

Chapter Five: Locating the Effects of Long-Term Precarity in Department X

Me: can you tell me more about this chart?

Participant 1: And why I have it on my wall? Cause it reminds me that I have successfully made it through cynicism, sad math and rage. Sad math happens in year three, that's when you start doing math problems that show you [how] you are grossly underpaid for someone with a professional degree.

We have a fake, committee called "GRIT—Global Rhetoric Something Something, in Technology," and it's really just an excuse to get together, um, it's me and a few other NT people, and so this all grew out of that...and I have kind of developed this over time, in fact I just had a conversation with [a colleague] who's been here for 12 years, um, and is still an instructor, because they can't figure out how to promote people who have master's degrees.

I asked her, "does this repeat, or is it all just a blur?" And she said that two years ago, she had another rage year, and another cynicism year, so it seems like maybe the only thing that doesn't repeat is enthusiasm, maybe we save that for the classroom. I'm very enthusiastic in my classroom.

...

Participant 1: I'm really looking forward to next year, which is acceptance, project optimism 2.0, which is then blur.

...

Participant 2: I think she [participant 1] showed you our timeline of emotions in connection with this job?

I don't know if she told you that we've been thinking that at a certain point you just kind of stall out at a certain experience? And now we don't think that that is true because we're both currently experiencing apathy in a different way than we were before. Um. And I think, I mean that tension has to do, for me, with moments where, one of two things happens:

Either (long pause), I or someone in a position similar to me, wants to do a thing and is rejected. Not because they can't do the thing, but because the institution has not created a way for them to do that thing. That happens, in a variety of contexts including like, I want feedback on my teaching if someone is going to observe me, but we don't actually, even though we have policies in place that say I should receive that feedback, we don't have the institutional structure to allow that to have happened in this particular context. Um, but, it happens in a bunch of ways, it happens with students too and that's really frustrating because it feels as if there is no way to change the system as an individual so those things are just going to keep happening. And the kind of despair around a problem that can't be solved (long pause) is real.

...

Me, the sad math year.

Participant 2: ah the sad math, it's a real thing.

...

Participant 2: When we did our last three-year review, the three of us got an email, that was forwarded to us from [a colleague], who was chair at the time that said we'd all been granted another three

years. That's it. A forwarded email that was like, "Congrats, you still have a job," like, sent mid-June, as an afterthought. We got nothing on paper. We got a forwarded email—that was not actually intended for us—that affirmed that we still had jobs in the fall.

Introduction

I offer these extended excerpts here as a starting point to this chapter which seeks to ground an interpretation of the experiences of those in Department X who work off the tenure line, with the descriptions offered by those faculty themselves. IE relies on a triangulation between boss texts and the ruling relations and social coordination inscribed in them, with the standpoints of workers. Here, I explore how they make sense of their everyday work. I do so too because, for me, these moments of discussion in interviews pointed directly to some of the tensions those working off the tenure line in the department experience, particularly around their long-term trajectories. And further, they speak to the larger contexts of non-tenured labor in our discipline, which I was formerly implicated in as a managerial WPA and which persist, even if that non-tenured labor in Department X is not highly precarious in the short term, as with most adjunct labor.

The shape of my discussion here, a focus on narratives from interviews, resides again with my primary methodology, IE, which seeks to uncover the dynamic tensions of those working in an institution. Not meant to be a withering critique, this methodology naturally produces a complicated picture of social relationships in a workplace, *because* it looks for divergences and the particularities of how people take up work in localized ways. IE illuminates here, a tension between dominant narratives of

cooperative, participatory shared governance in Department X and a lack of a sense of value or forward movement from the subjective standpoints of participants whose stories are indicative of the everyday features of their work inside that system. Put simply, while interviews are necessarily subjective and not meant to represent objective fact, they work here to reveal some of the lived experiences of those in particular standpoints within the department and are valuable, as such. Rather than simply report their stories as fact, they are treated as data here, and contextualized in relationship to all I know about the department as a participant, as someone with administrative experience, and as a researcher who analyzed multiple components of the departmental relations.

The excerpts that begin this chapter refer to a document that one NT faculty member has on their office wall that shows a trajectory over time, of the cycles and experiences some of their colleagues share. Their document is a strong counterpoint to top-down narratives, in the department, to the “means well” ethos, and those selfsame disciplinary narratives related to progress, evaluation, and the investment in the careers of faculty. For tenure line faculty, the cyclical (year to year) and progress over time (renewal-promotion-tenure) are clearly delineated from annual reviews, to third-year reviews, associate professor status, full professor status, emeritus. The career trajectories of those off the tenure line are less codified, though the institution where my study lived also takes a growth over time approach. An NT faculty member might move from “instructor” all the way to more permanent status, “Des B,” associate, full. For AS faculty, they might move from continuing status to eventually, “senior

academic specialist.” Yet, as the interview excerpts above suggest, perhaps some never move through these trajectories. For those that do, each step is accompanied by a process, a form, and an engagement with department and colleagues. The excerpts here are meant to point to how these workers have made sense of the tensions they encounter in those cycles and trajectories together in ways that are in contrast to the ruling relations/dominant narrative of the department and the institution.

