

Academic Labor

IJoC

## The Politics of Academic Labor in Communication Studies: A Re-Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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Early in my term as department chair, I brought a dilemma to a faculty meeting. The dean had given us an “envelope” of money (a common and apt metaphor, at least at my university) to hire non-tenure-stream teachers. We had a choice. We could hire seven individual people on a single-course sessional contract basis to cover seven courses. Or we could hire one person, with a modest but real salary and benefits—not to mention a nicer office and a CV line—to teach four courses as a faculty lecturer.<sup>2</sup> There was no tender option. Either we hire at the more exploitative rate and staff enough courses for our undergraduates or squeeze our students to provide a better job to someone. We chose the sessional option.

If I learned one thing in my time as department chair, it was that constraint conditions the most basic experience of university administration, whether the administrator is in the lower-middle management positions usually occupied by faculty (program director, chair), or in the much higher administrative positions. Individuals in administrative positions are often presented with seemingly impossible choices that we must make—both in the course of normal university business and in more acute situations where keeping the school running might be at stake. Today, it seems that the entire academic system is defined by these logics of constraint—setting the terms of decision making for individuals and whole systems alike.

Like all institutions, universities sometimes have to be coldly impersonal in order to run, and that impersonality can easily veer off into cruelty if people aren’t vigilant (and sometimes even if they are). But the manner and scene of coldness has changed over the past generation or so and acutely since the

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<sup>2</sup> At the time, we were paying sessional instructors (more commonly called adjuncts in the United States) \$5,000 per course. A “faculty lecturer” position could be paid \$32,500 for just under nine months’ work on four courses. Sessional salaries are rising to \$7,200 per course at McGill, though overall funds for these hires have not increased, meaning where once there were three jobs, there are now two.

world's largest bank scam went bad in 2008. In many places around the world, public higher education is being defunded and transformed. Students pay more—where they can even afford to remain in school—there are fewer full-time professors, and the entire faculty and staff are being pushed harder to do more with less. Labor conditions are getting worse for everyone in most universities and colleges all around the world, and the stories keep coming. Right now, the clerical union at my university has just gone on strike (<http://munaca.com>). Although they are paid considerably less than full-time faculty, their complaints echo those often heard up and down university hierarchies: stagnating wages and benefits, workplace speed-ups and other erosions of job quality, less decision-making input, and lack of parity with other institutions.

The story so far more or less follows the familiar long-standing trope of a crisis of the university and the crisis of the human sciences.<sup>3</sup> This is well-travelled territory—by some of the authors in this special section and also by writers in a wide range of academic fields (for an excellent review of the recent books in this area, see Deresiewicz, 2011). What is so surprising is how little attention has been directed at issues of academic labor in communication studies, and how infrequently people in our field have participated in national and international conversations about the labor politics of what we do. Analysis, critique, and programmatic thought on academic labor in communication studies has been a long time coming. While there have been sustained considerations of academic labor topics in fields like history, English, and anthropology, only now have some sectors of our field begun to develop a sense of urgency.

Perhaps this is because communication studies is not exactly a discipline. If you wanted to have a field-wide conversation, where would you go? ICA? NCA? SCMS? AEJMC? IAMCR? That's not even a beginning if you want to think internationally, especially considering the overwhelmingly American bias of those organizations (except perhaps for IAMCR). We have a constellation of professional associations with overlapping intellectual jurisdictions and competing desires for preeminence. Our field is as intellectually diverse as it is institutionally diffuse, and it continues to grow and meld with allied disciplines. Departments and programs are still forming and expanding. The roots of thought on communication reach back into most of the human sciences and professional disciplines. The branches we perch on afford us particular views of the field that may or may not be commensurable with that of others. But if we are not united by heritage, orientation, perspective, or career aspiration, we can at least come together around a shared set of problems that affect almost every institution that uses a communication studies-related moniker.

There are other reasons why communication studies hasn't had the sustained conversation about academic labor that other fields have. One reason may simply be a combination of self-centeredness and good fortune. In relative terms—at least as reported anecdotally by many of my colleagues—our so-called job market has been much better than fields like English, history, and anthropology. Communication studies has large applied branches and deep historical connections to a variety of professional schools. At least in terms of enrollment dollars, communication studies programs have also been cash cows for

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<sup>3</sup> At a certain point, crises evolve into ongoing conditions. Since the humanities, at least, have been “in crisis” since I started my Humanities BA in 1989, perhaps it's time for some new words.

administrations. Our departments routinely have some of the highest student-to-faculty-ratios in our schools, and the staffing gap for courses is covered by fleets of perennial part-time and non-tenureable faculty (this is based on anecdotal evidence—I did not find a systematic study of this phenomenon, which is a little surprising given its pervasiveness). The field has at once been a testing ground for the casualization of the professoriate and an institutional holdover from a more serene moment, until recently avoiding some of the shrinking pains in other humanities and social sciences. To be fair, we are not quite as unique as we think: Looking at the use of non-tenure-stream faculty in professional fields like law, medicine and business, some similarities arise. But unlike those fields, many of our programs have been as likely to staff “theory,” “academic,” or “non-applied” courses with part-timers as they are to hire them for professional courses.

