

# (Dis)similarity and Identity: On Becoming Quasi-WPA

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*This article examines WPA positions that are non-tenured, part-time or otherwise under-supported. Drawing on previous discussions of this precariously-situated WPA position, the authors introduce the term “quasi-WPA” and explore how WPAs in this position face three critical issues in their position as administrator: (1) authority and power dynamics, (2) identity, and (3) resources. Due to the dynamics these WPA positions come with, the authors argue that these critical issues are magnified for quasi-WPAs. The authors investigate how the quasi-WPA position is made problematic by their positionality. They are holding a position of responsibility while also occupying a position of uncertainty. The quasi-WPA does everything a regular WPA does and deals with all the same issues that any other WPA must navigate, but they must do so through the complications contingent employment present.*

*It's not about choosing the job or not choosing the job. That's a false and binary understanding of the choices we face for employment and academic responsibility. It's about not letting the job choose you, and not letting it alone define your identity.*

—Colin Charlton, Jonikka Charlton, Tarez Samra Graban,  
Kathleen J. Ryan, Amy Stolley Ferdinandt, *GenAdmin*:  
*Theorizing WPA Identities in the Twenty-First Century* (3)

We are contingent faculty and writing program administrators, a both/and construction that attends to an intersectional and problematic positionality. Fully contingent and fully WPA, we sometimes find it difficult to enact and embody both identities simultaneously—and so find ourselves quieting one role in order to represent the other. In this way, each identity-role becomes a situational performance rather than a full embodiment and acknowledgment of our physical and scholarly labor. And though some may argue that role suppression is more emblematic of the everyday movement through life (sometimes I'm being parent, sometimes I'm being spouse/partner, sometimes I'm being teacher, sometimes I'm being little league coach, and so on), it feels rare that any of these roles actively inhibit enacting and embodying another role. Andrew, for example, has had to bring his son to work when the school district had a day off but the university did not. On that day, he was both teacher and parent simultaneously as he taught classes while his son sat in the corner of the classroom, doodling on the whiteboard. How-

ever, Andrew's contingency seems to occasionally interfere with and inhibit his work as WPA: when the National Census of Writing was conducted, he was not able to add the information for his campus until responses were again called for after the first deadline. The link for the survey had not been sent to him, but instead to another tenured rhet-comp faculty member (someone on campus more likely to be WPA?). This small incident certainly wasn't malicious or intentional. He simply was not on the radar as the WPA, not even (at the time) on his own department's website. Jessie, likewise, is both a part-time adjunct employee and a writing program administrator overseeing online first-year writing courses. And at one point she was also a full-time student. Some days she functions as both adjunct and administrator or adjunct and student and on some days she functions as all three simultaneously.

Contingency and administrative work do not necessarily imply complication. In practice, though, the two identity-roles duel, fragment, coalesce in piecemeal fashion that feels like being both WPA and not-WPA. What is it to be both contingent and WPA, then? We are naming people in our position quasi-WPAs (qWPA). The quasi-WPA is a WPA, but without the traditional accouterments that often accompany administering a writing program. The qWPA addresses the same issues any other WPA must and does so through the complications that contingent employment presents. For us, the inclusive identity-role of the qWPA is identified through three complicating strands that we discuss in the sections that follow:

1. **Identity**, in which we discuss why we use the term "quasi" as opposed to simply owning our WPAhood or using the more common term of "NTT-WPA";
2. **Authority and power dynamics**, in which we describe the variety of difficult spaces and situations our positionality inheres within;
3. **Resources**, in which we suggest that administrative resources are largely developed for those functioning in more traditional roles.

Although we treat these areas individually, each area finds strength and complexity when considered together. For example, the usual kinds of problems associated with peer review (scheduling, content, addressing opportunities for growth, feedback) become more complicated viewed through the lens of authority dynamics and identity when the WPA is contingent/NTT and the faculty member being observed is tenured or tenure track. To be clear, however: we thrive in the duality of our roles.

