



Rhetorical Listening and Strategic Contemplation as Research Tools: Learning from Edwin Hopkins and Early Attempts at Labor Reform in Composition

Rebecca Gerdes-McClain
Columbus State University

Rebecca Gerdes-McClain is an Assistant Professor of English and the Director of First Year Composition at Columbus State University in Georgia. Her scholarly interests include the labor history of Composition and Rhetoric, feminist research methodologies, and Writing Program Administration.

Abstract

This paper is a personal and historical study of the labor conditions of composition teachers, in which I present the work of Edwin Hopkins, a professor at the University of Kansas from 1889 to 1937, who collected data on composition teaching between 1909 and 1915 in an attempt to reform the labor conditions of composition teachers. The paper is necessarily personal because I employ rhetorical listening, developed by Krista Ratcliffe, and strategic contemplation, developed by Jaqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch, as research methods for engaging with historical and archival research. Both of these methods require careful analysis of my personal interests in and motivations for this research. This analysis of my personal interests and motivation takes two forms: (1) narrative vignettes of my own labor experiences, which I use to facilitate rhetorical listening, and (2) descriptive analyses of my reactions to my research, which document how strategic contemplation was enacted through my reflective practices. The reader should therefore be prepared for the paper to alternate

between readings of Hopkins' work and reflections on my own teaching and research. Using rhetorical listening and strategic contemplation, I evaluate Hopkins' strategies for reforming labor conditions in the early twentieth century and what they offer compositionists interested in reforming our current labor conditions. I focus particularly on Hopkins' attempts to persuade those outside the composition classroom that labor conditions in those classrooms were untenable and directly related the "problem" of unsatisfactory student writing, looking for resonances—my term for connections and similarities—between attempts to reform modern labor issues in the composition classroom and Hopkins' strategies. Ultimately I argue that attempts at labor reform need to consider historical case studies, like Hopkins', when strategizing ways to improve the teaching conditions of writing instructors. Too often, attempts to improve labor conditions surrounding the teaching of writing ignore the rich and complex labor history of our field.

This paper is a personal and historical study of the labor conditions of composition teachers in which I analyze the work and legacy of Edwin Hopkins, a professor at the University of Kansas from 1889 to 1937, through close readings of: his published works, archival sources at the University of Kansas, scholarly histories of First Year Composition, my own lived experiences, and my emotional reactions to this research. Too often, contemporary attempts at labor reform ignore our history. In this article I demonstrate that historical case studies offer insights that can be usefully and strategically deployed to support contemporary efforts to reform the labor conditions of composition teachers. Hopkins is a significant figure in Composition Studies due to the fact he was (arguably) the first to collect and publish data on the labor required to teach First Year Composition, particularly in terms of the labor required to respond to student writing (Popken 631, "Edwin Hopkins"). He also collected data surrounding the costs of teaching First Year Composition with the goal of comparing those costs to the instructional costs of other disciplines. Hopkins believed that other faculty members, as well as most administrators, did not understand the labor conditions of composition instructors. He also believed that if presented with hard data to support his arguments for reform, other faculty members and university administrators could no longer ignore the serious overburden he experienced firsthand. This burden, he believed, was physically and emotionally disastrous for composition instructors. Hopkins himself was a victim of this overwork, illustrated most dramatically during the 1919-1920 school year when he was unable to teach due to a nervous breakdown (Popken 630, "Edwin Hopkins").

Though Hopkins' research was often delayed by his labor conditions and the poor health brought on by those conditions, he collected an enormous amount of empirical data over the course of fifteen years and shaped it into the argument of *The Labor and Cost of the Teaching of English in Colleges and Secondary Schools with especial reference to English Composition* (Popken 632, "Edwin Hopkins"). The findings of the report were damning:

The committee report shows why [poor teaching happens]; it shows that under present average conditions of teaching English expression, workmen must choose between overwork and bad work; between spoiling their material or killing themselves; and the end for which the committee is striving is to place these painfully simple facts before the public so that the responsibility for the continuance of present conditions, if they must continue, may rest where it belongs. (Hopkins 70, "The Labor")

With the findings from this study in hand, Hopkins strove to alert those both inside and outside academia to labor conditions which he believed made achieving the goal of teaching students to write well impossible. In particular, he focused on the size of composition classes (often over 50 students), the total number of students a composition teacher taught a semester (at the beginning of his time at the University of Kansas teachers averaged 149 composition students, not including their other classes), and how these realities conflicted with best practices in the field (such as leaving personalized feedback for each student) (Hopkins 3-4, "Can Good"; Popken 621, 623, 634, "Edwin Hopkins"). Based on this data he also made concrete recommendations for rectifying the situation, arguing that teaching load should be determined not by number of classes but by number of students, and that composition should be reconceptualized as a "laboratory" class because of its emphasis on guided practice and frequent feedback instead of as a lecture class in which generalized instruction is seen as sufficient for student progress (Hopkins 5-6, "Can Good").¹

Despite Hopkins' commitment to composition pedagogy and improving the labor conditions of composition instructors, the following article focuses on understanding how and why his work failed to create lasting change. In particular, Hopkins' goals of reconceptualizing composition as a laboratory class and determining load by number of

¹ After 1870, three styles of teaching were considered common: the laboratory, the lecture, and the seminar. According to Robert Connors, "The laboratory was conceived as a specialized scientific instructional form" (140, "Composition"). When Hopkins argues that composition courses are laboratory classes, he is arguing they are not (or should not be) lecture classes because of the one-on-one instruction that ought to happen through feedback. This kind of personalized feedback and one-on-one attention is seen as more analogous to the "instructional form" of laboratory courses.

students were largely ignored by administrators after the publication of his work (Heyda 248). Hopkins' goals were complex and ambitious; he wanted nationwide reform, ideally on the both high school and college levels. In light of the scope of his goals, it is impossible to blame him for what he failed to achieve. His accomplishments—presenting his research results, making improvements on his own campus, and bringing scholarly attention to the crucial role of labor conditions in composition teaching—should not be dismissed or downplayed. Nevertheless, I argue that certain of his rhetorical decisions had problematic and unforeseen consequences that are instructive for contemporary composition teachers and scholars as we attempt to achieve our own brand of labor reform. Today, as we attempt to persuade administrations, students, and the general public that labor issues, like the increasing reliance on contingent labor or the constant pressure to raise course caps on composition courses, are related to the type and quality of instruction we can give, Hopkins' experiences can help us prepare for these debates by providing argumentative strategies we may wish to copy and appeals to suffering we may wish to avoid.

While analysis of Hopkins and his work comprises the bulk of this article, my personal experiences as a composition teacher, as well as my emotional responses to this research, are also included and analyzed. These personal reflections not only make explicit my own positionality and how it informs my research, they also offer insights inaccessible through traditional scholarship alone. To analyze these personal reflections I employ rhetorical listening, developed by Krista Ratcliffe, and strategic contemplation, developed by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch. Both methods require careful analysis of my personal interests in and motivations for this research. This analysis of my personal interests and motivation takes two forms: (1) narrative vignettes of my own labor experiences, which I use to facilitate rhetorical listening, and (2) descriptive analyses of my reactions to my research, which document how strategic contemplation was enacted through my reflective practices. The reader should therefore be prepared for the paper to alternate between readings of Hopkins' work and reflections on my own teaching and research. Using rhetorical listening and strategic contemplation, I evaluate Hopkins' strategies for reforming the labor conditions of composition teachers in the early twentieth century and what they offer compositionists interested in reforming our current labor conditions.

