

# spectra

The Magazine of the National Communication Association

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## **COMMUNICATION AND THE ACADEMIC WORKFORCE**



# ABOUT spectra

*Spectra*, the magazine of the National Communication Association (NCA), features articles on topics that are relevant to Communication scholars, teachers, and practitioners. *Spectra* is one means through which NCA works toward accomplishing its mission of advancing Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry.

NCA serves its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests. Dedicated to fostering and promoting free and ethical communication, NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems. NCA supports inclusiveness and diversity among our faculties, within our membership, in the workplace, and in the classroom; NCA supports and promotes policies that fairly encourage this diversity and inclusion.

The views and opinions expressed in *Spectra* articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Communication Association.

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### Director of External Affairs and Publications

Wendy Fernando  
[wfernando@natcom.org](mailto:wfernando@natcom.org)

### Contributor

LaKeshia Anderson

### Design

Krystyn MacGregor

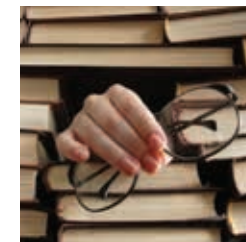
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## spectra?

### DID YOU KNOW

There are more than 28,000 Communication faculty employed in 809 undergraduate programs, 245 Master's programs, and 83 Doctoral programs at U.S. colleges and universities.

# Retreating Forward

By Star Muir, Ph.D.

I've always loved the irony of a retreat as a way to move forward. When the NCA leadership—the members of the Association's councils, the officers, and the staff—met for its annual retreat in March, part of the agenda was to reflect on our vision of NCA for the next three to five years, and to identify elements of that vision that are appropriate to pursue. By nature, visionary discussions are speculative, and many of these ideas have not been tested against budgets, available energy, or staff time. Yet the discussions were invigorating, and some of these ideas will help NCA more ably fulfill its mission. Retreat reflections have the unfortunate effect of distilling multiple, marvelous conversations into broad generalities, yet their publication has a salutary side effect of expressing public commitment to the continual improvement of NCA. As NCA President, both leading and participating, I ask myself: *What does it mean to be a part of something larger than oneself?*

Introductions by the nearly 40 retreat attendees were guided by two questions: 1) What is one thing NCA does well? 2) What is something that is challenging for NCA? Answering the first question, participants expressed appreciation for a broad variety of elements, including gathering and connecting space, the caucus community and activities, resources for teaching and learning outcomes, graduate student travel support, help with the job market, and many others. Several recognized the staff for its excellent work in supporting the Association and the convention.

The second question, about challenges for NCA, brought us into needed self-reflective space. Several thought that we should enhance visibility in the public sphere, find more ways to connect with outside audiences, and expand our media presence. NCA social media

engagement has increased dramatically over the past three years, so part of the challenge is picking good channels and promoting sustainable, engaging content.

Membership came up in at least three ways: opening up entryways to new members, increasing engagement of members with Association and community activity, and making the convention experience more welcoming for international, community college, and newcomer attendees. The recently installed Association Management System (AMS) will enable clearer and more flexible communication with members on a variety of issues, but pathways to membership and member experiences will continue to serve as important challenges.

Finally, though not exhaustively, concern was expressed about career and leadership development, particularly in providing mentoring, training on grant applications, support for career diversity (academic, private, non-profit, government), and funding for cutting-edge projects. NCA is initiating work on several of these issues and is eager to support career and network development in multiple ways.

Moving into a three- to five-year event horizon, our retreat shifted into group work on three areas: Membership Recruitment and Enhancement, Programming and Initiatives, and External Affairs and Communications. The first team explored membership needs and possibilities for the next few years, including discussion around the fact that there are roughly 29,000 post-secondary educators in Communication and related departments, only 6,000-7,000 of whom are members of NCA. The team identified several potential actions, including creating a members-only community board to facilitate convention cost- and transportation-sharing, coordinating a graduate student webinar series, recognizing



As NCA President, both leading and participating, I ask myself: *What does it mean to be a part of something larger than oneself?*

schools with high numbers of NCA members, and developing a video testimonial series. The team seemed impressed with the need to pay attention to member experiences and create a stronger sense of community.

The second team focused on programs and initiatives, and developed several innovative ideas. Among these was to provide seed grants for young scholars to gain experience and attract larger grants, coupled with mentorship through the process and connections to interdisciplinary grant work. A second idea was to develop a leadership institute that might variously address 1) Grant and fellowship opportunities, 2) Editor and Associate Editor experience, 3) How to talk to media/write op-eds, and/or 4) Leadership skills-building, including balance and mental health issues.

Focusing on external affairs and communications, the third team had a number of ideas: expand NCA's expert database to link media to our member expertise, translate some of our key scholarship to other languages (e.g., Chinese, Spanish), and train scholars to engage the public via op-eds and press interviews. The group's ideas about targeting materials to high school, community college, and undergraduates were intriguing, as they advocated shifting our emphasis from promoting career possibilities to focusing on "who you can be" as a communicator (advocate, activist, manager, leader, etc.). NCA does quite a bit with social media and press outlets, but the team had creative ideas to consider as our media environments and member needs evolve.

The retreat was a rich and stimulating experience. We had the most diverse group of leaders ever at an NCA retreat, and we were the stronger for it. It gives me great hope for the future to see the spirit and dedication of so many different people, to enjoy

discussions about cooking and culture over meals, to manage disagreements while seeking common ground, to appreciate the creativities we bring to our challenges, and to be clearly and kindly corrected when I misspeak. These are the treasures of community, and the reasons behind why I serve this Association.

What does it mean to be part of something larger than oneself? For me, it is the key relationship between my self and my community; the values that I hold for what we do together and for who we are together; the respect to allow each person their safety, worth, and dignity; and the willingness to look at a stack of work, roll up our sleeves, and get started. No more retreating... it is time to move forward!

I greatly appreciate NCA members who have long labored in academia, and particularly those leaders who invested time and effort to attend this retreat above and beyond their already ample responsibilities. This issue's theme, appropriately, involves changes, challenges, and inequities in the academic Communication workforce. Often billed as an institution of empowerment, higher education is also vested economically in the exploitation of various classes of people (from graduate students, to adjunct and term faculty, to historically underrepresented populations), and faces myriad other economic and administrative challenges as well. Highlighting critical issues for members that are often entangled in higher education challenges underscores the value of NCA membership and participation. As part of something larger than ourselves, we are greater than the sum of our parts. Together we can contribute to the evolving dialogue on the future and continued viability of higher education in an ever-changing world. ■

## DATA ABOUT THE DISCIPLINE

### Rankings for Federal Social and Behavioral Science R&D

The Higher Education Research and Development Survey is the primary source of information on R&D expenditures at U.S. colleges and universities. The survey is an annual census of institutions that expended at least \$150,000 in separately accounted for R&D in the fiscal year. Information is gathered on R&D expenditures by field of research and source of funds, as well as by types of research conducted, expenses, and headcounts of R&D personnel.

The top 10 U.S. universities that comprised the 2017 rankings for Federal Social and Behavioral R&D include the following. The complete rankings can be found at [www.cossa.org/resources/sbs-r-d-rankings/](http://www.cossa.org/resources/sbs-r-d-rankings/).

INSTITUTION	FEDERAL R&D (FY 2017)
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	\$126,694,000
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	\$117,218,000
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	\$44,272,000
University of Maryland, College Park	\$42,681,000
Pennsylvania State University, University Park and Hershey Medical Center	\$37,794,000
University of Washington, Seattle	\$36,061,000
University of Pennsylvania	\$32,388,000
New York University	\$32,384,000
University of Southern California	\$31,958,000
University of South Florida, Tampa	\$31,580,000

Source: [www.cossa.org/resources/sbs-r-d-rankings/](http://www.cossa.org/resources/sbs-r-d-rankings/).

