

Community Faculty: Part-Time Teachers Who Connect the Composition Classroom to the World of Work

Robert Gremore

For reasons we all know and lament, not everyone who graduates with an advanced degree in English, composition, or journalism ends up teaching. Some have opted out of the academic life; others have been forced out or denied admission to begin with. Thus, we should not be surprised to meet many individuals employed in business and government who hold advanced degrees and who have taught some years ago in composition programs or more recently in employee training programs. Equally important, these individuals currently work in positions requiring them to spend many hours per week in careful writing for clients, supervisors, or employees. They write memos, letters, reports, proposals, advertising copy, newsletters, environmental impact statements, legal briefs, and employee performance appraisals. Their writing skills are highly developed, for their jobs and the well-being of their firms often depend on this writing. In short, these individuals are true, professional practitioners of the craft we teach.

Metropolitan State University has recruited employed professional writers like these to serve as part-time writing teachers. Called "Community Faculty," these part-time instructors differ from the typical adjunct faculty of most colleges. As a result of those differences, community faculty are not troubled by issues that concern traditional adjunct faculty. In most cases, part-timers provide good writing instruction, but they receive relatively less pay than full-timers, enjoy few or no fringe benefits, lack adequate support services, have little voice in departmental decision making, enjoy no job security, receive little support for professional development, and feel cut off from the professional lives of their full-time colleagues.¹ Unlike typical part-time faculty, however, community faculty are not troubled by these issues. This paper describes characteristics we look for in community faculty, explains how we recruit and train these unique part-time teachers, and surveys the advantages they bring to our writing program. Our use of community faculty has not only helped us solve the "problem" of part-time teachers, but also has allowed us to make a valuable connection between the composition classroom and the world of work.

The writing program at Metropolitan State University is staffed with only one full-time writing specialist, who serves mainly as an administrator. Most courses and tutorials are conducted by the 20 or so part-time writing instructors on our community faculty. Qualifications we look for in prospective community faculty include a secure job, expert writing skills, an advanced degree, and at least one year's teaching experience. We seek individuals who also show understanding and commitment to the idea of liberal education. A letter or phone call to a PR firm, ad agency, or employee communications department will usually find its way to at least one interested and well qualified individual. Often these writers work on flexible schedules allowing them to escape their offices long enough to teach a class and hold office hours on campus. Other community faculty are available only in the evening, which is nevertheless a good time for extension classes, writing center workshops or tutorials. Some community faculty meets students during the day in their business offices. In some cases, the teacher/writer's employer views college teaching as a source of prestige for the firm or as a kind of community service and grants the employee time off to teach.

Although our community faculty are paid for teaching, almost no one is attracted for that reason. The pay is too low. At about \$1200 per quarter class of 20 students, our pay scale compares to that offered part-timers at many institutions. Relative to the time and effort involved in teaching writing, though, \$1200 means little to writers earning upwards of \$30,000 in their full-time jobs. Community faculty enjoy writing and want to share its pleasures with students. They feel obliged to pass on their expertise to beginners. They take aesthetic pleasure in presenting carefully planned and well conducted lessons. They like to perform for a class. They look forward to social interaction with Metro students, most of whom are adults. Or they enjoy the prestige of being listed as members of a college faculty. They would probably not teach if they weren't paid, but pay is not the main attraction. Most community faculty teach two or three courses per year and earn \$2000-\$4000 doing it-enough to pay for a luxurious vacation or an expensive hobby. The point is that community faculty are not trying to support themselves by teaching. Most of them view their teaching as a source of enjoyment and as a service to the community.

Since their full-time jobs provide community faculty with adequate salary, fringe benefits, and retirement security, these commonly voiced concerns of most part-time faculty do not trouble them. As a result, we are able to hire community faculty not as employees of the university but as independent consultants, like the contractor hired to renovate Old Main. As private, independent "vendors" to the university, community faculty are paid only a lump sum "for services rendered." This concept simplifies accounting for our business office because community faculty

salaries are not subject to withholding for taxes or social security and community faculty do not participate in university benefits or retirement programs. Since their needs are met by their full-time employers, we can devote our scant resources solely to honoraria and professional development.

