

Advocacy, Independence, and the Painful Kairotic Moment for Rhetoric and Composition

Kimberly Gunter

This article traces contradictions in two streams of WPA scholarship: (1) hero narratives in which WPAs recount their advocacy for non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty and (2) calls for independence for rhetoric and composition. Ironically, both veins of scholarship ignore the shortage of composition faculty with the terminal degree, an absence that constrains disciplinarity. Grounding this discussion in my work as a WPA across universities, I argue that advocacy for NTT faculty must sit alongside the expectation that composition faculty participate in the discipline within which they work, a minimal requirement if meaningful independence is to be realized.

Fatigue triggers the southerner in me. “Oh, honey, I wish I could,” I drawl, raising my hand shoulder-high, just as my aunties used to do, swaying in the pews during summer revivals. Turning down a colleague’s invitation for apple picking, I groan, “I am *crawling* toward fall break.” I don’t add, “Have you people never seen a farm?!” The job has me exhausted *and* ornery these days.

WPA work, like housework, can feel seasonal. Observations and airing out the quilts in autumn, evaluations and cleaning curtains in spring, syllabi review and washing windows in August, scheduling classes and laundry, it sometimes seems, 24/7/365.

This latest round of scheduling, however, stings. Routine emails to the registrar about timecodes and familiar negotiation of faculty requests dissolve behind the foreground of this fact: Nearly 80% of the adjuncts whose spring 2019 classes I am assigning on this October day will not return to Fairfield University’s core writing program in fall 2019. In four out of five cases, I scratch their names into my spreadsheet for the last time. Instead, February will find me weighing one against the other, struggling to identify the five or six from our current roster of 26 adjuncts to retain.

Programs are marked by seasons, too, kairotic periods that Michael Harker might characterize as “timing, appropriateness, and ethical underpinnings . . . at critical moments” (92). As a “new” WPA, hired to develop a new writing curriculum (one ultimately taught by a largely new faculty) located within an existing writing program, itself situated within an existing English department, all on an evolving campus with a changing core curriculum—yeah, kairos feels all too real and all too material these days.

The season in which I, Fairfield's core writing program, and our faculty find ourselves aligns with the greater kairotic moment of the discipline. Often the sole person responsible for manifesting rhetoric and composition on a campus, WPAs are particularly positioned to feel a contradiction within the current disciplinary zeitgeist. A tension abides, in the scholarship but equally in WPAs' lived experiences. First, WPAs frequently serve as advocates for contingent composition faculty, we subsequently articulating our heroic sagas within the scholarship. (This is not one of those tales.) Alternatively, we are frequently designated to make declarations of disciplinary independence, on our campuses and in academic monographs, declarations that result from and seek to further instantiate the discipline *as* discipline. Like the blues master Robert Johnson, we stand at what can be a kairotic crossroads of these two veins of scholarship and praxis.

In these reflections and in my daily work on campus, I sometimes feel that I am writing and working via Google Earth, now zooming in to describe local terrain, next shrinking back to read curves of horizons. Perhaps most grievously, herein, I speak of great bands of subjects as if they were singular—"the adjunct," "the WPA," "the discipline." I've resisted sprinkling quotation marks throughout, but concepts and populations deconstruct before me, and I realize I risk homogenizing that which is not. In the end, I describe my own midcareer move to a new institution and the competing allegiances that I feel within this new context. I attempt to illustrate how the storied advocacy for contingent faculty so common in WPA scholarship and likewise in my own administrative experience can sometimes counter the disciplinarity of rhetoric and composition on which calls for independence rely. Finally, I point to the resulting incongruity of WPA identities and call on the field to consider more fully independence's repercussions on staffing and WPA life.

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Kim (texting): This is as close to "shop boss" as I ever wanna come. I just sent 11 e-mails to 11 internal candidates, telling them that none have been selected for first-round interviews for the full-time lines.

Tasha: Not even Caroline?!

Kim: I know, I know. I just feel sick.

Tasha: Oh hon.

Kim: I'd say I'm gutted, but given how they are feeling, I can't very well think about how hard this is on me.

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Like so many, Fairfield University is revising our core curriculum. Three core directors, four years of negotiation, and untold committees and compromises speak to the high stakes involved. Alongside typical concerns like budgetary allocations and redistribution of requirements, revision of our core is complicated by at least three contextual facts. First, Fairfield has transformed in the 40+ years since its core was last revised. No longer solely a liberal arts school, Fairfield, now a comprehensive university, houses nursing, business, and engineering colleges. Second, a Jesuit university, justice, discernment, and *eloquentia perfecta* ground the institution's values. Third, my hire as the director of core writing signals the campus's evolving recognition of rhetoric and composition.