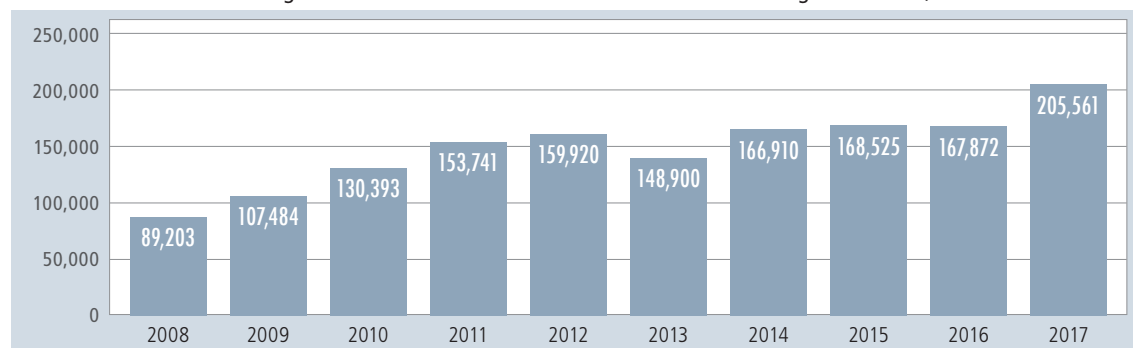
“Communication and communications technologies” combines with the fields of Business Management and Business Administration, Education, Humanities, Law, Social Work, Visual and Performing Arts, and Other to comprise the non-Science and Engineering fields. Together, these disciplines accounted for \$4,345,468 in Federal R&D, of which “Communication and communications technologies” accounted for \$205,561. The top five “Communication and communications technologies” institutions, ranked by Federal R&D funds received, are as follows:

INSTITUTION	FEDERAL R&D (FY 2017)*
University of Utah	\$29,639
Georgia State University	\$11,567
University of Washington, Seattle	\$11,272
University of Pennsylvania	\$8,989
University of South Florida, Tampa	\$8,087

\* U.S. Dollars in thousands  
Source: [https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2017/html/herd2017\\_dst\\_57.html](https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2017/html/herd2017_dst_57.html).

Federal R&D allocated to “Communication and communications technologies” institutions has increased dramatically. Since 2008, Federal R&D for these institutions has increased by 130 percent.

Federal R&D Funding for Communication and Communications Technologies Per Year, 2010–2017\*



\* U.S. Dollars in thousands  
Source: [https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2017/html/herd2017\\_dst\\_09.html](https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2017/html/herd2017_dst_09.html).

## PUBLIC PRESENCE

### NCA Hosts Public Program on Energy and the Environment

On Wednesday, April 17, 2019, the NCA public program “Energy and the Environment: Communication Challenges,” was held on the campus of West Virginia University. The program panelists discussed ways communication can help contribute to and/or solve environmental issues that are caused by energy creation and consumption. The topic is one of particular relevance in West Virginia, where coal is one of the state’s primary natural resources and natural oil and gas production is increasing. The program was co-sponsored by West Virginia University’s Department of Communication Studies. Panelists included Brian Ballentine (West Virginia University), Peter K. Bsumek (James Madison University), Emily Hughes Corio (West Virginia University), and Lou Martin (Chatham University).



Brian Ballentine  
West Virginia University



Peter K. Bsumek  
James Madison University



Emily Hughes Corio  
West Virginia University



Lou Martin  
Chatham University

## IN OUR JOURNALS

### Frances L. M. Smith and Crystal Rae Coel, “Workplace Bullying Policies, Higher Education and the First Amendment: Building Bridges not Walls,” *First Amendment Studies*, 52 (2018): 96-111.

In this article, the authors discuss the need for higher education institutions to incorporate specific anti-bullying policies into their Faculty Codes of Conduct. Smith and Coel’s analysis of 276 Faculty Codes of Conduct found that an overwhelming majority of colleges and universities lack clearly defined anti-bullying policies. Their research found that while harassment policies are often included in these codes of conduct, especially policies related to protected populations, the policies seldom address bullying. Further, many codes of conduct put the responsibility of maintaining a bully-free work environment on the faculty themselves by simply encouraging positive behavior in the workplace. The authors note that workplace policies to control speech and behavior underscore the importance of protecting First Amendment rights; however, they explain that not all employee speech has grounds for protection under the amendment, especially when it disrupts the workplace. The authors emphasize that workplace bullying will continue in higher education if institutions fail to modify their Faculty Codes of Conduct by adding anti-bullying language.

### Darrin S. Murray, “The Precarious New Faculty Majority: Communication and Instruction Research and Contingent Labor in Higher Education,” *Communication Education*, 68 (2019): 235-245.

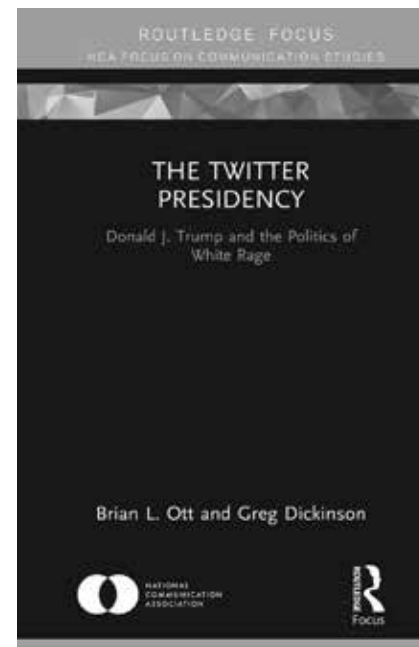
In this essay, Murray explores various issues associated with the use of contingent labor in academia. The author notes that the comfort of job security is often absent for contingent faculty, as institutions

may choose not to renew their contracts. Further, contingent faculty are frequently paid much less to teach the same courses as faculty on tenure-track lines. The author also highlights that contingent faculty often commute among multiple campuses, and don’t have access to private office space. This lack of time and resources often negatively affects their students. As Murray indicates, the number of contingent faculty in higher education currently outnumbers faculty that are tenured or on the tenure track, and institutions are continuing to depend on this growing use of contingent labor. The author laments the lack of representation of contingent faculty in Communication and instruction literature, and stresses that Communication scholars have a responsibility to recognize contingent faculty in their research, and to study their difficulties.

### Robert J. Razzante, “Intersectional Agencies: Navigating Predominantly White Institutions as an Administrator of Color,” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 11 (2018): 339-357.

This article explores the experiences of administrators of color in higher education, through the lens of educational and professional privilege and simultaneous racial marginalization. Specifically, Razzante explores how administrators of color participate in diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts, whilst occupying positions of both privilege and marginalization. Using co-cultural theory, dominant group theory, and intersectionality as frameworks, the author interviews administrators of color about their experiences in navigating diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts on their campuses. The author found that the experiences of administrators of color inform the ways in which they behave and communicate about and within their administrative roles.

## NCA FOCUS ON COMMUNICATION STUDIES



### The Twitter Presidency: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of White Rage

Brian L. Ott and Greg Dickinson  
Hardback: 978-0-367-14975-8 \$60/£45  
eBook: 978-0-429-05425-9 \$25/£15

*The Twitter Presidency* looks at the rhetorical style of President Donald J. Trump, attending to both his general manner of speaking as well as his preferred modality. Trump's manner, the authors argue, reflects an aesthetics of white rage, and his preferred modality of speaking – namely through Twitter – effectively channels and transmits the affective dimensions of white rage by taking advantage of the platform's simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility. Charting the defining characteristics of Trump's discourse and exposing how Trump's rhetorical style threatens democratic norms, principles, and institutions, this book will be of great interest to scholars and students of political communication and rhetoric, global politics, leadership and communication, and social media.

*The Twitter Presidency* is part of a new NCA books series: NCA Focus on Communication Studies. This series publishes cutting-edge commentary on topical issues, policy-focused research, analytical or theoretical innovations, in-depth case studies, and short topics.

Discover more about the book on our website today at [bit.ly/twitter\\_presidency](http://bit.ly/twitter_presidency)

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## AN INTRODUCTION



# COMMUNICATION AND THE ACADEMIC WORKFORCE

“It isn't easy being a member of the higher educational establishment in the United States these days.” So writes Carole Blair in the opening article to this issue of *Spectra*, which focuses on the state of the academic workforce. Indeed, the end of the academic year is a good time for such reflection, and the authors in this issue provide multiple perspectives on current challenges to their scholarly, teaching, and service pursuits. As Blair points out, Communication scholars face “increased faculty workloads, unfunded mandates imposed on departments and faculty, and lack of what should be pro forma support for faculty research.”

As a faculty member-turned-administrator, Blair Thompson writes that these problems are afflicting higher education writ large, and that they are largely the result of new financial realities: “Economic challenges hold higher education as a whole to a fire that burns hotter and spreads wider across nearly all disciplines.” Thompson offers ideas for how administrators can help faculty regain a healthy work-life balance in the face of these economic challenges, noting that Communication scholars are uniquely positioned to understand the importance of “context, dialogue, relationships and connections, organizational culture, and rhetorical power” in efforts to find solutions.

As if workload increases and financial constraints weren't enough, racial minorities in the academy face even greater challenges than their non-minority colleagues. Marnel Niles Goins writes that “Black females at predominantly White institutions (PWIs),” for example, “experience racial fatigue and are underprivileged,

undervalued, and underappreciated, resulting in both mental and physical exhaustion.” Niles Goins suggests that more organizations are needed “to address the marginalized experiences of traditionally underrepresented faculty in the academy” and that “one solution to hiring and retaining minority faculty in academia is to consider *and believe* our multiple views, as it is particularly important for majority faculty to begin to fully understand the experiences of traditionally underrepresented faculty.”