## ON BEING qWPA: OUR OWN CONTEXTS

The details of our own quasi-ness are further confirmation of the complexity of being a qWPA. Jessie, for instance, experiences her quasi-ness as an act of precarity, continuously in limbo because she is a “full-time” adjunct, building her own full-time schedule and salary from several different institutions, including large state universities and smaller colleges. She is a digital “road warrior” because her instruction is entirely online. As an adjunct, she holds little real power and technically little obligation toward building an annual review portfolio: at none of her institutions does she have voting rights (does this mean she lacks academic citizenship?); neither is she required to complete service or do any scholarly or professional labor and yet she does (lots of both!). Her continuing employment is based on enrollment numbers. And yet, she has found herself in a position overseeing online ENG 101 and 102 composition courses, developing curriculum, and co-founding one of the field’s most robust resources for online instruction (<https://www.owicommunity.org>). Jessie’s role as quasi-WPA was the result of the relationships she built. As qWPA, she facilitates a college goal to standardize the content, design, and rigor of online instruction across the institution. Her department chair keeps her in this position because it alleviates some of his own workload finding adjuncts with online teaching experience and ensuring that all the online adjuncts teach the same course (in terms of content, design, and rigor).

Andrew’s quasi-ness, on the other hand, appears much more like a traditional WPA position. In fact, before him, the WPA was a tenured rhetoric and composition professor. When the then-WPA became chair of the newly formed writing and language studies department, Andrew began coordinating the writing program. The circumstances of his stepping into the role, however, are less traditional. Andrew works at University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, an emergent R1 university with an FYW enrollment over 6000 students each year. In 2015, the institution merged, restructured, rebranded and suddenly the then-WPA found himself chair of a new department. At the time, the other senior rhetoric and composition faculty had administrative appointments (for example: graduate coordinator, office of student engagement director) and the junior faculty were blocked by the university from holding administrative positions like WPA because their focus should be on tenure, research, scholarship. Andrew had already been working as the assistant WPA (a common lecturer position) and so was appointed as the coordinator for first-year writing, responsible for forty-three full-time lecturers and ten more part-time lecturers and graduate part-time instructors.

Andrew's quasi-ness is different than Jessie's. For instance, though "contingent," Andrew is a full-time lecturer on a renewing contract. His quasi-ness is also characterized by supportive faculty and administration and may serve as an example for how to develop successful working ecologies for quasi-WPAs and the writing programs they administer. However, the agreeableness of his situation is more probably the result of good relationships with other contingent and T/TT faculty and administrators than deliberate systemic features—though an environment where good relationships thrive and enable the success of those within the ecology is often, as is the case here, the result of purposeful program building. What might happen, though, if his supportive chair is promoted to another position, or is offered a job at another institution, or retires? Is it possible that the support and relationships that were so deliberately encouraged and grown disappear? Or what happens when junior rhetoric and composition faculty are no longer "junior" and want administrative responsibilities? Could he be removed from his position? Because his situation is the product of interpersonal work rather than institutional measure, continued success is always in jeopardy.

So, we position ourselves as quasi-WPAs—having some, but not all, of the features common to WPA work, not to be conflated with "pseudo," which communicates false and fake. The features the qWPA shares with a traditional WPA are about the work we do: developing mission and vision for a writing program, managing and scheduling, developing curriculum, providing (for) professional development, assessment, peer review and observation, occasionally mediating disputes, acting as liaison between the writing program and other departmental and institutional entities. The features we do not share are the focus of our three complicating strands.

Our own experiences are not the only definitions for qWPA. We know assistant WPAs (lecturer position) who do the work of the WPA while the WPA functions as the director of a university writing program or chair of rhet-comp. We know lecturers who do the bulk of their program's WPA work without any title, recognition, or accommodation. But that's the point of quasi-WPA: our experiences are both emblematic of being a qWPA and unique to our own ecologies. Questions of identity, access, responsibility, authority create a discourse community marked by how individual and situational all our experiences are. Beyond our own experiences and observations, though, the National Census of Writing (2013) confirms a significant representation of those in quasi-administrative roles. According to the census, of four-year institutions, 10% of writing programs are coordinated/administered/run by NTT-FT faculty (like Andrew); 1% by NTT-PT (like Jessie); 3% by those on hybrid faculty/staff contracts; and 2% by full-time

staff positions. That's 16% of reporting writing programs at four-year institutions supervised by qWPAs. Also according to the census, at reporting two-year institutions, 7% of writing programs are supervised by NTT-FT faculty and 14% are administered by those with hybrid faculty/staff roles: that's 21% of writing programs at two-year institutions with some form of qWPA. What's more, only 42% of invited four-year institutions and 24% of invited two-year institutions responded to the first round of the survey. It is not unreasonable to imagine that qWPAs might be even more represented in future iterations of the survey, especially considering that the researchers "discovered that the term [WPA] was fraught with misunderstanding as many who administer different sites of writing do not consider themselves WPAs" (Gladstein 2013). Although our qWPA argument is primarily about first-year writing programs, we see quasi-WPA as a productive and inclusive term for other marginal sites of writing administration.