Although there are several radical traditions alive and well in communication studies, there are also many people in the field who have conservative and pro-business orientations; they would be unlikely to sign on to any serious rethinking of academic labor politics in the field, at least until their own comfort is threatened. As Thomas Discenna’s essay in this collection suggests, resistance to ideas of labor in communication studies may also emerge from the field’s own intellectual habits, and one might trace that back to an even longer ambivalence toward and distance from labor as a concept in our field. The idea of communication expanded in our culture and in our field (to encompass an ever-growing arena of symbolic activity) just as the domain of things named by labor become more and more restricted. When their histories are read together, the two concepts have a shared, but inverted, intellectual trajectory (Schiller, 1996, p. x).

People have been making sense of the situation for some time, and many authors on this issue begin by surveying the current crisis and placing their thoughts within it. But the challenge facing us is to change it. This is not an easy task. As my colleague Darin Barney (2010) has written, professors are structurally compromised because not only do we enjoy our positions—which, let’s face it, are incredibly privileged—but we tenured faculty who comment on the current crises also hold onto our suffering. There is a Zizekian pleasure in it:

There is nothing that academics enjoy more than their suffering: careerist students who can’t read and can’t write and can’t think; colleagues who are lazy and insufferable; granting agencies that are biased against our work; incompetent, corrupt, bean-counting administrators; governments run by philistines. We enjoy them all. We could not live without them. Our suffering is what distinguishes us. And, in rare moments, our enjoyment of the pleasures and pain of the university converge: we get on airplanes and stay in hotels and stand in front of audiences and say clever things about how the university makes us suffer and then go back home and submit articles based on what we have said and add lines to our CVs and get raises for doing it. (p. 384)

Barney’s critique of the academic labor and “crisis of the university” literature is perverse and comically self-deprecating: He had been flown somewhere and given a nice dinner to present a talk on the crisis of the university, which is now published on his CV. But he also sounds a very sobering note. As he writes, politics tend to happen to people, and the tenured professoriate is so privileged and so central to the

ideology of the university (at least in our imaginations) that it is very hard for us to put anything on the line. The question he fears after laying out the crisis of the university to students and audiences is the one that never seems to come: "Where were *you*? What did you *do*? How did things get this way? Is it because you, *professor*, allowed this to happen? Is it because you did *nothing*?" (p. 382).

There is great and systematic impetus for doing little of consequence. At a personal level, responsibility can be deferred for any number of reasons, from apathy to fear to disorganization to thinking it is someone else's problem. Tenure provides a certain level of freedom from the more worldly concerns of academia (for those who want that), but the privileges that come with it should also sound a call to responsibility to others not so fortunate, or not yet so fortunate. As paid intellectuals, we have the luxury of a situated transcendence, one that depends on a division of labor. Colleges and universities are special places because they afford opportunities for intellectual activity—research, teaching, dissemination—that is not immediately driven by the exigencies of industry, the need to sell magazines or newspapers, mainstream policy, or other instrumental agendas. We can work beyond immediacy and instrumentality, even if that thought sometimes leads us into instrumental action. At first blush, a focus on academic labor might seem antithetical to our loftier intellectual ambitions. But it is a tremendous privilege to be paid to think in the company of others. We have to be able to explain why our work matters and to actively defend it, especially in an age when others are no longer as willing to do the work for us. In other words, any critique of the politics of academic labor needs to retain a certain idealism about the intellectual work of the academy. That is, after all, what got most of us here in the first place.

If our professional lives induce a certain inertia, our professional associations have much to lose if there are big changes: from lost revenues if we were to move to open access publishing or open job fairs to a loss of prestige and respect if we were to acknowledge their actual roles in the field. They have a vested interest in maintaining their various prestige economies, and they openly compete with one another. At the same time, it would be hard to imagine any major changes in the field without people organizing within those organizations, as well as across them. Departments have their own hierarchies to protect,<sup>4</sup> and few professors and students want to consider their own privilege as a first step in thinking through how we might go about transforming the university. To use a term from Wendy Brown (1993, p. 406, see also 1995), faculty and students too often begin from a "wounded attachment" to a conception of their own suffering as the beginning for academic politics, which has the ironic effect of depoliticizing them. Many of the problems are much bigger than any one academic field—they are university wide or even bigger than the university system itself. But just as there must be activism outside our departments, so too should there be activism within our departments, in our research, in our publication outlets, in our classrooms, in our university buildings, hallways, and physical plants, and in communities far beyond those that we enter as a result of professional necessity and self-interest.

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<sup>4</sup> I am simply arguing that overinvestment in some hierarchical structures may get in the way of doing the decent and right thing; please don't read this as a pseudoanarchist argument that all hierarchy is bad.

**The Politics of Academic Labor in Communication Studies**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Structural Issues</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thomas Discenna, "Academic Labor and the Literature of Discontent"</li> <li>• Toby Miller, "The Contingency of (Some) Academic Labor: Communication Studies and the Cognitariat"</li> <li>• Michael Griffin, "The Uneasy Institutional Position of Communication and Media Studies and its Impact on Academic Labor in Large Universities vs. Small Colleges."</li> <li>• Victor Pickard, "First They Came for Everyone: The Assault on Civil Society is an Injury to All"</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Rethinking Careers</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amy Pason, "Four Myths About Academic Labor"</li> <li>• Kathleen F. McConnell, "Of Careers and <i>Curriculum Vitae</i>: Losing Track of Academic Professionalism"</li> <li>• Sarah Banet-Weiser and Alex Juhasz, "Feminist Labor in Media Studies/Communication: Is Self-Branding Feminist Practice?"</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Contradiction and Administration</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carol Stabile, "Who's Sitting in the President's Box?: Development and the Neoliberal University"</li> <li>• Fernando Delgado, "Reflecting on Academic Labor From the Other Side"</li> <li>• Anonymous, "Confessions of a Reluctant Manager in the Academic Labor System"</li> <li>• Anonymous, "Administration in the Neoliberal World"</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Rethinking Work</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ira Wagman and Michael Z. Newman, "PowerPoint and Labor in the Mediated Classroom"</li> <li>• Mark Hayward, "Canned Courses: Lecture Capture, Podcasting and the Transformations of Academic Labor"</li> <li>• Ted Striphas, "The Visible College"</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Activism</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jayson Harsin, "Negotiating Labor and Management in the French Context"</li> <li>• Kembrew McLeod, "Media Pranks: A Three-Act Essay"</li> <li>• Joel Saxe, "Critical Visioning in Communication Studies?"</li> <li>• Michelle Rodino-Colocino, "Getting to 'Not Especially Strange': Embracing Participatory-Advocacy Communication Research for Social Justice"</li> </ul>

