Two-Year College English Association

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White Paper on Two-Year College English Faculty Workload
TYCA Workload Issues Committee
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Introduction

Faculty workload is a persistent and sometimes invisible problem for English instructors at two-year, open-admissions colleges. Questions about what constitutes work for faculty at two-year colleges, how that work is valued, and how it is compensated are not new (see Yukor, 1984; Russell,1992). However, no recent study has explored how English instructors at two-year colleges spend their work time, how that time is compensated, or how demands on their time impact their teaching. To learn more about the working conditions and workload of two-year college English faculty, the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) organized a task force in 2018 to investigate workload issues at two-year colleges and to develop standards for professional working conditions. The purpose of this project was to investigate labor conditions, faculty experiences, workload levels, and working conditions at two-year colleges so that faculty, administrators, professional organizations, and the discipline at large might better understand and respond to working conditions. Subsequently, TYCA changed the status of the research group from a task force to a standing committee that will continue to investigate workload issues for two-year college English professionals over time.

In Fall 2019, the task force distributed a 39-question survey to two-year college English faculty through professional listservs, regional distribution lists, and social media platforms. The survey included six demographics, 28 closed-ended, and five open-ended questions about faculty work environment, expectations, and experiences. All responses were anonymous. Participants could skip questions they did not wish to answer and could opt out of the survey at any point. The survey collected 1,062 responses to questions about workload related to teaching, service, and professional development. The Task Force conducted a mixed-methods analysis of responses to the survey using descriptive statistics to analyze closed-ended responses and applied iterative thematic analyses of open-ended responses to survey questions using Dedoose, a web-based data analysis platform (see Corbin and Strauss, 2015, for more on iterative thematic analysis).

In this white paper, we draw from the analysis of the survey data (reported in multiple working papers and a quantitative report), synthesized with research and scholarship on workload. We describe the workload of two-year college English Faculty, identify important features of working conditions, and recommend strategies that programs can use to work toward equitable, sustainable workloads. We make recommendations for sustainable and equitable workloads for two-year college English instructors. Last, we recommend advocacy strategies that faculty and program leaders can use to improve working conditions for teachers

and students. The overall purpose of this white paper is to describe the working conditions of two-year college faculty in order to set in motion changes that help two-year college English faculty and their students thrive.

What Is the Workload of TYC English Faculty?

The TYCA Workload Issues Committee survey shows that defining workload for two-year college English faculty requires considering the full range of activities that make up instructor workload. In this section, we summarize some of the key findings from the survey in each of the three main areas of faculty workload: teaching, service, and professional development.

Teaching

The majority of survey respondents (56%) work off the tenure-track, and 44% identified holding tenure-line positions. The majority of respondents indicated that the annual full-time, tenure-line faculty credit load was 28 credits or higher (likely translating to a minimum of 14 credits per term with the number of courses varying depending on the type of curriculum and course assignments). Other key features of teaching workload are highlighted in the quantitative summary:

- Overload teaching is common with 57% of all respondents indicating that they sometimes, frequently, or always teach an overload on top of their base contractual course load.
- The survey results strongly suggest that both class size (80% of respondents) and number of assigned sections or credit hours (73% of respondents) have a significant impact on workload management for two-year college English faculty.
- Respondents reported that the highest levels of autonomy over key factors affecting their teaching workloads were for course content with 75% reporting "a lot" of autonomy and 23% reporting "some." Respondents also reported a high level of autonomy over office hours with 74% reporting "a lot" and 21% reporting "some."
- Respondents reported the least amount of autonomy over their summer teaching with 52% reporting "none." They also reported little autonomy over the number of sections they teach with 45% reporting "none," and little autonomy over the mode of delivery with 45% reporting "none." Only 12% reported that they had "a lot" of control over their schedule (Suh et al., 2020).

What is important to note about teaching workload for two-year college English faculty is that teaching labor is intensive, and a large number of credits and students in the lower-division or pre-college courses make up nearly all of an instructor's workload.