The university confronts an undeniable kairotic moment, and no unit will feel the curricular transformation more than core writing. We will move from a dated approach to composition instruction (expository writing in the fall, writing about literature in the spring, and, with no writing instruction required thereafter, students presumably inoculated from genre missteps and comma splices in perpetuity). Now, students will complete a single course, Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition, followed by three writing across the curriculum (WAC) courses taught by faculty across core departments; alternatively, students may enroll in two WAC courses and one writing in the disciplines (WID) class within their major.

This curricular revision accompanies massive changes in staffing the new rhetoric and composition course. Our current staffing model relies on semester-by-semester contracts for adjunct faculty who teach over 80% of the sections in our two-course sequence. Strong faculty governance at Fairfield, however, ensured that a proposed budget was included in the proposal for revising the core. That budget stipulated the hiring of full-time core writing faculty. These non-tenure-track (NTT) assistant professors of the practice (POPs) will be contracted for three-year, renewable terms; will be eligible for promotion; and will teach a 3/3 load of the new course. Thus, when we adopted the core revision (a proposal that upper administration very much wanted to pass), we as a university faculty voted up a considerable increase in allocations for core writing.

The very faculty who have constituted core writing, however, face not just kairos but crisis: most of core writing's adjunct faculty face losing their jobs in our program. First, effective fall 2019, the number of core writing courses taught in the English department will be cut in half; thus, even if we were to receive no full-time lines, our staffing needs would be halved. Second, we will move to full-time POP lines. Consequently, our faculty

will decline from approximately 26 adjunct instructors who teach most of our roughly 106 sections per year to six full-time POP hires and perhaps five or six adjunct colleagues. Thus, most current core writing faculty face no longer teaching at our institution. This fact is not softened, however, by the chance to secure full-time work, for many current adjunct faculty are unlikely to be hired into those full-time lines.

Four factors coalesce to counteract some adjunct faculty's competitiveness for POP positions. First, perhaps partly because Fairfield so values its traditions of faculty governance and academic freedom, that a composition class should be (or even could be) part of a larger program with program-wide goals and outcomes is new for some and resisted by a few. Second, involvement in program life craters for many core writing faculty for understandable reasons. We live and work in the densely populated Northeast. Surrounded by colleges and universities, many faculty teach at multiple institutions (and need to, given the cost of living in the CT-NY-NJ tristate area). Pinpointing a time when most core writing faculty can meet for faculty meetings is impossible, and some dismiss any need to meet. While most are committed teachers who exchange instructional strategies and assignments, some have never had the opportunity nor encouragement to participate in the life of a single program. In some cases, lack of professional experience and resistance to programs transmogrifies into seeing program meetings and professional development as needless at best and averse for many. (We do pay for participation in professional development, but it is a nominal amount that hardly competes with teaching gigs at other institutions for increasing faculty bottom lines).

Third, none of our current adjunct faculty earned a terminal degree in composition and/or rhetoric, though many hold MFAs and a couple hold PhDs in literary studies. While many core writing faculty are talented, prolific creative writers, editors, and publishers and are deeply invested in student writers, some lack the recognition that creative writing, journalism, and rhetoric and composition—while informing one another in generative ways—also diverge. Put plainly, a few (though they make their living teaching it) do not appreciate that rhetoric and composition is an independent, scholarly discipline. Instead of co-creating a disciplinary community of practitioners, some eschew the discipline altogether. This lack of immersion in (or even familiarity with) the discipline may lead for some to what E. Shelley Reid calls “unconscious incompetence” (131).

Fourth, prior to my arrival, Fairfield stakeholders had not anticipated the personnel needed to support the cross-disciplinary WAC/WID initiative, an initiative housed within core writing. Faculty across campus express tentative excitement but also abiding anxiety about the teaching

of and responding to student writing. Within two months of arriving, I proposed that the university provide the new POP hires one course of re-assigned time each semester to serve as WAC consultants. (The typical teaching load for Fairfield's NTTs is 4/4.) This course reassignment would allow us to fall within CCCC's *Principles for Post-Secondary Teaching of Writing* recommendation that "No English faculty . . . should teach more than 60 writing students a term," making these more equitable, more functional positions. In return, WAC consultants would provide one-on-one consultations, review syllabi, lead university-wide workshops, co-create disciplinary writing guides, and more. Particularly given core writing's unique position to bridge all colleges on campus via WID courses (the rest of the core is housed only within the College of Arts and Sciences), we sought to hire POPs with backgrounds in the rhetorics of health sciences, engineering, and business as well as global rhetorics and translingual writing, given our increasing number of international students. Couple the role of WAC consultants with the new rhetoric and composition course (a hybrid of WAC and Writing about Writing [WAW]), and many current adjunct faculty's competitiveness in national searches dwindles.