This special issue brings together a group of authors who want to bring the discussion forward. This is not the first time academic labor has been put on the agenda in our field, but this issue is intended as a constructive reintroduction of some of the key terms. Although there are many ways to subdivide the

articles, they are grouped into five areas: structural analyses, dilemmas of administration, rethinking careers, rethinking work, and activism. The authors have much to say to one another and certainly don't agree on every point. But the greater consensus is around the urgency of the situation and the need to both think and act. All authors have attached some proposed course of action to their critique; it should be easy to read this issue in terms of what you can and ought to do, by yourself and organized with others. These actions range from advocacy of particular approaches to our work, like Michelle Rodino-Colocino's call for action-research or Joel Saxe's call for something like action-teaching, to Toby Miller's suggestions that the most privileged academics ought to be the ones teaching the big classes and doing some of their department's heavy lifting to make room for people not on the tenure-track to do more scholarship, Jayson Harsin's sketch of organizing and activism in the French system, Kembrew McLeod's turn to pranking as an alternative plank of media activism, and Victor Pickard's call for media and policy activism across coalitions with whom we can build mutual support.

Some authors, like Mark Hayward, Ted Striphas, Ira Wagman, and Michael Z. Newman, suggest new relationships to basic components of our work lives—PowerPoint, the recording of lectures, and the authorial byline. Amy Pason, Kathleen McConnell, Sarah Banet-Weiser, and Alex Juhasz ask us to tell different stories about the career arc and to avoid some of the more commodified and individualized practices of academic life. Two anonymous chairs simply tell stories they are not supposed to tell, exposing aspects of academic life normally hidden from view, while Carol Stabile suggests that, given the costs of war to states and higher education, any academic labor movement is going to also have a central antiwar component. She and Fernando Delgado also chronicle the devolution of administrative work from higher administration to middle management and the professoriate, another challenge we must name and face. Michael Griffin's article, along with those of the anonymous chairs, also asks us to think situationally about the politics of academic labor. While higher education in general faces crucial challenges, there are big differences between large and small schools, big public universities and private colleges.

Following are some proposals for discussion (and I conclude with a call for more discussion as well). They only begin to get at the range of issues we need to deal with, and there are certainly other planks for a progressive program for communication studies. I would be delighted if others read widely in the academic labor literature and then challenged or supplemented the proposals that follow—as well as those throughout this collection—so long as they propose better solutions and concrete courses of action, whether reformist, transformative, or revolutionary.

### **A Broad Sketch of an Incomplete Program**

Creating a more just and equitable workplace is not an easy task, and in times of retrenchment it may be derided as unrealistic. But it is important that we keep some ideals and goals in mind, even if we can't quite see a way to achieve them at the moment. Any conversation about how things are needs to be combined with a sense of how things ought to be. Every one of us lives some kind of contradiction. In my case, I write about academic labor from a position of great privilege—a fact I am reminded of simply by looking around my room and away from my computer screen. No doubt I benefit from some of very structures that I argue should be transformed. It's not just the tenured and well-positioned, either. Even an underfunded graduate student in a bad job market may well be privileged with respect to people in

other professions and may benefit from a host of conditions of inequality. But if we all wait for our own houses to be in perfect order, nothing gets done. We all begin from (ideologically, ethically, politically, personally) compromised positions. But politics is not about settling accounts, and a little forgiveness for ourselves and others would be a fine first principle. Our challenge is to analyze the contradictions in which we find ourselves and others bound up so that we can then transform the conditions that shape them. Any academic labor movement ought to be led by the people who have the most to gain from it, but all of us have a role to play in making our departments and universities better places.

1. ***Treat the academic job market as part of a much bigger academic labor market.***

Over the last decade at least, departments and institutions have been paying more attention to what they call the “job market”—the market for full-time, tenureable professor jobs. Job listings have long populated our organization newsletters, and job fairs and general schmoozing are part of regular annual conferences. But now professionalization panels proliferate. The NCA has gone so far as to endorse a single career model (or set of models) at its website<sup>5</sup>— though, not coincidentally, the site also promotes that organization’s limited view of what communication studies is. The interested reader will also find lots of “how to” websites (I maintain one), along with candidate-run job search wikis, blogs, and countless posts in the various spheres of social networks. Behind this profusion of discourse lie noble motives, but taken at face value, it is extremely limiting, for as Kathleen McConnell writes in this issue, it accepts a certain kind of individualistic career narrative that has little basis in truth, or to use Amy Pason’s language, there is no ladder to climb. Full-time tenure-track professor positions are one node in a much large labor market that graduate students enter into the minute they start graduate school.