Theorizing and establishing the qWPA is not exactly an argument about tenure, though we might call tenure the inciting incident. Tenure represents approval and institutional consent for the work being done. In a job where little actual authority exists, tenure (-track) at least represents an in to the rest of the university. For example, at many institutions, contingent faculty, including full-time lecturers, may not vote on certain issues. Since most writing programs are composed of contingent faculty, the T/TT WPA often represents one of the few voices allowed and available to advocate for the program.

The difficulty is that, in naming the qWPA, we are arguing for the qWPA. One of the conclusions we are directing our discussion to is that a quasi-WPA is an important and meaningful position, one likely to be increasingly represented in institutions. We can't help but notice, however, that our contingency creates odd power dynamics such as when tenured and tenure-track rhetoric and composition faculty teach in the writing program (as we agree they should): is the WPA their supervisor? Advocate? Colleague? Scheduler of sections? All of the above? None of the above? The answer, to us, seems a gray area. While we want to create a space to discuss and theorize the qWPA, we are also aware, as Phillips, Shovlin, and Titus (2014) suggest in their discussion of their experiences as graduate WPAs, that "when we focus on an administrator's relationship to the tenure track, we minimize the work of those who are not currently on a tenure track appointment or may plan never to be on it and increase the likelihood that administrators with fewer resources and more complicated relationships to power will be unsupported by the profession" (p. 45). Part of the paradox of the qWPA is that we must at least acknowledge our positionality in regards to tenure in order to maximize awareness of the spaces in which we work

and might thrive. So, while our qWPA-ness may not focus on our “relationship to the tenure track,” that relationship is inarguably part of the rhetorical ecology in which our work takes place. Part of our purpose, here, is to normalize the quasi-WPA so that support and recognition are given rather than maybes. That is, support, recognition, and resources should be built into the infrastructure a quasi-WPA labors in rather than the result of good (yet precarious) interrelationships.

#### HISTORY IN BRIEF

The field is not silent about contingency or even non-tenured writing program administration. For example, the edited collection *Contingency, Exploitation and Solidarity* (Kahn et al., 2017) does important work for lecturers and contingency; and, Phillips et al., with their discussion of “liminal” WPAs (2014; 2018), bring much needed attention to the work of graduate WPAs. Nayden (2018) discusses the transition between contingency and tenure; and, the 2019 CWPA call for papers (Blaauw-Hara, 2019) is another good example of recent consideration given to “radical inclusion,” asking questions about what counts as WPA work. However, compared to the sheer breadth and scope of WPA literature, there isn’t much from or for non-tenured WPAs. In fact, the literature that responds to important questions like “What are we doing?” or “Who are we?” is usually by T/TT faculty to and for other T/TT faculty. Our theorizing has a special interest in the positionality of non-tenure track administrators. What happens (to the job, the writing program, the stakeholders) when, as is the case for us, the administrators are themselves contingent faculty? What happens, for example, to Bousquet’s critique of Harris (2002) and to Harris’s vision of WPAs (2000) when the WPAs in question are not eligible for tenure, are not part of the middle management, are more like team captains than coaches or team owners? That is, whatever authority the team captain has is largely the result of the rest of the team agreeing to the leadership. Practices and meetings called by the team captain are attended because the team has acknowledged that person’s leadership (as opposed to authority). Leadership skills and qualities are, of course, necessary for being a good WPA. We are not arguing authority over leadership. We do observe, though, that leadership without some built in authority is precarious. Again, how do nontraditional WPAs fit within WPA definitions, inquiry, scholarship, and the field? These questions are difficult and the possible responses equally complex.

In 1973, professors of design and planning Rittel and Webber defined “wicked problem” not as something “ethically deplorable” (p. 160) but as a complex problem with a significant social component that has, essentially,

an unlimited number of solutions that are not right or wrong but, instead, effective or ineffective. Working as a quasi-WPA, the existence of qWPAs, their relationships to their institutions, their programs, the field are all “wicked problems.” Quasi-ness is a design problem, and figuring out how non-tenured, contingent, scholarly laborers and administrators fit within established infrastructure, schema, and conventions is particularly complex, unique, connected to other problems, urgent—thus, “wicked.”