New to campus, I experience my own kairotic moment that centralizes my presence as an agentive actor. Any time a WPA joins a campus, kairos is heightened. We face skepticism from locals, and we ourselves become objects of observation and study, as we probably should. However, when hired to author a program and, at best, drastically cut the current faculty, "the ethical dimension of *kairos* that is often overlooked" (Harker 79) becomes all the starker.

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Kim (emailing search committee members): Colleagues . . . I have contacted all internal candidates and apprised them of the current status of their applications for this search, a painful task. . . . Bottom line, I just didn't want folks learning of our first round of interviews in a disrespectful way. Ugh. Brutal day.

Carol (a senior colleague): Ugh. I am so sorry. . . . Is there anything I can do for you today? Biscuits? Pie? (You can see my mind goes straight to carbs . . .)

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Donna Strickland asserts, "composition studies requires a dual schooling: an official schooling in composition pedagogy and rhetorical theories, and a usually unofficial schooling in the management of composition teachers and programs" (1). Strickland confesses, as a PhD student, she never imag-

ined being “interpellated into . . . the hierarchy of contingent teaching faculty and tenure-track administrators . . . endemic to writing programs” (1), yet every position she’s held has included administrative duties. Exploring the discipline’s “managerial imperative” (3), Strickland ultimately casts the managerial as energizing, innovative, and productive (119). On the way to that conclusion, though, Strickland reveals, if incidentally, a convention that runs throughout WPA scholarship and practice. She seeks to “examine the common place of marginalized but noble composition teaching” within its larger “economic enterprise” (7). That phrase, “marginalized but noble,” startles, for it so succinctly summarizes not only “the common place” of composition classes on university campuses but a commonplace of the discipline. It condenses how WPA scholarship characterizes composition teachers, especially the instructors most often at the front of our classrooms, NTT and adjunct faculty.

As WPAs strategize in our offices and on listservs and as we theorize in the pages of journals, we often position ourselves on a hero’s journey (albeit an often stymied one). Striving to enact Adler-Kassner’s administrative philosophy of *tikkun olam*, or “repairing the world” (170), we confront and cajole, provoke and plead on the part of our marginalized, noble faculty. Alice Horning eloquently reflects this scholarship:

In my ten years as a WPA, I was keenly aware every day of the exploitation of the forty or so part-timers in my program. I did what I could to improve their lives by trying to give them their preferred schedules and by lowering class size . . . to, in effect, reduce their workloads. I wrote about class size in a way meant to give other WPAs a resource to use in discussions with administrators. . . . So I have been raising my voice in support of contingent faculty for a while. . . . (73)

WPA scholarship often enacts an addictive symmetry: Marginalized but noble composition faculty are championed by a marginalized but noble WPA who is grounded in a marginalized but noble discipline.

Too often, we advocate at our own risk. Witness one paragraph cut from an earlier draft of this article:

Having taken the baton of Adler-Kassner’s “activist WPA,” I perceived myself aligning with the blue-collar ranks of composition teachers. . . . Meeting with a former provost . . . who asked me cunningly, “What’s it gonna take for us to make you happy, Kim?” I gleaned satisfaction in rejecting his dealmaking, leaning across a mahogany conference table, and replying, “It’s gonna take what we’ve outlined: functional working conditions for our faculty.” I had become a zealot for the cause. On days when voting rights were restored to NTT fac-

ulty or when our program was awarded the CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence, my smugness must have smelled. But it took a zealot, one armed with scholarly journals and budget mockups and bulleted proposals and, once, Nancy Sommers herself, to make gains for that program in that context at that time.

I wince at how I appear here, picturing myself astride Rocinante, *CCC* rolled up and brandished at oncoming windmills.

No doubt, my personal psychology led me to such struggles. The economy of the lowest earners producing the majority of a department's student credit hours taps a vein for me that traces back to my sharecropper great-grandfather and my mother setting collars in a Mid-South shirt factory. In Harker's terms (maybe in opposition to them?), in previous WPA positions, moving for full-time lines for adjunct faculty struck me as always kairotic—always timely, always appropriate, always ethical. Seventeen years later, “activist WPA” became part of my identity, at the heart of how I knew myself. More importantly, when my arguments succeeded, I saw lives change—adjuncts could quit side-hustles and get health insurance; students could find teachers in their offices and study within a program, one with far more consistency across sections.

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One adjunct, upon hearing of Core Revision's adoption: So we're screwed then.

