Introduction: Negotiating the Terrain

Abstract: In “Introduction: Negotiating the Terrain” we explain the rationale for this project, stipulate our intended audience, and outline the scope of this work. In this chapter, we introduce the external narratives appearing throughout the text, including current conversations on the realities of contingent faculty work in higher education, we define our terms, and we explore possibilities for expanding existing notions of scholarly inquiry. In addition to offering an overview of the text, we suggest strategies for using this volume as part of developing a scholarly research agenda and supporting professional development.

Keywords: adjunct teaching; contingent faculty; faculty funding; professional development; publishing guide; scholarship

Dear Colleagues:

Although it may seem unusual to open an academic reference guide with a message to our readers, we feel compelled to personally welcome you and at the same time explain our motivation for writing this text. In the following pages of this monograph, we present what are certainly bleak statistics and information about what might best be labeled “the plight of the adjunct laborer.” Recent articles and editorials with such harsh titles as “The Highest-Paid University President Makes 170 Times More than the Average Adjunct” and “An ‘Alarming Snapshot’ of Adjunct Labor”—along with controversial, high-profile stories of adjunct faculty members like Margaret Mary Vojtko, who taught French as a part-time professor for 25 years at Duquesne University, earning $10,000 a year with no health insurance and who died with no contract renewal—certainly paint an alarming portrait, and perhaps come as no surprise to you. However, we know that no one enters the academy with a plan to be (what we label and explain fully in the pages of this volume) “contingent.” Instead, we all entered our respective fields because we recognize our skill as teachers, researchers, and leaders; because we relish the enjoyment and fulfillment we find working with students and colleagues; and also because we love texts, broadly defined. No matter how overworked, underpaid, or peripheral we may sometimes feel, the impetus for pursuing academic degrees and entering the academy steadfastly remains. Although the aforementioned material conditions of contingent faculty work are gaining public attention (see, for example, the Coalition on the Academic Workforce website, which includes 33 recent studies addressing a wide range of issues), contingent faculty voices and the wealth of experience and expertise that authorities like you bring to college and university campuses are not fully represented in current academic conversations, and we find that to be a real problem. Depending upon your present situation, we hope this monograph will motivate you to resume scholarly pursuits, seek venues for disseminating work you have already begun, identify allies with whom you can collaborate, and discover new projects prompted by the information presented here. We know that other teacher-scholars will benefit greatly from your work and are confident that you will enjoy this process, as well—Lynée and Letizia