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Introduction

A Call for Adequate Work in Rhetoric and Composition

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The work has to get done. But there is so damned much of it coming from so many sectors of our *working* lives.[1]

So.

Damned.

Much.

It needs to stop.

Rhetoric and Composition's history is wedded in many ways to a history of us saying "yes" where others have said "no," filling voids left by those who don't understand what we do.[2] "No" is what we want to say, but without a deep reflection on how, when, or why we're saying "no," doing so can feel like or even be a violation of our ethical responsibilities. In the scramble to find someone else to do the work, we miss out on conversations about whether the work actually, really, truly needs to be done in the first place. From a different angle, in some

1. On the matter of increasing workloads, see Deborah Brandt's (2015) *The Rise of Writing*; Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's (1999) "The Academic Speed-Up"; and James Rushing Daniel's (2022) *Toward an Anti-Capitalist Composition*.

2. Many histories of Rhetoric and Composition are full of sad and depressing tropes about who we are and who does this labor: redheaded stepchildren, sad women in the basement, or the wives of the real professors (cf. Connors 1997; Crowley 1998; Miller 1991).

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cases (honestly, in many cases), it is easier to just do the work ourselves rather than to allow an incompetent or destructive colleague to join in.

The discipline has developed robust research programs, paradigms, and schools of thought about how to do our work and do it well. Our disciplinary investments thus perpetuate a dual dilemma. On the one hand, folks in Rhetoric and Composition are hired and trained to take on unequal amounts of administrative labor in a higher education environment that's only getting more complex; and, since few others want to do this work, our discipline has developed a set of internalized dispositions that makes us feel obligated to do so. The combination of these pressures—external and internal—is a profound sense that we're never doing enough. That is, if we truly believe our work matters, then someone needs to do it. Developing theories, teaching writing, running writing programs, training writing tutors, and conducting faculty development are all necessary parts of our job. In our more optimistic moments, we might even think that they're valuable to our institutions and students. To say "no" to doing this work can feel like a dereliction of duty.

We want to highlight, specifically, the frequency with which folks in Rhetoric and Composition are hired to take on administrative and teaching obligations, even if these obligations are not within our primary scholarly areas of expertise. This is personal for us: At his institution, Timothy was hired to direct the Professional and New Media Writing Program, an academic minor. For most academic minors in his department, there is an expectation for cycling in and out of directorships. However, there are too few Rhetoric and Composition faculty to take over should he want or need to cycle out of the directorship. At the small liberal arts college where Joshua was hired, where teaching is by far the single most important aspect of tenure review, he is the only faculty member whose contract permanently calls for administrative work. This has meant, among other things, that a new system used to evaluate him for tenure and promotion has needed to be developed. As the director and really the only permanent member of the so-called Writing "Program," Joshua is a one-stop shop for managing first-year seminars, running the Writing Center, and conducting faculty development through a hybrid writing across the curriculum (WAC) and writing in the disciplines (WID) program. We mention these personal examples not because they are exceptional but because in Rhetoric and Composition, they are normal. Often, departments must frame new Rhetoric and Composition hires as administrators to get lines approved, as even a cursory glance at job listings might suggest, putting pressure on job seekers to

apply for and accept administrative jobs even if they have not been trained in administrative research or praxis.

Rhetoric and Composition workers can internalize this structural reality in ways that can be harmful to our flourishing, becoming martyrs who overwork to make sure things get done (even if we aren't well trained or excited to do so), to make sure things get done well, and to make sure things are in alignment with the best practices of the discipline while being sensitive to local contexts. Susan Miller-Cochran's (2018) concern for souls, or that "administrative work can potentially put you at risk of losing yours," is especially on point (112). If the concept of soul is too abstract, we might add: Doing all of this work—and doing it successfully—puts you at risk of anything approaching a healthy work-life balance, likely requiring you to volunteer time to an employer who would easily replace you. Thus, we must ask: How can Rhetoric and Composition workers think about labor, work, and a cessation (temporary or totalizing) of unending and increasingly more production? Even if such a question sounds familiar, it is still worth asking given that it hasn't permeated at the level of disciplinary habitus.

Adequate: Rewriting the Logics of Success in Rhetoric and Composition arose from a desire to see further engagement with this question, and to think through how to answer it in our daily lives as professionals. We are inspired by work like Crystal Broch Colombini's "Composing Crisis: Hardship Letters and the Political Economy of Genre" (2018), which asks how neoliberalism, austerity, and economic crises affect composing practices, and Holly Hassel and Cassandra Phillips's book *Materiality and Writing Studies* (2022), which aims to ensure scholarship about writing in the United States and is more broadly reflective of the life, labor, and learning conditions of the era. Indeed, we are hardly the first—and make no claims to be—to ask about how to thrive in a profession at a moment when "success" itself seems impossible.

Two relatively recent collections do grapple with pragmatic realities of labor in the discipline by examining how such circumstances relate to epistemology and ethics. *Rewriting Success in Rhetoric and Composition Careers*, edited by Amy Goodburn, Donna LeCourt, and Carrie Leverenz (2012), engages the discipline's knowledge imperative, pointing out that professional definitions of success are often grounded in publishing and advancing the discipline's scholarly agenda at the expense of devaluing "what we spend most of our time doing—teaching, administering, mentoring" (viii). Their solution is to expand what counts as knowledge in our field (xvi). Contributors to *Our Body of Work:*

Embodied Administration and Teaching, edited by Melissa Nichols and Anna Sicari (2022), examine "institutional embodiment," or what the editors describe as "a kind of a posteriori knowledge gained through individual's experience of and within the institution" (6). The edited collection provides multiple narratives of labor highlighting experiences too often ignored in disciplinary discourse—harassment, grieving, sickness, pain—drawing attention to the layers of complexity involved in being or having a body and doing labor. They challenge their readers "to do better" and pressure the field to "rethink and rework our practices if we wish to create a more ethical discipline" (22–23). Both collections are vital contributions, showcasing aspects of academic labor typically left to the liminal spaces. Yet both continue to imagine success in the discipline, holding out that there's a way we could do our jobs (however defined) better. Alternatively, our collection asks: What if we take success off the table? What if we aim to be adequate at the work we choose to do?