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Another seam of scholarship exists, though its assumptions are not frequently enough brought into dialectic with these WPA hero tales: calls for independent writing programs. Disciplinary declarations (successful ones, increasingly) of independence invoke their own commonplaces. Justin Everett and Cristina Hanganu-Bresch ably catalog this scholarship. They write that it is disciplinarity “articulated as power within the college structure” that inspires many programs to seek independent status (5). While foregrounding disciplinarity means for some that campus colleagues will “understand the disciplinary distinctiveness of Writing Studies from Literary Studies” (7), for others, recognition of composition's disciplinarity empowers the teaching of writing.

Metaphors for departmental splits and composition's independence abound, from Angela Crow and Peggy O'Neill's “divorce” (3) to Susan McLeod's “child now grown” (529) to Barry Maid's “emancipation” (“Creating Two” 130) to, ironically, Maid's “going home” (“More Than” 149). Composition's independence is sometimes dismissed as trendy, but appeals

for independence emerged concurrent to the contemporary discipline. Most famously, Maxine Hairston in 1985 painted for us the “Mandarin Wars” within English departments, positing, “Perhaps it’s time that we repeated the exodus [of rhetoric], this time taking freshman English with us” (281). Even earlier, Janice Lauer in 1970 labeled composition’s location within English a “ghetto”: “Freshman English will never reach the status of a respectable intellectual discipline unless both its theorizers and practitioners break out of the ghetto” (396). In the scholarship of independence, then, we cast rhetoricians and compositionists and, specifically, WPAs who inhabit *de facto* leadership positions, less heroes crusading for downtrodden NTT faculty and more as revolutionaries, clutching the Good News that is rhetoric and composition *as discipline*.

This Good News of disciplinarity can wax romantic, whether due to a marketing mentality we may adopt in selling independence to university administrations or simply revolutionary zeal that recognizes opportunities that manifest when rhetoric and composition is unencumbered by others’ agendas. It’s useful to compare independence narratives to disciplinary histories. Strickland complains, for instance, “most histories of composition studies . . . more or less presume an audience of professionally secure teachers. With this emphasis . . . these histories have followed idealized trajectories” (5). For Strickland, these narratives’ usefulness is undercut by recognizing that few of us direct idealized programs. I can’t help but fear that some calls for independence may face the same criticism. Too often in listserv posts or conference papers lurks the assumption: if our programs were properly resourced and could crawl from beneath the thumb of literary studies (that is, if we but had support and a room of our own), we could readily succeed and could do so tomorrow.²

As Carrie S. Leverenz’s work on the hiring of rhetoric and composition PhD’s demonstrates, however, and as we like to remind graduate students, rhetoric and composition has not faced the hiring collapse that so many disciplines in English Studies have. With at least a 1:1 ratio of open, tenure-track positions to newly doctored candidates in a given year, Leverenz’s work suggests a dearth of rhetoric and composition specialists. Rhetoric and composition PhD’s are not only getting degrees; as Andrea Lunsford promised the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 1998, “they’re getting jobs” (Schneider A15).

Bring these three streams into confluence—our characterization of NTT faculty as marginalized but noble and WPAs as their champions; the insistence on the disciplinarity of and increasing calls for the independence of rhetoric and composition; and the robust “seller’s market” for rhetoric

and composition PhD's—and we too often stop short of acknowledging, “Urbana, we have a problem”—a staffing problem.

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Kim (describing to department colleagues the search for four core writing POPs): Of the 95 applications received thus far, nearly 30% have a rhetoric and composition PhD in hand or are ABD. None of these applicants with the degree in discipline are among current core writing faculty.

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Bruce Horner edges toward this possible contradiction between advocacy and independence. Horner observes that the authors of CWPA's statement on *Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration*

argue that the success of staff development depends primarily on “the degree to which those being administered value and respect the writing administrator,” which they take to result from the ability of the WPA to “incorporate current research and theory into . . . training” . . . (168)

Horner, skeptical, replies:

But there is no reason to believe that staff value and respect . . . the WPA's knowledge. . . . Typically, staff members are not in a position to recognize, let alone evaluate, the WPA's command of this knowledge. . . . What they might recognize as “new research and theory” may well be anything but. (169)

Horner asserts that many instructors are simply not steeped enough in the discipline to surmise accurately its best practices.

