

Professional Development as a Solution to the Labor Crisis

Morgan Hanson

This bibliographic essay examines the relationship between faculty professional development and labor throughout *WPA: Writing Program Administration's* forty-year history. I concentrate on the key theme of unity in professional development, separating the essay into three sections: professional development for retraining senior faculty (1980–1985), professional development for departmental unity (1985–2010), and professional development to establish disciplinarity and end neoliberalism (2011–present).

Almost forty years ago, Wayne Booth (1981) listed a host of complaints familiar to writing professionals today: “slave wages,” lack of job security, rivalries within ranks, and the lack of participation within university governance (35). Although not the first person in *WPA* to cite “professional development” as an answer (a special forum issue on the topic had appeared a year earlier), Booth’s way of framing issues became a dominant voice in the early conversation on the relationship between labor and faculty professional development. According to Booth, professional development exposes the working conditions of all faculty to each other, which encourages inter-departmental support to combat labor issues.

In the decades since Booth’s article, the dominant theme to emerge from the bibliographic literature might be considered one of unity amid a labor crisis. The following essay highlights the evolution of the labor conversation in faculty professional development scholarship over *WPA: Writing Program Administration's* forty-year history. Early literature in the journal on faculty professional development hints at this crisis, but it wasn’t until more recent work, namely Nancy Welch’s 2017 CWPA keynote address, that the scholarship on professional development responded directly to the labor crisis by naming it neoliberalism and calling for reform. Welch defines neoliberalism as “recurring crises in capital accumulation” that are often resolved through a host of cuts to social services and institutions and

“labor casualization” (104). Indeed, the earliest articles in the journal open with concerns about staffing composition courses with underprepared faculty due to budget cuts, mostly strategizing methods for bringing recalcitrant senior faculty into the composition fold. Later articles continue an emphasis on community via articulations of departmental transparency of policies, standards, and pedagogy with the hope to reveal and change the working conditions of composition instructors throughout the university.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR RETRAINING SENIOR FACULTY (1980–1985)

It’s an all-too-familiar scenario: budget cuts and low enrollment demand a scramble to find composition instructors. In early versions of this crisis, though, “new” composition instructors came from the ranks of tenured faculty, many of whom were less than thrilled to return to the composition classroom. Adding faculty professional development as a site for retraining into the mix made for an increasingly toxic and divisive situation due to the time spent in professional development and the likely (unfortunate) assumption that “retraining” indicates a problem that needs to be rectified.

In *WPA*’s first forum issue and only special issue on professional development in 1980, five scholars explore strategies for retraining senior faculty (Marius; Lyons; Nold; Bonner; Brothers). These authors, especially Richard Marius and Robert Lyons, speculate the causes of and strategize methods for handling senior faculty pessimism that came along with the territory of retraining and returning to the composition classroom.

Richard Marius explains this pessimism by arguing that senior faculty avoid first-year writing courses because they prefer the glory found in lecturing and publishing, and so they do not wish to put in the time to teach intensive and intimate writing courses (10). Robert Lyons adds that senior faculty feel like they paid their dues early in their careers, which means that they do not need to be retrained (13). Lyons, though, aims to solve the issue through a “program of professional collaboration” in which all writing faculty in a department enter into reading groups that study prominent scholarship from the field in an effort to bridge the gap between literary and composition studies, thus boosting the credibility of the field while increasing departmental unification (17–18). Lyons’ call serves as an early articulation of a major theme within later faculty professional development scholarship: boosting departmental credibility while also increasing field reputation and awareness.

In 1984 and 1985, Linda Polin and Edward M. White published three articles documenting their four and a half year study of compo-

sition instructors within The California State University system (Polin and White, "Patterns"; "Speaking"; White and Polin, "Research"). Their National Institute of Education supported research sheds additional light on the issues identified by Marius and Lyons. For example, in their final article in this series, Polin and White note that senior faculty (and they include tenure-track faculty in this designation) have dismissive attitudes toward both the instruction of writing and composition as a field of study. They reveal that poor labor conditions not only impact faculty lives but also the well-being of the department (and, by extension, its students). Therefore, Polin and White determine that retraining tenured and tenure-track faculty proves to be "largely unsuccessful" ("Speaking," 27), and they ultimately conclude that staffing composition courses with recalcitrant tenure-line faculty and defenseless part-time instructors makes it unlikely for a strong writing program to succeed within a department (30). A writing program's survival depends upon positive attitudes towards instruction, and so faculty professional development appears to be the most likely space to encourage those attitudes.