In building this collection, we imagined *adequate* as a deliberate choice to value our needs and desires as workers against the material and structural realities of our present. On the one hand, we know that there's always more to do, and we value what we need to do; on the other hand, we are equipped with decreasing resources (financial, temporal, emotional, physical) to do them. Adequacy in this context, then, emerges as a form of agency—a goal for thriving by empowering ourselves to focus on the work we choose to do and to let other things go. In this way, adequacy is a possibility that lies outside of the continuum of success and failure. Many of our contributors provide their own definition of "adequacy," and as quite a few of them point out, adequacy is sometimes, often, horizonal—never to be reached.

In this way, adequacy has the timber of utopic envisioning. What might it look like to imagine labor beyond as it is typically understood within the contexts of higher education? What does our work look like if we define our sense of ourselves and our professional agency without centering publishing, awards, enduring an oppressive system, getting tenure, moving from the professoriate to administration, or teaching and mentoring beyond working hours? *Adequate* is our attempt at some answers to questions such as these.

It's Too Much: The Unethical Work Burdens in Rhetoric and Composition

As news articles about cuts to the humanities proliferate, and journalists in the *New York Times* and other blue chip legacy rags declare the liberal arts to have "lost," as Florida colleges are remade in the governor's image (Hodgson and

Kumar 2023), and as entire political campaigns (Smith 2021) are waged against the propagandized image of Critical Race Theory by people who've never read a word of it (or read it selectively), it's easy to wonder what being a Rhetoric and Composition professional is really about these days. The dismantling of tenured positions at West Virginia University (Corrigan 2023) and the reshaping of tenure in Wisconsin (Flaherty 2016) and the ongoing fight in Texas (McGee 2023) to dismantle tenure completely remind us that employment protections are not guaranteed in a political climate of manufactured financial crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the working conditions of millions. Entire industries did not just suffer, but came to a full stop during the early years of the pandemic.

We take as a given that we are currently working within a neoliberal, corporate university system of labor exploitation and extraction. Marc Bousquet (2008) compellingly argues that the corporate university system is not just dominated by profit-seeking behavior and managerial bloat, but a transformation of the culture of higher education. Bousquet describes how many public institutions of higher education are gripped by market consciousness; shared governance has been replaced with administrative demands grounded in austerity and driven by perpetual budget crises. All of these concerns frame and reduce the most important decisions in higher education to matters of economic solvency. Ever self-aware, Rhetoric and Composition is not immune from the cultural shifts resulting from domain corporate university structures. Donna Strickland (2004) described the effects of this on Rhetoric and Composition studies: We are often part of the maintenance of rather than resistance to these corporate cultural logics. Our colleagues have been warning us of these dangers at least as far back as Bruce Horner (2000, 2016) but also from Catherine Chaput (2008), Nancy Welch and Tony Scott (2016), and many others.

Louis Menand (2023) provides a useful working definition of neoliberalism that serves our purposes. He writes,

> Neoliberalism, in the American context, can be understood as a reaction against mid-century liberalism. Neoliberals think that the state should play a smaller role in managing the economy and meeting public needs, and they oppose obstacles to the free exchange of goods and labor. . . . The label "neoliberal" has been attached to a range of political species, from libertarians, who tend to be programmatically anti-government, to New Democrats like Bill Clinton, who embrace the policy goals of the New Deal and the Great Society but think that there are better means of achieving them. But most types of neoliberalism reduce to the term "markets." Get the planners and the policymakers out of the way and let the markets find solutions.

Leaders of higher education have internalized the logics of neoliberalism to transform the operations of college and universities into corporate machines. Administration—in the form of provosts, deans, directors of institutions and centers affiliated with colleges, and department chairs—exploits academic workers' precarity and vulnerability, and consistently asks for more. Part of what we mean by the corporate neoliberal model of the university and its specific effects on Rhetoric and Composition is articulated via Linda Adler-Kassner's (2017) idea of the Educational Intelligence Complex (EIC), which grounds proficiency and efficiency as its guiding metrics for success. That is, the terms of labor are not defined by workers but by those obsessed with branding, framing students as consumers, and moving those consumers quickly through the institution with only enough attention given to them to solicit alumni donations or to include in branding efforts.

In all of this accounting and marketing, financial projecting and contract exploiting, does anyone even notice if we're actually good at our jobs? Does a dean know the difference between a cutting-edge writing center and one that's stuck in a 1960s Current Traditional Rhetoric fix-it shop model? Does a provost know the difference between a decent composition class and an excellent one? Between an ethical and equitable grading policy and one that merely keeps problems off their desk?

Perhaps (probably) not, but still the administrative burdens increase and we need to find ways to alleviate them.[3] This is not, we admit, an easy task—nor even a possible task for all people. Tenure-track lines in Rhetoric and Composition are often connected to administrative positions, despite advice about not taking a writing program administrator (WPA) position pre-tenure being repeated so frequently that it's a rhetorical commonplace (Horning 2007; Ratcliffe and Rickly 2010). While this commonplace is almost certainly outdated (see Stolley 2015) and impractical considering that folks need salaries, the existence and perpetuation of the commonplace should give us pause. WPA positions are complex and thorny—arguably, more complex and thornier than other types of academic labor given the advice that one should have the

3. We use the phrase "administrative burden" to highlight the seemingly never-ending supply of work that comes down institutional pikes onto often underresourced and already overworked professionals. Writing Program Administration (WPA) can be tremendously rewarding, and the pages of *WPA*, *CCCC*, and other top journals are replete with necessary scholarship that theorizes administrative work as an agentive space to create real change on our campuses. But we are also keenly aware that many folks in the field—including contributors to this volume—turn toward WPA scholarship as a matter of necessity and not as a matter of preference. As enriching as that work can be, we cannot, in the end, scholarship our ways out of the morass of labor.

protection of tenure before taking them on. The burdens, such as they are, likely aren't going to go away. Perhaps our response to those burdens can change, though. Doug Hesse's provocative suggestion that we focus on "teaching and writing" as our core professional identities and avoid "selling our birthright for a mess of managerial pottage" is one way (2015, 131). At a certain point, not everything will get done or not everything will get done as well as it can. What's the amount of administrative burden we can do to keep ourselves whole while keeping our jobs?

