *rationalize* our individual, emotional responses to the inevitable. Riedner and Mahoney continue:

Despair provides a way of reconstituting a subject's identity by allowing for a rational acceptance of [a morally outrageous problem] . . . while reclaiming that subject *as* moral, right, just, and good. The subject can *know* what's moral and just, but is *unable* to activate his or her sense of morality and justice because he or she has no choice. (78–79)

In the neoliberal university, even those who express moral outrage at abusive labor practices typically practice rhetorics of despair when we talk ourselves out of taking concrete actions to redress those abuses. We appeal to *rationality* and offer *counterarguments* to the initial *moral outrage*. The rational counterarguments lead us to conclude, despairingly, that “there is no alternative” (to borrow an infamous phrase from Margaret Thatcher).

A textbook example of this rhetoric: In December 2014, news broke that workloads for full-time English instructors at Arizona State University would be redefined the following fall. After many years where their workload was 80 percent teaching (four courses/semester) and 20 percent service/professional development, it would now become 100 percent teaching (five courses/semester) with occasional (and individually negotiated) access to reassigned time for service or professional development. The problems

with this shift were well articulated publicly. For our purposes, what mattered was the response. A group of instructors in the department started a website and a petition calling for a reversal of the decision. On social media, contingent faculty activists spread information and calls for action using the hashtag #ASUagainst55, and conversations sprang up on professional listservs like the WPA-I.

The initial reaction was outrage, but soon the pressure to *be reasonable* started to mount, then the counterarguments. Nobody, to our knowledge, argued that the change was good. The counterarguments arose in response to every proposed response: We can't do that because . . . It wouldn't help because . . . Somebody else has to do that because . . . If we win this argument at ASU it causes problems for other people at other institutions . . . Quickly, the wave of outrage had subsided. ASU's upper administration somewhat improved its workload and salary offer in response to the initial outcry but didn't restore access to service or professional development as part of the base workload.

Responses to censure proposals have generally followed this same cycle. People get angry about labor conditions. Anger, infectious at first, soon draws calls for civility (or reasonability, or professionalism, or practicality). The initial impulse to act dissipates, replaced by rationalizations explaining the failure to act, thus perpetuating the source of the outrage and protecting the sense of propriety among respondents.

The Indianapolis Resolution addresses these resistant responses directly. Activists have heard continuously that professional organizations can't censure because of bylaws, so the resolution doesn't ask organizations to censure. Instead, we call our organizations to collaboratively convene an independent body to investigate allegations of academic labor abuse, issue findings, and follow up with departments or programs found to be in violation of professional standards. Employee handbooks and union contracts provide models for this kind of investigatory process—our group is less concerned about the final details than about the commitment to formulate a process and conduct the investigations.

Regarding the charge of toothlessness, the Adjunct Project and other online venues demonstrate that easily available communication technologies can publicize violations and violators very openly. As academic labor activist networks grow and strengthen, it is not hard to make sure people know pertinent information, both positive and negative, about labor practices

among our departments and programs. We're not calling for public shaming as all too often happens on social networks; we're saying that publicizing violators and violations is not difficult, and if positive image management is a hallmark of neoliberalism, then calling on institutions to *do positive things* is reasonable. The resolution calls for a "seal of approval" for departments or programs whose labor practices are compliant with professional standards. Units doing well by their faculty deserve credit, and we see this seal of approval aiding recruitment efforts for both students and faculty.

### ***Pedagogical Imperatives***

This call emerges primarily from a conundrum in our graduate programs: preparing students for careers in which they are likely to be contingent workers or managers of contingent workers—or both. More ethical graduate curricula will be explicit about how to negotiate these potential realities. On the one hand, students often enter our programs dreaming of becoming full-time professors, usually unaware that much of their education has been enabled by adjunct workers. While drafting the resolution, we discussed the rude awakening many graduate students get when they begin the job hunt, realizing that adjunct work is not an apprenticeship or stepping-stone, but permanent reality for many. Indeed, an entire genre of essay has sprung up around this realization; for example, Jessica Lawless's "Labor Pains: From Adjunct to Organizer" on Miranda Merklein's blog *Fugitive Faculty*. Rising student debt in the United States exacerbates this issue; we ask you to consider the ethics of encouraging students to pursue expensive graduate degrees, knowing postgraduate wages as adjuncts would make repaying student loans a greater burden. We relish teaching students who love the subject to which we have dedicated our own careers, but the responsibility to prepare them for the material realities that come with a graduate degree or an academic career in English is clear.

On the other hand, programs most often prepare graduate students to work in some ideal context, without acknowledging the conditions that allow us to enact our pedagogical knowledge: reasonable course loads, small classes, professional resources, and office space. Graduate education ought to make students investigate how the pedagogical and administrative models championed in graduate school drift far from the reality of teaching in many locations. For instance, the benefits of conferencing with individual students or even holding consistent office hours can seem a dream—or

outright insult—to an adjunct faculty member teaching six classes at two institutions without office space at either.