Finally, Katie Brown and William Howell offer readers a look into perhaps the least appreciated faculty population—graduate students, who, the authors note, frequently receive little or no compensation, no benefits, and poor treatment from their institutions. Yet, Brown and Howell argue, they are responsible for meeting many of the same teaching, research, and service commitments as their non-student faculty counterparts fulfill, in addition to meeting the demands of their own educational pursuits. “If academia expects us to publish, present at conferences, and do service work,” the authors write, “it must support those expectations with time and financial support.” Brown and Howell note that some colleges and universities do provide reasonable support, and they urge institutions nationwide to improve their own graduate employee practices.

While all of these articles paint a bleak picture of the current academic workforce landscape, they also offer a multitude of potential solutions to today's problems. We hope those ideas spawn additional dialogue, and that you enjoy this issue of *Spectra*. ☺



# THE Deprofessionalization OF THE Faculty

By Carole Blair, Ph.D.

It isn't easy being a member of the higher educational establishment in the United States these days. I don't mean to imply that being a researcher, teacher, or administrator was ever easy; we all know better. I mean instead to point to the conditions that threaten the kind of work we do, how well we do it, and even what most of us mean by higher education. I also refer to the insistent demand that we all just face reality and cope, preferably even cooperate, with the "new normal"—increased faculty workloads, unfunded mandates imposed on departments and faculty, and lack of what should be pro forma support for faculty research, even as our students are faced with major tuition and fee increases and crushing debt when they graduate. Meanwhile, many state legislators and governors blithely (even cheerfully) and repeatedly slash funding for higher education and appoint highly paid bureaucrats to university and college governing boards and administrations who will do their bidding, threaten tenure, and challenge shared governance.

In a March 2015 *Washington Post* editorial, University of California System President Janet Napolitano wrote: "Imagine, if you will, an American business that other countries, from China to Saudi Arabia, seek to emulate. A business that routinely accounts for advances in science, medicine, technology, arts and humanities that have established the United States as the most innovative nation in the world. A business whose customers number about 20 million in this country alone, spanning the spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds. A business that conservatively contributes more than \$400 billion annually to the U.S. economy. A business that is commonly recognized as one of America's greatest contributions to civilization. That enterprise is America's system of higher education."

It is interesting to contemplate Napolitano's forceful statement in the context of a 2017 Gallup/*Inside Higher Ed* survey of top business officers representing 409 colleges and universities nationwide, including both public and private institutions. Despite recent drastic

institutional reductions and austerity measures, the survey revealed that only 48 percent of respondents were confident in the sustainability of their institutions' financial models over the next ten years. Indeed, fully 71 percent of respondents agreed with the following statement: "Media reports suggesting that higher education is in the midst of a financial crisis accurately reflect the general financial landscape of higher education in the U.S." It is foolhardy to disinvest in such an enterprise as Napolitano describes, and yet that is precisely what has been going on for decades.

Please notice that I haven't yet mentioned the issue that surely garners the most attention in academic media venues—the two-tiered faculty. I didn't mention it early, because I think that all too often, the topic is approached as *the* problem of higher education institutions, rather than as a *symptom* of problems that have many far-reaching effects. The two-tiered faculty, often now referred to as "the new faculty majority"—another fallaciously implied inevitability—is the result of a massive movement to "casualize" or "deprofessionalize" the professoriate. This phenomenon consists of the steady replacement of tenure-track faculty lines (from here on, TT faculty) with non-tenure-eligible, often part-time faculty positions. This so-called efficiency measure basically reduces increasing numbers of faculty to teach on demand, typically with very little notice, appallingly low compensation and no benefits, no office, no input into faculty governance, and no guarantee of academic freedom.

While the non-tenure track category of faculty (from here on NTT) is a diverse group, increasingly, their numbers cannot be shrugged off in the belief that the standard profile is that of practitioners who have full-time employment elsewhere but teach an occasional course because of their experiential knowledge. Those beings do still haunt an occasional hallway, but most NTT faculty members are people with advanced degrees in their fields, very often Ph.D.s, who have applied routinely for tenure-track jobs.

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While the most overt negative effects of a growing NTT workforce reside with the NTT faculty themselves, the now-documented negative student impacts enlarge the portrait of damage.

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The conditions under which NTT faculty work have been catalogued over and over, but mostly in publications read rather exclusively by those in higher education. That's too bad, not just because their situation is scandalous, but also because the overpopulation of universities and colleges with NTT jobs is accompanied by many additional negative effects, including the effects on undergraduate student populations. Research in this area was summarized in a 2014 report by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The CHEA report emphasizes that the findings do not and should not "implicate [NTT] faculty, as individuals, as being responsible for negative outcomes." It is instead, CHEA reports, increased *reliance* on NTT faculty that has produced such results as negative impacts on student retention and graduation rates, effects that are magnified further when most of that reliance is on *part-time* NTT faculty. Some of the research addresses NTT faculty at two-year colleges, with one study finding, for example, that "increased proportions of part-time faculty were correlated with lower transfer rates" to four-year colleges.

While the most overt negative effects of a growing NTT workforce reside with the NTT faculty themselves, the now-documented negative student impacts enlarge the portrait of damage. But that portrait should be far larger, a point that is often obscured by the focus on the two-tier faculty as the central problem. It's not particularly surprising that the contrasts drawn between the two tiers of faculty often lead commentators or advocates to construct the scenario as one of privilege. Although it's understandable that NTT faculty need a point of comparison that demonstrates the disgraceful circumstances of their employment, the naturalization of the distinction on the grounds of privilege has implications that are no more productive than they are accurate.

The worst of those implications is the construction of the differences not as comparative, but as adversarial. The privileged *versus* the de-privileged. This is certainly one of the worst possible outcomes of calling laser-focused attention to the two-tiered faculty as if it were itself the problem, instead of a very obvious and odious symptom. There is every reason to see TT and NTT faculty as natural allies, not enemies, although some of the most heated commentary pitches the two groups against each other, sometimes even framing the TT faculty as the principal exploiters of the NTT faculty. It should seem rather obvious that TT faculty have no vested interest in the deprofessionalization of *any* faculty group. Many of us TT-ers can point to some of our own former students who are among the NTT ranks, which is certainly not what we hope for any of them. I don't mean to suggest that TT faculty always treat NTT faculty with the notice or respect they deserve; I know that isn't the case, although it should be. But it is equally counterfactual to view the TT faculty as perpetrators of the problem, or even to think that TT faculty members regard it as a positive situation.

If nothing else is convincing in that regard, perhaps a simple scenario—one that has played out repeatedly all over the country—might help explain why the deprofessionalization of the faculty is counter to the interests of *all* faculty. Imagine Hypothetical Department X, located in a research-intensive university. The department at one time included 20 TT faculty, but it has lost seven of those faculty members to retirement, moves to full-time administration, or jobs elsewhere.

The administration allows the department to hire perhaps even *more* than seven *people*, but none on the tenure track, and most of them not full time. The governance/service workload for 20 TT faculty thus



becomes the workload for 13. It's extremely rare that NTT faculty are compensated for service contributions, and most part-timers, who often teach at three, four, or more institutions to make ends meet, typically don't have time. Of course, the remaining 13 TT faculty in Hypothetical Department X asked that all seven losses be replaced with TT positions, but to no avail. Assume now that of those 13 remaining TT faculty, four are assistant professors, six are associate professors, and three are professors. Hypothetical Department X has had a long-standing commitment to shielding its assistant and associate professors from undue service burdens. But with this new set of conditions, that becomes virtually impossible. Interestingly, while the hiring of especially *part-time* NTT faculty at most kinds of institutions has leveled or even decreased in the past few years, that is decidedly not the case at research-intensive universities. So, what happens to the research programs of those four assistant professors in Hypothetical Department X, when their research programs are the primary factors in earning tenure? What happens to the six associate professors who have been aiming at promotion, with that same primary factor at stake? And the three professors? Let's not forget that nearly every university and college already, *necessarily*, reserves some service work for full professors, and this is often some of the most labor-intensive work—serving on promotion and tenure committees, research ethics committees, and college advisory boards; serving as department chairs; etc.

And what about the graduate students in Hypothetical Department X? They now have fewer

faculty for their committees, and their committee members and advisers have considerably less time for them; they are, well, OTO—on their own.