To his point, of the 26 faculty teaching in Fairfield's composition program this semester (spring 2018), one holds a terminal degree in the discipline: me. In the previous program that I directed for nine years, though enrollment is far greater, the number of terminal degrees is lower. Not a single instructor with the PhD in rhetoric and composition is teaching General Education composition (though two are ABD). The *National Census of Writing* mirrors these numbers and underscores the contradiction too often left unaddressed in calls for independence. In 2011–12 (the most recent data), in just over 80% of reporting writing programs, no tenure-track writing faculty taught first-year composition; in 85% of reporting programs, no full-time, NTT faculty taught FYC either (Gladstein and Fralix). In the very sites which have resulted from rhetoric and composition's disciplinarity, we have “outsourced” its teaching to the least compensated, least secure

faculty positions. Moreover, given the dearth of and competitive market for rhetoric and composition PhDs, in many of these same programs we will also find the least prepared teachers. When filtering census data by the Catholic Consortium of Colleges and Universities, the numbers are even worse: 90% report no tenure-track writing faculty teach FYC, and 100% report no full-time NTT writing faculty teaching FYC. With so few teachers holding a terminal degree, we should not be surprised that, unlike the great majority of introductory courses on campus, first-year composition in many instances retains skills-based, remediation approaches and often little resembles the discipline discussed at conferences and in the pages of journals like this one.

Horner notes that some FYC faculty may not merely be unfamiliar with the discipline but may resist it: “as typically overworked staff, they may have a vested interest in rejecting a WPA’s attempts to introduce programmatic changes informed by . . . research and theory when it means significant disruptions to their practices . . .” (169). Horner hints at a sort of sly resistance, a calculating rejection of professional development because of the (too frequently unrewarded) labor that results from embracing it, underscoring Harker’s conviction that teachers may refuse to “revisit their own approaches to writing” (Harker 89).

In examining instructors’ resistance, it is useful to consider underlife. In his analysis of Braddock Award-winning essays, Harker turns to Robert Brooke’s “Underlife and Writing Instruction,” pondering whether underlife violates kairos. Brooke relies on Erving Goffman’s definition of underlife as “activities people develop to distance themselves from the surrounding institution. . . . Underlife allows individuals to take stances toward the roles they are expected to play, and to show others the stances they take” (Brooke 144). Brooke observed composition students attempting to “[get] by’ in the classroom without losing themselves in its expectations” (147). Harker speculates that some might reasonably assess student writers’ underlife activities as disrupting kairos: They “‘go against the grain’ of the classroom. They interrupt and often draw attention away from the instructor or task at hand” (86).

As Fairfield’s new WPA, I glimpsed underlife immediately. Asked to describe the new writing program at an August retreat, I had arrived on campus less than two weeks earlier. Thus, in depicting the burgeoning program, I largely relied on documents that predated my arrival (e.g., the core revision proposal that characterized the suggested WAC program and CWPA Consultant-Evaluators’ site report from the previous year). When asked to describe a WAC assignment (I offered a project that asks students to complete primary research on the rhetoric of a community they wish to

join), one colleague snapped, “We already do that.” She continuing, I intuited that she challenged not so much me personally but the new curriculum (including the notion that a WAC/WAW course was substantively different than the doomed Expository Writing/Writing about Literature sequence) and the general brouhaha over it.

Harker switchbacks, though, arguing to envisage underlife as only resistant to *kairos* is shortsighted: “to completely ignore or harshly reprimand a student who challenges the temporal and spatial boundaries of a classroom through some form of *unkairotic underlife* behavior is . . . to ignore a pedagogical opportunity and to disrupt the generative and constructive potential of that moment” (86). Harker echoes Brooke’s conclusion:

to really learn to write means becoming a certain kind of person, a person who accepts, explores, and uses her differences from assigned roles to produce new knowledge, new action, and new roles. . . . underlife shows us this process. . . . It suggests we think carefully about the identities we have, the identities we model, and the identities we ask students to take on, for . . . building identity is the business we are in. (152)

What to make, then, of underlife not from students but teachers? What is the “constructive potential” (152) in some faculty’s resistance to the discipline within which they teach? What are the identities that WPAs model, and what identities do we ask composition faculty to adopt?

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Kim (via Messenger, describing a meeting with a dean at a previous institution): So she’s kvetching about students’ poor writing, extrapolating composition faculty’s poor teaching, and calling me out, and I say, “Well, we’re in a remote location. If you want me to hire more skilled faculty, I need full-time lines to conduct national searches; I can’t just call Manpower Temp. Agency and have them send over Rhet./Comp. PhD’s.” And she says, “You think it’s hard to find a writing teacher! Try and find a chemist!”

Tasha (long suffering): Help-rejecting complainer, that’s what she is.

* * *

I have written my own hero tales, my advocacy always prioritizing full-time lines. My slog as WPA has included promoting multi-year contracts, pushing for sound office spaces (hell, any office spaces), requesting keys to the copy room (!), and standing in a computer boneyard trying to splice

together functioning machines for adjunct faculty. Inevitably, though, I have led programs that relied on too many adjuncts, and full-time lines always persisted as my most constant goal. Regardless of how talented many were, reliance on adjuncts was egregious for lots of reasons. Low course caps matter little if faculty teach eight classes across three institutions, and professional development falters if only 20% of faculty attend workshops. Full-time lines, then, seemed to supersede everything.