Marc Bousquet (2002, p. 87; 2008) has famously called the PhD a “waste product” of graduate education, where students are admitted to English programs to staff massive undergraduate composition programs whether or not they have any hope of landing a tenure-track job after graduation. In their introduction to *Higher Education Under Fire*, Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson (1995) argued for closing more mediocre PhD programs in English, a proposal that is still reverberating almost two decades later (also see, for example, Bérubé, 1998, pp. 79–85; Nelson & Watt, 1999, pp. 121–127; Watt, 1997). Clearly, communication studies is not yet in the dire situation that English departments found themselves in during the 1990s (and perhaps English has the most developed scholarly literature on the academic job market crisis). We don’t need to begin with an argument about whether specific programs should be closed. But the same structural issues apply and are growing more serious. We should be extremely critical of the push at some universities to create new communication studies graduate degrees, especially PhDs.

Graduate programs should reexamine their admissions policies to see if they are driven by needs such as the staffing of undergraduate teaching programs that have nothing to do with the capacity to supervise or place their students. My own program, while not solving the problem for everyone, has in recent years reduced our admissions cohort and improved funding packages for each PhD student we admit. Whether this will have the desired long-term effect remains an open question, one that is bigger

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.natcom.org/uploadedFiles/Prof%20Dev%20Text%20vFINAL%20Nov%202009.pdf>

than any one program. We might also want to develop a habit of asking one another impolite questions. Programs should not be proliferating or growing right now; faculty without significant research profiles of their own have no business taking on doctoral students in the current climate unless they are mentoring them for a career path other than that leading to professorship. While acknowledging that the PhD is primarily a research degree, departments should go to some length relativizing the academic career as the only or best outcome of graduate education, and we should do our best to facilitate students finding alternatives should they want to pursue them. This is also a personal matter—how many supervisors tell their doctoral students that we will support them regardless of their career aspirations and whatever they wind up doing in the end? We all should.

As Bousquet has pointed out (2002), supply and demand talk is somewhat beside the point. The so-called job market is not a free market with an invisible hand. It is a product of higher education policy. If the problem is that universities and departments have an interest in recruiting graduate students *as graduate students*—for instance, to cheaply staff undergraduate courses or even just to assuage faculty egos—they will continue to feed lines to applicants, and professors and programs will continue to benefit from fairly exploitative conditions. An increasing proportion of university teaching is carried out by part-time, non-tenure-track faculty at all levels, and the condition we have misnamed as an “oversupply of PhDs” is not the cause of the problem, but rather its effect.

An American Association of University Professors study (2010) offers some striking numbers for the United States: Although the majority of professorships have always been teaching-intensive, whereas in 1970, about 75% of faculty were in the tenure stream and 78% were full time, by 2010 almost 70% of all faculty members in the United States were employed off the tenure track. As with full-time tenure-track positions, non-tenure stream appointments—as well as teaching assistantships—are written into school budgets (or given euphemistic placeholders), and they presuppose a population of workers ready to fill those slots. Of course, some professionals like having a course to teach at the university, and some communication studies programs depend on professionals to staff parts of their applied curricula. Obviously, it's a great thing for a graduate student to design and teach a course—once or twice—to build up a teaching portfolio as part of the PhD, perhaps covering for a full-time professor on leave or sabbatical. But those scenarios hardly justify the widespread reliance on part-time labor for delivering the basic curriculum. Although this is to a large extent a structural problem in which communication studies programs are caught, they are particularly reliant on part timers and should therefore be particularly mindful of the relationship between graduate education and academic employment. They should also be at the forefront of agitating administrations to create more tenure-track positions. In many cases, large enrollment humanities and social science programs subsidize other small-enrollment programs, even in faculties like law or business.

There is another cause for concern with the AAUP statistics, which is that the period they cover—roughly 1970 to the present—coincides with the opening up of academia. Who in the university can afford to be nostalgic for 1970? The golden age only existed for some people. A large proportion of those full-time professors in 1970 were straight (or in some cases closeted) white men with wives who supported them in one way or another. In the intervening years, the profession has diversified considerably, with white women making the greatest inroads. But this work is still largely unfinished. The faculty could still



be considerably more race- and class-diverse than it is now, and it also has not fully adjusted to the diversity of people it currently contains. Women and people of color on the faculty still often bear disproportionately heavy service roles. In extreme cases, tacit tolerance of sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and assertions of white or heterosexual privilege still mar some departmental cultures. In such situations, people need to organize so that problems that may feel individual are dealt with collectively, as they often result from structural problems.

At a more mundane level, the hermeneutics of the curriculum vita still treat many normal life events as “career interruptions” and somehow aberrant, especially those around caregiving—from parental leave to childcare and eldercare (which are, unsurprisingly, gendered). Decent parental leave<sup>6</sup> at our schools is a problem that goes far beyond our departments, though chairs can certainly be creative, judicious, and generous in how they interpret leave policies. A smaller step we can take right now would simply be getting beyond the mythical figure of the white-man-with-a-wife-who-handles-this-stuff-and-edits-his-manuscripts as the implied ideal subject of the curriculum vita. There would also be side benefits to such a move. For one, it might help ease the publication arms race and provide a platform for resisting the general speed-up in our jobs—encapsulated in the terrifying term “time deepening” quoted by Joel Saxe. It might also allow schools to rebalance how we interpret quantity and quality in hiring and merit decisions, though those processes are also due for some careful thought. If we subtract the idea of a golden age from our conception of the present problems, we may find other ways—for instance, eroding some of the privileges at the very top of the field—to distribute the resources that come with them more broadly to those who are considerably less privileged.