The field has attempted to respond to versions of this wicked problem for more than thirty years. If we entertain that the first recorded effort began with the Wyoming Conference Resolution (Robertson, Crowley, & Lentricchia, 1987) and continued through the Portland Resolution (Hult, Joliffe, Kelly, Mead, & Shuster, 1992) and the Indianapolis Resolution (Cox, Dougherty, Kahn, LaFrance, Lynch-Binieck, 2016), then this issue has been on our radar for thirty years. Many of those efforts begin by pointing out how prior understandings of the contingent labor narrative were incomplete or ineffective, then they present new ideas or solutions, and end with a call for action that this time will be the best and smartest way to fix things. Why can't we determine a long-term, satisfactory solution? Perhaps because solving wicked problems is always contextual and what might have been effective for one time and place does not remain so. We need new insights for instructors and administrators on the issues quasi-WPAs face. We need to revisit this particular wicked problem. Yet, working on the same issues for so long can be exhausting. Thirty years is a long time. An entire generation has passed between the Wyoming Conference Resolution and this article—the names on those first articles have retired (or come nearer each passing semester). It would be easy to become discouraged about the state of “things” (teaching writing, program administration, job security, for-profit education, and so on). We feel differently, however. The state of “things” is ripe for a new generation of empowered contingent labor. Rather than be discouraged, we believe it is now more important than ever to make the invisible visible, to testify, to assert our presence and positions. Contingent labor and contingent administration are increasing realities in our institutions and our writing programs. To ensure productive and meaningful work, we need to fully theorize what it means to be a quasi-WPA and what that kind of position means for our writing programs more generally.

### *Complicating Strand 1: Identity*

Necessary to unpacking the identity problems related to work as a quasi-WPA is resolving terminology. Why the identifier *quasi-WPA* and not *contingent WPA* or *NTT WPA* or *liminal WPA*, especially since we have

already introduced work from Phillips et al. (2014, 2018) and will rely on their scholarship for our discussion of authority and power? For us, *contingent* and *NTT* do not embody the rhetorical heft we were looking for: *NTT* is education-style initialism jargon and does not mean anything. It certainly does not communicate the emotional and professional incompleteness that often attends non-tenured WPA work. Further, *NTT* is an institutional classification, category, not a name. There's something important and powerful about shaking off a perfunctory term and choosing something more descriptive and apt. Then, *contingent* sounds to us like *probationary* or *interim*, as though one might be the contingent WPA until paperwork is finalized or a full-time replacement is found.

On the other hand, we like *liminal* quite a bit. But following the old "a square is a rectangle but a rectangle is not a square" logic, we see *liminal* WPAs as quasi-WPAs, but not all quasi-WPAs are *liminal*. Liminality suggests transition or transience. Phillips et al. (2014, 2018) discuss being graduate WPAs and junior WPAs. The gWPA eventually graduates and may or may not find more work as a WPA. However, the gWPA was never intended to be a long-term position or a career in itself. jWPAs also exist on a hierarchy, and part of that hierarchy implies movement. jWPAs often have the opportunity to become senior WPAs (sWPA). None of these situations are true for us. We are the full-time, singular administrators of our writing programs and we do not embody all the traditional definitions of WPA. In fact, for us to become *traditional* WPAs, we would have to apply for different jobs (not promotion) than the ones we have.

Perhaps the most significant counterargument to establishing the quasi-WPA comes from those who would encourage us to own our WPA-ness. If we're doing the work of a writing program administrator, why not fully embrace that term and its definitions? This is one of the possible solutions to the wicked problem of NTT-WPA work. It is also true that neither of us has been overtly dismissed, redirected, or otherwise personally insulted for applying "WPA" to our work and our positions within our writing programs and the field more generally. Part of the answer is that just as Phillips et al. needed "liminal" to accurately and adequately describe their situation, we need "quasi" to more fully describe ours. We need a way to articulate not the kind of work we do (that's the "WPA" in "quasi-WPA"), but the way we do that work, the environments we find ourselves laboring within, and the changes that make NTT-WPA work a different job and position than T/TT-WPA. More to the point, WPA and quasi-WPA feel, to us, similar but not identical.