Although most new community faculty come to us with strong backgrounds in writing and teaching, they appreciate the professional development programs we offer. We present four kinds of programs. In the first session, new faculty attend a general orientation to University policy and to procedures affecting them. Occupying about three hours, this session provides an introduction to the school, to the faculty role in general, and to terms and conditions of their employment. This orientation session serves new community faculty from all departments of the University. After the orientation, new writing faculty receive a packet of journal articles on composition theory and writing pedagogy, a brochure describing the writing program, and a collection of syllabi previously used in the courses they were hired to teach. This material provides the base for a subsequent "Writing Instructors Workshop" that new faculty must attend before meeting their first class.

New community faculty are delighted to attend this workshop, which meets for four hours on a Saturday a few weeks before the quarter begins. The workshop is led by the writing program director, and veteran community faculty are invited to meet the new teachers and contribute to the workshop. At this point, the new faculty are usually feeling a bit apprehensive about returning to the classroom. Although they're experienced teachers and expert writers, it may have been years since they've designed a lesson or faced the anxiety and awkwardness of beginning writers. The reality of what they've agreed to do has struck them, and they're wondering how they're going to fill 30 hours of class time, what kind of assignments they're going to make, and how they're going to grade all those papers. Also, almost none of them has kept up with the literature in our field, so many of them hold outdated notions of how to teach writing. This seminar, then, provides a forum for discussing the journal articles they've read and relating them to course design or classroom practice. Also, we agree on objectives for each course and on a variety of likely ways to achieve them. We survey teaching techniques and classroom practices that have worked in the past with our students. We review strategies for creating and sequencing writing assignments. And we survey effective ways of responding to student writing. In addition, workshop participants have a chance to examine a large sample of writing texts and identify ones to use in their classes. They're assisted in this by the workshop leader and veteran teachers, who can comment on some of the texts. That is an outrageous agenda for a four hour workshop, and we cover no topic in much detail. The workshop does,

however, introduce new faculty to current theory and practice in the teaching of writing, and it gives them much to think about as they design their syllabi.

After the workshop, each participant develops a syllabus and mails a draft to the writing program director, who reviews it and meets individually with each new faculty member to discuss it and suggest revisions. Only after attending the writing instructors workshop and submitting a revised syllabus is a new community faculty member allowed to teach a class.

These writing instructors workshops are held only when we hire several new writing faculty at once. That has happened twice in the last three years. For most quarters, of course, we have no need to hire new faculty. When we hire only one new teacher, we schedule no formal workshops. Instead, the writing program director works individually to orient the new community faculty member. Those individual sessions are similar in substance to the group workshops conducted when we hire several new teachers.

A third professional development program consists of a series of Saturday morning sessions open to community faculty from all departments of the University. These sessions cover topics such as "Use of Audio-Visual Materials in the Classroom," "Teaching Returning Adult Students," "Library Resources in the Social Sciences," and so on. These sessions are arranged by the office of curriculum and instruction and conducted by appropriate members of the full-time faculty. The intent is to provide all community faculty with information they have little chance of acquiring on their own due to their professional commitment to careers other than college teaching. Community faculty receive a modest honorarium of fifteen dollars for attending these general faculty development sessions.

The fourth professional development program is intended only for community faculty in writing. Once each quarter, the writing faculty meets for a four-hour "Professional Development Seminar." Throughout the year, the writing program director monitors the major composition journals, selecting articles to be photocopied and forwarded to all writing faculty. These articles sometimes serve as a base for seminar meetings in which we discuss the articles and consider their application to individual classes. Community faculty have been especially interested in articles that discuss classroom practices or explore strategies for responding to student writing. Since community faculty are not professional teachers, they perceive these areas as their weakest. Although there are individual exceptions, most community faculty have been less interested in articles exploring composition theory. They have succeeded as professional writers without needing to articulate theories of writing or dis-

course, so they view themselves primarily as practitioners. They are especially strong at teaching strategies for editing and revising, but they are less self-consciously aware of the early phases of the writing process, especially of strategies for generating and developing ideas. Community faculty most appreciate theoretical articles on these topics when the seminar focuses on applying the theory to course design or classroom practice. And as full-time writers, they bring some unique and useful insights to our discussions of theoretical articles.