Service

Though full-time (and contingent) respondent survey data show that teaching is the primary emphasis of a two-year college English teacher's workload, it was also clear that service responsibilities place many demands on the time and labor of faculty. Of the 923 responses to a survey question about service, 609 (66%) identified service as a defined element of their employment contracts. An additional 205 (22%) indicated they contributed to their institutions through service even though service was not required in their contracts. Of those 205 respondents, 162 indicated their service was uncompensated while 43 (4.7%) conducted non-contractual service for additional compensation.

Faculty participants described interest and willingness to conduct service that informed their teaching and/or directly informed students' experiences. Participants described such

experiences, including reforming assessment and placement practices, contributing to disciplinary work through TYCA or CCCC, and committee work tied directly to teaching and student support in generally positive terms. However, participants also noted that English faculty may bear a disproportionate burden for service because English and math departments are often tasked with revising curricular elements and implementing reform initiatives, including those stemming from their disciplines and those directed down through state-wide and privately funded mandates (Griffiths et al.).

Professional Development

For many respondents, professional development is a component of their workload, either because of their independent desire to participate in professional development opportunities or because of a contractual obligation to demonstrate continued professional development. A total of 923 respondents reported participating in some type of professional development. The majority of these respondents (821 of 923 or 89%) report weekly engagement with some form of professional development. Only 5.5% of respondents reported that they participate in no professional development. The most common barriers to participating in professional development activities (defined broadly to mean attending conferences or workshops, reading circles, and training) were lack of resources (money and time), lack of relevance to their teaching work, and lack of (or no) value attached to professional development by their employing institution.

Workload Issues for Two-Year College English Programs

Workload refers to measurable elements of labor, including time spent on compensated and uncompensated work tasks, teaching loads, course enrollment caps, contractually-determined responsibilities for institutional service and professional development, as well as individual scholarly commitments to disciplinary service, scholarship, and professional development within one's discipline. These elements of labor are necessarily shaped by working conditions, which can include funding structures, access to material resources (like office space and computers), political pressures, and social and symbolic capital afforded professional members by way of public status and effective autonomy over how and when work is conducted. Without question, the unique histories and multiple missions of two-year colleges that shape the working conditions of two-year college faculty inform questions of workload and labor.

Workload and working conditions for English teachers at two-year colleges differ radically from colleagues at graduate-degree granting institutions. First and foremost is the heavy teaching load. Faculty at two-year colleges teach far more students each semester than any professional organization recommends (for example, CCCC "Principles" and MLA "ADE Guidelines") and far more than nearly all faculty at four-year institutions. It is not uncommon for faculty to teach beyond a standard 5-5 course load with class caps for each section at 25 to 30; in fact, an 8-8 load is not uncommon (Suh et al.; Calhoon-Dillahunt), and instructors often have classes distributed across multiple campuses (Giordano et al.; Klausman, Roberts, and Snyder). Because of the open-access mission of almost all two-year colleges, two-year college faculty teach the broadest range of students in higher education, including students who would not be admitted to other institutions.

This heavy teaching load in terms of sections and high student needs along with large class size is driven by a lack of economic security among both tenure-line and contingent faculty (Giordano et al.; Giordano and Wegner; Hassel, Sullivan, and Wegner). Many faculty regularly

teach overload courses to compensate for low salaries, leading to even higher workloads (Suh et al.). Add to this the lack of security that the vast majority of contingent faculty and some contracted full-time faculty face, and it's not difficult to see why the emotional toll of the workload is heavy (Klausman and Hassel).

Austerity measures stemming from the Completion Agenda have also increased faculty's course loads and class sizes (Suh et al.). As Nancy Welch and Tony Scott note in their Introduction to *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, "Composition still lacks a developed understanding of how labor conditions shape pedagogy, scholarship, and the production of literacy and students' writing" (6). Welch and Scott suggest that the need for this understanding is crucial to our work as educators as we respond to the exigencies of austerity and other conditions like the Covid-19 pandemic, which are reshaping higher education in America. They note that "In the age of corporatization and austerity, we now face the consequences of a field that has never established a scholarly habit of positioning composition scholarship in relation to powerful political economic factors and trends that shape composition work" (6). The effects of this very oversight play out daily in the working conditions of writing teachers at two-year colleges through overreliance on adjunct faculty and an increase in austerity-based accountability funding associated with top-down education policy initiatives.