This does not foreclose the good efforts of the institution or department, but it does, arguably, illuminate the counternarratives emerging from those inhabiting these processes and institutional spaces. As I have mapped in the previous two chapters, Department X has worked to codify ethical practices around evaluation and promotion at each rank grounded in departmental agency and built-in participatory structures (Chapter 3) and they have built habits and practices to support effective supervisory and peer visits in service of departmental mission and professional advancement (Chapter 4). Taken together, my analysis points again to the central tension of this study about well-designed and well-meaning structures to support faculty. Chapter Five, here, is meant to further uncover the granular divergences from those structures in the experiences of faculty off the tenure line. Department X does so many things in innovative and ethical ways, but barriers built by institutional and departmental hierarchy can hamstring those efforts as they are dispersed across rank.

This chapter relies primarily on analysis of interview data from those working off the tenure line and specifically works to understand and introduce a concept I call “long-term

precarity.” Long-term precarity is a concept that came directly out of interviews with faculty as I worked to understand a collective standpoint based in their own descriptions of how they conceived of and experienced their work and the evaluation of their work in the department over time. Long-term precarity is in contradistinction to short-term precarity which has been discussed at length in both disciplinary and public literature (Brannon, 1993; Horner, 2010; Scott, 2009; Bousquet, 2004; Schell, 1998; Kahn et al, 2017).

Short-term precarity might be best characterized as the emblematic “free-way flier,” the adjunct professor who works at multiple institutions for low pay, for per course pay, whose appointment is contingent on enrollments from semester-to-semester, who doesn’t have access to office space, professional development, a long-term contract or health and retirement benefits. There are many institutions where this is the case.

In contrast, long-term precarity is revealed when departments and institutions take steps to mitigate the most deleterious aspects of adjunct labor but must still contend with a set of pernicious tensions related to the career trajectories and potentials for engagement and advancement for those off the tenure line. Many universities and writing programs have taken steps to mitigate short-term precarity by offering longer-term appointments, sometimes called “lecturer” lines, here, “NT” faculty, and have set up structures by which teaching faculty have access to professional development and advancement as well as benefits and stable employment. Department X is amongst those. However, some debate has been offered about the benefits of these labor arrangements which investigates the realities of permanent non-tenured labor

(Harris, 2006; Murphy, 2000; Cox, 2018; McBeth & McCormack, 2017; Colby & Colby, 2017).

Scholars such as Harris and Murphy argue that long-term arrangements, even if they are not on the tenure line are the most reasonable way to combat the worst ravages of contingent employment, in direct response to a shrinking tenure class. McBeth and McCormack (2017) argue similarly, in “An Apologia...Programs” that though these positions are not perfect, they are preferable to adjunct labor and their work shows that it is possible to move from an adjunct model to a long-term model in a single department or program, by mapping their own efforts. Others, I included, (Cox 2018; Colby & Colby, 2017), do not debate the overall merits of the existence of these kinds of appointments, but have worked to illuminate points of persistent precarity within these positions. For example, my own 2018 study revealed the perceived lack of academic freedom that a group of “full-time lecturers” experienced in a first-year writing program where I argued that long-term contracts alone are not a solution to the full range of precarities those off the tenure line face.

Yet, so far as I know, no one has yet examined appointment types like our own NT and AS roles specifically for evidence of career trajectories over the long-term or how precarity might persist in those roles across years or decades of employment. How might that appear in the working lives of people in these appointment types? I seek to do so here not by conducting a longitudinal study, which this issue deserves, but by working to uncover the collective standpoint of NT and AS workers with Department X as my primary site of investigation.

This work revealed some of what interview participants in NT and AS faculty roles think, know or feel about their own work experiences in relation to evaluation activities and specifically in the context of how they view their career trajectories unfolding in the department over time. By telling these stories, I hope to uncover or provide a mapping of some key nodes of experience that point to long-term precarity as a persistent, structural condition of labor off the tenure line.

Mapping an Anchor Standpoint

This chapter again uses a standpoint approach to engage the theme of long-term precarity. Naples (2003), who works in an IE framework, points out that the feminist scholarship where standpoint methodology resides “has been particularly effective in identifying the processes by which power and the relations of ruling are inherent in disciplinary practices” and further, pointing to Smith and Hill-Collins’ conceptualizations of such, that a goal of standpoint methodologies are to “decenter dominant discourse, and to continually displace and rework it to determine how power organizes social life and what forms of resistance are generated from social locations outside the matrix of domination or relations of ruling” (pp. 51-53).