Not all seminar meetings proceed from journal articles, though. Other professional development sessions address specific topics in writing or teaching. For example, recent seminars have focused on assignment shaping and on techniques of workshopping student writing. Still other seminar meetings are devoted to idea/method exchanges or to paper-grading sessions in which faculty compare their responses. The idea/method exchanges are particularly fruitful with community faculty, for they bring to their classrooms--and to our seminars--a variety of unusual teaching techniques learned from business consultants, staff development professionals, and corporate training meetings. Since community faculty are generally isolated from other writing teachers and from the academic journals, these professional development seminars are a necessary way of keeping faculty abreast of recent developments in the field and assuring that faculty are teaching and grading in effective and reasonably uniform ways. Community faculty receive a modest stipend for attending these seminars.

Another professional development issue that we are just beginning to address is that of research and publication. Until recently, community faculty have served only as teachers, but their positions between the composition classroom and the world of work make them especially well situated to conduct ethnographic research that could bear directly on their teaching. A few interested community faculty have agreed to work with the writing program director on research projects that could lead to publication or conference presentations.

The combination of training, professional experience, and desire to teach makes our community faculty effective and engaging instructors. Perhaps equally important, they are able to teach without generating the concerns facing most part-time faculty and the departments that hire them. Teaching salaries and benefits are not issues for community faculty because those needs are met in their full-time jobs. The professional development programs allow community faculty frequent interaction with colleagues, and since community faculty teach almost all courses, these part-time instructors have not become an underclass at the University. On the contrary, their full-time jobs as professional writers give them perhaps more status and certainly higher salaries than most full-time writing faculty. Far from being an exploited underclass,

community faculty are successful professionals performing a service for the University and the community.

Since their major professional commitments are to careers other than teaching, however, community faculty generate a few special concerns in our writing program. One of these arises when a newly hired community faculty first begins to plan a writing course. Typically, faculty at this point become quite righteous about writing mechanics, and the grammarian in each of them emerges with strident aggressiveness. Newly hired community faculty generally have not kept up with research in our field, so they equate rigor in the writing class with vigilant attention to punctuation, usage, and the "proper form" in which a given document should be cast. Community faculty turn away from this mind set not only during the writing instructors' training workshops but also while designing their first syllabus. In outlining a ten-week course, they discover that they don't actually have much to say about surface features, and instead they design a course based in their experience as professional writers, which of course is an experience of the writing process.

Another concern of new community faculty involves evaluation. As professional writers, they are not always sure about what standards to apply in evaluating writing in an academic setting. We have approached this concern by asking community faculty to evaluate student writing in terms of what they would want to know about a student's writing if they were considering hiring that student as a writer. That line of thought leads faculty to produce a narrative evaluation resembling a job recommendation. The narrative evaluation can then be converted into a ranking scale like writers in business would use to rate job applicants, and the ranking scale can be converted to a scale of letter grades. It's a long way around, but community faculty are comfortable with the process and the evaluations that result have the virtue of reflecting criteria actually in force in the world of work.

A third concern is that community faculty are not always available to attend training sessions, and they are even worse than regular faculty about submitting forms and reports by the appointed deadlines. They are busy professionals whose full-time jobs often call them away from their duties as writing teachers. This is a situation we simply live with, for if community faculty are busy professionals, they are also responsible individuals. They know how long they can delay completing a form, how many professional development seminars they can miss without seriously falling behind in the program, compromising their effectiveness as teachers or inconveniencing their students. Community faculty generally respect these limits. Those who do not handle their time responsibly are not asked to teach again. Since they are independent vendors to the university, their contracts can be easily terminated. And we can do so knowing that we are not ruining a career or depriving someone of a

livelihood; their careers and livelihoods are elsewhere. As a result, only the most conscientious and effective community faculty remain with the university.

