

Speaking Up, Speaking Out: Lived Experiences of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty in Writing Studies, edited by Jessica Edwards, Meg McGuire, and Rachel Sanchez. Utah State University Press, 2021. 243 pp.

Reviewed by Stacy Wittstock, University of California, Davis

It should come as no surprise to anyone working in or around the field of writing studies that the number of non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF) teaching and working in US colleges and universities has steadily increased over the last several decades. In an oft-cited statistic, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) reported that as of 2016 over 70% of instructional positions in US higher education were off the tenure track (see also Giordano et al.; Kahn et al.; Kezar et al.; Maisto and Street; MLA Office of Programs; Welch and Scott). Writing studies has a long and rich tradition of scholarship on NTTF, including the CCCC-sponsored journal *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*. Likely because of the many constraints placed on NTTF regarding research and publication, scholarship focusing on NTTF has most often been written *about them* rather than *by them*. A recent edited collection, *Speaking Up, Speaking Out: Lived Experiences of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty in Writing Studies*, addresses this gap by presenting fifteen chapters written exclusively by scholars who, at the time of writing, were teaching and working off the tenure track. Edited by Jessica Edwards, Meg McGuire, and Rachel Sanchez, all NTTF themselves, this collection centers on the voices of NTTF, allowing them to tell their own stories, speak their own truths, and reclaim their own narratives.

The fifteen chapters include qualitative and mixed-methods research studies, theoretical frameworks and metaphors for understanding the realities of NTTF work, and reflective narratives about authors' experiences. Each chapter evokes a sense of vulnerability through storytelling—a rhetorical move that lends credence to the title's use of the term "lived experiences." A number of common themes emerge across the chapters, many of which should be familiar to anyone interested in conversations around academic labor in writing studies. One common refrain among authors is feeling undervalued, looked down upon, or exploited by their institutions, programs, and tenure-line colleagues. For example, chapters by Rachel Azima, Lilana M. Naydan, and Megan Boeshart Burelle and Elizabeth J. Vincelette each describe working conditions at the intersection between the institutional devaluation of writing centers and the liminal space of contingency. Several authors express feeling demoralized at being as equally qualified as their tenure-track colleagues but having limited job protection and being paid considerably less, even when doing similar tasks like research, administration, and committee work. In her chapter, Heather

Jordan contends that the idea that academia is a meritocracy is a harmful myth that creates an unsustainable environment for both NTTF and tenure-track faculty. A longing for a sense of community and collegiality also permeates the chapters, in addition to a palpable sense of frustration with the lack of professional development and teacher training available to NTTF.

The collection is separated into 4 parts: Definitions, Critical Perspectives, Lived Experiences, and Next Steps. “Part 1: Definitions” highlights the difficulty of defining NTTF given that they often occupy an array of different positions and titles with varying levels of institutional protection. Azima, a Professor of Practice and Writing Center Director, explains the ways that perceptions of her status as NTTF and the service-oriented view her institution held of the writing center impacted her work. Similarly, Naydan spotlights the challenges in defining NTTF whose work encompasses more than teaching, particularly those who work in writing centers. Peter Brooks proposes training NTTF in theories from student affairs in order to help them learn productive ways to support students while coping with the emotional labor such work involves. Erica M. Stone and Sarah E. Austin compare their differing experiences as NTTF, with one holding a full-time, renewable appointment at a military college while the other was a part-time adjunct at several institutions. All told, instead of clarifying definitions, this section is helpful in that it further highlights the lack of clear common characteristics among NTTF—a reality that makes finding common solutions equally difficult.

“Part 2: Critical Perspectives” offers frameworks for understanding NTTF experiences. Lacey Wootton develops a gendered metaphor for NTTF work by comparing the myth of women “having it all” during the second-wave feminist movement to the complex positionalities and working conditions of NTTF who are institutionally encouraged to expand their labor outside of teaching. Brendan Hawkins and Julie Karaus present the results of participatory action research with fellow adjuncts aimed at understanding conceptions of “contingent spaces” (92); their results demonstrate that adjuncts, who are often denied space both physically and communally, have little to no professional community to call their own and often feel as if they do not belong.

“Part 3: Lived Experiences” provides narratives of the working lives of NTTF. Burrelle and Vincelette explain how vague job descriptions hampered their work as NTTF directing a writing center, leaving them with unclear labor boundaries and few ways to account for their administrative work on their promotion portfolios. In a conversational narrative, Jessica Cory and John McHone describe their hectic NTTF household where she holds a full-time NTTF position and he adjuncts at several nearby institutions. Angie McKinnon Carter, Christopher Lee, and Linda Shelton explore the ways that the lack of security and stability for NTTF can lead to feeling silenced and

voiceless, while Denise Comer provides an honest account of her experiences as an administrator (albeit NTTF herself) who did not initially understand and support unionization efforts of another NTTF group. Finally, this section ends with an emotional and philosophical narrative (with a bonus bread recipe) from Seth Myers, who examines “body and affect” through his career as NTTF and co-founder of the Conference on Community Writing (178).