I focus particularly on Hopkins' attempts to persuade those outside the composition classroom that labor conditions in those classrooms were untenable and directly related to the "problem" of unsatisfactory student writing, looking for resonances—my term for connections and similarities—between attempts to reform modern labor issues in the composition classroom and Hopkins' strategies.² Ultimately, I argue that attempts at labor reform need to consider historical case studies like Hopkins' when strategizing ways to improve the labor conditions of writing instructors.

Feminist Revisionist Methodology: Rhetorical Listening and Strategic Contemplation

According to Ratcliffe's work in *Rhetorical Listening*, rhetorical listening is a tool for hearing the responses and experiences of another which helps the listener avoid the impulse to create immediate identification (19). Ratcliffe imagines this tool as primarily pedagogical, helping students to engage in difficult discussions, particularly conversations about race and gender. This method asks students to first name their own experiences and emotional reactions explicitly, and to then name the positions and experiences of the speaker. In the process of this naming, students are asked to avoid instinctively identifying with arguments and ideas and instead to allow ideas to exist alongside one another (Ratcliffe 32). By resisting the impulse to identify, the listener can begin to consciously sift through moments of both non-identification and identification. Ratcliffe uses metaphors of sound (hearing) and space (distance) to illustrate how rhetorical listening makes it possible to map the (dis)connections produced by such conversations, a process which makes previously obscured areas of overlap or disconnection visible. The "hearing" reflects how rhetorical listening can be used as an invention practice because new "voices" are made accessible to the listener. The metaphor of space highlights the different outcomes that become possible when difficult discussions are based on "distance" rather than identification (Ratcliffe 46). While Ratcliffe posits rhetorical listening as a teaching and composing skill, the space for difference it fosters allows historians of Composition and Rhetoric to balance their personal connections to research subjects with the distance necessary for thorough historical work. Using rhetorical listening, historians are not asked to ignore or mask their personal connections; instead, they are asked to listen to them in order to critically

² In a 2012 *CCC* article, "Remapping Revisionist Historiography," David Gold challenges revisionist historians in Composition and Rhetoric to explicitly articulate connections between their historical work and the major conversations happening in the field today (24). As such, one of the goals of this article is to illustrate the value of understanding Hopkins' history as the field wrestles with how create supportive labor conditions.

consider the ways in which those connections limit or enrich their research.

Because rhetorical listening invites researchers to think about the complicated interactions between self and research, strategic contemplation is particularly well-suited to work alongside it. According to Royster and Kirsch, in their book *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, strategic contemplation is a purposeful methodological technique which asks researchers to pause for intuition and unconscious thought in the hope that such ruminations will lead to new insights (86). They explain that:

Contemplative moments seem to be a driving force for many scholars who have reported not only on how they have found passion in their work (a spiritual dimension) but also on how they have made chance discoveries and traveled down unexpected paths [...]—all when they allowed themselves to pause, to wonder, to reflect, to see what else they might not have considered, and to articulate these moments in language. (Royster and Kirsch 86)

Strategic contemplation goes beyond simply thinking deeply about one's work. It is a methodological practice which supplements the hard work of gathering and analyzing research with the conscious choice to make time for unconscious thought. By inviting reflective thinking and following up on the leads that strategic contemplation suggests, researchers can deepen engagement and allow for new insights. While rhetorical listening requires researchers to grapple with the complexities of their connections and disconnections to their research, strategic contemplation “asks us to take as much into account as possible but to withhold judgment for a time and resist coming to closure too soon in order to make the time to invite creativity, wondering, and inspiration in the research process” (Royster and Kirsch 85). Together, these methods for engaging in research can push a researcher to notice different and additional connections and to make more complex arguments.

Attachment, Identification, and Scholarly Research

At their core, the methodologies I have just described ask researchers to name, and then critically consider, parts of the research process that are often unstated. Why are we, as individuals, drawn to particular questions, people, and theories? How have our personal experiences and interests shaped our reading of texts, sources, and situations? What assumptions and value systems underlie both our own inquiry and the creation of the texts we study? In the spirit of such questions, and of making explicit my experience of this research, in the following section I share both how I stumbled on Edwin Hopkins as a research subject and what about him that resonated with me.

When I first encountered Edwin Hopkins, I was looking for information about Barrett Wendell and Radcliffe College, or
Harvard's

composition program in the 1880s and 90s, with the goal of reconstructing Wendell's labor as a composition teacher. Recognized as an important figure in creating the current-traditional pedagogy that exponentially increased the labor required to teach rhetoric by advocating for frequent student writing and teacher feedback to that writing, I wanted to see how Wendell himself responded to student writing and to gain a clear sense of how much time he invested in that labor (Connors 111, "Overwork"). I was particularly interested in three things: the kinds of comments Wendell left for his students, his classroom pedagogy, and the overall labor conditions that influenced his work (such as the number of students he personally responded to a semester). The day I "found" Hopkins, I was tired and frustrated; none of my sources were giving me the information I wanted about Wendell. I noticed an unusual title, "Edwin Hopkins and the Costly Labor of Composition Teaching." The essay, written by Randall Popken,³ focuses on Edwin Hopkins, a teacher of composition in the early 20th century. The name was only vaguely familiar; I was suspicious that he was connected to my research on Wendell—after all, Hopkins was part of the next generation of composition teachers, working until roughly 1940 (Popken 619, "Edwin Hopkins"). While Wendell was part of the generation that created the First Year Composition course, Hopkins was part of the generation that followed, a generation in which First Year Composition became both ubiquitous on college campuses and dreaded by English professors who saw the class as a hell of mental drudgery and overwork (Connors 108, "Overwork").

Still, I scanned the first few pages: "[Hopkins'] ideal is that writing faculty should read their students' writing carefully and provide thoughtful commentary on it. Further, Hopkins promotes the individual conference" (Popken 621, "Edwin Hopkins"). I was surprised to see many of my own values represented so clearly and found myself wishing for a hard copy of the article to annotate. My reading slowed; I was no longer skimming: "As his career progressed, Hopkins ran headlong into the conflict between his sense of duty and the intense demands of his labor. No matter how many hours a day he spent and how much effort he put into his paper reading, for instance, he couldn't get everything done" (Popken 629, "Edwin Hopkins"). I thought of my psoriasis flaring up after a weeklong rush to respond to student papers; I thought of my Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMJ), and the painful swelling around my jaw that can leave me near tears if I grade too many essays in one sitting. Now, all my attention focused on the pages in front of me. I never found the connection to Barrett Wendell implicitly promised, but I had stopped reading for that. Something was reverberating inside me; I felt deeply drawn to Hopkins. In response, I printed off and annotated the

³ Published in the June 2004 *CCC*, Popken explores how Hopkins' pedagogical commitments and religious beliefs fueled his calls for labor reform in First Year Composition classrooms.

essay. Unable to connect it to my research on Wendell, I filed the essay away in my desk, labeling it with a sticky note: “Come back to this!” I underlined the words three times. Given my frenzied schedule, I should have been frustrated to lose an hour of my time. That hour could have been filled with lesson prep, grading, committee work, or research that would contribute to my current project—all the things pressing down on me relentlessly and endlessly. Instead, I felt energized.