In 1977, the soon-to-be-eminent psychologist Amos Tversky suggested that "similarity plays a fundamental role in our theories of knowledge and

behavior” (p. 327). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) would make similar arguments later using metaphor as the linguistic and cognitive vehicle. Tversky, however, empirically demonstrated that “similarity should not be treated as a symmetric relation” and that similarity judgments have “directionality and asymmetry” (p. 328). In this way, it makes sense, for example, to say that a Tonka dump truck is like a dump truck rather than a dump truck is like a Tonka truck. Tversky argues that the directionality of a relationship correlates with our ability to map and match features between objects or situations. He also acknowledges that “changes in a context or frame of reference correspond to changes in the measure of the feature space” (p. 340). More importantly, the consequence of the features of similarity is understanding that “the variant is more similar to the prototype than the prototype is to the variant” (p. 333). The full answer to why the term *quasi-WPA* is necessary is this: although a quasi-WPA is like a WPA, a WPA is not like a quasi-WPA. In fact, we are owning our WPA-ness completely—and part of owning our WPA-ness is recognizing that it is unlike traditional notions of who a WPA might be.

Much has been written defining, understanding, and articulating WPA identity, mostly as it pertains to jWPA and sWPA (George, 1999; Weiser & Rose, 2002; Strickland & Gunner, 2009; Charlton et al., 2011; Malenczyk, 2016). Quasi-WPAs, however, often struggle with additional identity issues. Who is the quasi-WPA to the program and department? Part, of course, depends on the local context. For example, at a community college a WPA may hold dual positions as WPA and department chair (51% according to the National Census of Writing). A WPA who is fully remote and supervises other instructors, designs courses, and facilitates courses online could hold the title of program chair or course coordinator. Local titles aside, the quasi-WPA, though fully contingent and fully administrator, may feel like they exist in the interstices of contingent lecturers, T/TT faculty, and staff.

As we move between our responsibilities, we identify with each group in turn. When we teach, receive our workload for the semester, react and respond to university policy regarding lecturers, we stand with our contingent colleagues. When we develop curriculum, present at conferences, research and write, we enact the same roles and disciplinary authority as our T/TT colleagues. Then, when we schedule, mediate between and for faculty, request and spend money, we embody staff roles. With the exception of contingency, this identity shifting is common to WPA work more generally. What becomes problematic is whether the groups we identify with, in turn, claim us. For some contingent faculty, the WPA is an “other” and so stands outside of the “pure” experience of contingency. Our T/TT colleagues have different contracts and status within the university. It may

be natural for them not to claim us as we are outside their experience and status. Furthermore, as administrative roles can often be part of someone's post-tenure promotion application, the roles we occupy may be seen as poaching important outlets for obtaining full professor. The full and complex truth of our rhetorical ecology is that we aim to work side by side both our contingent and tenured colleagues. Written out like this, it seems like we are uniquely positioned to collaborate and liaise with all groups. This is the case, most of the time, for Andrew. There are other times, though, when it feels like we don't have full membership in either group.

A large part of what is problematic for a qWPA's identity is that it is difficult to locate ourselves in the field. Roozen (2015) argues that because "our participation with our multiple communities involves acting with their texts, writing serves as a key means by which we act with and come to understand the subject matter . . . as well as the beliefs, values, and interests they reflect" (p. 51). If we look around and find ourselves un(der)represented in the literature, does that mean we are somehow valued less? At the very least, it is difficult to understand the subject matter of the quasi-WPA (or NTT-WPA/contingent WPA) because it is seldom addressed. If, as we've suggested, "quasi" does not qualify the kind of work being done, what is the separate subject matter we need addressed? That separate subject matter includes how to lead, how to advocate, how to model while within a contingent ecology. Advocating—for the program, its courses, its faculty (also contingent), a budget, policy, workload—is simply different when the advocate cannot leverage their own university status or research agenda and they are always one contract non-renewal away from unemployment. Is it possible that the squeaky wheel doesn't get the grease, but instead gets replaced?

### *Complicating Strand 2: Power/Authority Dynamics*

Quasi-WPAs have power (read: responsibility) because they function as the WPA. In what has become a professional commonplace, contingent faculty do not have power in the same way as tenured or tenure-track faculty. And because quasi-WPAs are contingent, they operate in the same uncertain employment status as many of the instructors they are responsible for training and supervising. They, like their contingent peers, face the challenges of low wages, renewing contracts, lack of resources, as well as lower cultural capital within the university system. This positionality can create a bizarre power dynamic in the department and a confusing dynamic between instructors and administrator: recall our earlier example of a quasi-WPA completing the peer observation of a tenured rhetoric and composi-

tion professor. While we recognize that power dynamics exist whether or not we acknowledge them, we can also attest that discussions of power are often problematic. We are not arguing for a Draconian WPA. We do think that having the authority to lead the writing program is important, and so we foreground these difficult conversations of power and leadership in our programs, departments, and disciplinary scholarship.