At a very fundamental level, we understand academic work to encompass all those things we do in the process of knowledge production (of theory, teaching, administration, etc.) and dissemination and the surrounding conditions that make that work possible. We acknowledge that for some folks, the distinctions between work and labor are important. Labor activist Seth Kahn (Kahn and Payson 2021) describes the difference thusly:

> "I understand academic labor as referring both to concrete work behaviors we engage in (teaching, research, administration, shared governance) and the worker/manager relations (compensation, hiring/firing, evaluation, discipline) that determine working conditions. In other words, if we are not talking about how work is managed, we're not talking about labor issues" (114).

In that same structured dialogue, Amy Pason extends Kahn's ideas of academic labor, saying, "When I think of academic labor analysis we should expand out to identify the full system that we have to address to change our individual working conditions" (116). We agree. The intertwining of work and academic labor would offer a fuller analysis. With the exception of Laurie A. Pinkert and Lauren Marshall Bowen, Brigitte Mussack, and Jen Wingard and Rachelle A. C. Joplin (who offer revisions to how administration or mentorship might be reimagined), most of the ideas within *Adequate* focus on work and less on labor. We affirm the necessity of looking to focus on work for two reasons. First, work occupies the space of the moment; it is something that we can do while building an imagined future that is equitable and fair to those working in academia. Second, while the terms of work are often handed to us, we believe that in the doing of the work, gestures to alternative futures remain possible. That is, there is a relationship between what we do now and what we can imagine for the future, even as what we do now falls short of what we imagine. What we have is the unfolding of work so that we might understand something powerful about academic labor.

Central to doing the work is considering how we matter and for whom we matter insofar as we maintain. Hesse and Kahn and Pason sensitize us to the very real fact that all around Rhetoric and Composition, workers are administrators, students, and an antagonistic public that increase our emotional demands and commit us to doing things we don't want or need to do. These people who demand more of our work in order to get *their* needs met do so, frequently, without regard to the individuals they are inviting to work. And in those cases where administration *does* care about individuals as people, they often act as agents loyal to the institution. When we say "no," are we always leaving that work for someone else to do? Is a "no" an invitation to consider whether *this* work needs doing *at this time*? How can we begin to consider the ripple effects of "no" in a workplace environment that always, by capitalist design, asks for more?

As workers within the profession of Rhetoric and Composition struggle to thread many answers of "whom" the work is for, we also must contend with what our work is. One answer is clearly offered by Carmen Kynard (2021): Disrupt in a focused and just way. In "All I Need Is One Mic: A Black Feminist Community Meditation on the Work, the Job, and the Hustle (& Why So Many of Yall Confuse This Stuff)," Kynard creates a three-part heuristic that extends productively to questions of academic work. The work is whatever it is we need to do to disrupt the "white, neoliberalist, racial-affect-sanitized ethos of the western academy and its epistemological violence" (12). Importantly, Kynard understands her students, and her Black students particularly, as already doing the work of disruption. When student activists form unions for collective bargaining rights, when they make demands of colleges and universities to create courses of study, or generally agitate for better working and learning conditions, they are doing the work. We can frame and amplify their rhetorical dispositions and link the knowledge production we have been a part of to illustrate for them the coalition between our field and their work.

Kynard's notion of "the work" is useful for us to ground what we do in some meaningful vision of whom we are doing this work for. To counter the tendency of what Hesse is suggesting (i.e., that we're doing too much), we need to create a way of saying "no" without giving up or breaking down. The way to ground our choices is to ask whom we're serving—who is the beneficiary of the knowledge production and dissemination we enact? Before Rhetoric and Compositionists take up Kynard's ideas for their own use, it is important to sit with the complexity of them. Kynard grounds her notion of work in the lives of Black students and how her work is supported by their intellectual and activist

actions while at the same time supporting them in these endeavors. We do not, nor do the contributors promise, the same work that Kynard does. What makes Kynard challenging for us is that she gets us to consider deeply whom our work is for. Ultimately, whom the work is for might be the most important argument in which our profession should engage.

Responding to Untenable Working Conditions

The harms of the corporate university system on Rhetoric and Composition workers are pervasive, established, and complicated. In Rhetoric and Composition we note four broad responses to these harms: leaving the profession, staying but refusing to work, echoing negative feelings, and integrating ourselves into the current structure. Certainly there are others, and in any given context one or more of them may be more acceptable or understandable; they do all cause harm, and, in the end, none of them are completely persuasive. Their very inability to persuade us necessitates a deeper consideration of adequate as a potential for a different kind of working life as Rhetoric and Composition professionals. While simplified for our purposes, we do not believe them to be straw people nor do we believe them to be caricatures of the position. For every response that follows, adequacy is often a better course of action.

RESPONSE ONE: LEAVE THE UNIVERSITY OR THE PROFESSION

One radical but realistic response to the harms of the corporate university is to leave the university or the profession. If the university is so broken and violent, so inequitable and so complicit with colonialist, racist, ableist projects that it cannot be transformed, what's the use of remaining (see Ahmed 2017, 2021)? Many professionals with strong reputations have simply left university life altogether to pursue different professions. They might still occasionally publish in the field or manage journals, but they are no longer a part of the system of the university or seek to serve the profession. We know their stories because they are spoken of in the halls of our institutions and at conferences. *He left because . . . She isn't doing that because . . .* Sometimes, we envy their reasons and admire our colleagues who move on to what they think will be more rewarding careers. Still, many others leave not because they desire to, but because they cannot live off the wages of academic work or endure emotional abuse from administrators or colleagues. We don't hear their stories as much.

Often, the stories of leaving that circulate in the halls of our professional organizations and workplaces are those who have already established themselves

well enough to make such moves. Their publications records, professional advances, and cultural capital appear like a standard narrative of success *before* they left. It is easier to leave when the leaving is accompanied by financial stability, cultural capital, and professional respect via continued citation. Though the leaving may have and likely did cause emotional stress and worry over the future, stories of leaving often end with the protagonist landing on their feet. The stories of the folks who don't—often, the ones who left because they had to, because they couldn't afford academic life anymore—don't get told as much.