At Fairfield, though, I am cast less as ally and more as adversary by current NTT faculty, and I'm peeved with myself for struggling with that reality. After all, Nedra Reynolds reminds us, ethos includes "the individual agent as well as the location . . . from which that person speaks" (326). Loading that 26-foot U-Haul, I thought I had accounted for location. Moving from a public, southern, isolated campus of nearly 18,000 to a private, northeastern, Jesuit campus only an hour north of New York City, the radio transitioned from bluegrass to jazz on the ride up I-95, but there are nuances of context we can't learn from university fact books or the FM dial.

So I return to Brooke, "think carefully about the identities we have, the identities we model, and the identities we ask [others] to take on" (153), and acknowledge, if we apply his admonition only to our teaching, we risk hypocrisy and paternalism as administrators. How do I hold myself accountable to Brooke's warning? Said more frankly, I realize the zealot that reasoned and ranted for full-time positions for previous programs' adjuncts would find me in this new context unrecognizable. How can the WPA who carried stacks of adjunct faculty's student evaluations to cocktail hours where I thought I might bump into the dean now support national searches prioritizing disciplinary PhDs, a degree I know that most local adjuncts will not have?

As flaccid as it sounds, I turn to distinctions in contexts, first, local ones.

The most obvious difference is resources. By fall 2019, Fairfield's core writing program will be taught almost entirely by full-time rhetoric and composition faculty, all of whom will have reassigned time for additional disciplinary roles on campus (i.e., WAC consultant or assistant director positions). (We have filled four lines for 2018–19 and will fill another two for 2019–20.) Thus, that most intractable battle has been won. I have spent so much of my professional life pushing for what is already ensured here due to the foresight of our cross-disciplinary faculty and the ethic of the administration. With writing designated one of three core "signature elements" and full-time lines ensured, my baseline as administrator has shifted.³ Moreover, with a 3/3 teaching load, renewable contracts, promotable lines, and a competitive salary, these POPs are good positions.

As influential as resources is institutional respect for rhetoric and composition. Upper administrators are educated about the discipline. The vision of what core writing could be was shaped in no small measure by CWPA Consultant-Evaluators. That the institution valued the discipline enough to invite this team speaks volumes. CWPA reviewers cautioned that the new composition course shouldn't emerge a mishmash of our current Expository Writing and Writing about Literature courses, but the institution should seize this intellectual moment and craft a purposefully designed course. I quoted that line to our provost; she responded, "If those reviewers had said nothing else, that review would have been worth the money." Imagine my surprise. (On a previous campus, one administrator rebuffed my request for a CWPA review, concluding, "They're rhet./comp. people. Of course they'll agree with you.") Fairfield is not Camelot, and there are challenges everywhere, but I'm grateful that this was not my first position. I have the good sense to know how fortunate I am to be here.

There's also this: At both Fairfield and my previous institution, many adjunct faculty graduated from programs housed in local English departments. At my previous university, that meant that many NTTs had completed a Composition Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy seminar and three one-hour mentoring courses (Teaching in the Writing Center, Teaching Expository Writing, and Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum). Many students also chose to earn a rhetoric and composition graduate certificate which required additional coursework (options included Teaching Basic Writing, WPA Scholarship, Digital Rhetorics, etc.) and either a capstone or a thesis. Many spent two or three years post-MA teaching in the composition program, traveling to conferences, and preparing doctoral applications. (Those MA graduates have earned rhetoric and composition PhD's from University of Louisville, Iowa State University, Washington State University, Miami University and are now studying at Florida State University, Syracuse University, and Michigan State University.) Though that program's resources were thinner, those adjunct faculty were extraordinarily well versed in the discipline. At Fairfield, however, many adjunct faculty hold MFAs, many earning this degree from our own stellar program and others like it that do not require rhetoric and composition coursework. Thus, though these faculty hold a terminal degree in creative writing, many are far less familiar with rhetoric and composition.

Finally, here, as WPA, I prioritize terminal degrees in rhetoric and composition in order to give this new signature element of Fairfield's core its best chance for success or even survival. Chris Thaiss and Tara Porter demonstrate that it's easier for WAC programs to fail than to succeed: "well over half of the 418 programs identified in . . . 1987 . . . no longer exist or have

been ‘restarted’ in the years since” (458). Part of what makes our POP positions good ones, for both the hires and the institution (i.e., the reassigned time to work as WAC consultants), is what demands deep knowledge of the contemporary discipline. Hiring POPs with expertise in the rhetoric of the sciences, medicine, or engineering (for that matter, in digital design, ePortfolios, response to student writing, translanguaging approaches to writing, etc.) enables WAC consultants most effectively to assist cross-disciplinary faculty in reimagining writing in their courses. POPs can then rely on these interactions as a kind of laboratory for their own scholarship. This dynamic demands contemporary expertise that the typical MFA or MA candidate is simply unlikely to hold.