**2. *Resist, or at least negotiate, the commodification of academic labor as intellectual property.***

Ted Striphas’ (2010) classic and should-be-required article “Acknowledged Goods” nicely outlines the economics and politics of journal publishing. He is primarily concerned with cultural studies, but his conclusions could easily be applied to journals across communication studies: More and more, our journals are being published by big conglomerates that are themselves parts of even bigger conglomerates. Increasingly, authors are asked at the last minute to sign away their rights in ridiculous contracts. Not only are we asked to give up the right to share our work on our own terms, we are also often asked to give up the right to republish it or even rework it later on, and in extreme cases, some contracts even contain wording about rights to the very words and ideas we use. We can see the for-profit trend in academic book publishing as well. Increasingly, books are solicited by publishers for markets where the textbook and selling-to-libraries model expands into ever growing spheres of publication, and fewer monographs are being published. While the problem is not as dire as in some other fields, it is certainly moving in that direction. “Handbooks” and “Readers” proliferate (to continue from my prior confessions, I’m in several and editing one myself), many of which exist due more to felt market needs among

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<sup>6</sup> Quebec already has wonderful parental leave—so good that many of our graduate students take it at some point. It would also be good to extend paid family-leave policies to eldercare or family care (a reality for many academics at one time or another in their careers) and, perhaps, even to child-free faculty who want to spend a term devoting themselves intensely to some other generally recognized social good.

publishers than to felt intellectual needs among their editors (Blair, 2009). While these collections can serve important intellectual functions, they cannot and should not replace publication that is initiated and produced on a more purely intellectual basis.

Whether we are talking about being able to afford to operate or simply being economically useful to the conglomerates that own them, presses are also concerned about their economic viability. This often leads to unnecessarily conservative positions on other aspects of intellectual property practice: Consider presses' timidity around fair use of images, text, lyrics, and so on. Consider also our own institutions' timidity. Universities rarely fight for their faculty's fair use rights and, in fact, often advocate a conservative position that is likely driven by fear of litigation. I was reminded of this fact daily as a teacher, as some agency at McGill University decided that the library should print the blatant lie that "IT IS ILLEGAL TO PHOTOCOPY THIS COURSEPACK" on each course reader it held in its reserves.

Of course, someone has to pay for publication, and it's too easy to make a blanket call for open-access publishing secured with creative commons licenses until you try to figure out who pays for that model. But we need to consider who pays for the current model. Schools pay twice for our work as intellectuals: once in our salaries as professors and then again when they buy the products of our intellectual labor from presses. It is true that some valorization goes on in the process of peer review and editing,<sup>7</sup> but as Gary Hall has argued, much of that work is performed as free labor; that which is not, like copyediting, has suffered greatly, especially at some of the more commercial presses. One could imagine alternative institutional arrangements for supporting scholarship—for instance, where libraries take on the curatorial role for electronic resources and manage copyediting (using their acquisitions budget), and schools no longer pay exorbitant fees for journals. Another model is the medical model, where authors pay the journal as part of the process of open-access publication. Such a model assumes faculty have grants from which to pay, so it is not immediately applicable to all parts of our field, but it shows that alternatives are possible.

At the very least we should be supporting non-profit presses. But we also need to look into alternative outlets: open access journals such as this one, open access presses such as Open Humanities Press (<http://openhumanitiespress.org>), alternative modes of archiving content and facilitating fair use like Critical Commons (<http://criticalcommons.org>), and alternative forms of publication that take advantage of the multimedia capabilities that are now widely available in computers and reading devices that aren't books.

To this, we can add a measure of responsibility. Established scholars should edit every single objectionable provision out of publication contracts they receive from presses (have a look at the SPARC author's addendum for a good example: <http://www.arl.org/sparc/author/addendum.shtml>); we should resist any scheme to put in some kind of disastrous digital rights management (DRM) protocol on our work (see Gillespie, 2007, for a critique of DRM). And we should do everything we can to support publication outlets and publishers with progressive approaches to intellectual property issues. That means

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<sup>7</sup> Although it is also time to rethink peer review. See, for example, Blair, Brown, and Baxter (1994), Schwartzman (1997), and Fitzpatrick (2011).

publishing more in journals like this one and less in, for instance, *The Journal of Communication*. We should also fight our own institutions' timidity through the adoption and promotion of practices like those outlined in the work of scholars like Siva Vaidyanathan and Kembrew McLeod (McLeod, 2007; McLeod & Kuenzli, 2011; Vaidyanathan, 2001), and in Pat Aufderheide's (2011) *Reclaiming Fair Use*. And we should make space for new forms of publication, especially for junior colleagues who have not come up for tenure. This is not an argument about the content of scholarship, which is a separate matter, but rather an acknowledgment that the old forms of the monograph, the essay, and the article are themselves historically plastic. Academic essays, books, and articles looked different 50 years ago than they do now; we should allow them to change again, along with modes of presentation.

### 3. ***Develop a politics of budgets.***

Consider the standard post-2008 story: Schools were hit on both ends by the financial crisis. While public funding diminished, private endowment monies also shrank because schools lost so much money in their investment portfolios. But to tell the story this way is make it sound inevitable that academic institutions would fare the same as investment bankers. The story assumes that it is normal for university endowments to be highly exposed to market fluctuations. It leaves out a crucial question: Why were schools exposing their endowments to so much risk?