On the whole, the concerns generated by the use of community faculty may be less serious and more easily addressed than those arising with other kinds of part-time teachers. And against these concerns we may weigh the substantial benefits community faculty offer. As professional writers, community faculty bring to their courses and to our writing program in general not only teaching and writing expertise, but also a first-hand knowledge of writing as done beyond the classroom. As full-time writers, they have perfected strategies for writing sensitive documents quickly in office settings under the pressure of strict deadlines. Often, they give students assignments culled that week from the faculty member's office "in" box, or they create writing assignments based on case studies drawn from their experience on the job. They teach students to approach these assignments in the same ways professional writers would. Although they can teach "the expository essay" as well as any instructors, community faculty know that writing is not only a literary skill or even a uniquely academic skill, but a way to learn, to solve problems, and to create an impact *in the world*. As college professors, our working lives revolve around classes, course syllabi, assignment sequences, and journal articles. In that situation, it's easy for us to forget that most of our students will be in college for only four years. We may hope, though, that students will continue to write for one purpose or another long after graduation. Community faculty can teach them to write college essays and term papers, but equally important, they can show students how working writers apply academic writing skills to create an impact in the worlds of business and government, where our graduates will spend most of their lives.

To some adjunct faculty, the concept of community faculty may seem less desirable than a continuation of the part-timers' status quo. In this respect, the idea of community faculty has two faces. One face is threatening. The use of community faculty diminishes opportunities for individuals who wish to remain part-time professionals. It takes a job away from someone who wishes to teach only part-time and hands it to a moonlighter who already holds a secure full-time position. Furthermore, the use of community faculty reduces the number of full-time teaching positions available for those part-timers who hope someday to land a tenure-track job. As individuals concerned with the strength and future of our profession, we may justifiably question those developments. But in that questioning, we should also consider the other face of the community faculty concept. This face is more benevolent. The use of community faculty reduces the number of teachers whose expectations we are abusing. Many individuals teach part-time in hopes of eventually

being selected for tenure-track positions that might someday open up. Most of these people will be disappointed. Similarly, few part-timers receive medical or retirement benefits. This lack of benefits may not concern them now; they're young, healthy and retirement is far away. But they may justifiably feel abused in the future when these concerns become more immediate and the part-timers realize they have accrued no benefits after ten or twenty years of poorly compensated service. These concerns simply do not trouble community faculty. Another virtue of the community faculty concept is that it makes teaching positions available to English and journalism graduates who have been obliged to accept fulltime work outside of academe. These individuals can support themselves comfortably in business or government and still pursue teaching as a serious avocation.

Despite these virtues, community faculty may not be effective or desirable at all colleges. Many small communities lack adequate numbers of professional writers who could teach as community faculty. And the continued strength of our profession requires numerous full-time practitioners who have dedicated themselves to teaching and research in our field. But for some small colleges operating on tiny budgets in large cities, community faculty can solve the "problem" of part-time writing teachers and at the same time make a valuable connection between the composition classroom and the world into which our students will soon graduate.

Notes

¹Ben W. McClelland, "Part-time Faculty in English Composition: A WPA Survey," *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 5.1 (Fall 1981):13-20. Also, Timothy Dykstra, of Franklin University, has begun compiling a bibliography of surveys of part-time teachers.

For discussions of the concerns of part-time faculty, see the following: Wayne C. Booth, "A Cheap, Efficient, Challenging, Sure-fire, and Obvious Device for Combatting the Major Scandal in Higher Education Today," *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 5.1 (Fall 1981):35-39. This issue of WPA is devoted to the concerns of part-time writing teachers. See especially Susan Blank and Beth Green, "Living at the Bottom"; Geoffrey S. Weinman, "A Part-time Freshman Writing Staff: Problems and Solutions"; and Donald McQuade, "The Case of the Migrant Workers," all in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 5.1 (Fall 1981).

For solutions to the concerns of part-time writing teachers see the articles cited above by Booth and Weinman. Also see Paula J. Gaus, "A Survival Kit for Part-time Faculty," *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 5.3 (Spring 1982):25-27.

Works Cited

McClelland, Ben. "Part-time Faculty in English Composition: A WPA Survey."
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