In a matter of months I was traveling to the University of Kansas archives, intent on learning more about Hopkins. I had read his published works and located him in the histories of our field, but I wanted more. I wondered about his teaching and his daily life. I also read Hopkins’ personal journals, an unpublished manuscript of his theory of literary criticism, and other assorted papers. I was most interested in his journals, which he began keeping as a small boy and continued throughout this life. Hopkins’ journals were very business-like and compact. One page might contain entries for an entire week, with tight scrawl listing time markers and the day’s accomplishments, sometimes accompanied by brief commentary. I wrestled with his handwriting. One word in particular gave me trouble. It appeared over and over again. Usually, it followed “Classes and.” Sometimes there were elaborations about a topic, but the handwriting, the cramped pages, and the deterioration of the paper combined to baffle me. I recognized it was the same word: the same jutting “h” near the beginning, the same slope, the same general size. Finally, after nearly three hours it dawned on me. Chapel. Classes and chapel.⁴ Solving this riddle left me elated, as though I had cracked a code. Thumbing through his journals—seeing mentions of his wife, his teaching, his daily routines—Hopkins became very real to me. I imagined him as grandfatherly and felt fond of him in a personal way that surprised and, initially, unnerved me. What would it be like to research and write about a person that I felt connected to and even protective of?

As women and feminists make their mark on historical work in Composition and Rhetoric, they remind us that we should allow ourselves to feel “passionate attachments” to our research subjects (Royster 68). In “Reseeing and Redoing,” Liz Rohan argues, for instance, that “While traditional methods encourage critical distance from a subject, scholars [...] demonstrate that empathy and identification with a research subject can be integral to the research process; emotions can drive and inspire scholarly questions” (30). In her essay, Rohan talks about her own passionate attachment to her research subject Janette Miller.⁵ It motivates

⁴ When Hopkins began working at Kansas in 1889, chapel was only a nominally religious activity and served more as a daily assembly (Rudolph 75; 77).

⁵ Janette Miller (1879-1969), grew up in Detroit Michigan, where she worked as a librarian. She later became a missionary in Africa. Rohan encounters her journals decades later and comes to both identify with and resist elements of Miller’s experience (Rohan 233, “The Personal”).

her; it leads her to surprising sources and to patient insights; it helps her push for a lovingly honest assessment of a complicated and imperfect individual. Jacqueline Royster, in *Traces of a Stream*, notices a similar connection, but one she attributes to spiritual ancestors (87). For Royster, African American rhetors erased or minimized in traditional histories represent a legacy of thought she can place herself within. By rescuing and reconstructing their histories, she can more fully understand and position herself. She argues that “people who do intellectual work need to understand their ‘intellectual ancestry’” (265). Part of her attachment to her research subjects, then, is derived from her sense of their contributions to the world she currently inhabits. As a compositionist, understanding Aristotle and other important historical figures in rhetoric is certainly part of my intellectual ancestry. But what about my nearer ancestors, those teachers and thinkers of the past 150 years who also came before me? What about Edwin Hopkins—his messy handwriting and passionate attempts to reform the labor conditions of composition teachers?

What was it about Hopkins that reverberated in me? How can I understand my connection to this man separated from me by time and place? Why is understanding that connection important, not just to me but to others in the field? Early in this project, I feared my deep identification might be a hindrance. I saw our connections clearly and felt confident in my ability to develop them. Would I also be able to remain open to our differences, to the distance created by different historical contexts, different genders, and different values? How could I tease the purely personal connections from the professional ones? With these questions in mind, I applied Ratcliffe’s concept of rhetorical listening to what I had found on Hopkins. Ratcliffe explains that “rhetorical listening signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” (1). Thus, I could use a stance of openness and a willingness to hear difference, as well as connection, as a method for invention. For this research project I wanted to push past my instinctive identification to better understand our distances and differences, while also investigating where my identifications might take me. Because Hopkins’ work, both as a WPA and as a champion for labor reform, takes up key values of the field, understanding how labor concerns have evolved in the history FYC is important. Amy Heckathorn, theorizing the value of shared history to a discipline in “Moving Toward a Group Identity,” argues that “Other than documenting and legitimizing the work of former WPAs, a history can and should inform current and future practices. Modern WPAs benefit greatly from the theorizing and evolution of a disciplinary identity” (211). Hopkins’ research is dedicated to documenting the early labor conditions of our discipline, conditions that certainly affected the creation of our “disciplinary identity.” In this way, part of what Hopkins offers me and, I argue, the field, is an in-depth look at the reality of teaching early in our history as well as a sense of our labor history. Many of the resonances that exist between Hopkins and I are personal, but others are signs and symptoms of engaging with layers of responsibility—as a teacher, scholar,

and administrator—and remain key preoccupations of our discipline. With these layers of personal and professional identification in mind, I returned to Popken’s essay on Hopkins, the one which had so enamored me, and consciously worked to apply rhetorical listening.

Where did I hear identification? Where did I see myself and my concerns, as well as the concerns of my field, reflected in Hopkins’ history? Popken goes to great lengths to document the material conditions that contributed to Hopkins’ dissatisfaction with the labor conditions surrounding the teaching of writing, reporting that in the fall of 1890, Hopkins taught two composition courses with a combined total of 119 students, as well as three literature classes (Popken 623, “Edwin Hopkins”). Personally, I immediately identified with the overwork described here; I’ve also taught five and six classes in a semester. Like Hopkins, my response to demoralizing labor conditions was a new kind of awareness, a thrill of electricity jolting my consciousness: I must do... something about labor in my field. Professionally, the issue of overwork is a pressing reality the field discusses in its journals and professional organizations, though today the culprit is more likely to be adjunct labor spread among several institutions than lecture-sized classes.⁶ Laura Micciche, in *Doing Emotion*, identifies this problem as one prevalent among academics generally: “Surely, disappointment in relation to working conditions and employment opportunities is one of the most familiar contexts for diminished hope and cutting cynicism among academics” (73). While labor conditions in academia are often, as Micciche points out, disappointing, labor conditions in Composition and Rhetoric are recognized by most as particularly unpleasant, largely because of the ways our writing heavy curriculum and vulnerability to contingent labor leave us vulnerable to unproductive labor demands. Thus, today scholars like Marc Bousquet, Christopher Carter, and Tony Scott (to name only a few) are deeply invested in creating sustainable and supportive labor conditions for teachers of writing. Even Derek Bok, in his book aimed at a more general audience, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, writing about the problem of teaching college students to communicate on a university-wide level, devotes serious time and attention to the unproductive labor conditions of teachers of writing (87-91). Hopkins’ descriptions of hellish overwork resonate with me personally, but they are also representative of deep and ongoing labor problems for teachers of writing.