To my knowledge, there has been *no* systematic research about the effects of two-tiering on TT faculties, on research productivity, or on graduate students. So, let's broaden the portrait now, and ask some of the more obvious questions: What happens to faculty research and the total output of scholarship from universities and colleges nationwide, when this increasingly likely scenario pertains across so many of them? What happens when assistant professors end up with so many service commitments that they get denied tenure? Will they then be replaced by NTT faculty, in a never-ending exacerbation of deprofessionalization? And, if that cycle persists, will there be *any* TT faculty left after another generation? Another quite reasonable question: What can we expect in terms of the quality of our graduate program applicants, when increasing numbers of them learn that their most likely career option may be to be precariously employed? So far, in Communication, our academic job market remains relatively robust. But only the most optimistic among us believe that will continue indefinitely, as we look at most of our sister humanities and social sciences disciplines' dismal numbers.

Meanwhile, many college and university administrations have been engaged in two separate but pernicious acts that intensify the ugliness of this already unattractive picture. One has been labeled review creep, the enlargement beyond reason of numbers of outside reviews done for personnel cases, not just demanding



a dozen or more reviews for a promotion or tenure case, but also now requiring reviews for three-year assistant professor *probationary* cases. These time-intensive reviews are almost never compensated, and are absolutely and purely exploitative, with the exploitation usually targeted at senior professors who work at other places. Outside reviewing has always depended upon the strong sense of professional obligation felt by faculty, but with senior faculty's almost certainly intensified demands at their own institutions, it becomes little more than a self-immolating luxury to hold fast to that sense of obligation. That ultimately helps only to lay *further* waste to the tenure system and to faculty governance processes, and it does so unnecessarily. Who needs 10 reviews to assess a tenure case, or a three-year probation case, or even a promotion to full professor?

I'll take the liberty of calling the second practice the "deprofessionalizing" of the remaining professional faculty. One example of this is the increasing tendency of administrators to deny faculty members any support whatsoever, particularly in the form of precious time, to take on journal editorships, or to serve their academic societies in leadership positions. Consider NCA as an example. NCA holds an Annual Convention that serves a great many ends for many different groups. But that's only the most visible tip of the iceberg. NCA publishes 11 academic journals, and it provides astonishing amounts of information on everything ranging from professional development and teaching to position announcements and resources for choosing a doctoral program. NCA also offers grants, sponsors other conferences, promotes our scholarship, advocates along with sister associations

to decision makers in government, foundations, etc. All of that—particularly journal editing and association governance—requires faculty work, much of it senior faculty work. So, the lack of support on the part of university administrations can negatively affect many domains. Questions must be posed about who will do this kind of work, or at least how the time burdens of it can be offset. The sustenance of editorial and peer review processes, as well as the association stewardship that often undergirds those processes, will be at stake otherwise. And that implicates *all* stakeholders in higher education, from graduate students and junior faculty, to publishing houses, academic associations, etc. Even government, corporate, and public interest in reliable research could be at issue.

A 2015 report from the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success and the University of Southern California's Pullias Center for Higher Education, had this to say:

[A]lthough our institutions have retained a subset—albeit a shrinking one—of tenured and tenure-track faculty, there are signs of strain as these individuals take on an increasing and likely *unsustainable* level of responsibility for satisfying the multiple obligations of conducting research and providing administrative leadership and other forms of service for their institutions. These arrangements *cannot possibly be sustained in the long run*.... It is unclear at what pace or to what end this trend toward greater contingency will proceed in coming years. However, there is cause for concern that, with a continued decrease in tenured and tenure-track faculty... it will soon be the case that our institutions are no

longer able to satisfy their complex missions, which extend well beyond teaching alone to encompass the demands of policymakers and the public.

According to Daniel Maxey, one of the report's co-authors, "We don't know what the tipping point is, or when it will come, but there are really serious questions that are raised by current circumstances, and we'd be foolhardy to ignore the implications...." If we continue to act as if we've passed the tipping point, then I believe the entire system of higher education as we know it will be doomed.

But there are plenty of things we can do, some of them already underway. We can *all* support NTT faculty demands, not just for better conditions, but for TT jobs. We can *all* examine and demand reasons for administration policies on our own campus that deprofessionalize faculty. Some of us can research the under-studied effects of current

conditions and report on them. *All* of us can continue to insist publicly that higher education is worth saving because everyone in this country will be affected if it continues to be undermined. All of us can continue this conversation at the conferences we attend and at our institutions. And, all of us can support NCA's actions to work alongside other scholarly societies to oppose actions that damage higher education and to advocate for a serious public reinvestment in the originating impetus that gave rise to the best system of higher education on earth—the idea of the common good. That reinvestment needs to be a cultural, political, and economic one, and above all, it must be soon. We don't know when the tipping point will come. ■

*Note: This article was adapted from the author's Presidential Address, delivered at NCA's 2015 Annual Convention.*



CAROLE BLAIR is Professor of Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and former President of the National Communication Association (2015). Blair's research focuses on the rhetorical and cultural significance of U.S. commemorative places and artworks. Blair teaches related courses on visual and material rhetorics, rhetoric and memory, and rhetorics of place, as well as on contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism.



# Academic Workload *Challenges*

By Blair Thompson, Ph.D.

**P**resently, challenges associated with fiscal concerns in higher education cannot receive enough attention. Far too many U.S. higher education institutions face severe economic hits that directly impact the work lives of their faculty and administrators, and consequently, the educational experiences of their students. Higher education's economic challenges are, of course, not a "new reality."

Specific to the Communication discipline, for example, department chairs and Basic Course directors have shared a variety of narratives over the years about engaging in battles to save their department or status in general education, and have engaged in sustained national efforts to establish and advance the importance of the discipline in the grander academic

landscape. I appreciate all the efforts of those who have historically fought these battles (and certainly, a great deal can be learned from these past experiences).

However, the battlegrounds have shifted over the last decade. Economic challenges hold higher education as a whole to a fire that burns hotter and spreads wider across nearly all disciplines. Both the level and types of cuts across the nation are unprecedented. This is more than just an economic "dip"; fundamental changes to the nature of higher education are on the horizon. The conversations that need to happen across disciplinary, regional, and state lines require colleges, universities, and academic associations to work collectively to begin proactively addressing the fundamental fiscal changes higher education faces.

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Faculty workload represents one mechanism that is being used to address fiscal challenges, whether by the individual institution or externally through political initiatives. An article in a 2018 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* included comments from University of Wisconsin-Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank, who wrote about an initiative promoted by then Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. Walker had pushed to add an additional course for all faculty statewide to help address state budget concerns. Whether or not such initiatives come to fruition, the larger concern is that pushes such as these are becoming more and more commonplace in our discourse about the status of higher education. Faculty and administrators from Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Texas, and California, to name a few, have shared stories with me in recent years about their changes in workload and the “new” expectations for faculty work-life.

I was asked to author this article primarily because of an Economic Issues in Higher Education initiative started during my time as President of the Central States Communication Association (CSCA). In the last 2018 presidential spotlight article I wrote in *Communication Studies*, I reflected on the preliminary work of the Economic Task Force, suggesting that it is imperative for national, regional, and state associations across disciplines to collaborate on this issue by working together to advocate for policymakers to place a higher priority on funding for higher education. This essay focuses more directly on academic workload, an element that has become enmeshed in the economic challenges colleges and universities face. It is relevant to note that this academic year, I have transitioned into an administrative position outside of the Communication discipline and now serve as Interim Director of the School of Teacher Education at Western Kentucky University. This affords me a unique position from which to address this issue, blending a faculty and administrative perspective that crosses disciplinary lines.

At the 2018 CSCA conference, the Economic Task Force brainstormed about problems that were surfacing nationally in higher education. Academic workload emerged as an issue, including the changing expectations for faculty members—rising expectations for tenure and promotion, an elevated emphasis on external funding, and increasing student enrollment without a corresponding increase in staffing. Doing more with less weaves itself into the fabric of every decision by administrators, which subsequently impacts faculty workload.

One of the primary themes the task force identified centered around costs and cuts occurring at academic institutions, many of which have direct implications for academic workload. Cuts associated with lost tenure-track lines (including cutting faculty lines when faculty members leave/retire), program cuts (enabling institutions to cut tenure-track faculty), and combining program areas (whether they have natural connections or not)—all of these tactics dramatically affect academic workload. Class sizes and course loads increase because of reduced staffing. In addition to higher caps for class sizes and additional teaching responsibilities (in some cases for

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At a time when salary increases are “lean” or “frozen,” academic workload increases can have a dramatic impact on faculty morale. Faculty often feel there is little value placed on what they do or on their professional identity.

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no additional pay), research expectations have also increased at both R1 institutions (including expectations for grant dollars) and comprehensive universities.