At least part of the answer lies in something called "The Yale Model," an approach to endowment and pension fund investing credited to David Swenson (2005) in his role as Yale University's chief investment officer. Historically, universities had invested their endowments in two kinds of assets: fixed-income assets (like bonds) that were relatively low return, but also very low risk; and domestic equities (like regular stock market stocks and mutual funds), which carried somewhat higher risk and the potential for higher income. The Yale Model, meanwhile, expanded and diversified their investment portfolio so that it included a whole set of other kinds of assets that behave very differently from traditional stocks and bonds: "absolute return," which includes essentially betting on particular corporate transactions like mergers and bankruptcies, and various kinds of short selling strategies—"identification and exploitation of inefficiencies in pricing marketable securities"; "private equity," which involves venture capital and leveraged buyouts; "real assets," like real estate and commodities; as well as foreign equities and fixed income assets. The advantage of the Yale Model is based on the idea that endowments generally have a long period of time to perform and can weather fluctuations in the market in exchange for a very high rate of long-term return. The disadvantage of the Yale Model is precisely this exposure to risk. Before the popularization of Swenson's model, it is quite unlikely, for instance, that university endowments would have been involved in the derivatives market or buying into mortgage-backed securities. To do this well, universities must hire fund managers, whose salaries are higher than those of traditional investment managers, and so they must have an even higher rate of return to justify that expense (Swensen, 2005). As *The Economist* explained, "the asset managers get rich but the investors still get clobbered" ("Yale may not have the key," 2011).

This level of detail shows how serious a simple matter of investing can be for a public institution. It has direct effects on the conduct of the school's daily and yearly business, but it also affects things like retirement and pension benefits for its employees. When this happens, employees and former employees

bear the cost of an institution's financial risk taking. Schools have a choice in how to handle their money. Smaller returns mean less income, to be sure, but also less exposure to risk. We need to ask what kinds of risks universities and other public institutions can and should take. This is another side to the corporatization of higher education: There are many cases where the desire to maximize efficiency or profit may not be appropriate for institutions whose primary purpose is something other than generating value for themselves. Yale may have done very well for many years, but that doesn't mean every school will do as well simply by following its approach. As with many investment strategies, the Yale Model works best when not everyone is doing it. The imagined "efficiencies" of the Yale Model may not be efficiencies at all if the first goal is maintaining a baseline of institutional support from endowments.

If there is a politics of budget, it affords a somewhat crueler politics of debt. In her President's Address to the American Studies Association, Ruthie Gilmore (2011) tells a chilling story. In the 1840s, Ivy League schools gave fellowships to farmers' sons in the hopes that they would train as clergy and move west to proselytize as part of the project of conquering the Western United States. Instead, the farmers' sons went to school and then did what they pleased with their degrees.

The Ivy managers got together and decided that they would use debt to discipline the farmers' sons. They would lend them the money to go to school, and forgive the loan if and only if they went off and worked as clergymen. They would discipline them in that way, and if they didn't work as clergy, they would be hounded for repayment of the loans, and it would all be due at once. No monthly payments. It worked pretty well. Today, while the imperial imperatives might be different, the role of debt is the same—to compel consent through the coercion of debt. (pp. 260–261)

It is stunning that for all the students' services that universities provide and all the career counseling that professors engage in for their undergraduates and graduate students, almost nothing is said about debt, financial planning, and the politics of money. Part of this has to do with the institutions' interests. I regularly walk by tables where someone is hawking a credit card offer to students (or to anyone who will pass by, including me). Universities themselves will market credit cards to students. They also enjoy a symbiotic and lucrative relationship with the people who provide financial aid to students, as evidenced by the burgeoning interest in Pell Grants on the part of for-profit schools in the United States. Schools sometimes have a direct interest in the economic exploitation of their students, from admitting underqualified students to cash cow graduate programs to calculated exploitation of undergraduates, as in the recently exposed collusion between Penn State and Hershey (Preston, 2011; see also the discussion of UPS in Bousquet, 2008, pp. 125–156).

Institutional debt also affects academic governance. When there is no money or not enough of it, old political antagonisms and power plays emerge. Gilmore's story could easily be extended to departments and programs, as well as to students. Crisis management allows for all sorts of "disaster capitalism" strategies to operate ("A Smaller Tulane," 2005; Klein, 2007). Sometimes, managers are simply operating in the context of constraint. Sometimes, they are using a condition of crisis to install radical reforms that they have long wanted. But the effects can feel the same regardless of intent: Which

kinds of jobs can be cut? Whose salaries and benefits can be cut? Whose tuition can be raised and by how much? What programs can be cut and who decides?