For these reasons, we assert that labor studies should be a component of all pedagogical instruction in composition studies, including postgraduate professional development, and a significant part of conversations at professional conferences. Students need to understand the difficulties—both enacting pedagogies and paying their bills—of teaching off the tenure track and be able to choose accordingly. They also need to know the statements and strategies by which WPAs and others have successfully argued for better labor conditions in their programs. Simply put: if professional organizations or graduate programs are not teaching about the labor market's connection to degree programs and professional pathways, they are unethical. Conversely, materially grounded and labor-aware preparation in composition and rhetoric can make our students better advocates for students and teachers alike in their future work.

### ***The Pressing Need to Support Labor Research***

The need for more labor research in the field is clear. The Indianapolis Resolution contends that our field must resolve to support new labor research in two connected ways: materially, by funding it and offering more and better distribution venues; and politically, by granting it the same prestige within the field as other domains of research. It's not enough to simply *do more*. We must respond to this kairotic moment by making—and letting—that research *count more*.

Some extant data indicate that contingency harms student learning conditions (Eagan and Jaeger; Jaeger; Umbach), whereas some data indicate that under certain conditions students do better with contingent faculty (e.g., Figlio, Shapiro, and Soter). It serves no one to call for a definitive answer as to whether teaching quality varies by status. Instead, the field needs to understand more fully what conditions best support learning and teaching. We have learned and can learn much more about successful program designs and efforts that achieve greater equity and quality results. We clearly need more research on teaching loads, class sizes, curricula, assessment and so on, from perspectives that are labor centered.

We need high-quality research data not only better to understand but also better to contend with data-driven administrators when we make claims about contingency's effects on teaching. The slogan "Faculty working

conditions are student learning conditions” resonates with us, but administrators may be more persuaded by systematically collected evidence of the negative effects of contingency on the classroom. Obviously, as Lee Artz argues in “Speaking Truth to Power: Observations from Experience,” the truth doesn’t magically produce rational outcomes, and we can’t expect all the data in the world to convince neoliberal upper administration to do the right thing simply because it’s right. That said, another important reason to develop our research base is to short-circuit the rhetoric of despair that often invokes the absence of research as a reason not to act.

Given both of those purposes (convincing administrations to act reasonably; convincing ourselves that we know enough to demand better), the evidence we need is in short supply. As Amy noted in *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*, “scholars have done little in the way of investigating the tangible effects of staffing practices on composition pedagogy” (Lynch-Binieck A7). It is also telling that *Forum*, the single journal in English studies dedicated to contingent issues, is a thin insert appearing in CCC each fall and in TETYC each spring. We’re grateful that *Forum* circulates via those larger publications, but by allocating only enough space for two or three brief essays, hardly room to report extensive research findings, the value publishers and the field place on labor scholarship looks limited.

In the same way that contingent labor activism outside the field provides both a context and a catalyst for our own, existing qualitative and quantitative research into the effects of labor appearing outside of journals in English or composition studies can catalyze our own research into hiring trends (Reichard; Benjamin), the relationship between contingency and retention/graduation rates (Eagan and Jaeger; Ehrenberg and Zhang; Jaeger and Eagan; Jaeger), or teaching efficacy (Umbach). That is not to say that our journals have completely ignored labor. For example, the special issue of *College English* in 2011 on the profession focuses on labor in the field, including two articles grounded in data collection (Doe et al; Meloncon and England). Likewise, the January 2015 issue of *Pedagogy* centers on the need for reform in graduate education and professionalization, and several of the articles in the issue constitute research studies, though economists wrote the only explicit discussion of contingency (Colander and Zhuo). The English studies scholars most passionately and overtly addressing adjunctification are usually writing critical essays and polemics and rarely reporting on primary data.



One difficulty in researching contingency is that those with the most time, support, and resources to do it are tenure-track and tenured faculty. Some of these faculty may not see contingency as an issue of concern (wrong though they'd be), may be wary of how labor research may be read and valued by tenure and promotion committees, or may be concerned with ethical issues. They may also find that, outside of special issues, many journals are slow to consider pieces about labor. Contingent faculty, with an obvious interest in such research, often lack the institutional support and time to pursue either critical studies or the more resource-intensive work of qualitative and quantitative research; eligibility for the CCCC Emergent Research/er Award is a positive step.

Despite the problems of researching-while-adjunct, many adjunct faculty and allies have taken on the responsibility outside the confines of academic journals and professional organizations, including efforts we've mentioned such as Joshua Boldt's *Adjunct Project*, the New Faculty Majority Foundation, and the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, each of which have gathered significant data. The Public Sociology Association, a graduate student organization at George Mason University, has conducted locally focused research to advocate for change on their campus. The work of these groups is all the more compelling because they are not associated with our conventional professional organizations. They are grassroots efforts, responding to the pressing needs of contingent faculty by addressing the need for research on contingency.

Professional organizations in English certainly sponsor some research: NCTE, CCCC, and MLA have committees dedicated to the concerns of contingent faculty and have sponsored some research initiatives, such as the MLA's *Action for Allies* initiative. But given that, as noted in the Indianapolis Resolution, "labor-focused research has the potential to improve both working conditions and teaching practices" and that there is relatively little "support for creation, publication, and dissemination of research into labor and its effects on teaching," our professional organizations could do much more to sponsor, grow, and publicize this important work.