In the final section, “Part 4: Next Steps,” authors provide some thoughts on how to address the inequities experienced by NTTF outlined throughout the book. Dauvan Mulally presents a qualitative study of portfolio-assessment groups in her institution and posits that such groups might provide NTTF opportunities for community, professional development, and collegiality. Nathalie Joseph and Norah Ashe-McNalley contend that collaboration can make publishing more manageable for NTTF by describing their own fruitful and amiable relationship as research collaborators. Jordan pushes back on this suggestion by pointing out that the institutional expansion of NTTF work beyond teaching serves to increase their workload without offering them the benefits their TT colleagues receive for the same work. As a reader, I found this section to be somewhat nebulous in that it does not offer much in the way of consensus-driven suggestions or solutions; however, this is perhaps because as the narratives throughout the book demonstrate, the needs of NTTF faculty are exceedingly diverse. In this way, the collection reveals not only the distributed and divergent experiences that NTTF have, but also the related lack of coherent or centralized next steps in addressing inequities related to their work.

As I read this book, I found myself resonating on a deep, personal level with many of the experiences outlined by the authors in this collection. Like Sanchez, I took what for me turned into a three-year “bridge appointment” when I was hired to teach as contingent faculty by the department from which I earned my MA (9). I experienced the same contradiction of immense gratitude—“We’re so lucky; it could be so much worse”—with a quiet knowledge that my appointment benefited the institution far more than it did me (11). As a contingent faculty member and then later a PhD student facing an increasingly uncertain job market, I have also experienced the same fears expressed by Wootton; that if I don’t take advantage of every opportunity, be it underpaid work or unpaid service, those prospects might vanish forever. Even for the opportunities I have taken, as when I accepted a WPA position as a coordinator in my MA institution’s writing center, my status as contingent, combined with the institutional undervaluing of writing centers noted by several authors, led to the position being abruptly cut, leaving me scrambling to find full-time work.

This collection emphasizes that despite their often monolithic treatment in scholarship, NTTF experiences actually vary widely. They are known by a

variety of titles, hold a variety of professional identities, and experience the labor associated with writing programs in a variety of ways. The support (or lack thereof) that they receive often hinges on their perceived value to their institutions and can both determine and be determined by their status in relation to their colleagues. But as the editors note in the introduction, one commonality among all NTTF is that they “are consistently defined by what [they] are not” (3). Overall, this collection contributes a comprehensive representation of the range of experiences and identities of NTTF, helping to move the conversation forward by developing a better account of the diverse needs of this community of faculty through those experiences. As writing studies labor scholar and activist Seth Kahn has highlighted in “The Problem of Speaking for Adjuncts,” well-intentioned tenured or tenure track faculty can easily speak for or over NTTF. This collection offers a valuable and much-needed alternative by lifting the voices of NTTF to speak for themselves.

Davis, California

Works Cited

- American Association of University Professors (AAUP). “Data Snapshot: Contingent Faculty in US Higher Ed.” *AAUP Updates*, 11 October 2018, <https://www.aaup.org/news/data-snapshot-contingent-faculty-us-higher-ed#.YMBNnjZKjPA>
- Forum: *Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*. Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/forum/issues>
- Giordano, Joanne Baird et al. “TYCA Working Paper #9: Contingent Labor and Workload in Two-Year College English.” *Workload Issues Committee, Two-Year College English Association (TYCA)*, April 2021, https://ncte.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TYCA_Working_Paper_9.pdf
- Kahn, Seth. “The Problem of Speaking for Adjuncts.” *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, edited by Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Binieck, The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado, 2017, pp. 259-270, <https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2017.0858>
- Kahn, Seth et al., editors. *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2017.0858>
- Kezar, Adrianna et al. *The Gig Academy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.
- Maisto, Maria, and Steve Street. “Confronting Contingency: Faculty Equity and the Goals of Academic Democracy.” *Liberal Education, American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU)*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2011, <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/confronting-contingency-faculty-equity-and-goals-academic>
- MLA Office of Programs. “Preliminary Report on the MLA *Job Information List*, 2017–18.” *The Trend: Research and Analysis from the MLA Office of Programs*,

21 June 2019, <https://mlaresearch.mla.hcommons.org/2019/06/21/preliminary-report-on-the-mla-job-information-list-2017-18/>

Welch, Nancy, and Tony Scott, editors. *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. University Press of Colorado, 2016.