These early conversations establish the trajectory for future studies on professional development in two key ways. First, these articles emphasize the role community plays in combating divisive labor conditions that harm a department, and later articles offer more tangible strategies for increasing collegial unity. Second, the importance of field definition and delineation in regard to labor subtly appears, most obviously in Lyons' call for more composition scholarship in professional development. As Matthew Abraham notes, "rhetoric and composition's status and legitimacy as a discipline are tied up with the labor conditions in first-year writing" (69). The emphasis on unity in these early articles, then, extends beyond the department and to the discipline as a whole.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR DEPARTMENTAL UNITY (1985–2010)

By the mid-1980s, most scholarship on faculty professional development within *WPA: Writing Program Administrators* turns toward collaboration, collegiality, and community. Joseph F. Trimmer's "Faculty Development and the Teaching of Writing" (1985) demonstrates the reasoning behind moving away from focusing on senior faculty and progressing toward an emphasis on departmental unity. When he and his colleagues undertook a "campus-wide re-education on the teaching of writing" with the help of a CWPA consultant (12), he found that the program was largely successful. However, even though his program proved to be successful, Timmer notes that he was unable to persuade the "department curmudgeons that [they]

are doing anything except whistling into the void” (14). Due to the effects of differing attitudes inspired by the curmudgeons, naive newcomers, and the complacent faculty who wanted to maintain the *status quo* (15–16), he calls for a “rhetoric of compromise” as a solution to encourage all faculty to examine their positions, and, rather than abandoning them, to shift them toward a compromising position that benefits a unified, departmental vision (17).

Trimmer’s recommendation for conversation and compromise to create community establishes the foundation for much of the professional development scholarship until 2010. From the 1990s to early 2000s, scholars considered various methods for boosting departmental unity through professional development. John T. Gage (1990), for example, recommends WPAs create a handbook on their particular program policies and resources in order to convey to those inside and outside of the program (such as other university administrators) the goals of the writing program. He concludes that his immediate and extended communities all benefited from an articulation of their shared beliefs.

Opening up conversations for faculty to share and reflect on their experiences with the department remains a key point for professional development (Swyt; Rose and Finders). Of note in this scholarship is Chris Anson, David A. Jolliffe, and Nancy Shapiro’s oft-cited “Stories to Teach By: Using Narrative Cases in TA and Faculty Development” (1995). They endorse workshops that have instructors create, share, and discuss case studies from their own experiences as teachers in order to be critical of their behavior as instructors. Anson, Jolliffe, and Shapiro see these workshops as creating and establishing open dialogues between novice and expert instructors in a department.

But faculty professional development is not all sunshine and roses during this time span. Several articles appear that examine faculty resistance to professional development (Swilky; Salem and Jones; Bedore and O’Sullivan), predominantly in later issues of the journal. Unlike early comments on the sour attitudes of senior faculty (a point that returns in Swilky’s article), these studies emphasize positive actions that WPAs can take to improve departmental morale. For example, in 2010 Lori Salem and Peter Jones conclude that WPAs should create more inviting professional development workshops by reframing them as introductions to writing pedagogy to make these sites for sharing less intimidating (77). Conversation and collaboration progress toward unification in more welcoming environments, and this unification may spread beyond one department into a university and an entire discipline.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO ESTABLISH DISCIPLINARITY
AND END NEOLIBERALISM (2011–PRESENT)

As more writing-intensive courses appear throughout the university (Salem and Jones describe such an initiative), the labor conversation proceeds to methods for unifying the discipline. Scholars propose that if the field of writing studies has clearly articulated delineations, then stakeholders throughout the academy will understand the work performed by instructors of all ranks. Ann M. Penrose (2012) stresses the importance of professional identity for non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty. She articulates that because of the many avenues of inquiry within writing studies as a whole, different programs can stress different theories, which can make it difficult for NTT faculty (who often take jobs at more than one institution in a semester) to identify as an expert. Rather, NTT instructors may feel outside of the collaborative community in which they work, which further marginalizes their position. Thus, national unity can drastically improve the working conditions for all writing faculty.

One strategy for establishing the field's boundaries is a national credentialing system for all writing instructors. Steve Lamos in his 2011 article, "Credentialing College Writing Teachers: WPAs and Labor Reform," calls for credentialing at the national and local level, arguing that such a move would make visible the work of writing teachers and lead to labor equity. Lamos provides the broad strokes for credentialing, listing several issues WPAs must consider (such as the knowledge to be included in a credential program) and the strategies WPAs can take for "story-changing" to justify credentialing costs. Ultimately, he calls for CWPA to establish a credentialing task force to begin the work toward a truly unified discipline.

While national-level professional development may cause grand overhaul of labor conditions for writing faculty (particularly NTT faculty), the current scholarship provides only generative ideas for such a movement rather than concrete strategies for implementing national reform. In her 2017 keynote address (printed in 2018), Nancy Welch returns the conversation to the local level, providing a practical approach that impacts both local and national writing programs: professional development that actively interrogates neoliberalism and austerity. Welch talks little about professional development, but her entire talk serves as a starting point (a primer, as she labels it) for WPAs to initiate conversations about the labor crisis with others, both locally and nationally. She encourages conversations to instigate change throughout the university instead of competition among programs (110).

As the conversation on unity through professional development has grown, shifted, and evolved over the past forty years, open conversation among colleagues remains a constant strategy for establishing unity for positive change. Booth and Welch, on opposite ends of the professional development timeline, both advocate that professional development can dramatically impact the labor crisis within the academy simply because it makes visible the labor issues within the university. Future work on faculty professional development should extend its labor conversation to the often-invisible work of dual-enrollment instructors within a writing program. By illuminating the labor conditions of all their faculty through professional development workshops, WPAs can actively respond to Welch's call to change the neoliberal landscape of the university.

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Morgan Hanson is assistant professor of English at the University of Southern Indiana. Her research interests include faculty professional development, threshold concepts of writing studies, and labor issues within dual-enrollment.

