


Chapter-15

TEACHERS, SCHOLARS, UNION MEMBERS, RADICALS: NON-TENURE TRACK FACULTY AND NON-TRADITIONAL GRADING IN A UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

University writing programs, primarily staffed by contingent faculty with relatively little status in the university, may find themselves advocates of non-traditional grading (including contract grading, labor-based grading, and ungrading), which is an example of a student-focused inclusive and antiracist pedagogy. As non-tenure track faculty have unionized, in some universities, writing program faculty have led labor organizing efforts on behalf of all contingent faculty across the university. Conflicts therefore arise between the pressures of the neoliberal university, including a pushback against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, and the interests of writing program faculty who are on the forefront of disseminating new pedagogies even while they are disenfranchised by typical university governing bodies.

Keywords: Contingent Faculty, Alternative Grading, Antiracist Pedagogy, Faculty Unionization, Neoliberal University, Writing Programs

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Thirty-five years ago, Ann Raimes (1991) first used the classic metaphor of a journey “into the woods” to describe the efforts of writing teachers “in search of new approaches” (p. 407). Raimes detailed five “thorny issues” in the teaching of writing and discussing, that, as her title proposed, made up the first steps “out of the woods” in the form of “emerging traditions that reflect shared recognition” in the field of writing studies (p. 407). It’s necessary here to point out that these thirty years have seen the rise of the internet, a global pandemic, and the emergence of a new wave of antiracism (Kendi, 2019) – all of which have permeated and affected the academy in general and writing studies in specific to greater or lesser extents. Whether or not we have, in these past decades, made it “out of the woods” with regard to every aspect of writing instruction, I argue that the issue of writing assessment, and in particular, the move toward various forms of ungrading in college-level writing classes, rather than traditional forms of grading, is on the cusp of becoming a potentially transformative force in the university. This move toward non-traditional assessment is poised to emanate out from writing programs and create even larger and more substantive changes in universities and society. Keeping in mind that writing instruction at North American universities today is often the domain of contracted, non-tenure track (NTT) faculty (Schwartz, 2020), it is interesting and ironic that such powerful practices are

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