On the flipside, we strongly resist despair-driven calls for more research. When such calls are offered as reasons not to act, that's problematic—especially when used to dissipate the momentum for concerted responses (the WPA-I discussion about ASU is a prime example). Similarly, we caution against letting calls for research get bogged down in overdrawn



debates about research methods and ethics that stop the research rather than improving it, or deny the legitimacy of the topic. Our position is simple. We, as a field, must commit to granting labor-oriented research the same professional ethos and status as other kinds of research—by publishing it in our flagship journals; making sure that contingent faculty and graduate students have access to resources to conduct it; encouraging tenured and tenure-track faculty not to dissuade graduate students from doing it. The benefit is twofold. We get more and better labor research. We also legitimize it within the profession simply by agreeing that it's legitimate.

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### **Making Possibilities Matter, Resolving to Commit to Labor Equity**

The Indianapolis Resolution recognizes that the current *kairotic* moment not only *enables* positive efforts on behalf of labor equity but also *demands* them. The work we see across academe in extra-institutional, social media, technologically enhanced and more formally organized spaces is producing an undeniable momentum. Renewing labor efforts within composition studies allows us to build on and lend to the emergent efforts of others. We have sought to craft a resolution that responds as the kind of grassroots, member-driven, bottom-up and democratic site that these other movements have shown can contest the concentrated power of neoliberalism. We hope our efforts articulate a call for action that members of the field can respond to in flexible and personally compelling ways. The resolution enables work to be done within local institutional settings and via more complex cross-institutional and organizational processes.

We are far from alone in calls to dynamic activism. In his 2015 CCCC Chair's Address, Adam Banks calls on us to think beyond our own disciplinary and to aim toward justice. Banks reminds us that the scholarly work of composition studies is also citizen work; it is *always political*. He also reminds us that the contradictions of professionalism that we've outlined

here cannot be solved through more professional respectability. Echoing the feminist women of color and black radical traditions that have long critiqued the limits of respectability, Banks tells us:

I want us to take off our own respectability politics for a minute, and realize that no matter how hard we push our students to dismiss their home languages for some assimilated standardized version, respectability will not save them or us. I want us to realize that the funkiness of “CCCCs the Day” and sparkleponies is one of the best things *about* us. And that, even if we did not have them, the *Chronicle* still wouldn’t understand us, and, much less, save us. (Banks 11:57–12:43)

Whether we’re talking about students of color who are often the most marginalized in our institutions, composition’s funky and undisciplinable underground status within the larger apparatus of the academy, or the adjunct teacher’s exploitation as partial subsidy for the star scholar’s course reassignment and academic achievement, the Indianapolis Resolution connects us as citizens to this broader context and to the power of coalition work that has historically come to life across movements for civil, social, gender, sexual, racial, and economic liberation. This work is powerful precisely because it proceeds through coalition and solidarity, and it always has. After all, Black Caucus member and former CCCC Chair Vivian Davis was one of the lone voices alongside Sharon Crowley to demand censure remain in the CCCC “Statement of Principles and Standards for the Post-secondary Teaching of Writing” when it was being drafted on the heels of Wyoming (McDonald and Schell 370).

The twenty-first-century political economy we face as professionals will organize the shape(s) of our field’s labor even if we don’t recognize and respond to it. At the risk of sounding simplistic, committing to act ethically and to demand the same of our institutions is an obvious, necessary part of the process by which we get better results from them. That demand necessitates a commitment to fighting against the many rhetorical stances and arguments that would disempower or dismiss our efforts for better teaching lives. We can identify as both professionals and workers. We can make a difference in ways big and small. We can act locally and nationally.

Wholesale commitment to all the provisions of the Indianapolis Resolution is likely hard to come by, we realize. At the same time, we want to urge members of the field not to invoke rhetorics of despair that rationalize

inaction, especially by invoking *professionalism* as a reason not to engage. Put another way, it's time to admit that professionalism alone was never meant to save all of us. And now that it seems like it ultimately might save *none* of us, we respectfully submit that it's high time to remember that we are *all* workers first, and to build our rhetorics of professionalism from a base that includes our shared condition as laborers. The time has come to join together and act.

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### Notes

1. In addition to the authors, Vandana Gavaskar also facilitated the workshop.
2. These teams included ourselves, Jessica Philbrook, Casie Fedukovich, Timothy Oleksiak, and Dayna Goldstein.
3. The CCCC 2015 Labor Caucus–sponsored panel facilitators were Jessica Philbrook, Stephen Fox, Mitzi Walker Jones, Seth, Michelle, and Amy.
4. The class size and workload provisions were added back into the document in March 2015 after several situations in which the absence of those provisions were publicly noticed.
5. For more on the contradictions of professionalism, see Trimbur, Hansen, and a slew of others in the wake of “Statement.” We’ve known professionalism’s problems for some time now.

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