In 2018, Barbra Teater and Natasha Mendoza reported academic workload research findings in the *Journal of Social Work Education*. Their research pointed to the need to rebalance faculty workload expectations across teaching, service, and research. Interestingly, the researchers identified service as the primary area on which faculty spent more time than expected. Though this study took place in Australia, faculty in most locales can identify with the challenges raised by increased service expectations. In fact, Chancellor Blank referenced earlier noted that faculty have a variety of service tasks and in some cases departmental administrative responsibilities such as advising, recruiting, and even budget oversight. When such responsibilities and expectations, even those that are minor in nature, are added to faculty workload across these three realms, it can cause faculty to feel that something needs to give, especially in a time when there may be little given back in terms of compensation or course release for these added responsibilities.

I will “switch hats” here for a moment. The transition from faculty to administration has certainly reshaped my view on academic workload in some ways. It has become clear in my initial months in administration that the workload of our faculty continues to be stretched as a result of a variety of fiscal realities. While my hope and efforts have been to enhance our faculty’s work-life, the reality of the present context leads me more often than desired to add to their plates as opposed to easing an already heavy workload.

One of our faculty members commented in an end-of-the-semester reflection exercise: “The workload continues to increase and there does not seem to be any stopping in sight. New responsibilities keep coming and nothing is taken away.” Regrettably, this comment could likely have been written by almost any faculty member,

in any discipline, at any higher education institution right now. As a new administrator, I wish my response started with something more positive than this: “In the current fiscal situation in which we find ourselves...” I share my response to this faculty member’s comment to illustrate that administrators recognize the “pain points” faculty encounter. My experience thus far is that answers and solutions are neither easy nor readily available. At a time when salary increases are “lean” or “frozen,” academic workload increases can have a dramatic impact on faculty morale. Faculty often feel there is little value placed on what they do or on their professional identity.

In my presidential spotlight article in *Communication Studies*, I highlighted three overarching potential solution areas that the Economic Task Force had identified: collaboration and connection, value promotion, and political/advocacy work. Each of these areas is critically important for consideration by academic associations and academic institutions. To more directly address academic workload challenges here, I outline two relevant ideas.

First, department chairs play an integral role with respect to faculty workload. While workload decisions/negotiations need to reflect larger institutional norms, if students’ production hours and needs/demands for courses are met, there is some room for flexibility in faculty course load. In a 2013 custom research brief for the Education Advisory Board in Washington, DC, addressing faculty workload at public universities, Ashley Greenberg and Sarah Moore reported that some universities try to maintain flexible workload policies that allow department chairs to determine personalized workload expectations for each faculty member. While the report notes a norm of three three-credit courses per semester for faculty across the universities included, it also mentions that decentralizing the workload and moving toward flexible workload policies enables the department chair and faculty members to maximize the strengths of each faculty member.

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Being transparent about what certainly feels like “overwhelming challenges” at times is crucial, but it is equally important to have open dialogue about how we can work within those challenges to navigate them together.

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Another common approach universities are implementing is “measuring faculty productivity through student-to-faculty ratios.” According to Greenberg and Moore, “these measures of productivity” can become a means to “determine funding and position reallocation for departments.” While the move away from the number of courses taught to student-to-faculty ratios can add fairness to faculty workload by accounting for the number of students each faculty member teaches and/or advises, it also can have potential detrimental effects in times of financial crisis. Too much emphasis on student-to-teacher ratio can devalue faculty research and service, both of which are incredibly important to the individual success of the faculty member, as well as to the university. Balance of these considerations is both essential and contextual.

Second, in times of scarce resources, profound change in higher education, and a frequently increased faculty workload, exploring ways to enhance faculty morale is critical. In one effort to address morale, as well as to support continued faculty professional growth amidst budget cuts, I am meeting individually with each faculty member in the school to listen to their challenges and concerns, and to learn about how the leadership might be able to better assist them with the work they value. This approach was outlined in 2012 by Tom Green and Mary Miller in *Servant Leadership in Hard Times*. In the foreword to the book, Dr. Kent Keith (CEO) wrote, “When the challenges seemed overwhelming [at Delphi Brake Assembly] and there were no plans or roadblocks to fall back on,” the leadership “used servant leadership principles to connect with their fellow employees, develop plans and strategies, and move forward together.” Being transparent about what certainly feels like “overwhelming challenges” at times is crucial, but it is equally important to have open dialogue about how we can work within those challenges to navigate them together. We are having focused conversations on the individual level about how to be strategic with scarce resources to best promote faculty success and balance while simultaneously serving the needs of our students.

As part of the conversations about how we can best navigate the present fiscal reality in our university’s context, we are talking directly about how department leadership can assist with faculty workload. While our present circumstances do not allow for a decrease in course load, we are collaborating to identify ways to innovatively support faculty work. Guided by the principles outlined in *Servant Leadership in Hard Times*, I am listening to faculty members to learn from their perspectives about how changes to their work-life and some of the fiscal realities we face affect them individually. What can leadership do to better facilitate their growth during these challenging times? I have also asked what aspects of being a faculty member they currently find most rewarding; I find hope in the fact that every faculty member, even in these demanding times, has identified elements of their work that they still find rewarding.

My hope is to find creative ways to assist faculty with some of the additional responsibilities that have been added to their workload, and to help them find ways to enhance the work they most value. As an administrator, while I cannot honor every request or idea (fiscal constraints and students’ needs prevent that), we are identifying ways to better utilize current resources to support faculty and to be more efficient with faculty time. We are reducing the number of meetings and better utilizing student workers and graduate assistants in meaningful ways to support and assist faculty members. It has also been important to include faculty voices in how we can better manage our current budget in ways that might better support professional development and individual faculty work.

In discussing the increase in faculty workload in *Times Higher Education* in 2016, William Locke emphasized the critical importance of developing opportunities for faculty amidst challenging times. While workload has increased, finding ways to help faculty members grow professionally within these parameters is critically important; finding value in both current and new responsibilities has the potential to improve morale.

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We as Communication scholars know the importance of context, dialogue, relationships and connections, organizational culture, and rhetorical power. We need to be leaders in a collective movement to address the economic challenges higher education faces...

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The economic challenges we face are real. And, they are painful for both faculty and administration. However, such challenges also force us to re-evaluate what we most value and to strategize about how to streamline our efforts in ways that utilize resources more effectively.

We also must work collectively across disciplines, universities, and associations to reverse the downward trend of economic resources devoted to higher education. Faculty and administrators alike need to remember we are in this fiscal battle together. As I live this transition from faculty to administration, I better recognize that if we draw disciplinary battle lines to protect “our own,”

cast blame on administrators (e.g., heartless, out-of-touch administrators), or criticize faculty (“all faculty” do is complain), it will be difficult, if not impossible, to address the economic quagmire hire education faces going forward.

We as Communication scholars know the importance of context, dialogue, relationships and connections, organizational culture, and rhetorical power. We need to be leaders in a collective movement to address the economic challenges higher education faces, whether that be in addressing issues such as academic workload, the contingent faculty workforce, or other workforce concerns addressed in this issue of *Spectra*. ■



**BLAIR THOMPSON** is Interim Director of the School of Teacher Education at Western Kentucky University, where he previously served as an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication. Thompson served as the President of the Central States Communication Association in 2017–18. Thompson’s ongoing research focuses on analyzing school crisis communication at the P-12 level, exploring instructional dialectics, studying student academic support at the university level, and examining parent-teacher communication at the P-12 level.

# The Struggle of Being a Racial Minority in the Academy

By Marnel Niles Goins, Ph.D., with Leticia Williams, Ph.D.

I attended my first Western States Communication Association Convention (WSCA) in 2010 and vividly remember feeling out of place because there were very few Black people in attendance. I was a member of the Legislative Assembly and expected to attend the evening meeting; however, I got lost, arrived late, and found the doors to the meeting room closed. At the time, I didn't know many people in the association. I was so embarrassed that I didn't even open the meeting room door; instead, I turned around and hurriedly retreated back to my hotel room. My experience as the "Other" epitomizes the reality for underrepresented populations in the academy. According to the National Center

for Education Statistics, full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions in Fall 2016 were more than 75 percent white, among all ranks, leaving few spaces for me to see other faculty of color.

Two years after my initial experience at WSCA, I received an email from Lisa Flores, a former Past President of WSCA, who asked me if I'd consider running for First Vice-President of the association. After weeks of hesitation, I submitted my nomination. I lost big time. This became a pivotal moment in my academic career. The sting of losing lasted a day, but the idea that a prominent member of WSCA recognized my presence and recommended me for a leadership position stayed with me. As a result, I opened my online calendar and



marked the month and year when I would again run for First Vice-President of WSCA. Over the next eight years, I nominated myself for a number of positions within WSCA and the National Communication Association (NCA). Currently, I have the honor of serving as both President-Elect of WSCA (the first Black person to hold this position), and Chair of NCA's Finance Committee.