The area of discussion here then relates directly to that kind of primary standpoint: those working off the tenure line whose work trajectories are not easily captured in disciplinary narratives of tenure, promotion and advancement, nor by the discourses of adjunct labor and the adjunctification of the academy itself. The tool of standpoint then is meant not merely to illuminate individual perspectives but to understand how those social positions are a part of a larger

matrix of social coordination, and ruling relations.

Standpoint has been previously discussed in other locations in this dissertation in terms of its roots in materialist feminist theory and its value as a grounding for feminist research work, but I return to it here specifically in the context of IE methodology. Janet Rankin (2017) rationalizes the researcher exigency of taking up standpoint this way:

An IE researcher is advised to adopt a standpoint—a stance that has an empirical location, where a group of people are positioned, within a complex regime of institutions and governance (*the practices that construct the “regime” are the ultimate focus of the research*). The IE researcher must stay grounded in descriptions of things happening—and the observed tensions and contradictions that arise there for those people (who occupy the standpoint). Researchers must discover: *What do these people know about how things work? What do these people do?* This interest includes all the formal and informal things that contribute to the sum of something happening. The interest in the standpoint informants’ knowledge is ultimately empirical—to build an account of how things that are happening are being organized and coordinated (2). (emphasis added is mine).

I choose to look at the experiences of those working off the tenure line, both NT and AS faculty because of the unique, interstitial roles they play in Department X which push back against what one participant called, “the grand narrative of

tenure” and which potentially offer rich perspectives from which we might reexamine faculty roles writ large in the academy. I seek to build an account of a collective standpoint, rather than carving out one individual’s experience alone (Naples, 2003) by examining interview responses which were coded to particularly look for explanations of long-term precarity and specifically how that appears *over time* in the departmental cycles of annual merit review and teaching review for promotion at all departmental faculty ranks.

The complex phenomenon of long-term precarity in Department X is here, illuminated in a number of ways in interviews, sometimes relating to confusion over the official or lived processes of evaluation and sometimes related to ideological notions of futility, futurity and individual or collective agency. Similarly, to the textual analysis, and building from it, these stories can help us understand how “what is happening” is “organized or coordinated” (Rankin, 2017, p. 2). The stories speak also to notions of the value of both sanctioned and unsanctioned participation in these processes.

In order to remain faithful to the thick descriptions in interview data, over an outside conceptual schema imposed a priori on the data, interviews were coded as mentioned in the methodology chapter in three cycles and will be taken up in the discussion here in short, chunks which were identified by the following coding units:

1. Metaphors: most if not all participants took up a series of metaphors in their accounts of experience with observation and evaluation in the department in direct relation to experiences of precarity, agency, and

participation so the appearance of metaphors indicated moments when participants were accessing shared understandings around particular topics. They were then interpreted for underlying meanings¹.

2. Locations/Conditions; Potential Causes; Impacts/Actions: participants marked these three orientations surrounding the dynamic tensions they experienced in Department X and worked to trace their experiences to a place (textual or processual) a cause (ruling relations or social coordination) or impact/action (what a result was of an experience or what they did in response to experience). Language was coded to discover moments in conversations that spoke to those three markers².

Faculty Futures: Perceived Impacts of Renewal and Promotion Activities

Interview participants off the tenure-line shared some common perspectives, including the difficulties of low pay and perceptions of their status as being different from their tenure-stream colleagues. All noted aspects of their work as they envisioned it over time, some more positively than others. I begin this section by describing some common experiences captured by the notion of

long-term precarity and end by describing more in-depth, the experiences of three faculty members working off the tenure line through various moments of observation and evaluation as a part of their work and how they tied that to visions of their career trajectories in Department X.

“Who Reads This,”

An element that emerged repeatedly in interviews was a sense of confusion or difficulty with the process of evaluation itself. This confusion appeared in various ways and points in time for participants. A notable example was that participants expressed concern about how their own yearly or promotion documents were *perceived* or if they were *even read* as they moved through the institutional circuitry even if they were able to map what that circuitry was. In other words, the social coordination of the department was clearly articulated in institutional circuitry, but faculty *experienced* those processes in divergent ways from them. Initially, as a researcher I was confused about why this might be because simultaneously, those who had been on merit committees reported reading the material of their colleagues carefully. Yet, when it came to their own materials, I heard responses like the following:

It has to go to external review, and I don't know what external reviewers are willing to read...I am so deeply cynical that anyone above the chair level even looks at

¹ For example, non-tenure stream faculty consistently used the metaphor of a “rubber stamp” addressed in the previous chapter, which was interpreted as a reference to a bureaucratic process that stripped the experience of genuine meaning.

² As an example, when working to determine potential causes for a particular

aspect of the problematic, most participants were careful to not assign responsibility directly to any one individual and so often used a passive sentence construction to deflect agency, while simultaneously locating potential locations for a particular aspect of the problematic that they were encountering.

it. You know, they're not going to let you schedule your dissertation defense if you're gonna fail.