Local contexts crouch within a disciplinary milieu that reiterates rhetoric and composition’s disciplinarity and its (often modest) best practices for the teaching of composition. The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) describes exemplary FYC teaching as incorporating “the application of the best available theoretical approaches.” The CCCC *Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing* stipulates that a requirement for the hiring of writing faculty is their completion of “graduate coursework . . . [in] composition theory, research, and pedagogy . . . and rhetorical theory and research.” CCCC’s *Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing* argues that institutions safeguard “sound writing instruction” by “ensuring that instructors have background in and experience with theories of writing,” emphasizing instructors’ “attendance at local, regional, or national Composition and Rhetoric conferences.” Reading each new volume of CCC hardly guarantees effective teaching. (Oh, but if it did.) But being a passionate writer or student advocate is not enough either, and while earning the PhD in the field may not guarantee effective teaching, the terminal degree and scholarly participation in the discipline does at least promise the likelihood that FYC students will be introduced to the contemporary discipline of composition-rhetoric.

Another truth: One person does not make a writing program. As a WPA, I can parade across campus like *The Music Man*’s Harold Hill, thrusting aloft a copy of the CWPA *Goals and Outcomes Statement* to the tune of “Seventy-Six Trombones,” but what every WPA needs—more importantly, what every campus needs—is a community of rhetoric and composition specialists who can co-create with varied stakeholders a culture of writing in which students can thrive as composers. Returning to the above, CCCC recommends graduate students participate in program assessment and train to work in writing centers (*Preparing Teachers*); TYCA stipulates instructors “build deep theoretical and practical knowledge of . . . areas, such as curriculum design, writing theory, multi-modal composing, . . . writing across/

in the disciplines, . . . program assessment.” No one disputes that vibrant writing programs should provide opportunities for this sort of professional development locally, and faculty without the terminal degree can and do build this expertise. But not everywhere. This deep professionalization is rarer than not, not least because of the scarcity of material resources to support contingent faculty in this work.

Here’s the harder thing: WPAs are often the first to grapple with potential contradictions between advocacy and independence. I am not suggesting we set the two ever in opposition, but we must acknowledge the dialectic, one that is complex and frequently problematic. Advocating for sustainable working conditions for all composition faculty must stand alongside the expectation that composition faculty understand and participate in the current discipline within which they work. This, in fact, may be the minimal expectation if individual programs and the discipline are to flourish and earn the respect that enables arguments for independence in the first place.

Laura Micciche writes eloquently of “disappointment as a central affective component of the job” (435). Arguing that disappointment “characterizes English studies generally and composition studies—particularly writing program administration (WPA)—specifically” (432), Micciche attributes our malaise to everything from fleeting job opportunities to the unceasing need to argue for WPA work as intellectual labor. I bring into conversation with Micciche two additional discursive facts. First, Judith Butler reassures, the historicity of discourse that hails any one of us into being “exceeds in all directions the history of the speaking subject” (28). I, then, as WPA, enter a discipline, a position, and an identity the lore of which precedes even as it constructs me, sometimes as a disappointed advocate of marginal but noble faculty. Second, rhetoric and composition is generous. Perhaps we have even prided ourselves on a disciplinary culture of pleasantness and concession. This affective norm of (disappointed) compromise is partly pragmatic. The discipline is perceived as new (though we might argue that scads of the humanities derive from it), and we nowhere near approach having enough rhetoric and composition specialists to staff our classes. Both have always meant mentoring (prodding?) others onward in their understanding of our work. Additionally, central to our study remains the development of writers, a project that (perhaps sometimes too simplistically) assumes academic and social mobility as goals. In 2019, then, we all enter rowdy parlor conversations in full swing, both globally and locally, disciplinarily and subjectively.

Maybe it’s my sense of disciplinary “niceness” that leads me to contort myself here. Or maybe it’s my need to feel continuity across contexts in

my own identity as advocate. Maybe both, and more, collude to demand and dissuade me from candor—from arguing that kairos here and now at Fairfield was ignited not only by local champions of writing but by the long trudge of the discipline itself; from affirming baldly that, when we at the local level (all of us, all too rarely) can, we must step into the circle of respect that we have argued at the national level the discipline deserves; from asserting that disciplinary citizenship which the terminal degree signals matters, yes, “even” in first-year classrooms; from saying that sometimes kairos demands that we prize the discipline over disappointed poets and Victorianists.