But what about moments where a more careful mapping of our differences might be useful? This is where rhetorical listening became especially generative for me. Pursuing the strategy of rhetorical listening,

⁶ The publication *FORUM: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty* sponsored by CCCC is a powerful example of the significance of labor issues to the field; the mission of this journal is to sustain and empower conversations around a single facet of labor debates, part-time contingent employment.

I discovered important moments of difference. For instance, Popken devotes a good deal of attention to Hopkins' personal investment in teaching writing, which he links to his religious dedication, explaining that "Hopkins' commitment to the teaching of writing and the labor it entailed was both theoretical and spiritual" (621, "Edwin Hopkins"). Theoretically, Hopkins was aligned with New Rhetoric composition pedagogies that rejected large lecture classes and called for personalized teaching (Popken 621, "Edwin Hopkins"). According to this pedagogy, careful response to student writing was integral to writing instruction. Spiritually, Hopkins believed that finding one's professional calling was a religious experience (Popken 622, "Edwin Hopkins"). Hopkins' religiosity is well documented in the archival materials at the University of Kansas. His personal diaries contain weekly references to attending church (where he played the organ), various church activities and groups, and a robust spiritual network (Hopkins, "Journal 14"). His personal papers also include addresses delivered at chapel, with varying degrees of religious inflection (Hopkins "Kansas Day in Chapel"). For Hopkins, then, his ideal pedagogy was grounded in the discipline of Composition and Rhetoric—before it was a full-fledged discipline—but it was made meaningful and worth the enormous sacrifices of time, and even health, by his belief in the religious rewards of this work. It is here that I am no longer comfortable; here, perhaps, that I need to look more closely and make space for difference.

I, too, ground my pedagogy in student-centered theories. But I cannot follow Hopkins into his religious zeal for his work. The religious rewards which come from identifying God's role for one's work may be termed as a kind of "psychic income." Eileen Schell, arguing about the feminization of composition and its disproportionate number of female contingent workers in *Gypsy Academics* and *Mother-Teachers*, notes that ideas about psychic pay, or the emotional and spiritual satisfaction one gets from one's work, have been used to support demeaning labor conditions (41). Schell points to the history of women who have taught composition part-time and/or for a fraction of the pay of their tenured male colleagues and argues that "nineteenth century gender ideologies that advocated teaching as women's true profession" helped to cement composition courses as women's work and as less rigorous and important than the masculine realms of research and literature (36). As a woman compositionist interested in improving the labor conditions of my field, I have come to bristle at suggestions that the emotional, religious, or "psychic" rewards of teaching somehow mitigate exploitative labor practices.

Such bristling is not unique to me; many women scholars have noted and bemoaned troubling ways our field equates the feminine with "lesser." In *Composition in the University*, Sharon Crowley argues that part of the move toward defining "English as a language from which its native speakers were alienated" was designed to "escape of the effeminacy" associated with English studies (60). Theresa Enos, building on this thread, has written at great length about how the feminization of

the field has marginalized scholars (especially women), a theme she elaborates on in *Gender Roles and Faculty Lives in Rhetoric and Composition* (4). My discomfort with this aspect of Hopkins' identity is based on my awareness of these particular scholarly conversations and my status as a woman academic in a "feminized" field. Yet, as an historical researcher, I must also be able to listen to Hopkins' reality, the position that helped to define his experience of his work and his activism for improving labor conditions, in spite of my own context—a context which encourages me to be highly suspicious of (and even hostile to) factoring "psychic income" into labor debates. By listening to experiences laid side-by-side, I can honor our differences and see connections that may otherwise be missed or over-simplified. In this moment, drawn deeply to many of Hopkins' experiences, I need to not see myself represented by or against him. Instead, I must listen attentively to the insights another history offers me.

There is tension for me in this moment. I want to critique Hopkins. I want to reject this part of his reality, to rush to judgment, so that I can close off this space of discomfort. Rhetorical listening has helped me to identify and think through a moment of non-identification, but strategic contemplation can help me resist the urge to come to closure too quickly. Strategic contemplation asks me to pause, to listen, and to refuse to rush to judgment. Royster and Kirsch, introducing strategic contemplation as a research method, argue that it is a method designed to "reclaim a genre of research and a scholarship traditionally associated with the processes of mediation, introspection, and reflection" (84). Part of Royster and Kirsch's book argues that in the current publish or perish environment of academia, historians can feel pushed to report findings and make arguments before they have had a chance to sit with information. While there is truth in this claim, I also find it difficult to process information which threatens my research goals or the trends I have already begun to trace. Because I felt immediately connected to and invested in Hopkins, moments of non-identification were uncomfortable for me. Rhetorical listening asks me to name and recognize these moments; strategic contemplation asks me to linger over them, giving myself time to process my reactions and listen for new insights.

The Labor of Response to Student Writing

As I've alluded to, much of my identification with Hopkins comes from my own experience of the labor surrounding teaching composition. In the four years immediately preceding my initial introduction to Hopkins, I worked as both a full-time visiting lecturer and an adjunct. Overall, I was lucky. There were several adjunct positions at my university but few lecturer positions. The majority of our First Year Composition courses were taught by adjuncts. I occupied a visiting lecturer position for three years. While I could not count on my job being renewed each year, once it was, I was safe for the entire year. My co-workers, my friends—even my partner—were adjuncts. One semester they might have three classes,

the next just one. They made less per class than I did, even though we held the same degrees. The unfairness of the situation—that others made less money for the same work, and that so many had to deal with a permanent lack of job security—was never lost on me. In this context, I was immensely thankful for my job. But I was also tired. In the fall I applied to Ph.D. programs, the fall before I began researching Hopkins, in addition to my 4-4 load at my home university, I taught courses as an adjunct at a local community college. In my full-time position I was not only teaching; I was serving on several committees, training new faculty, and working on a major program assessment. At the same time, I was completing graduate school applications, tracking down recommendations, and working on my conference presentations. My plate was full. Those responsibilities weren't what bothered me. What made me sick with stress and worry was responding to student essays, of which—with six classes—I simply had too many.⁷ I had essays or drafts to respond to nearly every day. I was always responding to student work. I enjoy reading and thinking about student work. But evaluating and responding to it—for five and six classes worth of students and four preps worth of curriculum? I was exhausted.