Yeah, it's a weird thing, because, if I hadn't done it, I'm fairly certain that, like, they would have had grounds to fire me. And yet, I'm not even certain that anyone will look at it. *Takes a long pause.* So, it's a very bizarre 200 some pages.

This sentiment was pervasive, even beyond the NT and AS faculty I interviewed to those in assistant professor roles. So, while constructing a standpoint of those off the tenure line, this particular sentiment seems to speak to a larger, structural tension for all faculty. Yet, unlike those on the tenure line, for NT and AS faculty it also spoke directly to their sense of perceived value, of the investment in their work over the long term, or as one participant perceived it, "the kind of investment the university makes in careers, for tenure-track versus NT and academic specialist, is, huge, right? The disparity there is as remarkable as the pay inequity."

"Opacity"

Another key element which might help us to map the divergences between the well-meaning and well-crafted documents and practices of Department X and the ways in which participants in the department experienced them is the notion of opacity, or lack of transparency, and the ways in which participants tracked that to their forward movement or trajectories in the department over time. Efforts in the department to understand the rifts in department culture through surveys and outside consultation surfaced this need for "transparency" over and over, yet it appeared as difficult to define

or operationalize. Arguably, transparency speaks to a hidden curriculum, or the "stealth requirements" I mentioned in the previous chapter which also may stem from the ways Department X interpolates members into unpaid service and participation. Though sometimes oversimplified as an unevenness between expectations and pay inequity, one interview participant summarized it this way:

I would argue that our labor situation here is *not good*. I would be the first person to say that I think that the ways that people move through here are opaque in ways that I have not experienced elsewhere, even as an adjunct.

This participant used the metaphor of NT faculty being "like the kids in the department" to refer to the ways in which they perceived their expertise as being less valuable than others, a nod to status concerns. Further, this participant marked a connection to notions of long-term vs. short-term conceptions of their position in the department:

The idea that you would constantly get from tenure-track people as an adjunct, "you're just an adjunct because you just started out. Not, you've been an adjunct for five years." Or you've been one for 6 years because we have a system that demands you stay an adjunct. You get that same idea with people [here] with NT, is the idea, where there is a kind of "oh you're NT, because you do, you know, you're just starting out but like eventually, you'll find your way into a TT position like us.

This participant's perception of TT attitudes is counter to the sentiments of

each of the NT and AS participants I interviewed who were all planning on being in their positions permanently. The above participant, (and others), located a lack of clarity around processes of observation and evaluation and the role those held in their advancement as playing into a sense of insecurity about what is possible, or probable even, for themselves as professionals over the long term. One noted, “[two colleagues] got promoted this year and so there is this big push like, [*whispering*] ‘we really want you to do this’ but it’s really unclear what it means. Like, what, what does it mean?” They continued, “it’s like, this really strange liminal...ideological...quandary...and the whole entire thing is based on the tenure-stream RPT³ model. They can’t figure out how to evaluate us on what our contracts really are.”

“What is this Process For?”

Thick descriptions in interview data which contributed to the collective standpoint mapping in the context of long-term precarity and which might evince larger complexities of power in the department also seemed to revolve around processes themselves. Moments of tension, in interview data, seemed to occur for faculty when their own experiences diverged from what they knew, hoped, or understood to be the protocols they would follow through moments of promotion and advancement. This seemed to cause them to need to make sense of or redetermine the nature of their potentials in the department. Arguably, these moments for participants spoke to their perceived sense of value to the institution and the possibilities or lack thereof that they imagined for their careers over the long term in Department X and they tracked it directly to that. Below I tell three stories at some length

which are meant to help support an understanding of such elements of the work and work processes, illuminating where long-term precarity shows up in the experiences of these faculty.

Navigating a Teaching Review Process

In our artifact-based reflective interview one participant brought in the materials they submitted for a promotion and described them to me by first defining them and then explaining the process that they experienced in relation to these texts. They noted first that gaps appeared in a few ways in the materials themselves. They explained that much of their work is administrative but that this is difficult to document and explained that though this process appeared to “mirror” a TT promotion process, they were unable, due to the nature of their work, to provide accompanying materials because of their appointment type.