On the other hand, *leaving* can't be the only response. Some of us simply cannot. In countries like the United States where healthcare is linked to employment, leaving can be a matter of life and death. At many institutions, the flexibility offered by academic institutions is simply the best for those with care responsibilities. And so, while we acknowledge the symbolic power of leaving and hope that folks listen and act on these symbolic actions, walking away isn't desired or appropriate for all of us.

Finally, some of us just don't want to leave: Despite critiques of academic systems, many of us still like being Rhetoric and Composition professors. As someone who grew up in severe poverty, Joshua is reluctant to leave a job that provides him with a better financial future than experienced by many of his family or friends from home. He actually likes his job despite feeling overwhelmed at times by its demands. Wishing a job could be more manageable does not necessitate leaving said job. The thought of moving into the 9–5 corporate grind or moving from salaried position to contract work is deeply unappealing to Timothy. For these reasons and more and despite all the problems with working in academia, Timothy would rather stay put. And staying put is animated by both a sense of comfort and safety and by a deep commitment to the work of Rhetoric and Composition.

RESPONSE TWO: STAY BUT DON'T DO THE WORK

Not doing the work can look like two very different things depending on who is not working and what the consequences of this not working are. The first is simply being incompetent at your job by not being able to do the work or being so unwilling to work after a particular point in professional advancement that you stop showing up. We know the colleagues who get tenure and then refuse to serve on committees or collaborate with colleagues on real needs of the department or institution. This is the kind of unethical worker who drains resources from institutions while putting pressure on others to say "yes" when it might not be feasible or any part of a worker's career plan.

Most academic institutions have documents (handbooks, memos of understanding, union-negotiated contracts, board of trustee dictates, etc.) setting minimum expectations for work to which all faculty must adhere. While faculty might not like doing this work, rejecting it outright (for whatever reasons we might have) is not an appropriate suggestion if only because refusing minimum work expectations outright will likely result in being let go from the position. The pragmatism of minimum faculty expectations should not lead one to the conclusion that these expectations are always just. Work policies we agree to can be ableist. Rather, they must be changed through committee work and advocacy so that they are more just; an individual faculty member cannot simply refuse and expect to retain their position in the institution.

"Stay but don't do the work" may also look like quiet quitting. Since major stay-at-home and industry shutdowns encouraged a shift to increases in work-from-home situations, the term "quiet quitting" has circulated in newspapers, magazines, and social media situations. Rather than quiet quitting, we prefer the union-supported phrasing of "work to contract" or "work to rule" (Hiltzik 2022). Work to contract is a union effort to put pressure on management without calling for an official strike. It is doing precisely what your contract requires and nothing more. In college and university settings, this means the service efforts faculty are asked to do in order for upper administration to complete their projects come to a grinding halt. While work to contract is the epitome of adequacy, blanket calls for it without direct union action are likely to be as successful as boycotts of chocolate or bottled water: They would work *if only* everyone did it. The United States is currently facing an uptick in unionizing efforts, and we should take great care to not reduce these efforts by co-opting union work in nonunionized contexts.

RESPONSE THREE: DOUBLE DOWN ON NEGATIVE AFFECT

The most damaging response to tough work conditions is the emotional mindset that keeps us complicit in our own exploitation. Simply quitting or refusing to work fails to address the deeper issue: the emotional ties that bind workers to their labor. Leaving might mean students get taught by teachers less attuned to better practices (Cicchino and Hicks 2024) in writing pedagogy. We want to stay and do our jobs; what we want is for our jobs to be manageable and for us to have agency over what our jobs entails. Nevertheless, this hunt for more perfect work can function as a form of cruel optimism. We borrow "cruel optimism" from Lauren Berlant (2010), who coined the term to explain how individuals become attached to those objects that promise, but never deliver,

on a good life. In the case of Rhetoric and Composition, the moralistic tendency to situate our writing knowledge through the language of harm and alarm, whether supported by research or not,[4] has the effect of creating anxiety about how to be good in the field. This anxiety can be felt most perniciously by discipline members who don't enjoy the comforts of stable employment or who do not have mentors who might guide them through the many (often contradictory) moral imperatives of the field.

Rhetoric and Composition scholarship is committed to the idea that we could be doing our jobs better. Rarely are we invited to consider what is enough. Saying that we could be teaching writing worse would hardly be a way to build a discipline, of course, but sometimes the sum total of the discipline's knowledge can be a seemingly permanent sense of *inadequacy*. There's simply so much to keep up with; we need to decide what we care about and what we're willing to let go. This is the essence of *adequate*.

Take, for example, a 2023 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, arguably the discipline's most important journal. It includes an article about how to create conditions that allow "community-engaged scholars greater institutional freedom to create and sustain strong community partnership projects" (Hartline 2023) and another article about being attuned to the knowledges students from evangelical backgrounds bring to their writing (Mannon and Privott 2023); another article talks about how syllabi can play a role in disabled students' agency to disclose or not disclose their accommodations (Simpkins 2023); still another article describes how neuroscience can help us to provide resources for students to "persist in writing-related tasks and to better realize their rhetorical and social goals" (Comstock 2023). These aren't even all of the articles in that issue. While some of those are issues we (Joshua and Timothy) know a bit about, others are completely new to us, and even the ones we knew a bit about we aren't experts in. Now that we've read the articles, we can commit ourselves to trying to think of all of this going forward—and we're going to be better professionals for it. But at a certain point, we have to wonder if the add-ons to our knowledge base can make our teaching unsustainable: If we did everything we know to be true—if we did everything we *know* can be helpful for students—would we have time to do anything else? Is there ever a point where our classes are just good enough? Can we embrace adequacy? If

4. One illustration of what we are talking about is that the field's rush to embrace contract grading, for example, as a response to the violence of grading was widely celebrated. This collective embrace was challenged recently by Sherri Craig's (2021) excellent piece "Your Contract Grading Ain't It."

there is a central question guiding this collection it is this: If you are invited to engage the idea of adequate, what would you find?