To illustrate, Phillips et al. (2014), exploring the wicked problem that is “quasi-WPA,” introduce the “liminal WPA” which they define as WPAs outside of the tenure track “who work at the margins without the protection of a degree and/or job security” and must “locate power in unusual places and use it to benefit their programs and institutions” (p. 62). Locating power in unusual places, however, is difficult and becomes part of the narrative of quasi- and liminal WPAs. Since power and authority are not conventionally available, we piece together our authority using a number of leadership and relational strategies: we shake hands or show up with donuts, anything that helps develop genuine rapport and trust. We don’t mean that quasi-WPAs have to be good leaders because their positions do not have any real authority and that traditional WPAs get to be poor leaders because their roles have authority built in. It is not a stretch, however, to suggest that nontraditional WPAs have to rely more on leadership and interpersonal skills because they lack institutional authority. It’s the proverbial *who died and made you boss?*—truthfully, most of the time, we don’t know either. What happens, for example, when good program stewardship requires tough decisions or difficult actions? Sometimes “power” is the security that making an unpopular but necessary decision will not result in losing the administrative position—or the whole job. Unpopular decisions are endemic to WPA work: course scheduling, course rotation, professional development meetings, faculty evaluation, office space, culture building, and so on.

Sometimes power is the ability to assert value. Long have those in WPA positions struggled with tenure and promotion because the work of the WPA is/was not seen as valuable. For the quasi-WPA who has no or little opportunity for promotion, the value of the position and the program are called into question. Surely, so-called “real” writing programs would have “real” faculty administrators. The hierarchy of the university creates a system of value. The projects of those with the most prestigious positions (in this case, the full professor) are imbued with the most value. What is being communicated about a program of contingent lecturers run by a contingent administrator? This value is echoed in another unfortunate reality that many WPAs deal with: the belief from so many stakeholders that writing can be taught by anyone. Our difficulty moving past this misconception

may be attributable to the value ascribed to our contingency. Still, we do not believe anything undesirable must necessarily be communicated by contingent faculty and contingent leadership. We read authority and power as the confidence and skill and vision to develop a purpose-driven, student-centered writing program. We read it as experience and expertise. The trick seems to be having others, including faculty and staff across the university, recognize and understand our experience and expertise.

The challenges of authority and power the quasi-WPA faces are about positionality in the program, the department, the university, and sometimes in our field. A clear and ever-present fact remains true of many (if not most or all) universities and colleges: tenure represents status and consent, and that matters for administrative positions. In the recent collection *WPAs in Transition*, Phillips, et. al. (2018), reiterate their arguments about power and authority by noting that “Liminals are asked to engage in work incommensurate with their institutional status—an institutional status that marks them as impermanent and thus lacking the power senior WPAs have to do their jobs effectively” (p. 70). This impermanency is manifest in the day-to-day work of WPAs who are contingent labor. Like many of the instructors they supervise, their position in the university is also impermanent. This is a difficult reality to contend with, but we do not believe this to be absolutely disenfranchising. We recognize that much employment outside academia is “at will” and that it is not unreasonable that maintaining a particular position requires consistent and continued effectiveness. Any impermanence inherent to the nature of employment is not what we are engaging with here.

What is problematic is that the nature of contingent employment, being so marked as “contingent,” carries an identity of ephemerality more felt and palpable than what usually attends. The truth is that many of us are perpetually contingent. Andrew, for example, has a three-year rolling contract that does not require re-applying for the position. It is as steady a job as any within or without the academy—still contingent. Jessie, as an adjunct, literally signs a contract each semester. It is as precarious a job as any within or without the academy, even with her responsibilities coordinating ENG 101 and 102 classes—still contingent. Embodying contingency communicates something lesser and brief and incomplete. This is how our work is “incommensurate with [our] institutional status” (Phillips et al., 2018, p. 70). The lesser quality of our status is not reflected in our responsibilities, less status for full work. What makes this even more complicated is we do not seek a solution that requires less of us so that our responsibilities match our status; we want our status raised to match our responsibilities. What that means, we’re not exactly sure.

Conscientious bridgebuilding may be an important element to resolving this wicked problem (Nayden, 2018). Perhaps continually having these conversations, not just about contingent faculty, but also about contingent administrators can create forward movement. Recognizing the limitations that one faces in a quasi-WPA position and acknowledging the positionality that comes with this type of role allows for the thirty-year narrative to continue with new and different details, further making an impact on the power dynamics involved between contingent and tenured faculty in administrative activities.