This personal context—symptomatic of labor conditions in the field more generally—is part of why I found Hopkins such a compelling figure. Hopkins, teaching a comparable number of composition students to many writing teachers today, was physically overcome by the labor demands of responding to his students' writing. This helps to explain how, separated by nearly one hundred years, his descriptions of teacher fatigue and the never-ending deluge of student papers resonated with my own experiences. In fact, he comes to believe that the labor conditions surrounding the teaching of composition cause teacher burnout and substandard instruction (Hopkins 5-6, "Can Good"). To prove this, and to advocate for reforming those conditions, Hopkins turns to his empirical research study, publishing the final results in 1923. To compile these results, he sends two rounds of surveys to all colleges in the United States (Hopkins 22, "The Labor and Cost"). For the first survey, collected in the years 1909-1913, his goal is to "determine the labor necessary to meet current standards of English composition teaching." He reports receiving responses from faculty at approximately one fifth of colleges, representing 33 states, 96 colleges, and 345 teachers (Hopkins 22, "The Labor and Cost"). For his second survey, collected from 1913-1915, his goal is to "make a comparative study of cost." In this survey, he tries to find out how much it costs to staff English sections compared to other subjects, factoring in everything from equipment and classroom space to instructors

⁷ Caps for my four classes at one university were 20 (for a total of 80 students) and caps at the community college were set at "how many they could fit in a room," typically maxing out between 25 and 30. I was fortunate that my specific sections were, by luck, closer to 20. Together, for semesters when I taught six composition classes, I had approximately 120 students.

and assistants. He reports that approximately ten percent of colleges responded (Hopkins 22, “The Labor and Cost”). Analyzing his results, Hopkins’ finds that “the theme reading labor expected of a college freshman composition instructor is more than double (250 per cent) that which can be carried without undue physical strain” (Hopkins 20, “The Labor and Cost”). To support this, he explains that the average student writes 650 words a week; teachers can read student writing at an average rate of 2,200 words an hour; instructors can read for up to two hours a day (or ten hours a week) without “loss of efficiency,” and, finally, the average instructor teaches 105 students a semester (Hopkins 20, “The Labor and Cost”). Ultimately, he argues that these labor conditions are the direct cause of two problems: that the “results of the work are unsatisfactory” and that “conscientious and efficient teachers are brought to actual physical collapse and driven from the profession” (Hopkins 21, “The Labor and Cost”).

It is important to note here that Hopkins was not the only composition teacher in his era writing about labor, but the fact that composition was not recognized as a field hampered efforts at systematic or permanent reform. In 1918, Frank W. Scott, Joseph M. Thomas, and Frederick A. Manchester, in the “Preliminary Report of the Special Committee on Freshman English” for *The English Journal*, discuss critical issues facing composition instruction. They note that “the supply of competent teachers must be increased” (593) and that “if we sincerely desire to improve the quality of the teaching in Freshman English [...] we shall do whatever is practicable to lighten the burdens and increase the opportunities of the teacher of the Freshman English and other similar courses in composition” (594). However, Composition and Rhetoric was not yet a generally recognized discipline, and teaching writing was widely considered to be the commonsensical application of grammar rules which any competent writer could drill into a student’s head (Connors 110, “Overwork”). Without a dedicated field of fellow-scholars, support for research, and recognition that the labor of composition teachers was both specialized and important, Hopkins and the few others who did write about pedagogy and labor as they related to Freshman English, had no professional community with a clear identity to take up their findings, theorize ways to practically apply them, or advocate effectively for change. Hopkins, in carrying out and publicizing his findings, is impressive in what he was able to accomplish, and the fact that his findings failed to permanently alter the labor landscape of composition instructors, according to his recommendations, is at least in part due to the field’s lack of disciplinary legitimacy.

Identification and Distance

“Lack of disciplinary legitimacy,” “overwork,” “failure to alter the labor landscape”: these phrases—so appropriate for the clinical nature of much scholarly work—are also euphemisms that sanitize the human costs associated with the labor conditions surrounding writing instruction.

Popken, in his analysis of Hopkins, details these human costs explicitly. In Hopkins' journals and correspondence, Popken finds evidence of general nervousness, insomnia, eye strain, and depression in the years from 1890 to 1919 ("Edwin Hopkins" 629-30). For example, in a letter from Hopkins to his Chancellor Frank Strong, Hopkins writes about "eye and nerve strain which all my work entail" and which brought him "to the verge of breakdown" (qtd. in Popken 630). It was descriptions like this one that most resonated with me. This identification, the recognition of labor demands that leave physical scars, was responsible for my sticky note with three underlines and an exclamation point. At the time I "found" Hopkins I was a graduate teaching assistant (GTA), teaching two sections of composition as I took two graduate courses. At the same time, I was tutoring between twenty and thirty Chinese students applying to American colleges, and working for Educational Testing Services as an Advanced Placement Exam grader. Like Hopkins, I often felt "on the verge of breakdown."

Beaten down by my workload, my health suffered. I wondered with true panic: How can I do everything? How can I respond to my students the way I believe in responding to them—carefully, thoughtfully, fully? I graded through migraines, tears in my eyes. I would rationalize that I was almost through the busy part of my schedule, that I was managing things well. Then my body would remind me of the truth: my psoriasis would flare up, my TMJ would lock my jaw in place, my weight would balloon, and I would get strange headaches that lasted for days. When I "met" Hopkins, I immediately identified with his "nervous energy" and history of breakdowns brought on, in large part, due to his scrupulous response to student writing. The stress culminated in 1919, four years before Hopkins finished his fifteen years of labor documenting the labor conditions of composition instructors around the country, when Hopkins was hospitalized for "increasing nervous exhaustion with dental infection added" (Hopkins, qtd in Popken 630, "Edwin Hopkins"). Hopkins would spend the entire 1919-1920 school year recuperating while receiving a paid leave of absence. Though Hopkins returned to the University of Kansas the following year, he continued to struggle with the physical effects of the demands of his job (Popken 630-31, "Edwin Hopkins").

I could hear Hopkins because I could identify with him. As I pushed myself to not identify, I was still struck by the pathos of his situation. Even working not to see Hopkins as a representation of my own exhaustion, I sympathize with his situation. Thus, while in Hopkins' history I find many meaningful connections, I also find these connections troubling. Hopkins dedicates much of his professional energy to preventing just the kind of exhaustion and overwork that I identify with my own work life, a century later. Despite a tireless devotion to improving the labor conditions of composition teachers, Hopkins had limited success, at least in light of his stated goals—changing how teaching loads were determined and how the instructional system of composition was

conceptualized (Popken 18, “The WPA”; Heyda 247). It is true, however, that even with a hostile administration Hopkins is able to make clear improvements during this tenure on his own campus, reducing the student load per faculty member in composition from 177 in 1909 to 49 in 1925 (Popken 18, “The WPA”).⁸ Hopkins’ larger goal, however, of national improvement, was not realized: in 1929 the average student load for composition was still 93 (Taylor 20).⁹ Additionally, John Heyda points out that “[Hopkins’] study did not succeed [...] in redefining definitions of load. Nor did it give rise to alternative models for organizing composition’s delivery systems” (247). Again, this lack of success was at least partially due to the loftiness of Hopkins’ goals, and the fact that there was no established disciplinary field to support and act on his findings. Yet, Heyda, looking at other writing roughly contemporaneous to Hopkins to analyze trends in Freshman English, notes “how little impact Hopkins’ study had on administrators’ thinking in the decade following his report’s appearance” (248). Why was Hopkins unsuccessful? Given my shared values and history with Hopkins, what can I learn from him? More importantly, given the enduring nature of labor problems in teaching writing, what can our field learn from him?