The felt need to commit oneself to relentless teaching is not always or ever a demand of higher education and its army of administrators. It is predicated, rather, on where our disciplinary knowledge has led us. The disciplinary work that has been done has unwittingly *increased* our emotional labor. That is, when viewed from outside our discipline, we don't actually need to be doing the things that we insist on doing and yet can never fully realize. We need to reconsider trying to cram everything we possibly can into the first-year writing class. This "cram it all" attitude has seeped into disciplinary demands that imitate administrative demands for excellence.

RESPONSE FOUR: SEEK INTEGRATION WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Finally, another response—one we see the attractiveness of and could even be said to have participated in at times—is for Rhetoric and Composition to seek better working conditions through a more fulfilling, legible, and recognized integration into the intellectual life of the institution. Unlike the more radical response of leaving entirely, this is the option to stay and be the best. This response is both emotional and intuitional, psychological and social. Simply put, Rhetoric and Composition is less valued than other disciplines—this has been true historically, as Miller described so long ago. Her invocation of the "sad women in the basement" imagery both reflects historical codings of composition work as symbolically lower than other courses and disciplines, and describes how composition was ideologically interpellated not as a discipline in its own right but as one concerned with initiations to a higher discourse (1991, 136–142). But it's larger than just our own need for recognition from colleagues: The lack of respect has material consequences on our ability to do our jobs, as Rita Malenczyk et al.'s 2018 collection *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* explores in great depth. As these writers point out, one benefit of being seen as a discipline (or field) is a recognition that we have "scholarly rigor," which would allow "us to work with all students more effectively, precisely because as a disciplinary unit, we would control curriculum and budgets in ways we often now do not" (7). That is to say, recognition by others as a discipline could allow us to increase our agency within our institutions and—we might assume—fight for better working conditions, for ourselves and for others who are intellectually committed to this same cause.

Whether chasing after disciplinarity is a good thing is perhaps outside of the purview of this collection, although Bruce Horner's work (2016) on value describes the pernicious effects of commodifying the work of composition in terms of how it occludes "the labor involved in the realization of the value of that work, distorting and undercutting its demands and its potential as work both within and on the social" (122). Horner particularly points to disciplinary statements such as the Council of Writing Program Administrators' "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration" and its delineation of specific types of work as intellectual and therefore tenurable, as an example of how chasing after prestige and status can come at the detriment to workers by privileging some aspects of their work over others. Likewise, Donna Strickland's *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies* (2011) provides a compelling account of how expertise in Rhetoric and Composition prepares graduates not to be specialists in a discourse valued for its intellectual merits but for its administrative and managerial capabilities. As Strickland points out, the "Evaluating" statement gets at the heart of the problem: "Scholarly expertise in composition studies is expertise in pedagogy, rhetoric, or writing theory. That expertise is then applied in administrative settings, thus making writing program administration into intellectual work . . . but as the 'Intellectual Work' document makes clear, even the very people involved in administration understand management to be separate from (and implicitly inferior to) the scholarly, disciplinary expertise of writing specialists" (9–10).

So, we might have a frying-pan-and-fire situation: To gain respect within the institution as a Rhetoric and Composition specialist might, ultimately, lead to finding oneself "promoted" through course releases, some nominal amount of money, or appreciation, as the manager of others, someone implicated in but only possibly able (and possibly not) to improve the very working conditions that led to the drive for institutional respect in the first place.

This effect isn't, as we've stressed before, universally true. Plenty of folks have published in top journals, won teaching awards, and built stellar programs that have allowed them to advocate for better working conditions. We don't deny that. But we would suggest, perhaps, that the desire for integration in the university's system of valuation is often an individualistic response to a collective problem, and one that could very well result in professionals perpetuating the very harms they sought to alleviate. A different response, grounded in collectivity, is needed.

The Utopian Potential of Adequate Work

We champion adequacy now, years into a pandemic that has upended the borders between work and life, at a moment when self-care and resilience have been promoted as strategies for survival in the face of state failure and late capitalist chaos. At a time when institutions call on us to see one another as families, to take care of one another, to listen and be present, they also call for us to do more, to be ambitious, to be entrepreneurial. The work is getting harder, the work is unrelenting, and the emotional and material benefits of doing it all have gotten less clear. Yet, for many workers, striving for excellence is perceived as the only option. Given Bill Readings's (1996) incisive takedown of the term "excellence," we know excellence is an empty platitude that can be used to buttress nearly any initiative or ideology administrators want. But as workers with bodies that need to be taken care of, dogs and spouses and families who need our attention, as workers who sometimes just want a drunken night out with the girls or to play board games with our chosen family, and as workers with lives beyond academic production, we need something in the now that helps us imagine a better future. *Adequate* as a collection aims to engage in temporal longing, viewing a utopia where "adequacy" would be an agentive norm pushing us into spaces that may never be fully reached for all of us but that can still in the now provide a sense of clarity about our temporal and material realities. We do not refuse to address structural realities but engage with them: What does agency look like in a structural condition of inequity? In a world seemingly hell bent on destroying our bodies, what work should we do now that will allow us to flourish as academics and maybe do some good for the world?

Adequate, ultimately, says, "We will not repeat the cycles of trauma that this profession and this culture together do to us." The hope in *Adequate* is that you decline to take on burdens you do not want but that in the saying of "no," you do no harm to those for whom good work you've distanced yourself from can still take place. Early in the process of building this collection, a colleague looked at our draft call for proposals (CFP) and encouraged us to be mindful that we didn't come off too strongly as white tenure-track men complaining. There's something to that critique. We are perhaps not the best poster children for "adequate." Timothy is a highly motivated researcher with a deep commitment to service to the discipline via participation in professional organizations and who has been published in some of the top journals in the field. Joshua is an emerging scholar who has started to make his own mark on the discipline

too. Both enjoy comfortable, relatively stable employment at a public research university and a small liberal arts college, respectively. Both of us want to and actually do live in metropolitan regions, have stable housing, and are in loving marriages. Part of what drew us to "adequate" as a concept is grounded precisely in our lived experiences. What we want is a way to exist within the discipline without suffering under the burdens that we feel are threatening to our work-life balances. We want, for all of us, to understand the material actions necessary for maintaining our physical and emotional well-being. We want no one to struggle with whether or not to go dancing at the club with your best Judys or filing the assessment report on a Saturday evening. If you enjoy assessment reports, file them. But if you, like us, would prefer to go dancing, then go dancing and leave the rest of it until Monday morning.