### *Complicating Strand 3: Resources*

Traditionally, WPAs continually face two major issues: (1) having enough people to teach the courses and (2) having enough resources to support these instructors and the writing program. These are fairly typical concerns and there is wide representation of these issues in writing program literature. The difference in looking at these issues through a quasi-WPA lens is that issues involving resource management are suddenly magnified. Having enough resources to successfully run a program as a contingent employee while also supervising many other contingent employees is doubly challenging, and in program ecologies increasingly marked by austerity measures (Welch & Scott, 2016), finding and managing resources are difficult regardless of program size or institutional affiliation.

What's more, however we discuss the operations and scholarship of program administration, one primary function is to empower faculty and students to engage with our content, theory, and to find ways for all stakeholders to think more critically and carefully about composition, rhetoric, literacy, language. Creating a program that meets the needs of diverse student populations is a more pressing need for the quasi-WPA because of the complicated identity and authority structures that enmesh quasi-WPA work. Directing resources to hiring and training instructors is difficult in itself—programs today respond to multi- and translingual students, first generation students, nontraditional students, students with disabilities, underprepared students, global students, among others—but the infrastructure to managing and employing resources is often tied to entrenched hierarchical structures. Contingent faculty often do not have access to account numbers or the portals to post job ads. Quasi-WPAs then find themselves beholden to department chairs and administrative assistants who do have access to funds and staffing portals. Without direct access to resources, time- and relationship-management become added aspects of the job. Work moves slower for quasi-WPAs.

Quasi-WPAs also may not be personally equipped in all areas of student and faculty need, yet they must supervise faculty and help them teach to/for those student needs. This means professional development opportunities for all faculty, including the quasi-WPA, become imperative. But where do the resources come from for this professional development? Providing professional development is often part of the WPA's job description. Traditional WPAs usually have a 1/1 (maybe a 1/2 or a 2/2) workload and receive course release equivalents for providing PD and assessment. Quasi-WPAs may not have these releases. Jessie has no releases because none of her institutions recognize the work she is doing elsewhere. Andrew, as a FT lecturer, teaches a 4/4 course load. He receives no official releases from the university. His department chair, however, sometimes provides a graduate student instructor for one of his courses. Other times, he teaches a developmental writing course that functions as an unofficial course release because that course has the same students across two sections. This is the type of wrangling and creative problem solving that is the everyday situation for quasi-WPAs.

These working conditions and lack of resources can make it difficult for qWPAs to participate fully in professional activities. That doesn't mean that quasi-WPAs lack the desire to be part of their institution or the field writ large. To that end, Lind and Mullen (2017) are worth quoting at length:

Contingent faculty often have the same experience and research curiosities as their tenure-track counterparts, but rarely have the same opportunities to continue their professional growth. Reduced workloads, access to travel funds, and other internal resources are seldom available to non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty, even those with terminal degrees: contracts usually specify their primary responsibility as teaching, and workloads leave little time for extensive scholarly pursuits. (p. 13)

We know from our own experience that many contingent faculty and quasi-WPAs want to present at conferences, publish, and obtain advanced degrees, but qWPAs often lack the time or access to resources like funding for conferences to fully participate. Doe and Palmquist (2011) remind us that sometimes the field assumes that contingent labor is somehow subpar and that contingent faculty are doing less than their tenured counterparts, but they note, that their "findings suggest that contingent faculty members are engaged in the same forms of work carried out by tenure-line faculty, leading us to argue that the essential role of non-tenure-line faculty within higher education must be taken into account as we move toward a new understanding of academic labor" (p. 354). The implications are distress-

ing: the system in which quasi-WPAs work is designed to keep them contingent, struggling for resources, and underperforming in the field. To be clear, we do not believe that this is the plight of the qWPA at the hands of traditional WPAs or rhetoric and composition as a field. Rather, this is a result of austerity measures that pigeonhole qWPAs into being contingent middle management.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

We believe the quasi-WPA to be an important, productive, and meaningful job and positionality. We don't believe that contingency must be something negative or that working as a contingent administrator must be seen as a sort of detriment to one's career or future opportunities to gain a tenure line position, if that happens to be a goal. We have argued that the quasi-WPA faces magnified challenges and we've identified and discussed three complicating critical strands: (1) identity, (2) authority and power dynamics, and (3) resources. We also acknowledge that many may not now feel empowered in their quasi-WPA positions or that their work is meaningful and productive. Our hope is that by acknowledging that these "quasi" positions exist, by beginning a new chapter to a narrative that has been told and retold for thirty years, and by rehashing the particularly wicked problems of these three complicating strands that we can keep the conversation going and help others in our positions develop the theory, literature, resources, and community of other WPAs and quasi-WPAs that they can rely on for support. We want quasi-administrators to feel like they are not alone and that they have the power to participate in and contribute to the field in ways that make a real difference. We want that for ourselves, too.