Analyzing Hopkins’ Arguments for Change

Understanding how Hopkins attempts to educate and persuade his readers can offer both models and cautionary tales for Composition and Rhetoric scholars attempting to tackle labor in its most recent permutations. In order to better understand why Hopkins’ work fails to reform labor in composition, especially through gaining allies in other departments and in university administration, I return to his body of work and track the different arguments he makes for addressing his concerns.

When Hopkins first begins to advocate for better labor conditions for composition teachers in 1909 on his own campus, he focuses his arguments on the quality of work teachers are able to do, arguing “that large student loads diminish the quality of composition teaching” (Popken 625, “Edwin Hopkins”). This argument, that current labor conditions are linked to unsatisfactory teaching results, remains throughout Hopkins’ work. In his final presentation of his research data in 1923, for example, he argues that:

If the public now pays large and growing sums for Bad English and then complains of the badness of that English rather than of

⁸ While this number is a clear improvement, it is important to remember that faculty were still teaching other courses (primarily literature) in addition to their composition loads.

⁹ Warner Taylor’s survey, published in 1929, looked into the “conditions in Freshman English” on a nationwide scale. One of the conditions he surveyed was class size. Hopkins, based on his research, recommends 35 composition students per instructor with 60 as the upper limit (4, “Can Good”).

the cost, it is at least possible that the same public may eventually [...] be willing to make the necessary and reasonable addition to its present ineffective outline for the teaching of English expression, if thereby it may ensure the desired return. (Hopkins 37, “The Labor and Cost”)

The underlying claim is that the reason the public is receiving “Bad English” is because teachers are not able to provide good instruction given their current labor conditions. This argument for improving the labor conditions of composition instruction is based on Hopkins’ pedagogic commitments: instruction is failing because instructors are unable to effectively carry out the personalized pedagogy Hopkins’ supports (2, “Can Good”). While this argument never entirely disappears from his work, he realizes early on that this argument alone is insufficient, as can be seen in the increasing complexity of his arguments detailed below.

When appealing to the needs of students and teachers fails, Hopkins devotes much of his argumentative energies to a scientific approach, both as an intrinsic good—a way at getting at the truth—and as a way to solve the problem. In presenting the findings of his nationwide study, Hopkins writes: “For two and half years an investigation has been in progress to ascertain what are the proper laboratory requirements for the efficient teaching of English expression” (Hopkins 747, “The Present Conditions”). This line both highlights the scientific value of his study and one of his main arguments in campaigning for better labor conditions for composition instructors: teaching writing is a laboratory subject.¹⁰ Indeed, in his final 1923 report, Hopkins claims that “although not in agreement with tradition, it is now commonly even if reluctantly admitted that English composition is a laboratory subject” (36, “The Labor and Cost”). Hopkins, looking at composition classes through the lens of laboratory classes, makes it clear that “the system of determining teaching loads is wholly unjust,” using scientific methods and calculations to allow him to offer a solution by inventing “a formula for determining faculty load that counts ‘theme and exercising correcting’ on same level [sic] as ‘conducting recitations’” (Popken 626, “Edwin Hopkins”). By applying scientific arguments and formulas, Hopkins is able to argue for, and eventually carry out research into, composition instructors’ labor conditions, while also suggesting solutions to alleviate the burden—solutions he positions as fair and unbiased. Another benefit of his scientific approach is that they allow him to present his arguments as factual and, therefore, unassailable by those of goodwill and good understanding. Before his recourse to a scientific study of labor problems faced by composition instructors, he laments that:

¹⁰ See footnote 1

[W]hen English teachers have stated these facts to educational authorities, they have not infrequently been called incompetent, ignorant, or even untruthful; while more often and perhaps more recently they have been assured that these matters, while possibly true, are after all unimportant and irrelevant; that they have no bearing upon the situation, or that they have nothing to do with the real problems of English teaching. (Hopkins 5, “Can Good Composition”)

Hopkins believes that his scientific study will silence these kinds of responses. In relying on science for authority, Hopkins can quiet his opponents by representing them as unwilling to see reality. After arguing, for instance, about the maximum amount of student work an instructor could read in a day, Hopkins writes “Some, who perhaps do not wish to admit the truth, dispute this statement, but it can be disputed only by refusing to consider facts and figures” (Hopkins 747, “The Present Conditions”).

Finally, Hopkins co-opts the language of business to reframe better labor conditions for teachers as commonsensical. Hopkins summarizes the current situation in terms of pointing to its absurdity: “Much money is spent, valuable teachers are worn out at an inhumanly rapid rate, and results are inadequate or wholly lacking. From any point of view—that of taxpayer, teacher, or pupil—such a situation is intolerable” (Hopkins 1, “Can Good Composition”). In this assessment of the problem, Hopkins argues not that the public is getting affordable education and exploiting teachers; he argues they are getting ineffective instruction because they are exploiting teachers. Although Hopkins’ work is motivated by his pedagogical concerns, this framing of the situation implicitly reorients his argument in terms of profitable business practices. Is it worthwhile to expend more money for better results? Following this line of logic, Hopkins makes the case that, according to business values of costs and benefits, it is worthwhile to hire more English teachers. He asks why “if there is more English work than English teachers can do, there should not be more English teachers” and argues that before hiring more instructors can be dismissed as too expensive, administrators and the public must know “just what does English cost now, and what is the actual value of it, in relation to other subjects and the number of pupils concerned” (Hopkins 750, “The Present Conditions”). Hopkins works hard to argue that any additional costs associated with his suggested reforms will result in worthwhile benefits.

Ultimately, Hopkins makes purposeful rhetorical choices—focusing on the pedagogical justifications for his preferred “laboratory”-style instruction, the scientifically demonstrable need for improving labor conditions, and arguments that additional costs are justified by improvements in the writing skills of students—all designed to sway his audience. How is it, then, that these arguments failed to achieve his recommended reforms?

Insights from Strategic Contemplation

Earlier in this article, critiquing Hopkins' spiritual motivations as "psychic income," I used rhetorical listening to identify a moment in the research process where I was tempted to "rush to judgement" to avoid the tension of non-identification. I forced myself to name and then wrestle with that tension. But how did that look? What did strategic contemplation and letting this moment linger in my mind add to my research process? Here, an illustrative narrative is useful. When I had written about a dozen pages of this article, I got feedback from a writing group. As I always do with such feedback, I read the draft start to finish, reacting to comments as they appeared in the text. I had several rounds of feedback, so I ended up reading through my draft three times. The comments were insightful and gave me useful ideas. But in the back of my mind I felt uncomfortable. I had "heard" something. This something was not written down, at least not explicitly. But I felt it. I made notes about avenues to explore. I got good ideas, made good plans. I went back to that uncomfortable feeling. I circled passages which badly needed editing and sat for a few minutes, thinking in an undirected kind of way. It didn't come to me, so I packed up, filed the feeling away in my brain, and went home. I asked myself to sit with the feeling, hoping it would germinate; I consciously made space for strategic contemplation.