So, yes, perhaps there is an extent to which "white tenure-track men complaining" is at play. We'll own that. That's not something we can deny as editors. But what we can push for, what we hope this collection can help make space for, is a collective sense that complaining is not simply cathartic but world building (Ahmed 2021). We need to keep complaining until we have created the right conditions for a loving reception of our complaints. To our mind, some of the best resources for developing this kind of agency are located in coalitional, utopian politics.

The scholar most important to our thinking with utopian coalition politics is Jennifer C. Nash. We are listening to Nash rhetorically as a way to consider what it might be to hear how Black feminist thinking can inform what we see happening in this collection. Listening to Nash positions us as stewards of her ideas as academics whose job it is to think with the ideas of others and make a case for why these particular sets of ideas are appropriate in this context. It is, to be honest, easier for us to engage the utopian coalitional work emerging from queer theorists and queer Rhetoric and Composition studies. In citing Black feminist politics, we want to take care to suggest two important things that, helpfully enough, Nash (2020) articulates in a different context. First, this isn't a co-optation of Black feminist thought. Rather, it is an articulation of how Black feminist thought helps us, Timothy and Joshua, make sense of what is happening in *Adequate* and the affective theorizing and working found throughout. Second, it is not to suggest that Black feminist thinkers and activists have been right all along but unable to find their voice. Black feminist theorists and activists have been speaking for a long, long time (Combahee River Collective 1977; Logan 1999; Royster 2023; Spillers 1987; etc.) and finding critical

uptake by scholars and activists in every space where activist and intellectual work is being done. At the risk of imperfectly taking up Black feminist thought, we offer here the ways Nash has been supportive of our thinking about the work we can imagine doing in Rhetoric and Composition.

Nash (2011) credits queer theorists like José Esteban Muñoz, Anne Cvetkovich, and Lauren Berlant with a popularization of academic affective politics. Without denying the contributions of these scholars, Nash constructs a genealogy of Black feminist love-politics that predates and surrounds queer theorizing but is situated within and around queer affect. Building upon the intellectual contributions of June Jordan (2003), Audre Lorde (1984), and Alice Walker (1983) specifically, Nash expands their notion of love-politics to create a non-identarian theory of political action. When Nash describes love, she resists the kind of surface empowerment movements that suggest positive attitudes or prioritizing the self as a process of checking out of the world or our responsibility for working in it. It is possible to love yourself so much that you no longer see yourself as responsible for doing the work. Rather, Nash argues that love is "a significant call for ordering the self *and* transcending the self, a strategy for remaking the self *and* for moving beyond the limitations of selfhood" (3). For example, seeing oneself as beautiful when dark skin is considered ugly is not just a practice of self-empowerment but a reimagining of the entire politics of beauty that upends a network of politics that emerge from dehumanizing definitions of beauty. It is watching Cynthia Erivo in *The Color Purple* standing on a stage alone, facing an audience singing "I'm beautiful / and / I'm / here" and not only *feeling* that she is beautiful after a lifetime of feeling and being told she is ugly but *knowing* that kind of self-love might have created a world other than what we currently have. To witness the self-love of Celie, as embodied by Erivo, or Whoopi Goldberg, or Fantasia Barrino, for that matter, is to glimpse that glimmer of something other than what we have. The attendant feelings emerging from a recognition of self-love are the resources for political action and structural transformation. Walking away from Erivo's moment thinking "Celie *finally* loves herself and has struggled to realize that about herself" while exiting the theater is to have missed the world-making revolution of her self-love and to reject the utopian power of noticing a woman who loves herself. It is not saying to ourselves, "Good for her" or "I wish I had that," but rather considering that a world where Celie *is* beautiful is possible. It is the essence of "the personal is the political" but framed as a utopian politics. Returning to Nash: "Black feminist love-politics crafts a political community

that eschews the wounded subject that lies at the heart of identity politics. In its place, it crafts a collective marked by 'communal affect,' a utopian visionary future-oriented community held together by affiliation and 'public feeling' rather than an imagined—or enforced—sameness" (2011, 18–19).

The Black feminist love-politics Nash develops, ultimately, is precisely what is necessary for developing the kind of agency necessary for adequate work in Rhetoric and Composition. Such a utopian love-politics is everywhere throughout the pages of *Adequate*, but we name several practices here in order to make the connection between Nash and our development of agential adequacy here. It is adequate to

- form more pleasurable spaces of bonding over workplace burdens or traumas;
- develop more distributed mentorship that allow new folks to work less tirelessly;
- communicate the specificity of "enough" when we recognize it;
- resist finding solutions to vexing problems;
- create new models that reject accumulation of traditional success markers.

Building the kind of love-politics might also be recognizing that administration (not some nebulous "institution") does not recognize our humanity and that a reclamation via stories, complaint, or active resistance is a reclamation of the fundamental power that comes from recognizing ourselves as powerful and good. Because we are powerful, we can take on agential adequacy in ways that do not demand those who assume ownership over our work lives. Nash writes, "By insistently looking *away* from the state, love-politics practitioners perform frustrations, revealing their understandings of the limitations of a regime that is not committed to redressing their harms" (2011, 15). On a different scale, we want to turn away from administration to see what kind of work is possible when we look to ourselves to do the work. While many of us are in state institutions, this does not mean we look to management to solve our problems.

Utopian politics is not a sit-and-wait for something to happen. It is not simply enduring the present hoping others do the work of upsetting structures of inequity. It is a work that looks like building a better future without knowing precisely what that future looks like. It is the knowledge that whatever is happening now isn't working. The contributors here touch on the pragmatic, the possible, the achievable, and the impossible. The work of the possible is not solely the responsibility of us editors nor of the contributors.