I've attempted to replicate my experience by intentionally noticing other people of color at conventions and inviting them to be active participants in their regional and/or national Communication associations. However, my experience is uncommon, as there are a number of faculty of color and traditionally underrepresented populations in the academy who are appreciated primarily for

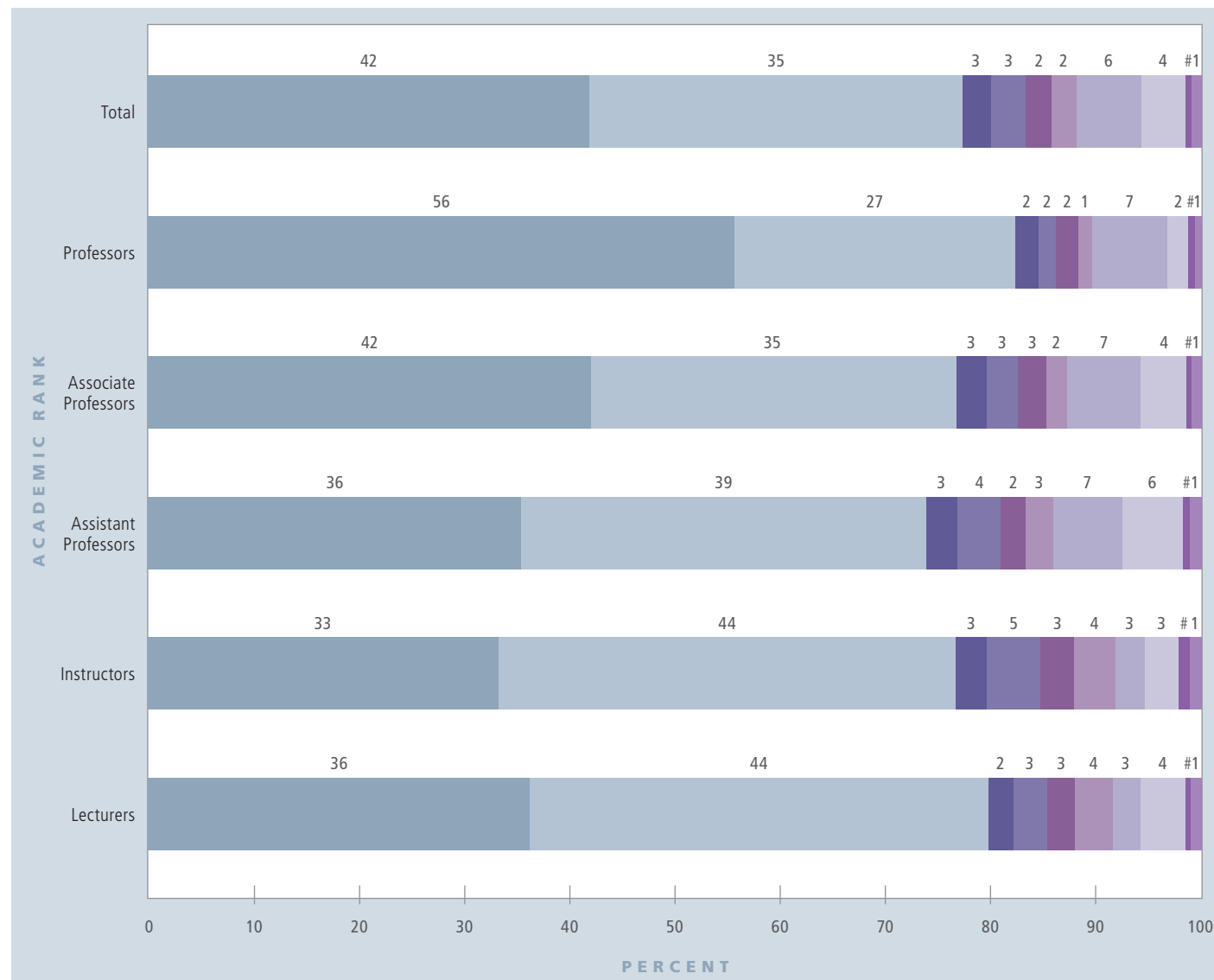
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My experience as the "Other" epitomizes  
the reality for underrepresented  
populations in the academy.

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fulfilling a role and increasing their institution's diversity numbers, but are rarely invited into the conversation or recommended for leadership positions at their institutions.

Percentage Distribution of Full-time Faculty in Degree-granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Academic Rank, Race/Ethnicity, and Sex, Fall 2015



■ White Male    ■ Black Male    ■ Hispanic Male    ■ Asian/Pacific Islander Male    ■ American Indian/Alaska Native  
■ White Female    ■ Black Female    ■ Hispanic Female    ■ Asian/Pacific Islander Female    ■ Two or More Races

# Rounds to zero.  
 Note: Breakouts by sex excluded for faculty who were American Indian/Alaska Native and of Two or More Races because the percentages were 1 percent or less. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Estimates are based on full-time faculty whose race/ethnicity was known. Detail may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.  
 Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), IPEDS Spring 2016, Human Resources component, Fall Staff section. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 315.20.

### CHALLENGES FACING TRADITIONALLY MARGINALIZED FACULTY

The challenges facing diverse faculty have been written about extensively and discussed anecdotally. It has consistently been found that academic spaces are not colorblind and instead reify the same racist and sexist structures that they claim to vehemently oppose. For example, Black females at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) experience racial fatigue and are underprivileged, undervalued, and underappreciated, resulting in both mental and physical exhaustion. In other words, our institutions expect us to overextend ourselves more than our White counterparts do, particularly in the area of service, without receiving a salary increase, reduction in course load, or even an acknowledgement of our sacrifice.

Another major challenge is the sense of belonging that historically underrepresented faculty often lack at their institutions. However, a lack of belonging goes beyond a general feeling of loneliness or not receiving an invitation to dinner. Instead, it means that even after being hired, faculty who are racial or ethnic minorities feel that their department's commitment to diversity was momentary. As traditionally underrepresented faculty, we are expected to conform to Eurocentric scholarship and logic; as such, our teaching is critiqued more heavily by both students and faculty, and our scholarship is excluded from major journals within the Communication discipline. Our applications for tenure and promotion are criticized and rejected as a result. Yet, we are expected to remain docile, because White guilt is defensive, vengeful, unforgiving, and dangerous to our academic careers.

### AN INVITATION TO OUR TABLE

There are strategies to begin to confront these challenges and experiences. Transforming how we hire faculty presents a meaningful opportunity to increase diversity in the academy. The all-too-familiar sequence of events often goes like this: institutions and departments discuss the difficulty in finding faculty of color in certain areas within the Communication discipline. To combat this difficulty, search committees email their calls for faculty positions to NCA Caucuses, in hopes that they will reach a diverse set of applicants. Search committee members

feel a sense of satisfaction that underrepresented groups will feel invited and welcomed in the academy and at their institution. Few people from minority groups apply for the position, but they are not invited to campus because they "are not as qualified," resulting in another white person joining the faculty. Reasons that prevent diverse faculty hires include organizational structures, institutional needs, and personal biases.

Beyond these practices that inhibit the hiring of historically marginalized faculty, institutions must consider how to create campus cultures that are more inclusive of underrepresented populations in the academy. After proactively recruiting and hiring diverse faculty, colleges and universities must provide resources to support and help new faculty in navigating the academy. One of these resources is mentoring, which is a cornerstone, particularly for early career faculty of color. Mentorship can be central for early career faculty of color who are navigating the tenure process and dealing with marginalization, overwhelming service commitments, and the burden of being perceived as less qualified, less competent, and less tenurable. If diverse faculty do not have mentors to guide them through the "unwritten" rules of the tenure process, they will be subject to mental, physical, and spiritual tolls that can negatively impact their mental and emotional health. In the same vein, universities should develop formal funding practices (e.g., mentorship grant programs) to support virtual and in-person mentoring for faculty of color, and also count membership on support groups, which can include a form of mentorship, as a form of service for faculty applying for tenure advancement. Ultimately, there are several opportunities to foster mentoring, which is critical to equipping diverse faculty with the knowledge and resources they need to address career challenges.

