

## **Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession Annual Report 2011**

### Background and Charge

The committee was established in February 2009 and charged as follows:

The Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession is charged with considering a range of issues that affect teachers of modern languages and literatures in institutions of higher education who hold non-tenure-track appointments (e.g., salary and benefits, workplace issues and conditions of employment, demographics, participation in departmental and institutional governance, academic freedom, professional development). The committee should collect information useful to individuals and departments and identify effective policies and practices. The committee should organize convention sessions and should consider proposing association publications and other projects that will address the concerns of non-tenure-track faculty members and the departments that employ them. The committee will report annually to the Executive Council.

The following were members of the committee for 2010–11:

Janet Casey, Skidmore College (Senior Cochair)  
Beth Landers, University of Missouri, St. Louis (Junior Cochair)  
Sandra K. Baringer, University of California, Riverside  
Cary DiPietro, University of Toronto, Mississauga  
Jane Harper, Tarrant County Community Coll. (ex officio)\*  
Dorothea Heitsch, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (ex officio)\*\*  
Douglas Hesse, University of Denver  
Nicolas Shumway, Rice University  
Emma Widener, University of New Haven\*\*\*

\* Term ended 2010

\*\* Replaced Jane Harper in spring 2011

\*\*\* Resigned fall 2010

### Meetings and Activities

The committee met at the MLA offices on 20–21 September 2010 and by conference call on 10 November 2010, 2 February 2011, and 27 April 2011.

Throughout the year the committee remained keenly interested in various documents released by other organizations; in particular, we read and discussed the New Faculty Majority's

report, “A Program for Change: 2010–2030.” David Laurence also kept the committee updated on the fall 2010 survey of contingent faculty members conducted by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW), which generated over 20,000 responses that are currently being analyzed. The committee awaits the release of CAW’s first report on this data, to be presented in November at the conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education.

A great deal of work went into the committee’s plans for the 2011 MLA convention, which featured a special theme on the first day of the convention, “The Academy in Hard Times.” The committee’s first priority was to arrange free participation during this one-day initiative for contingent faculty members in the Los Angeles area; this was a first step toward a more fully imagined networking opportunity for contingents at the 2012 convention (see below). The committee also hosted two events. The first was a roundtable discussion on academic work:

#### **162. Collective Work, Working Collectively**

**Presiding:** Cary A. DiPietro, Univ. of Toronto, Mississauga

**Speakers:** Elizabeth Hoffman, California State Univ., Long Beach; Maria Maisto, New Faculty Majority; Gary Rhoades, American Assn. of Univ. Professors; Nicolas Shumway, Univ. of Texas, Austin; James Turk, Canadian Assn. of Univ. Teachers

**Description:** This roundtable will consider both the philosophical and practical dimensions of academic labor and explore how they are related. Specifically, how do (or should) definitions of work affect academic employment practices, and how are our employment practices dependent (or not) on our implicit and explicit definitions of academic work? To approach this topic, we are asking participants to respond to two questions: (1) What is the nature of academic work? (2) What does it mean to work collectively?

The second event was a panel discussion:

#### **70. Improving Non-Tenure-Track Appointments: Current Models from California, Colorado, and Missouri**

**Presiding:** Nicolas Shumway, Univ. of Texas, Austin

1. “Dogs over Fences: Getting Security of Employment without Perfect Guarantees,” Benjamin Harder, Univ. of California, Riverside
2. “NTT Participation in Faculty Governance in Colorado: An Effort to Change Culture,” Sue Rowe Doe, Colorado State Univ., Fort Collins
3. “Imagining a Career off the Tenure Track: New Titles and Promotion Guidelines from Missouri,” Elizabeth Landers, Univ. of Missouri, St. Louis

The committee judged both events successful, though the relatively sparse attendance, especially for the roundtable discussion, was noted. While the committee feels strongly that its charge includes hosting such events, we also recognize that the general lack of contingent faculty members at MLA conventions means that our efforts to reach such colleagues may be especially difficult. Future efforts to add contingent faculty members to the MLA membership, or simply ensuring that local contingent faculty members may attend the convention free or for a reduced fee, will hopefully make it possible for the committee's work to reach a more varied audience.

Plans for the 2012 convention were shaped in part by the committee's perceptions of its 2011 convention events. For 2012, the committee plans to host a free breakfast for Seattle-area contingent faculty members that will also serve as a networking opportunity and a focus group; the program will be planned at the September 2011 meeting. Unfortunately, a proposed panel on Academic Work had to be cancelled due to a lack of viable abstracts, but it has been replaced with a roundtable discussion in which committee representatives will present our new policy document (see below) and information regarding the CAW survey (see above). The committee will also host a panel on hiring and assessment.

The committee's major accomplishment this year was the creation of a new policy document, "Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions." This document is "intended to assist individuals and departments in assessing the policies and practices related to non-tenure-track faculty in their own programs." It covers five major areas: hiring and assessment, compensation and professional advancement, professional rights and responsibilities, professional development and recognition, and integration into the life of the department and institution. Work on the document commenced via extensive brainstorming sessions at the September 2010 meeting; Janet Casey then produced a draft, which committee members continued to refine throughout the year.

The final version was submitted to the MLA Executive Committee and approved at its May 2011 meeting. It is now part of the MLA's Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit (online).

Oversight of the committee's wiki, created in 2009, has been ongoing. We will continue to seek new ways to publicize it and interest others in contributing to it.

New initiatives for the coming year will be discussed at the September 2011 meeting.

However, a number of possibilities have been advanced, including:

- A campaign or strategy for bringing awareness of the committee to a larger public. Individual committee members might be assigned to respond to relevant publications or to write something on behalf of the committee.
- An investigation into on-campus faculty associations that have managed to bring together faculty members in various types of employment positions. The committee might make contact with such groups in the hope of furthering their development on other campuses. A possible addition to the Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit might offer information on how to start such a group or how to contact other groups for advice.
- Plans for strategic presentations to other organizations. The MLA could possibly provide some travel funds for this purpose.
- Participation at the first conference of the New Faculty Majority to be held later this year in Washington, DC.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Casey (Senior Cochair)

Beth Landers (Junior Cochair)