Approach to the Creation and Organization of this Collection

We see the articulation of how this collection came together and our editorial approach as part of increased calls for transparency and vulnerability, and in the spirit of a distributed mentorship necessary for doing the work of creating such collections. The theoretical work done in the first half of this introduction was predicated on the following questions:

- Can we imagine work within the discipline if we take success, recognition, and hard work out of the equation?
- Instead of ceding laziness, unproductivity, and mediocrity as undesirable traits of those who don't care or who aren't committed to their jobs, what if we imagine these as agentive positions that allow us to actually do our jobs while remaining whole?

Included within the CFP was a sense of *how* we would be thinking about the ideas proposed. We remained open about the shape and structure of the collection, but in general things we were interested in and stated in the CFP included:

- examinations of unproductivity, quiet quitting, or failure to achieve as agentive choices;
- imaginations of a new set of affective relationships to our labor beyond our unlivable present;
- uses of temporality as an analytic frame to redefine the nature of academic work;
- critiques or reframing of keywords clustering around negative associations with labor including, but not limited to, imposter syndrome, exceptionality, replicability, mentorship;
- descriptions of imperatives (a la pedagogical, improvement, or production imperatives) that make imagining difficult;
- contributions we cannot imagine prior to you sending them our way.

In addition to circulating our call for proposals to email lists and on social media, we reached out to some folks in our professional circles by sharing the CFP with them directly. This process is common for edited collections where editors are empowered to select contributors in a variety of ways. In our call and in our response to authors who submitted proposals, we indicated that selection would be based on the stories that emerge when we place proposals in relation to each other. We offered to provide feedback on proposal drafts, and many people took us up on that offer. As our CFP said, our criteria for

choosing pieces prioritized those that were clearly engaged with the theme of adequacy, those that were most clearly invested in (and were citational to) the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition, those that were clearly intersectional in their framing of labor, and those whose full pieces we could easily envision. As we reviewed, we also gave thought to how pieces would speak to each other, looking for throughlines between and among pieces. The pieces represented here were grounded in a kind of exciting theorizing that we hoped to engender in our original call and grounded in work necessary for continuing *in* the university. Many of the contributions will offer new ways to conceptualize things that must be done in the university at some points in our careers.

Three contributors had wonderful proposals, and we selected them for their boldness and creative ideas *and* because they offered insights to the concept of adequate that were not represented by others. We were deeply saddened by their need to back out of the project. While it is not uncommon for contributors to back out after they receive encouragement to develop proposals into full chapters, the reasons for these colleagues needing to back out tell us something important about the state of academic work. As editors, we believed it was important to mark the impossibilities for some of our colleagues. We extended deadlines, encouraged messy drafts, and did what we could to create a humane process. We believe it humane to make accommodations, and we asked some of our contributors directly: "What can we do to support you in the development of your chapter?" Ultimately, we had to accept contributors' choices to back out or say "no."

We also recognize that sometimes an invitation, though welcomed and considered deeply, is simply not the right time for our colleagues. Our research agendas do not align; internal pressures or service or other scholarship demands make saying "no" a necessity. An invitation is never a demand. Sometimes a cold email to a respected name in the field goes unanswered, which has everything and nothing to do with who we are. We wanted more contributors and more space to include more voices. At a certain point, we acknowledge that participation in an edited collection, for some, does not yield material benefits that would encourage colleagues to prioritize this work.

While academic presses have the right to choose external reviewers, we were encouraged to name several. As editors, we wanted to make sure that our list of external reviewers had scholarly engagements relevant to the concerns of this collection. Two other concerns guided our list. First, we are aware of who has been given space to contextualize this collection as a whole, and we thought carefully about how our reviewers might augment the printed considerations

here. Second, we selected a list of external reviewers from folks we talked about the collection with and who were excited about it but could not submit proposals of their own. They asked us to be put on the reviewer list, and we have taken them up on their generosity here and have learned so much about how others not embedded within the project receive it.

In our acceptance letters, we asked our contributors to read and integrate the suggestions of the "Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors" (Cagle et al. 2021). We wanted our contributors to work with minoritized scholars and engage the kinds of thinking these scholars encourage them to take. While the "Heuristic" is not the end all of antiracist work, we hoped that our contributors engaged with scholars of color to develop their ideas. We see many of our contributors not just citing BIPOC scholars but engaging their theories and thoughts.

Additionally, we noticed in drafts a tendency to articulate privilege in relation to some other imagined group of workers. Each and every one of the contributors to this collection recognize that they have some form of privilege that makes their lives less burdensome. As we noticed these moments in their chapters where they felt the need to assert their privileges, we asked them to remove those lines *unless necessary* for the point they are making. We did this for several reasons. One main reason is that it is our belief that unless you are making an argument about privilege and its consequences, to suggest that one group is less privileged than you can feel defensive or theatrical to many readers (Patterson 2018). So much of this collection is about asserting our rights to be adequate in an era of uncontrolled capitalism. We asked our contributors to trust their boldness, and we will defend their experiences and that boldness as worthy and important scholarly contributions. Another main reason is that privilege and disadvantage are complicated and relational, felt by everyone depending on the contexts in which rhetors and their audiences/writers and their readers interact. The arguments and stories herein are of a specific context. If we place any one of these contributors in a different context, their relationships to privilege and disadvantage shift.

Finally, with our editorial feedback we had four primary intentions: (1) Remind contributors to ground their work in whatever "adequate" can and might still mean and how authors might foreground that knowledge; (2) provide feedback that allows an author to strengthen his, her, or their prose; (3) be as generous in our feedback and as open to dialoguing with contributors as they want and time allows; and (4) approach responses to contributors as a dialogue, not a promise to accept whatever they submitted to us. We were

open with contributors who needed to shift authorship or approaches, but we also made our own insistences. We encouraged all our contributors to ground, when necessary, the historic context in which they work. Our assumption here is that this book will outlast anyone reading it and its initial publication day, and so folks reading it twenty or thirty years from now should have citational access to what we all know to be currently true in 2022–2024. When it came to personal experiences, we trusted authors. Sometimes the need for citation bumped against the truth claims regarding a contributor's lived realities. On these moments, we tried to mark the difference and encouraged contributors to take a more "journalistic" approach that would help future readers see what we know to be valid in our present day. Our initial inline and end comments were invitations to dialogue. Whether contributors took us up on this offer was up to them, but we tried to answer every question and Zoom with everyone who wanted it. We recognize that continued dialogue might seem like more work for contributors to undertake. An offer was not always taken, and we hoped that our feedback was received generously, though we understand such generosity was neither a right of ours nor a demand we made of our contributors.