* * *

I cock an eyebrow and turn my laptop to Ross. “I wonder if this is for me?” After a stinging department meeting during which I explained the search committee’s process, my Spidey sense intuits rumors crackling across Fairfield County.

Ross reads the Facebook exchange between two adjunct faculty. One has posted a meme that soothes, “No one is judging you, sweetie. That’s your conscience talking.” Another responded, “Oh wow, I never thought of that.”

Ross feigns dismay. “Lucille maintaining deniability even as she is passive-aggressive on social media? Can’t be.”

* * *

To Harker’s definition of kairos, “timing, appropriateness, and ethical underpinnings present at critical moments” (92), I add prologue and epilogue. In my amended definition, kairos is a process, personal and public, inflected locally and nationally, of “timing, appropriateness, and ethical underpinnings present at critical [discursive] moments.” And it damn sure ain’t bounded by consensus, and it can hurt like hell.

Strickland urges us to see class, labor, and management not as fixed but as processes:

If we understand that a person acting in a managerial role is not by definition a member of an exploiting class—although that person may by default be contributing to an exploitative class process—then it becomes possible to see writing programs as sites of class struggle, as sites focused on transforming the extent, type, and conditions of exploitations in particular settings. (15)

These processes unfold “through a network of affiliate actions” (15). Taken collectively, Strickland declares that these processes create an inherently

managerial discipline, but she reframes this characterization with the managerial finally serving as “an imperative energizing the field,” producing “professional organizations . . . innovative scholarship . . . new ways of practicing teaching, writing, and, yes, administration” (119).

I gather two messages. First, Strickland’s work points me toward a Hegelian dialectic of the day-to-day, grinding compromise of WPA life. Tapping my Doc Martens (no longer made solely in the UK) and scanning email on my iPhone (with its 175 pounds of carbon waste) as I stew in my inefficient 2003 Honda idling in traffic, I am indicted. Just as I am when I request piecework contracts for part-time faculty and hedge, invoking the “strength of the applicant pool,” when one of those adjuncts asks me about his chances for a full-time position. No hero’s tale, I don’t come off looking real good on days like this one.

Conversely, Butler recounts the discursive position of us all. She reflects,

the vulnerability to being named constitutes a constant condition of the speaking subject. And what if one were to compile all the names that one has ever been called? Would they not present a quandary for identity? Would some of them cancel the effect of others? (30)

Maybe, but perhaps only if we insist on identity as persistent. If, though, we acknowledge labor and management and WPA—all identity, really—as process and if we acknowledge that the process of kairos invokes given identities at given moments, we may encounter representations of ourselves that are shockingly disorienting (no rarity of modern life, I know).

Upon arrival at Fairfield, I became the “new WPA,” a moniker that can bristle when bringing years of administrative experience. When I am tempted to suggest colleagues relocate those quotation marks to read “new’ WPA,” however, I pause, reminding myself that I may never again have as much influence on this campus as I do in my first year. Particularly with the sacrifice of tenure to join this faculty, I feel the probationary-ness, the liminality of my current position, and I feel watched. But being watched also means being seen, and any time any one of us enters a new campus as WPA, the moment is kairotic, for us and for the institution. Here, I am starting again, beginning anew. With this positionality comes great insecurity but great possibility, too.

Intervening in the class processes fashioned in composition programs demands the seizing of (as possible, the sparking of) kairos at the local level. It means arguing for creating full-time lines. Period. It means being innovative in our design of positions so that various stakeholders realize how they benefit from creating just working conditions for writing faculty.

We create kairos as a discipline, too, though. Strickland’s managerial imperative that led us to create conferences, journals, doctoral programs,

undergraduate majors, pedagogical best practices—all coalesce into greater respect for the discipline *as* discipline, making what was before kairotic now seem banal.

If local programs are to take advantage of these cultural shifts in ways that the movement for independence of rhetoric and composition demands, moments manifest when we must value disciplinary knowledge more than hero tales or compromise. Said another way, as the discipline succeeds, ironically, WPA may become an even less comfortable identity to inhabit. Nonetheless, we as WPAs, in campus quads and in scholarly journals, must contend more frankly with this dialectic, one that all too frequently falls first on us.

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms are assigned to colleagues and friends throughout.

2. And I know very well this characterization may be true at some institutions, as I have discussed previously (Rhoades, Gunter, and Carroll).

3. Social justice and interdisciplinarity are the others.

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Kimberly Gunter is associate professor of English and director of the core writing program at Fairfield University. Her work focuses on writing program administration, queer rhetorics and identities, and first-year writing.