Theorizing the work of quasi-WPAs is complicated. Perhaps for some we have not been critical enough of contingency or about labor conditions, for example. We feel we must directly say that we have not bought in to the neoliberal austerity measures that keep so many lecturers as perpetual adjuncts (Welch & Scott 2016). At the same time, what we are advocating here is not some Stockholm Syndrome version of employment. And this also isn't an argument to "play the game" so that "we can at least make our own rules." The conditions of contingent employment—including the label "contingent"—need to improve. We feel that way for education and teaching in general. Class size, support, professional development, compensation, public perception, all these things need our attention and continual improvement.

However, it is equally problematic to suggest that all contingency is wrong or bad for the system. For Jessie, contingency is a choice, one that

provides flexibility, change, a wider network than most. For Andrew, contingency is not the same as semester to semester or emergency employment. Sometimes too many conversations are wrapped into one overlarge argument, and that is part of our problem with “contingency” as a label. It does not account for lecturers who are simply non-tenure track (though we find this label unsatisfying as well). It does not account for those who choose a peripatetic lifestyle (or in our current educational ecology, what amounts to digitally peripatetic—in fact, cobbling together online employment is much different than the “highway warriors” of yore). Quasi-WPAs exist, and we must be able to support and theorize this work without affirming or subverting the systems in which they exist. For us, this work is not about the system, but about the people in the positions.

When people end up as quasi-WPAs, whether by choice or circumstance, we want the position to be meaningful and productive. We are interested in developing knowledge for and about nonstandard administrative work. About knowledge, Janet Atwill writes that “[p]roductive knowledge is defined by three characteristics: its concern with the contingent, its implication in social and economic exchange, and its resistance to determinate ends” (as cited in Charlton et al., 2011, p. 108). Although Atwill was not referring to contingent labor, we find this to be inspiring and worth developing as a variation on a theme. The quasi-WPA is situated to be a site of productive and meaningful knowledge. We recognize in the quasi-WPA a resistance to determinate ends, a significant role in the social and economic exchange of a writing program and its relationship to the university and community, and a deep and enduring concern with the contingent. WPA work is often discussed in the literature as a marginalized position, work on the edge of what is seen as meaningful to the university or our field. We see evidence of this time and again in the numerous resolutions published about WPA work as scholarly work. If WPA work is work on the margins, how much more so is quasi-WPA work? The prospect seems almost too daunting to address.

But if “productive knowledge is defined by . . . its concern with the contingent,” (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 108) maybe quasi-WPAs are not on the margins of the margins. Maybe quasi-WPAs are an emerging site of unique productive scholarship. The relationship of WPA to quasi-WPA might be the relationship of north pole to south pole on a magnet: each pole attracts the other; and, without the relationship, the magnet does not exist.

Our contribution to the narrative, then, is about becoming and not being a WPA. As we affirm our roles as quasi-WPAs, we find inspiration worth quoting at length:

we are always in the process of becoming—not in the sense of our arriving at a particular WPA identity or becoming the WPA but becoming in the sense that we aren't asking to arrive or survive. We are seeking to rhetorically thrive and continually change . . . we must choose this philosophy of change as our goal, how systematically we must live it out, and how necessary it is that we re-imagine the production of knowledge as rhetorical in the administrative positions we inherit, adapt, create, and work through with such a philosophy. (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 106)

Narratives of becoming don't end. They aren't meant to. Instead, these stories get fuller, more detailed and robust. We call for more narratives, more theorizing about quasi-WPA work—not so that we can put this behind us once and for all, but so that we can “rhetorically thrive and continually change” for the better. Roozen (2015) reminds us that “our identities are ongoing, continually under-construction product[s] of our participation” and that our writing is “about becoming a particular kind of person, about developing a sense of who we are” (p. 51). Our contribution to establishing the qWPA, and those that will come after ours, make the narrative more developed, harder to ignore, more representative of the shifting ecologies in which we participate—it's about cultivating a more material sense of our selfhood, looking into the field and recognizing others like us.

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