They next described a situation in which the process of promotion for their rank seemed unclear or unknown to the department itself, despite language existing in the bylaws. Incidentally, this lack of clarity was confirmed by other interview participants about the AS rank. This participant described the unfolding of their process across two semesters, in which they requested information about the proper process to follow but that information was either not provided, or unknown. Then, a set of materials was requested in the week immediately after finals week, with a time window of 10 days to complete and submit them. The participant described this moment in this way:

[because it was the week after finals] I was totally fried. But it had to get done, so I did it. And then [it was] made more

³ Renewal, Promotion and Tenure

frustrating by, I don't know what happened to my external reviewers, supposedly they received all the materials? I have not been told one way or the other. I was, however, informed, on like, January 15th, that my teaching committee had been formed, and then was told by a member of that committee, outside of any formal, communication, that they had not received any of my teaching materials, could I please send them? And that was, maybe like, Feb. 3rd

In speaking to others in the department, it was clear that this experience was perhaps anomalous and that other teaching committees were able to move other AS faculty through this process smoothly. However, this participant's experience provides insight, nonetheless, into a potential unevenness in the process from which this faculty member garnered a feeling of precarity. The AS rank in Department X remains a somewhat nebulous area in moments of promotion and evaluation processes, perhaps a byproduct of their creation which was done by a former chair's executive decision, with little explanation of the role itself. For example, a TT teaching review committee member confirmed in another interview that they tried to just follow the TT process in the absence of other information, yet, as the above participant noted, because of their appointment type, they would be unable to provide a TT like dossier for such an activity. This AS interview participant reflected on their promotion process this way:

There's just no sense of an actual investment in a career, right. And

so I, that part of the intention there was, as you said, to build in bylaws so that it had to happen that there would be this sort of mentorship available. But the problem is that there's no one in our department who is a senior academic specialist and the nature of, at least our employment in this department, has made it that the opportunities to meet and network with people beyond the department, are not readily available.

Of particular import to this discussion to me, was just this, the moment this participant described how they marked a difference in their ability to gain mentorship and access to networking opportunities outside the department both as an AS (and, perhaps, they speculated, because of their gender), as a distinct feature of how they perceived precarity in the long-term and how they perceived the value of their work in the institution:

My observation has been that, any opportunities that I might have to expand my network beyond the department have been opportunities that I have both fought for and sought out myself... If you're doing your job and you're doing it well, it's easy to be overlooked. Especially if you are in an institutional structure that does not have space to reward you... I mean, technically it's a promotion, but really, it's "congrats, you can keep your job." Right? Like, it's very unlikely that this is going to result in increased pay. It's certainly not going to result in any difference in how I operate in the institutional structures.

Other AS faculty in the department, who are male, for example, had been offered roles that took them outside the department via committee or working groups, or to develop new skill sets in administration, campus-wide leadership and service, curriculum design and online instruction. One of those participants explained that he felt these opportunities had prepared him, if not for a TT faculty appointment, for a university level administration position. Another male colleague's work closely mirrored that of a tenure-stream faculty member. This is in contrast to the participant whose story I tell here, whose administrative work was housed within the department itself, in a support role.

Finally, this participant described specifically, the impact they perceived of the limits of their rank over the long-term this way:

I've tried to make connections with people that have more experience or are at a higher rank in order to try to kind of create some sort of stability for myself in terms of long-term goals and what I've come to realize, is that while there is a lot of positive talk around NT faculty and AS having careers here, that talk...(sighs)...is weirdly, inauthentic, right, like *even* when it's coming from me, because there is this sense that there isn't forward movement and that professional development happens, *within* the department, which means that you aren't actually developing a network, you're not actually looking for the next step. You're only being made more and more insular because within academia if you don't have that larger network, if you don't

have ways to think about the next step for your research and the next step for your teaching, the result is that you're left behind very quickly, right, because there's always new grad students who are valued as those who are more likely to have a career, than this person who has been in an NT position for 10 years. I don't know, it ends up kind of creating a weird set of, tensions, around...what's even possible.

“The Weight of the Institution” in a Promotion Process:

The next participant described in our interview, “the weight of the institution” a reference to the ways in which bureaucratic processes move slowly and sometimes prevent action and mapped the very real impacts in their working life under that weight. In IE, that weight can stem from what it refers to “institutional discourse” (McCoy, 2006, p. 121), which both guides and limits possibilities. McCoy notes interview participants sometimes mark their own experiences in opposition to such discourses. The participant whose story I tell here highlights some of those moments of opposition and calls into play the concept of the “extra-local” or what is outside of a participant's experience, though they have strong knowledge of its workings (LaFrance, 2019, p.31). This participant began to weave in the moments of sense making and oppositional discourse that faculty sometimes engage in our interview together by describing their process of promotion. In Department X, promotion activities are part of a social coordination

process that exists both within and extra-local to the department in the college⁴.

In response to my artifact-based reflective interview request, this participant explained that there were many items they might share with me which related to the ways a course observation somehow showed up later down the line in their promotion work. They talked through several with me in the course of our interview but began with an email communication from one of the deans in the college which related to the submission of materials for “Des B” promotion. They saw this as a linked document to observation work, which is why they selected it—as their appointment type is primarily teaching based—their submitted materials center pedagogy in all its multiple forms, and they are evaluated on teaching primarily.