Three or four nights later, as I was getting ready for bed, it came to me: I found the "problem" with my draft and the real reason why I had wanted to rush past—with easy dismissal—Hopkins' religious understanding of his work and his suffering for that work. Hopkins and I are annoying in our valorization of suffering. We take perverse pride in a work ethic that is physically exhausting, perhaps damaging. I have good defenses to this accusation. I do suffer, at times, from the physical effects of my labor, but I work hard because I believe in this work. However, if I listen, especially to my own story in this narrative, the things that drew me to Hopkins and the ways that I read him, I can hear pride in my willingness to go above and beyond, enjoyment in the struggle to do the impossible. I critiqued Hopkins for the spiritual dimension of his work. I worried that his religiosity allowed him to romanticize his debilitating overwork as a sign of "goodness." I said, not me. And yet. Me. Absolutely me. That is part of my connection to him. Whether or not Hopkins himself would own or articulate a tendency to romanticize damaging work conditions, I have to own it. I hear it when I lay my experience alongside his, when I give myself time to reflect and withhold judgment.

This insight opens a new window into my analysis of Hopkins' argumentative choices. Hopkins tried to appropriate scientific and business arguments to be persuasive. But, perhaps, these arguments were undermined by his representation of the punishing nature of his labor. Like me, he probably did not intend to valorize his painful labor moments.

However, how might these representations of suffering have been read by faculty in other disciplines? By administrators? On the afternoon that I read a shorter version of this article three times, though I couldn't immediately identify it, I was bothered by the dramatic rendering of the personal costs of such labor. That doesn't mean that I think these descriptions of my (or his) labor conditions are inaccurate. But I felt annoyed by my own descriptions of a struggle between an ideal pedagogy and the material conditions that make this pedagogy either impossible or painful to enact. I can only imagine the reactions of a less sympathetic or invested reader. Isn't there a simpler way to teach effectively, to leave quality feedback? Is such a detailed level of response really necessary? Do you really grade through tears? In Colin Charlton et al.'s *GenAdmin*, they critique the trope of the suffering WPA noting that "images of suffering can be overwhelming" in the literature on WPAs (55). They argue tropes of suffering create a victim/hero dichotomy that downplays the evolution of Composition and Rhetoric—particularly related to issues of writing program administration—as a dynamic and evolving field with engaged and empowered actors (Charlton et al. 55). Hopkins cannot be critiqued for following this trend so much as insights from later scholars like Charlton et al., who have the benefit of a discipline and history to analyze, can help us see the limits of this approach. Hopkins—and to a large extent myself in parts of this article—frames himself and other composition teachers as victims unable to enact change without outside intervention.

Hopkins is right that without help from his administration and the general public his grandest vision could not be realized. However, he does not account for what he could and even did accomplish. Teaching loads at Kansas were reduced under this tenure (Popken 18, "The WPA"). He did carry out and publish his research. And while I am frustrated by my own and my colleagues' labor conditions, this awareness was part of my impetus for pursuing my PhD and working as a WPA, where I have more (though by no means total) power to positively impact the labor conditions of composition instructors at my university. By downplaying his and other composition instructors' agency, Hopkins' depiction of the extreme suffering and physical costs of the labor required to teach composition likely worked against him, because its impassioned nature allowed readers to focus on the emotional tone of his findings and not the scientific data he worked so hard to gather. For instance, when Hopkins' proposal for research into the labor conditions of composition instructors was rejected in 1909 by both his dean and chancellor, Popken notes that "The proposal even got Hopkins in conflict with faculty members who believed he was trying to get special favors for his program" (17-18 "WPA"). Even more telling, when Hopkins' returned from his leave of absence in fall of 1920, his new Chancellor Ernest Lindley worried about Hopkins' mental stability, writing "Dr. Hopkins is in an overwrought state which excites my deepest sympathy but I am frankly at a loss to know whether his judgement in certain essential matters is as excellent as it would be under normal circumstances" (qtd in Popken 630-631, "Edwin Hopkins"). This

reaction by other faculty and his administration to his pleas to remedy the labor situation surrounding First Year Composition suggest that rather than being moved by his descriptions of the labor conditions surrounding the teaching of writing, his audiences were alienated by and suspicious of the dramatic rendering of those descriptions, believing instead that he was either purposefully exaggerating the situation or hysterical and unstable.

Many of Hopkins' rhetorical choices make sense to me. Employ arguments that matter to your audience in order to persuade them; get data to support your position. In fact, I find Hopkins' decision to research and document the labor conditions he sought to improve a canny move. And using the values of your audience—in this case scientific data and economically justifiable recommendations—is rooted in a rhetorical awareness I find compelling. Even these moves, however, may not have been as effective as Hopkins (and some Composition and Rhetoric scholars today) assumes. Marc Bousquet, in his essay "Composition as Management Science" traces several of the ways composition has tried to deal with its labor problems in the recent past. He cites several "trends in the discourse," one of which he identifies as particularly problematic. He describes this as a move "away from critical theory toward institutionally focused pragmatism, toward acceptance of market logic, and toward increasing collaboration with a vocational and technical model of education" (Bousquet 13). Bousquet explains that while the adoption of arguments drawing on these values may feel pragmatic or persuasive, the end goal is counter-productive; we end up indirectly validating the attitudes that produced our damaging labor conditions. In effect, arguments for reform that remain dedicated to fixing a broken or exploitative system have already, by legitimizing that system, failed.

This critique can apply to Hopkins. When Hopkins appeals to the economic value of reorganizing labor in composition classes, he assumes that economic arguments are valid educational arguments. And by trying to reclassify composition as a laboratory subject, Hopkins assumes that laboratory loads in other disciplines were fairer and more manageable. Christopher Carter argues that "good bureaucrats" like Hopkins "in appearing to patiently work within [bureaucratic boundaries], sustain as reality political limits that are neither honest nor natural but simply the limit—ideas most useful to hierarchies of decision making and money-gathering" (188). In effect, Hopkins' close attention to the material conditions of English compositionists blinds him to solutions that either assume different material conditions or that consider what the limits of these conditions mean when crafting curriculum. And by focusing exclusively on trying to prove that composition instructors had a unique teaching burden in responding to student writing, Hopkins fails to consider or imagine different material realities faced by other faculty in other departments. Just because an instructor was not responding to student writing does not mean her labor conditions were reasonable or humane. By failing to consider how his arguments validate the current system or

reflect the labor realities of other faculty, he risks making enemies where he may, by employing more inclusive labor arguments, make allies.