It is important for traditionally marginalized faculty to be bold and continue to break glass ceilings. In fact, Shirley Chisholm, the nation's first Black female presidential candidate, once said, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." Carrying this figurative folding chair is exhausting, and it places the burden of change solely on the underrepresented group. As an alternative, historically underrepresented faculty should be given

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Let us invite majority groups to *our* table so that our ideas can be heard, our structures can be observed, and true collaborations between traditionally marginalized faculty and majority faculty can be established.

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It is imperative that faculty of color feel empowered to share and implement their perspectives and ideas; that they feel they are valued members of their departments and institutions.

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a permanent seat at the table. Even better, let us invite majority groups to *our* table so that our ideas can be heard, our structures can be observed, and true collaborations between traditionally marginalized faculty and majority faculty can be established. Although it is beneficial for diverse faculty to coordinate with one another and establish support groups or meetings to discuss their experiences with overcoming challenges, this can also be a “Band-Aid solution,” which further indicates why faculty leaders and administrators must also be included in this effort. This would represent a more comprehensive solution to the challenge of diversity in the academy.

Majority faculty should also consider their own roles and be willing to learn and adjust on multiple levels (i.e., course syllabi, faculty hiring, what is viewed as traditional or foundational to the discipline), instead of making the assumption that implicit bias affects only *some* majority faculty. Brian Heisterkamp, in his heartfelt presidential address at the 2019 WSCA Convention, charged members of the audience with examining their individual biases and not viewing themselves as exempt from or immune to bias. He challenged the audience to specifically ask, “Are we unconsciously reproducing social structures

that perpetuate oppression?” and “How do we disqualify ourselves from interacting with people we perceive as different?” This reflection should be uncomfortable and also should result in active changes in behavior.

In order to further understand solutions to the challenges facing underrepresented populations in the academy, colleges, universities, and institutions (e.g., the U.S. Department of Education) should report the attrition rates of diverse faculty and examine why they leave the academy. Such information can provide the foundation administrators, policy makers, and others need to effectively implement solutions that both increase and maintain diversity in the academy. The effects of the solutions won’t be immediate, but they should be long-lasting.

#### **EMPOWERMENT FOR THE MAJORITY AND DISCOMFORT FOR THE MINORITY**

In 1968, the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Relevance was formed to serve the Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association). The Committee found that the Communication discipline neglected the experiences of people of color and overtly excluded minority groups from leadership within the association. These findings resulted in the formation of the Black Caucus, whose founding members were Cecil Blake, Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, Marcia Clinkscales, Melbourne Cummings, Jack Daniel, Lucia Hawthorne, Marsha Houston, Charles Hurst, Jr., Venita Kelley, Lyndrey Niles, Dorthy Pennington, and Orlando Taylor. The Black Caucus celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the 2018 NCA Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah. To this day, NCA’s Black Caucus and African American Communication and Culture Division serve the association formally at our Annual Convention, but also informally in that they represent safe spaces for scholars of color. Fifty years after its inception, the Caucus still advocates for the inclusion and equity of its members.

Other organizations like the Black Caucus are needed to address the marginalized experiences of traditionally

underrepresented faculty in the academy. It is imperative that faculty of color feel empowered to share and implement their perspectives and ideas; that they feel they are valued members of their departments and institutions. We are competent and want our co-workers to believe in our competence, as well. An additional solution to hiring and retaining minority faculty in academia is to consider *and believe* our multiple views, as it is particularly important for majority faculty to begin to fully understand the experiences of traditionally underrepresented faculty.

All faculty must continue to discuss and implement changes around these challenges for diverse faculty. Institutions, and particularly faculty and administrators, should continue to implement strategies to diminish these challenges and value the personal knowledge and experiences that historically marginalized faculty members bring to their pedagogy and scholarship. It is my hope that the experiences of underrepresented faculty in the academy will improve, though I do not expect these uncomfortable changes and improvements to occur quickly. ■



**MARNEL NILES GOINS** is Professor of Communication at California State University, Fresno, where she serves as Graduate Coordinator for the master’s program and teaches courses in Organizational and Small Group Communications. Niles Goins is Chair of the National Communication Association’s Finance Committee and President-Elect of the Western States Communication Association.



**LETICIA WILLIAMS** is a Postdoctoral Fellow for the NOAA Center for Atmospheric Sciences and Meteorology (NCAS-M) at Howard University. Her current research interests include science communication, technology, and media, and she explores the public’s understanding of science, how scientists communicate their research, and the role of communication in increasing awareness of issues related to STEM education and diversity.

# GRADUATE EMPLOYEES Need Your Leadership

By Katie Brown, M.P.H., and William Howell, M.A.

**T**he dean of our graduate school often reminds us that our employment (although he never uses the term “employment,” because we are “assistants”) is an “apprenticeship model.” This conjures a story from our youth—*Johnny Tremain*—about a Revolutionary War-era teenager who apprentices with a Boston silversmith. Like ours, his work is highly skilled, time-intensive, and exacting. His boss will eventually turn over the business to young Johnny, enabling him to prosper.

This isn’t the Revolutionary War, and we’re certainly not teenagers. But we’d like to focus on another difference between Johnny Tremain and us: the degree to which we can work “the business” as our predecessors worked it. Our argument: We can’t work the same way as our predecessors, because “the business” has fundamentally changed, and restructuring the academic profession must begin with graduate labor.

According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), since faculty now on the verge of retirement began teaching, the number of full-time, non-tenure-track faculty has increased by roughly 259 percent; simultaneously, part-time faculty have increased by 286 percent. The number of graduate employees has increased by 123 percent. The number of tenure-track faculty has increased by just 23 percent.

Different analysis, same conclusion: The Economic Policy Institute found that tenured and tenure-track faculty increased by just 4.8 percent in the decade between fall 2005 and fall 2015. That was less than overall employment growth, which was 5.9 percent. The number of graduate student employees? It grew at three times that rate—by 16.7 percent.

In 2017–2018, the average salary for full professors was \$104,820. That could pay for two lecturers or instructors, on



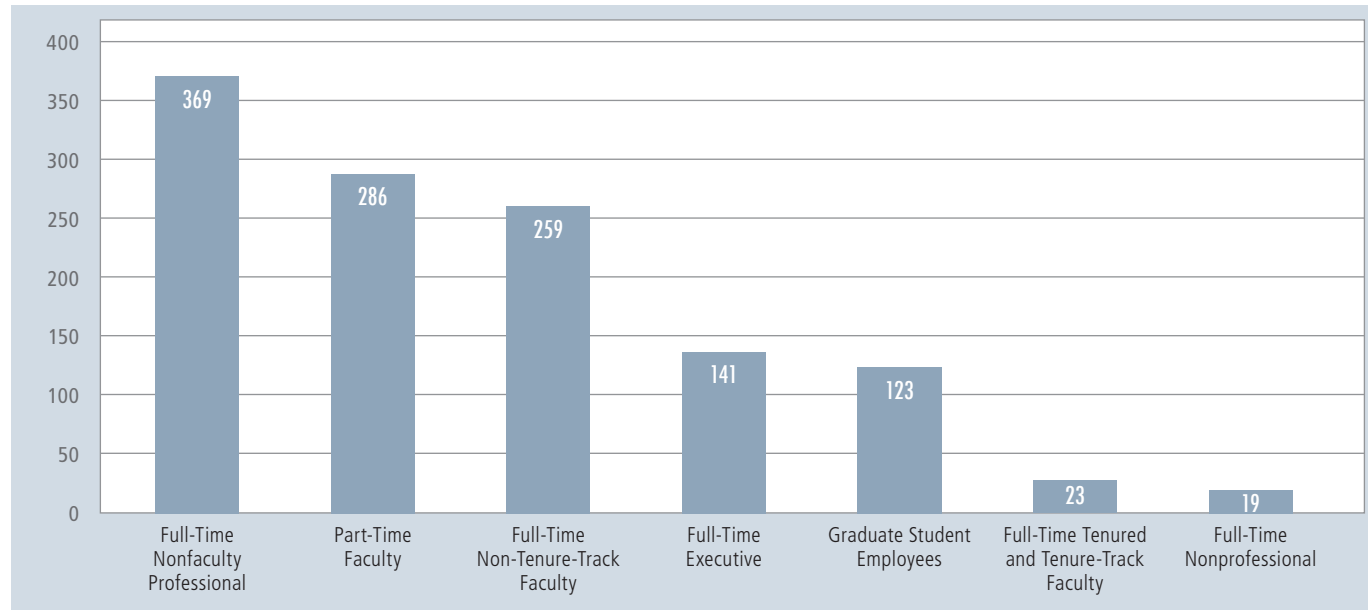
average, or seven doctoral-seeking graduate employees. It could pay for 12 master’s-seeking graduate employees, whose stipends averaged well below the federal poverty level.