They chose this item because it indicated clearly to them, the value of their institutional participation in the workings of the college. Their interview revealed in many ways, what I note in the difference between short and long-term precarity. This participant didn’t feel as if their job was under threat, but they did seem to feel that their efforts were less meaningful than they deserved to be or only valued symbolically and that this led to a sense of devaluation or limitation in their career trajectory over time. They related:

I was doing the dossier and was told, multiple times, you need to send everything. So, I had a 1000-page dossier. 24 hours before it was to go the provost’s office, I received an email from the associate dean saying that, “you need to cut this to 250 pages, you

have 24 hours” ... I cut the dossier by three-quarters and sent it back and made it clear that I wasn’t happy. And then received a long, apologetic email saying, “look, we read all your stuff, we just can’t send it to the provost.” And so that email, that moment of feeling...as if 750 pages of my 1000-page dossier could just be deleted, that would be fine...functions as an artifact on a number of levels.

For this participant, interactions like these were indicative of a lack of communication and attention to NT faculty and their work and this interpretation showed up for them in other locations as well. For instance, this participant noted a move to shorten time to promotion for NT faculty, but wondered, “are you really valuing the work we’re doing? It’s super unclear.” Much of this was tied up for them, in an identity as a scholar as well, and they noted a process by which they used their scholarship to affirm their own worth and value even as it would not gain them status institutionally. They remarked, “I did a presentation on ‘the NT art of failure’ [at a national conference] and doing that made me feel, ‘oh, wow, you’re not a failure.’ I’m a f***ng good teacher and here’s this thing that shows that.”

This participant spent much of our interview making sense of their own understandings of the motives of the institution itself, or the larger ruling relations and social coordination outside Department X. They related that the promotion process was, for them, in some ways an acknowledgement of the permanency of their role, if not its status,

eventually, back into the department via certification of a promotion.

⁴ As noted previously, promotion documents circulate from departmental committees and processes outward to deans and provosts, through academic HR and

explaining that “it’s like, oh, hey, you can have a career, feel good about it, we can’t address the pay inequalities but we can put associate professor on your business card.” However, this was, largely, a symbolic achievement for this participant, made somewhat inauthentic by the material conditions themselves. They remarked, “It’s not like we can go on the market as an untenured associate professor and expect to just start with tenure, right? So, it really is, what does this mean? Is this just naming? Is this a naming convention?”

Further, they marked a tension in the process of evaluation specific to rank which spoke to a central tension of this study. How do we evaluate faculty across rank? Do we standardize the process for each rank, should they be different? What are the impacts of those choices? This participant said,

You can’t have this division of labor and evaluate everyone the same way, right? That would be like, let’s say you work in a produce department and you’re stocking apples and then you’re stocking the oranges and somehow, you’re evaluating them the same way. It, it doesn’t work, right? And until this year, no one asked us [NT]. No one asked the specialists, hey, what do *you* think needs to happen?

This participant’s responses mirror discoordination I marked in Chapter Two of the dissertation in the way that the FAIS reporting systems assume particular functions of faculty, in contradiction to the appointment type of the majority of faculty in Department X. Yet, this participant described participating in quite a bit of service and engagement work and that they would continue to seek

promotions as they were available with a “why not?” approach. Long-term precarity showed up here as a disconnect between those processes and any meaningful advancement over time. Rather than locate agency over this with the department itself, the participant tracked their experiences back to the entire institutional paradigm and noted that the holding up of tenure as the central standard of faculty roles was “archaic” and disappearing, leaving them to question their own promotion processes being aligned to that standard.

Interviews like this one bring up vital questions about the roles faculty play in a changing academic landscape and the disappearance of tenure. How might we continue to build in labor equity as these structures change, knowing that work off the tenure line is the actual condition of the majority of faculty? The real benefit for this participant in achieving promotions wasn’t pay or status, which they marked as unavailable to them, but rather continuance. That continuance afforded them a place from which to push back against the power structures of the institution. They explained, “the whole thing brought about an epiphany; I’m just gonna stand up and speak truth to power and if you don’t like it, you can *not* reappoint me in three years when my rolling contract, nope actually, it’s a rolling contract so now you’re stuck with me and if you don’t like it, don’t listen.”

Teacher Scholar Identity as Refuge:

The final narrative I tell here is divergent from the first two in some ways. Rather than engaging oppositional discourse (McCoy, 2006) in relation to the ruling relations or dominant narratives of the department, institution and field, this participant aligned themselves *to* those discourses and located a sense of agency

over their work and status in the department and institution through a strong identification with what we might call a teacher-scholar identity.

This identity formation was indicated in part by the object they chose to share with me for our interview which was a text on pedagogy, something that was not generated or connected directly to the local conditions of their employment but which for them, helped them begin a journey as an effective teacher as a graduate student. They told a story about how this book led them to focus on teaching over time and that for them it also connected to evaluation and assessment more broadly in the ways that measuring teaching effectiveness is a part of their disciplinary participation and citizenship. Their very use of “we” language indicated a sense of belonging, which I noted in contrast to the language of some other interview participants who preferred either “they” constructions or simply used passive language to ascribe responsibility to their own department or the institution itself. When explaining their relationship to assessment this participant explained, “I think the ability to be assessment literate, to be reflective of your own teaching practices can be our biggest tool in improving the lives of students and faculty.”