We should all be supporting our unionized colleagues and working to build cross-class alliances within our schools to support everyone's right to decent compensation and working conditions. If administration is fundamentally about negotiating constraints, a union contract operates as a kind of positive constraint on administrators, much like tenure does for full-time faculty. It requires certain actions and disallows others; it exerts a gravitational force on budgetary choices that affect the most fundamental working conditions for people on campuses. One of the most common administrative objections to unions is that they reduce "flexibility" in decision making. This is entirely true, and as a chair I even experienced it once or twice: I felt I knew better what was good for a group of employees, but that the contract would not allow me to follow that course of action. But that is exactly the point. It is not about who "knows better," but about governance and rights in the workplace. That doesn't mean the union or the contract is always right, but rather that, like those in administration, workers across the university have a right to represent themselves and a right to be wrong and still have it matter. Faculty may also think that they can get a "better deal" as an individual than they could get as a member of a union. Perhaps in the case of a few celebrity scholars, this is true. But the illusion of professorial agency is just that: It is facilitated by the four walls that surround us in "our" offices, physically separate from our colleagues, as if we were free, autonomous, individual agents. Thanks to the academic division of labor, sometimes we can experience that autonomy, but as we are confronted with structural problems and structural changes, we will be completely ineffective if we are not organized as a group.

Many academics say that they support unions in principle, but don't like how the unions on their campuses operate. Fair enough, but this proposition holds unions to a higher standard of perfection. Will they object to the existence of their universities or departments because they don't like how they operate? Unions are far from perfect, but they perform a role that no other entity can in the university space: They represent people as employees. This is especially important in a time of eroding faculty governance. But it's even more important for clerical workers, graduate employees, and part-time faculty who play crucial economic roles for the university, but don't even have the veneer of representation offered by faculty governance. The tenured depend on the work of these other people: We would not exist without them, and because we benefit so heavily from the academic division of labor, we have an obligation to our colleagues across the different positions in the university.

Much of the crisis literature on the university places the blame for the current problem on administrators, who have themselves become more professionalized and are more likely to think in terms of efficiencies, outcomes, market logics, and the like (the locus classicus of this argument is Readings, 1997). This may be all true, and certainly in the case of union struggles, there are clear differences between labor and management at academic institutions. At the same time, many of the problems now faced by schools are much bigger than labor management. Even the highest-level administrators function within many constraints that have been even further tightened by the financial crisis. For every case of an administrator using a financial crisis to create false savings by cutting, for example, an interdisciplinary humanities program, many others simply are trying to keep the university running. As Fernando Delgado writes in this collection, higher administration's proper function has always been to make difficult decisions

and deal with logistics and economics, so that there will be paper for the copier, chalk for the chalkboards, and teachers for students. When cuts runs too deep, administrators no longer have the resources to maintain all parts of the university, and the cruel cuts start coming. But as Delgado also writes, faculty and administrators' differences (and those of students and staff) need not always result in conflict. In some of the most important cases, our priorities are the same.

4. ***Think and work across scales.***

Consider the case of activism at the University of California. As Rosalind Williams (2011) explains, state support for the University of California dropped from \$3.25 billion in 2008 to \$1.8 billion in 2010 (p. 2). There is no way to escape cuts in a scenario like that: Almost every person—faculty, student, staff, administrator—felt the squeeze. The question, then, is how to respond. Of the Berkeley protests, she writes that there were

rallies in Sproul Hall Plaza, demonstrations outside California Hall (site of senior administrative offices) . . . an occupation of Wheeler Hall, [and a] nighttime march by one group of demonstrators, some masked and carrying lighted torches, to the Chancellor's on-campus residence: they threw rocks at the windows and nearly succeeded in setting the building on fire. . . . These tactics and strategies were familiar ones on the Berkeley campus and were repeatedly explained and defended as part of "Berkeley culture." As a response to the economic crisis, however, they were ineffective. In part this is because protestors' demands were fundamentally inconsistent. Calls to maintain services, jobs, and salaries required more income, while demands to lower tuition and fees, or even to eliminate them, would further reduce the income stream, including that directed for financial aid. The protests were also ineffective in targeting campus and system administrators as culprits, although they had no responsibility for the dramatic drop in university income and were struggling to deal with its consequences. (p. 3)

Academic administrators are bound by the same logics of constraint and contradiction as everyone else in the institution, and they have no magic solutions. In cases of drastic cuts and defunding of public education, students, staff, faculty, and administrators all have a basic, common cause. We all need to work together to bring more money back into university systems. This is fundamentally a lobbying and policy question. Bousquet's (2002) point about the job shortage for PhDs could easily be extended to all aspects of academic politics:

Under the present arrangements the pool of tenure-stream positions is not primarily affected by forces such as "demand" for education or student enrollment but rather policy decisions made by legislatures, administrations and bodies of accreditation (about who will teach and under what conditions, and so on). Addressing these real problems of policy requires the faculty to struggle in these arenas . . . (pp. 84–85)

For publicly-funded institutions, the lack of money is a collective problem and should be addressed collectively. The shared collective interests are obvious when we are talking about policy activism, explaining the value of education to voters, and lobbying elected and appointed officials in government. It should also extend—at least coalitionally—to activism around the bailout budgets that have sapped all public programs in many countries, and in the United States at least, to its obscene military budget as well.

The need for collectivity also extends to cost cutting and dealing with the fallout of real cuts. Labor unions and faculty governance organizations can work together to come up with alternative budget solutions within the existing constraints. If there is an argument about whether the money is available, public schools at least should open up their budget ledgers completely, including both hard and soft money. Of course, this can only go so far: Cross-class resentments may get in the way of solidarity. Faculty and students may see a zero-sum game between tuition dollars and professorial salaries, and disciplines on opposite sides of the university may eye one another's research agendas as frivolous. But just because the conversation would be difficult is not a good reason to head it off. If faculty and students don't like the "benevolent dictatorship" of higher administration, they have to be willing to do some of the more difficult work of self-governance and to really learn how their institutions work.