Our aim for *Adequate* from the beginning was to create an intellectual space to consider the difficult working conditions faculty face. The contributors in this collection stake their own claims about adequacy in the work of Rhetoric and Composition. They draw on a number of methods, methodologies, histories, and cultural experiences. And yet they understand adequacy as necessary for reimagining our work. Together, this work represents the dynamism of Rhetoric and Composition and the ways that the work we claim to take up as professionals might get done. As for any edited collection, readers are encouraged to take the paths that they see fit, reading as their interests carry them from one author to the next. We have organized the collection into three parts: "Theorizing Support Under Impossible Conditions," "Responding to Structural Inadequacy," and "Adequacy as a Path Toward Change."

In the first part, "Theorizing Support Under Impossible Conditions," contributors imagine possibilities for sustained, coalitional transformation and persistence in the face of an often hostile workplace. In "Solidarity as 'Living': A Theory of Relationality for Community Building as Women of Color in Academia," Eunjeong Lee, Amy J. Wan, and Sara P. Lopez Amezquita develop an adequate network of care as women of color in a cruel, unrelenting corporate structure full of racism, colonialist pressures for individualist success, and ever more output. In "Imagining a Critical, Coalitional Kindness: Moving Beyond Niceness to Envision a Discipline of Care and Cooperative Disagreement,"

Mara Lee Grayson critiques the "niceness theatrics" that saturate neoliberal corporate university structures. Beginning with Jewish rhetorical traditions rather than Protestant rhetorical traditions, Grayson theorizes "coalitional kindness" as an adequate response. Finally, Olivia Wood writes in "Rhetorical Theory and the Fight for a Living Wage" that the work of obtaining adequate wages is often undercut by the very rhetorical theory that undergirds what we do. Wood invites us to think more critically about subjectivity and contract negotiations. We must have a clearer sense of who management is to begin negotiating with them.

The essays in our next part, "Responding to Structural Inadequacy," offer close readings of specific institutional roles common in Rhetoric and Composition. In "A Dialogue on Un/Learning Institutional Knowledge in Bits and Doing *the Work* as Pre-Tenure Administrators," Kelin Loe, Ashanka Kumari, and Gavin P. Johnson describe "coalitional administration" as a process of interdependence that has helped them establish shared goals, values, and strategies toward defining adequacy as centering difference, social justice, and accountability. In "Embodying (In)Adequacy: 'Good Enough' as a Blow Against the Meritocratic Regime," Christina V. Cedillo, Vyshali Manivannan, Ada Hubrig, and Bernice Olivas illustrate how multiply marginalized faculty face nearly impossible living conditions exacerbated by the university's dehumanizing demands. In "Temporarily Adequate: Learning to Be Enough at the Writing Center," Lauren Silber, Malaika Fernandes, Tenzin Jamdol, Audrey Auerbach Nelson, Xiran Tan, and Shaoxuan Tian bring queer failure into their understanding of what can happen during the building of a university writing center and the work of writing consultation. In "A Labor of Love: A Generational Conversation About Success, Living Well, and All That," Jen Wingard and Rachelle A. C. Joplin discuss their own relationships to graduate mentorship in the context of a labor market with diminishing R1 faculty positions.

In the final part, "Adequacy as a Path Toward Change," contributors focus on their own specific locations to work through the messiness of carrying on in administrative capacities. In "Confrontations with Adequacy in Pandemic Teacher Training," Crystal Broch Colombini, Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, and Sara Webb-Sunderhaus share stories from their disparate yet connected experiences mentoring new teachers during COVID. Laurie A. Pinkert and Lauren Marshall Bowen level a powerful critique of faculty evaluations and major reviews in "Laboring Through the Lifecycle: Toward A Disciplinary Approach to Faculty Evaluation." Pinkert and Bowen argue that integration into the discipline should be a metric for success rather than an accumulation of publications.

They illustrate how their work on disciplinary lifecycling offers a framework for rethinking faculty evaluations. In "This Is Fine: Reflecting on (Missed) Opportunities and Adequate Moments of Departmental Collaboration, Labor, and Care," Brigitte Mussack weaves theories of dissonance and care work to consider what it means to produce training and documentation for contingent faculty in her program. Mussack's work illustrates the importance of remaining *in* dissonance and how care work functions as an entryway to it.

In addition to the lengthier chapters, three contributors offer short interludes. Sara Doan's, Katie Manthey's, and Ada Hubrig's interludes rest at the borders of a collection of ideas and offer provocations and perhaps invisible bridges for us to walk upon as we head to the next momentary stopping points. Finally, Seth Kahn and Tony Scott offer an afterword. As leading theorists of labor activism and political economic critique in Rhetoric and Composition, they provide a dialogue that emerges from a deep consideration with the ideas throughout.

Content warning: Several of the chapters and interludes in this volume contain references to depression, suicidal ideation, and other potentially upsetting material. We encourage our readers to make appropriate adjustments for themselves prior to engaging the chapters and interludes that follow. Some of our contributors have chosen to include their own content warnings; others have not. We ask readers to prepare themselves as needed.

As for thoughts that resolve the ideas in this introduction? We know many of the adequate gestures that we offer, the lines of reasoning that extend only so far, the less polished prose . . . It is in keeping with the spirit of adequacy that we, Timothy and Joshua, say, "This is good enough. This achieves much of what we want to do." We have done work that has built our friendship, and we have thought with as much care alongside our contributors as they have allowed and as we have allowed. We hope, always hope, that the work sits with you and you begin to, or recognize with greater clarity than before, that you can be adequate.

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