This participant also explained that they spent their time thinking about “what it is to be a good teacher and to be able to translate the things we care deeply about into useful and transferrable knowledge for students.” They continued, “I’m of the belief that certainly, sort of what we were talking about right before we got on the microphone here, that humanists, those in the liberal arts, one of our biggest strengths can be our ability to go into the classroom and teach well.”

Also, in contrast to other participants, this person noted an overall trust and faith in the observation and evaluation process and related that they felt fairly valued as a teacher-scholar in the department professionally. They also spent time relating their understandings of the discipline and humanities in general, where they used the metaphor of “the sky is falling” over their own personal experiences with observation and evaluation.

However, using standpoint methodology, when looking closer at this interview, a few key moments of tension arose that helped me to locate “the disjunctions, divergences and distinctions experienced by [this] individual(s)” (LaFrance, 2019, p. 35). While other participants felt a lack of agency over their status, this participant did not track tensions to their work in the department directly. Yet, when I asked them whether or not they felt that their department viewed them as a “teacher only” and if so, if that had an impact on their work, they took a long pause. LaFrance notes that pauses, sighs, and affective moments in interview can act as “significant tells” (p.28) in IE work that demonstrate moments where a participant is grappling with contradictions between what they know and experience. After the long pause, the participant answered hesitantly, “I think so...that’s a great question. I think sometimes, yes, but it’s something that I haven’t necessarily pushed back on.” They explained that they didn’t necessarily perceive this role as a bad thing and that they viewed their colleagues as “generous and wonderful.”

Initially in this interview I began to question whether or not my working problematic was an accurate one for the site of study. This person seemed to have accessed networks both inside and outside

the department for growth in their career trajectory and seemed comfortable in their role as teacher-scholar. Yet, later in our conversation after our formal interview questions they revealed the following which spoke, for me, to a deep, underlying complexity in their work and career trajectory. This portion of the conversation is why I tell this participant's story here. It locates long-term precarity not simply in the ways in which professional identity unfolds at an institutional rank but the way in which this participant navigates that identity *outside* the institution. They described how they are navigating identity through a significant tension between the cultural status of being a "professor" and the actual, material conditions of their work off the tenure line. IE seeks an understanding of the material conditions in work cultures and this participant was able to speak to that relationship quite clearly. Specifically, this participant marked the way their material conditions impact them in their familial and social relationships.

In answer to a question about what the most challenging aspect of their work off the tenure line is, they began

I'll start with the biggest of them and work down to the most local. Just in general, pay and remuneration are the most pressing questions when it comes to NT faculty. Summers suck and right now you're seeing these emails, these Facebook posts, because people aren't getting summer appointments and people are having to drastically revamp their lives, to reimagine what they thought their lives would be like.

They continued by describing the first two years of their employment in Department X:

I do not remember two years of this job and it was, I don't think I don't know how we made it to be honest with you because it was scary, because I was on a fixed term...I thought, I have a career now and I was scared to death...I'll never forget going to get my taxes done, the two tax preparers were MSU graduate students and when they saw, "you're an assistant professor," they read my income and they're like, "how do you live off this?"...And I'll never forget it because I remember my dad and my brother being there, because we were doing this all at the same time and then this is the first time they heard what I made. There were like, "you're an assistant professor?" And I qualified that year for the earned income tax credit which was, according to my tax preparer, "the poor people's tax credit." I'll never forget it, because for that year, it was one of the toughest years of my life.

This participant's story was reflected in my conversations with department leadership as well, where it became clear that pay disparity is a persistent problem on everyone's minds regardless of rank. I tell this narrative not to ascribe any cruelty on the part of the department itself. Everyone is concerned with this issue. I point to it because as I mentioned early in this chapter, conversations about pay can seem oversimplified. We don't often consider how the issue has impact over time in the

career trajectory of faculty or how it in fact builds precarity in the long-term identification of faculty as professionals. We tend to view pay in a linear as opposed to ecological model. Further, it simply isn't possible to have a conversation about long-term precarity without addressing the issue of pay, which affects the majority of the teaching faculty in Department X and the majority of non-tenured faculty everywhere. Interview participants consistently noted that it was only possible to make it work because they ALL had working spouses making middle class incomes. As this participant explained, as a parent of small children they would mark real success by whether or not they would be able to send their children to school in the institution in which they worked by the time their children were college aged. They said that even with a 50 percent discount as a faculty member, that would be impossible to do on their salary. I wondered, how might our approach to labor equity change if we viewed work off the tenure line as permanent, not short term, or at will? What would we be willing to do change?