Concluding Connections to Today's Changing Labor Conditions

While rhetorical listening helped me think about Hopkins' and his (dis)connections to my own experiences more critically, strategic contemplation gave me the space to generate insights about what Hopkins' history offers today's compositionists interested in reforming our labor conditions. Articulating my responses to my research on Hopkins—and then resting with and investigating those responses—helps me to see and imagine other ways to respond to Hopkins' work, ways that help me understand why he had limited long-term, nationwide success. The most enduring lesson from Hopkins may be that he failed to achieve his recommendations for reform. Hopkins relies on three argumentative strategies: pedagogical justifications, authority garnered from scientific research, and costs and benefits analysis. These moves, however, are undermined by the valorization of suffering seen in his descriptions of dedicated teachers of writing and his commitment to working within the systems that produced the hellish labor conditions he describes. Today, arguments that accept unchallenged the cost-saving values that have allowed contingent labor to be increasingly exploited in American universities, or which pragmatically attempt to work within or alongside structures of exploitation, are likely doomed to fail. Likewise, solutions that improve the labor conditions of one small segment of teachers within the university (or within a department) are likely to encounter unexpected adversaries. Histories like Hopkins' cannot be mapped easily onto today's landscape, but they can inform the decisions we make and warn us about potential pitfalls as we attempt to reimagine labor conditions in composition that support our best practices and ideal pedagogies. In the end, Hopkins both offers positive models and cautionary tales for those interested in reforming the labor conditions surrounding First Year Composition.

Thus, while the majority of this article looks at where and how Hopkins' failed, it is also significant that Hopkins had important successes. Both during his lifetime and today (as illustrated by my own fascination with his work) Hopkins convinces a particular set of people of the importance of his research and the value of his findings: teachers of writing. For this audience then, his rendering of the real emotional and physical costs of our labor not only validates experiences that are too often unarticulated or treated like unchangeable "facts of life," but his arguments for change are persuasive. And persuasive arguments like his are why today the Conference on College Communication and Composition has adopted the "CCCC Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure-Track Writing Faculty" which recommends that NTT faculty, hired primarily as teachers and thus with the highest teaching loads in most departments, should have workloads "limited to a maximum of twenty students per semester per section of first-year and/or advanced

composition courses” and that “faculty should not teach more than three sections of such courses per term.” Similarly the Association of Departments of English’s “ADE Guidelines for Class Size and Workload for College and University Teachers of English” argues: “college English teachers should not teach more than three sections of composition per term. The number of students in each section should be fifteen or fewer, with no more than twenty students in any case.” These numbers are directly in line with Hopkins’ recommendation to limit the number of composition students per instructor per semester to between 35 and 60 (4 “Can Good”). And clearly, looking at my own rhetorical choices in this article, I expect that personal narratives and frank accounts of my emotional and physical experiences will not only resonate with readers but convince them of the importance of documenting, analyzing, and ultimately changing our labor conditions. Given one’s audience and goals, then, appeals to suffering, and scientific documentation and analysis of our labor conditions can help determine just what the field’s ideal conditions for carrying out a particularly pedagogy should look like.

At the same time, my close analysis of Hopkins’ work and its reception offers two additional insights, particularly for arguments geared toward persuading those outside our discipline to reform the labor conditions surrounding First Year Composition. First, we would be well-served to avoid focusing on the emotional and physical toll of this work in ways that suggest the uniqueness of our plight. Instead, we should focus on labor arguments that position us within a system of labor exploitation that requires deep and systemic reform. Our solutions need to be more inclusive by moving across rank—benefiting all teachers of First Year Composition from graduate students and adjuncts to full-time lecturers and tenure-track faculty—and across disciplines—joining forces with others from physical scientists burdened by unrealistic formulas for determining course load to social scientists with crushing advising expectations. Whether taking the form of conversionist, reformist, union/collectivist or abolitionist solutions,¹¹ our outward facing discussions of labor need to recognize and make use of the dispiriting reality that, in many ways, our labor conditions are not unique. We must identify and make use of our potential allies.

The second important insight Hopkins offers us as we craft arguments to administrators and the public is that accepting the value systems that have produced our labor conditions as a persuasive tool is not

¹¹ Schell, categorizes four major approaches within the field for addressing contingent labor and tiered labor structures. The “conversionist solution” suggests converting contingent positions into tenure positions, the “reformist solution” recommends professionalizing the working conditions of writing instructors, the “union/collectivist solution” advocates unionization, and finally the “abolitionist solution” supports replacing first-year composition courses entirely with vertical writing curricula (taught by tenured faculty) (Schell 90-115).

an effective long-term strategy. In truth, this is the finding from my research that I struggle with the most. While my scholarly persona as a writer and researcher might be ready to burn down institutions and remake the world, my administrative persona—grappling with the daily minutiae of running a First Year Composition program and creating the most equitable labor conditions I can in an imperfect system—sees, to borrow a term from Bosquet, “institutionally focused pragmatism” as an expedient tool for achieving real and significant goals, like lowering course caps or getting more full-time lines. In that context, what would it mean to not accept the unstated values that allow First Year Composition teachers not only be continually exploited, but also that allow those of us in positions of authority—like WPAs—to participate in that exploitation? To be perfectly honest, I’m not sure where this insight will take us. I can offer, however, a personal example of how this insight has shaped the kind of work I am doing in my own program.

Recently our First Year Composition caps were raised—despite thoughtful, persistent, and noisy pushback from the both English Department Chair and myself. At the same time, as Director of First Year Composition I’ve been tasked with redesigning the Basic Writing and Composition 1 curricula. Heading into summer workshops to accomplish these redesigns, I’m asking myself what it means to resist the assumptions that have created a situation like this one—assumptions such as the capitalistic mantra that it is always possible (and preferable) to do more with less or the disciplinary commitments to ideal pedagogies and our students that result in teachers who can be counted on to work beyond reasonable limits because they believe in the vital importance of the work they do. In response, I’ve been mulling what I think is a radical question: if these course caps and loads are the labor conditions these courses will be taught under, what would curricula built for these conditions look like? In other words, rather than basing our course outcomes solely on established best practices and typical course outcomes, what would it mean to take the labor constraints of large sections and high teaching loads into consideration when deciding what the course can realistically accomplish given those constraints? In practice, this would mean things like fewer writing assignments and circumscribed curricular goals. And while part of me immediately balks—I want our students to have the best and fullest rhetorical education possible—another part of me thinks of what these changes would mean to the daily lives of instructors in my program with longing. Playing out the idea in my head, I also wonder what administrators will say in response to the announcement that we’ve changed the course—making it less complex and less in line with disciplinary standards—in order to ensure that we can achieve the teaching we do promise without physically and emotionally over-extending teachers. What would my colleagues at other institutions think—would they accuse me of abandoning students by limiting their exposure to ideas our field believes are crucial to their development as thinkers and citizens? Or, will they recognize the practice even if it has been unarticulated in

their own schools? I share this example not because I think it is the solution — right now, it is no more than an idea in response to the collision of this research with my administrative duties—but because I wouldn't be asking these questions if I hadn't done this research and thought hard about what I've learned by studying Hopkins and his calls for reform.

Today, as our modern labor issues—most pressingly an over-reliance on contingent labor and unmanageable teaching loads—and possible solutions are debated in the field, the value of revisiting Hopkins and our labor history cannot be overstated. Hopkins offers a glimpse into how our arguments are or might be structured and the possible outcomes of such decisions. Analyzing Hopkins' failures, particularly to convince other stakeholders to invest in improving labor conditions for composition teachers, is important to us today when we consider reforms like unionization, which depend on coalitions across departments in the university, and as we interrogate the assumptions that have allowed these labor conditions to exist for so long despite our awareness of their costs to teachers and students.

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