### **What Did You Do?**

The long list of issues raised in this introduction and by the 18 other essays in this volume is daunting for anyone—and there is so much more. No single strategy or program will solve all our problems, and some solutions will be out of our control. As Kembrew McLeod points out, there is room for many different strategies. We can organize with like-minded people, we can think of strategies both small and big that can make a difference. Some of these are as simple as having enough courage to write a letter of support for striking workers at your school or, as one anonymous chair suggests, to look those less advantaged than you in the eye. Sometimes, it may simply be extending a small kindness that costs you nothing but a moment's thought. Sometimes, it may be slow, patient, and frustrating organizing at your institution or across institutions. But everyone can educate themselves fairly quickly about their own responsibilities and the challenges facing the higher education today, and everyone can keep the conversation alive when it needs to be and focus on the real ethical and political choices we face. We might also take instruction from Sarah Banet-Weiser and Alex Juhasz, who argue that we should be careful not to collapse critique and work into a "brand," an especially important stake as we try and tackle reasons, lest we descend into the political grandstanding and careerism that sometimes spoils critical scholarship and activism.

The call for this issue solicited writers from as many different kinds of academic positions and career stages as possible to write on a wide range of academic-labor-related topics. My success was mixed. The authors in this issue cover a wide range of topics and advance an abundance of proposals for consideration. The administrators in this issue bring new perspectives that complement the usual "from below" standpoint that animates most analyses of academic labor. However, the authors are not entirely a representative group. I did not get many submissions from graduate students, adjuncts, or lecturers: Only one of the contributors is not currently in a tenure track position. That may well be a failing on my part in

terms of circulating the call and seeking out contributors. It also may reflect privilege; it is easier to take time to write about these issues (and to take public stands on them) from the comfort of job security, though our two anonymous chairs' articles also illustrate that tenure only protects so much. Either way, a collection of writing like this is really only a single small step.

Any serious conversation on academic labor needs to make room for those less privileged perspectives to emerge and define the conversation. And so, while this special section is officially published, it will take advantage of being in an electronic journal to remain open to submissions. I will happily consider—and recommend for publication here—new work that extends the conversation on academic labor by bringing in different perspectives or by raising issues not yet covered in this special section. This should be only one of many spaces in our chaotic field for discussions of academic labor; we will consider the issue in the broadest possible sense, with an eye toward short-term and long-term solutions, proposals for reform, and total transformation. More important, any discussion we have needs to both bring in and extend out into the broader academic ferment about the future of universities and the place of workers of all kinds within them. The politics of academic labor and the problems of higher education are much bigger than our department, but if we ever had an excuse for inaction in our hallways, it is now long gone. The fortunes of faculty, undergraduates, graduate students, support staff, maintenance, casuals, part timers, and all the others who work in higher education are intimately intertwined. The crisis of academic labor is not the only social problem or the most important one today. But it is our social problem. We should attend to it with care, conviction, action, and tenderness.

(Montreal, Labor Day 2011)

*For "Call for 'More' Academic Labor Papers", see details following References.*



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**Call for "More" Papers  
"The Politics of Academic Labor in Communication Studies"**

Edited by Jonathan Sterne

Academic labor today is characterized by a series of disconcerting trends: an increasingly casualized professoriate; universities that increasingly depend on chronically undercompensated part-time and graduate student labor to support their course offerings; a top-down managerial style and erosion of faculty governance; increasing economic exploitation of staff and undergraduates; rising student debt; governments that attack public education; shrinking endowments (for the schools that had them) and heightened expectations for sponsored research; wooden research assessment exercises; and the acute uncertainty of the academic job market for recent PhD graduates. Attempting to counter these trends is a growing academic labor movement with its own intellectual organs, like *Workplace* and *Edufactory*, as well as a wide range of activist manifestations, from labor unions to noncommercial alternative universities. Academic journals have also fielded debate in this area.

This special forum of the *International Journal of Communication* aims to encourage people in communication studies—at all levels in the field—to reflect directly on the state of academic labor in our field and to propose concrete courses of action that we might take, however grand or small. Much of the academic labor literature has come from fields, like English and history, with considerably worse job markets than that for communication studies. Yet, communication studies does not conform so well to models of those other fields, either academically or institutionally. More important, it is possible that within both professional organizations and departments, we can begin to address some of these issues. But first we need to confront them.

Submissions should be 500–4,000 words in length and may come in any form of critical commentary piece, ranging from academic analysis of some aspect of the current crisis to personal/political reflection; to recommendations for activism, policy, or best practices; or to any other style of critical commentary. We are particularly interested in pieces that not only identify problems but also offer potential solutions or new perspectives.

Multimedia submissions are welcome as are direct responses to work that has already been published. Although the section will be edited and reviewed, it will not be subject to blind peer review. For the purposes of this forum, "communication studies" will be interpreted broadly to include all related fields and subfields, theoretical and applied.

We welcome commentary from any and all parts of the world, though submissions should be made in English. We encourage writers from all kinds of institutions, in all kinds of academic positions, and at all career stages to contribute. The goal of this section is to have thoughtful essays by graduate students, sessionals, full-time faculty, staff, and administrators sharing the same forum space.

Please send queries, proposals, or essays to [al@sterneworks.org](mailto:al@sterneworks.org). Submissions will be accepted on a rolling basis through and published when enough accumulate to warrant a new installment.

All submissions must follow *IJoC* style. Author guidelines for *IJoC* are available at <http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>

We look forward to your new submissions.