Systems of Remedy and Alignment

As with the previous two discussion chapters, I offer here, potential locations or methods by which systems in Department X might be more aligned to the remedies needed to address labor equity and long-term precarity specifically. This aspect is the most difficult to address here, in this final results chapter because of the scope, scale, and synthetic nature of the problem and the multitudinous ways faculty off the tenure line choose to adapt, affirm or reject, manipulate, or come to terms with their visions of their working and professional lives in the long-term in Department X.

As I began to think remedially, for example, I noted in an earlier draft of this chapter, that the particular confusion around systems of documentation, the purpose of evaluation at each rank, and the impact of evaluation and feedback etc. at least could be an easy one to solve through more information dissemination, more feedback, and clearer adherence to departmental processes. In other words, from closing the loop of evaluation and the feedback that results from it. I made this suggestion because, as I noted in Chapter Four, faculty consistently reflected they *wanted* more direct, thorough and individualized feedback in their moments of promotion and observation even as they noted a sense of that not being possible because of the time and effort it would take. I also noted, that because of its persistence, this confusion, coupled with a desire for more feedback spoke not only to a lack of resources but to confidence and faith in the processes themselves, or a lack thereof. I argued in that draft that this tension, even if superficially fixable, deserves reflection.

However, as a part of my work I did an extended member checking method (Chase, 2017) and it was there that participants challenged me and pushed back against my own simplified notions as a researcher, about an easy communicative “fix” at the level of boss texts. They all quickly noted that this solution too, ran the risk of feeling symbolic, as much as the current process feels symbolic (“rubber stamping”). Instead, one noted their own engagement with a university task force, where, they shared how NT faculty from across campus, alongside upper level administration, are working to improve evaluation models, to mirror those of a genuine “peer review” and to make them more meaningful across rank. Though this

process was in its beginning stages, the participant was hopeful that it could affect change. As a part of that work, they noted that, “[we] are re-writing the promotion protocol for UNTF and AS and it might have reverberating changes. They [the group] are advocating for language change, from NT to ‘professor of practice.’” They further explained that the work is was coalitional, and across ranks and that changes will start at the college level, and then, they hoped, that “when it works in CAL, HR and employee relations will take note and make changes broadly.”

I share this response here because it is important and powerful. At the heart of feminist methodologies, IE specifically and any work that draws itself from Marxist ideologies, the idea of collective stances, mutual aid, and collaboration are key components to improving institutional spaces, workplaces and societal structures. In universities, this work speaks to the need for us to think in cross-institutional ways to support labor equity. My suggestion here is simply that Department X align to, support, work with and incorporate the coalitional redesign being done by non-tenured faculty and adopt it in their own processes and documents.

Yet, I offer this example not to address long-term precarity writ large. Instead, I capture here, one potential location from which this department can engage the complexities of faculty evaluation across rank. In the conclusion below and the following chapter, I begin to consider long-term precarity more broadly.

Conclusion

Fieldwork begins with an analytic stance that is committed to gathering evidence to build an account about how something in the world is being socially organized for

particular people. Data collection is focused on learning from people about how they do their work and to learn about how problems are linked and connected within institutional processes. The analytic goal is to find and describe the ruling relations that can be shown to extend beyond the study informants.
(Rankin, 2017, p.6)

I end here with a return to Rankin’s notion of fieldwork in IE. The accounts of participants here, those working off the tenure line, as the anchor standpoint reveal something about how these people do their work and yes, how that work is linked to the institutional processes that inscribe such work from the promotion processes inscribed in the Bylaws to college level reviews to the material conditions they work inside of. In Department X there are broader opportunities for non-tenured faculty than in most places and these structures in turn enable us to consider a broader range of issues outside of what is normally considered when we have discussions of adjunct labor in writing studies. Those conversations are often confined to short-term precarity. Instead, the accounts here can help us to see clearly, the nodes of long-term precarity that reside in the work of and ruling relations at play in the department. Specifically, contributing factors to this long-term precarity in department X appear in A) insecurity related to value and opportunity over the long-term that shows up in observation, evaluation and promotion processes, B) lack of continuity to larger institutional processes in which NT or AS work is perceived as being expendable or not worth paying attention to in evaluation and C) pay and remuneration over the long-term which prevents faculty from achieving the full benefits of being a part

of the professoriate even as they perceive meaning and value in their teaching and scholarship. These aspects “extend beyond the study informants” in the way that they are tied up in texts, procedures and institutional workings.

Much of this may be bound up with “stealth requirements” but also in the very real necessity of shifting some of the service and administrative burden of labor in Department X to those off the tenure line. As Department X continues to work with less than 20 TT faculty and more than 50 NT faculty, these movements will become ever more present. The stories of non-tenured faculty also present an opportunity for reimagining faculty work while at the same time, building in structures to alleviate precarity in the long-term. The next chapter devotes itself to envisioning some of these possibilities and locating structures in Department X which might make it a model for how to do so ethically and pragmatically.