And, take note: The vast majority of masters- and doctorate-seeking graduate students *are not employed*, meaning they have nothing coming in and, with rising tuition rates, more and more going out. Without the tuition remission (which often accompanies employment),

they’re spending thousands each year on tuition—and then there are fees and supplies, and rent, and utilities, and food. And health care? And retirement?

AAUP notes that retirement security “has drastically eroded” since the recession, and that most part-time faculty lack *any* retirement benefits. We are both in our early 30s, with nothing to show, in terms of retirement savings, for our almost six years of graduate employment.

Percentage Change in the Number of Employees in Higher Education Institutions, by Category of Employee, 1975 and 1976 to 2011



Note: Percentage growth is from 1975 for full-time faculty members and from 1976 for all other categories. In 1976, graduate student employees included both full- and part-time employees; in 2011 all graduate student employees were defined as part-time employees.

Source: American Association of University Professors, [www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/files/2014%20salary%20report/Figure%201.pdf](http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/files/2014%20salary%20report/Figure%201.pdf). For 1975 and 1976, National Center for Education Statistics, *Fall Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, 1993 and Digest of Education Statistics, 2001*. For 2011, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Human Resources Survey 2011–12, Fall Staff component. Provisional data file. Tabulation by John W. Curtis.

To make matters worse, graduate student debt is ballooning. Graduate and professional degree-seeking students account for nearly 40 percent of federal education loans, despite representing only 17 percent of students. We borrow, on average, three times as much as our undergraduate counterparts. The number of graduate students borrowing at least \$75,000 has doubled in recent years. Add that to debt accrued during our undergraduate education (the average is \$30,000) and you’ve got a recipe for disaster.

In a true apprenticeship model, taking on such debt would not be so risky—upon graduation, we would enjoy well-paying, tenure-track positions, or jobs in industry where our degrees would afford us appropriate compensation. Not now.

You see the problematic chain reaction. Graduate employees stand on an increasingly shoddy financial foundation. While, like young Johnny Tremain, we once anticipated stable jobs down the road—jobs through which we could regain our financial footing and make up for lost ground—we instead face the prospect of earning half what we expected, with far less long-term job security, greater debt, and no retirement infrastructure.

So, the future is bad, but so is the present. Graduate employees confront a host of well-documented

workplace issues, from working beyond the maximum amount allowed by campus policies, to being subject to intellectual property theft. The advisors with whom we’re supposed to “apprentice” are often absent—and in research fields particularly, absence might be better than the in-person intimidation that occurs. We don’t need to elaborate these here—either you acknowledge that, generally speaking, graduate employees labor under mediocre circumstances, or you deny the ample evidence offered by multiple, credible sources. At this point, it’s kind of like denying climate change.

The most egregious evidence of these circumstances is, of course, graduate student mental health. A widely cited study from last spring found that graduate students were six times more likely than the general population to experience anxiety and depression. A more recent 2018 study of elite colleges found (this is a direct quote from *The Atlantic*) “that many Ph.D. students’ mental-health troubles are exacerbated, if not caused, by their graduate-education experiences.” On our own campus, a student group in another department surveyed the mental health of graduate students in that department. More than half of the respondents indicated that they had experienced anxiety, depression, and trouble sleeping.

Average Amount Paid per Graduate Teaching Assistant, by Category and Affiliation, 2017–2018, in U.S. Dollars

	ALL COMBINED	PUBLIC	PRIVATE-INDEPENDENT	RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED
Category I (Doctoral)	15,577	15,565	15,297	16,215
Category IIA (Master’s)	9,554	9,692	5,007	10,193
Category IIB (Baccalaureate)	8,871	13,260	9,072	5,620
All Combined	11,448	12,430	10,399	11,627

Note: This table is based on 225 reporting institutions.

Source: American Association of University Professors, *The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2017-18*.

The issues reported by graduate students who identify as women in that department were notably worse.

Clearly, graduate labor must be reconceptualized to attend to the personal futures of graduate employees, the undergraduates they educate, and the academy more broadly.

This reconceptualization must begin with a more equitable distribution of wealth in the academy. Here’s a stark example from our own university: The combined annual income of our chief financial officer, chief academic officer, and graduate dean equals what 55 average graduate student employees earn. We recently fired our football coach, and paying out his contract will drain the university of the same amount of money that 255 graduate employees earn over the course of a year. Three years ago, we fired the *previous* football coach to the tune of what 155 graduate employees earn in a year. Universities complain about budgets, but there is money when there needs to be money.

Perhaps universities are spending money in the wrong places. Administrative bloat is as common on our campus as elsewhere. When professors become administrators, their salaries increase—usually permanently, even when they leave their administrative positions—and they often create whole new offices that make the university function in completely new ways. Some of that might be worth the loss of instructor capacity, but now that capacity must be filled. Fulfilling *basic* teaching and research functions now costs more money, necessitating graduate employees, postdocs, or adjuncts who are paid as little as possible.

A university educates students and conducts research, and its budget should reflect those priorities. It should redistribute wealth—yes, we know that is a loaded phrase—from those who do not teach or conduct research to those who do, giving our front-line teachers and researchers the financial stability they need to do their jobs exceptionally well.

We must also make space for graduate student employees to be both good students and good employees, without sabotaging their personal lives. Unfortunately, this must begin with administrators being honest about the fact that their universities overwork graduate employees. If we can’t have that honesty, curricula must be reshaped around an overworked graduate workforce that is incapable of meeting our own dean’s expectation that graduate employees also “be working at least 40 hours a week as a student.” There are only so many hours in a week. Graduate employees need good physical and mental health support, paid sick time (though even *unpaid* sick time would be an improvement for many), family leave time, and affordable childcare. And, if academia expects us to publish, present at conferences, and do service work, it must support those expectations with time and financial support.

These conditions already exist at some U.S. colleges and universities. Our peers at such schools earn a living wage for a reasonable workload. Their institutional leaders train them to be good teachers and researchers, support their development as humans, and treat them as colleagues.

If the academy is going to stay the current course—relying more and more on adjuncts and visiting professors, and adapting course catalogs to reflect the shifting interests of new students—institutions must find ways to keep qualified people nearby, supported, and in reserve. One scenario: Institution A doesn’t need three sections of a class, just one—but it is near Institutions B and C, which also need one section of the same class. Why not collectively create support systems (e.g., benefits, sabbatical, research funding) that mirror what once existed in a robustly tenured academy?

To our thinking, unions are an ideal system. Unions lump together classes of similarly situated workers and enable systems that stabilize those workers (retirement, leave time, health insurance, etc.). If higher education administrators would voluntarily embrace this solution



We need administrators and tenured faculty to treat us as legitimate professional colleagues. We are comparably trained, comparably passionate about our scholarship and teaching, and comparably interested in keeping higher education robust and accessible.

rather than continually fighting it, higher education unions could facilitate the transition of academics from graduate employees to adjuncts, and even into tenured positions (should we be so fortunate). Hate unions? We're open to hearing other ideas, but the itch needs to be scratched.

Finally, we need administrators and tenured faculty to treat us as legitimate professional colleagues. We are

comparably trained, comparably passionate about our scholarship and teaching, and comparably interested in keeping higher education robust and accessible. If we were smart enough to be admitted to your colleges and your programs, we are smart enough to honestly represent what we need. Do not dismiss us out of hand or treat us as enemies. The future of the academy depends on it. ■



**KATIE BROWN** earned a Master of Public Health (M.P.H.) degree from the Department of Behavioral and Community Health at the University of Maryland and a B.A. in Anthropology and American Studies from the University of Maryland. Brown is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Communication. Her research examines digitally mediated and embodied disruptions of systemic white supremacy.



**WILLIAM HOWELL** holds a B.A. in Political Science from Macalester College and an M.A. in Communication from the University of Maryland. He spearheaded outreach and engagement efforts for political campaigns and advocacy efforts in Minnesota and Oregon before beginning pursuit of his Ph.D. Howell studies how entertainment rhetoric impacts U.S. citizens' political participation, political identity, and perceptions of political issues and actors.

**Assistant Professor of Communication, School of Communication & Mass Media  
Northwest Missouri State University**

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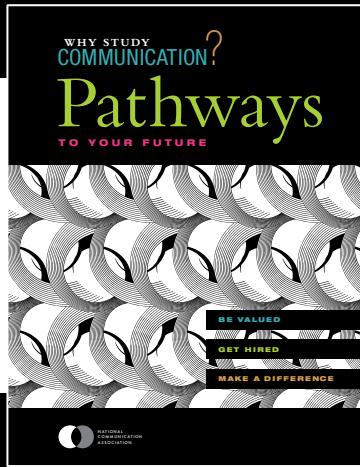
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