As tenure-line positions decrease, two-year English courses are increasingly taught by adjunct and contingent faculty (Eagan). Such faculty lines offer limited economic security for professionals who often need to combine such positions at multiple institutions to earn a living wage (Giordano et al.; Eagan; Holter et al.). In addition to limited financial compensation, adjunct and contingent faculty frequently lack access to discipline-specific professional development opportunities (Suh et al.). Indeed, respondents to the TYCA Workload survey identified lack of resources (e.g., time and financial support) as the most common barriers to participating in professional development (Suh, Tinoco, and Toth).

Reform movements also increase and complicate faculty workload in two-year college writing and developmental English programs. Grouped loosely under what is known as the "Completion Agenda" (Humphreys), efforts to increase two-year college graduation rates while simultaneously reducing costs to students and institutions have reshaped teaching English at two-year colleges with a significant impact on faculty workload. Some data (such as graduation rates and retention rates) do not acknowledge the material and college-going realities of two-year college students (Chen). Others illustrate the disparate impact of placement processes relying upon standardized tests (Scott-Clayton, 2012; Barnett, 2018)—the results of these reform efforts are increased labor for two-year college English faculty and writing programs in almost every conceivable way by changing administrative responsibilities, course sequence, course content, course outcomes, pedagogical practices, and course structure.

As a result, faculty workload has intensified. "TYCA Working Paper #6: Making the Labor of Assessment Visible" (Hassel and Klausman), for example, highlights how the reform efforts create new teaching and learning challenges. AB 705 in California and similar efforts across the country to eliminate developmental education coursework, or acceleration initiatives that place some or all students into first-year writing directly—with or without a corequisite support course—require instructors to implement curricular and instructional changes. These include adapting instruction to different credit hour structures, teaching different student populations in existing courses, creating new courses and program structures, and using new approaches to teaching. Meanwhile, the stakes are as high as ever for the largely open-admission student population.

Inequities are compounded for minoritized and marginalized two-year college English instructors. For example, contingent faculty have low status within their institutions but often teach a disproportionate number of labor-intensive writing and developmental English courses while also having limited access to material resources required for teaching (Giordano et al.). The proportion of tenure-line positions to contingent teaching positions continues to decline

(Government Accountability Board), with proportions of contingent positions highest at two-year colleges among all institution types (Flaherty). The result is an increase in the responsibilities of tenure-line faculty without a proportionate decrease in teaching load and without compensation (Klausman, Roberts, and Snyder; Giordano et al.).

Finally, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) faculty can have heavy social justice workloads in addition to their teaching and service responsibilities. The number of BIPOC faculty relative to the number of white-identified faculty in two-year college English programs and relative to the makeup of students remains disgracefully small (Suh et al.), particularly compared with the large proportion of BIPOC students who make up two-year college student populations (AACC; U.S. Department of Education). An inequitable workload burden is often thrust upon BIPOC faculty through expectations that they carry a heavier leadership workload (Oluo), such as serving on hiring and tenure committees; mentoring faculty; and leading institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

In the next sections, we a) establish workload standards for two-year college English faculty, b) identify program strategies to support meeting those standards, and c) offer a variety of strategies for advocating for change within a program, department, or institutional context.

Workload Standards for Two-Year College English

Two-year college English departments and programs can create sustainable workloads for instructors that support students in an open-access teaching environment through the following practices:

1. Pay instructors for their work. Clearly define contractual responsibilities and departmental expectations for teaching, service, and professional development. Compensate both tenure line and contingent faculty for required work beyond their contractual obligations through stipends or course releases.
2. Assign faculty fewer than four composition classes per term. Limit overall course load to a maximum of 15 credits each semester (depending on workload structure and term length).
3. Limit course enrollment caps in compliance with the recommendations of national organizations (CCCC "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing; the CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers , and the ADE Guidelines for Class Size and Workload for College and University Instructors of English). Enroll a maximum of 20 students per writing course and a maximum of 15 students for developmental writing, developmental reading, integrated reading and writing, and courses serving multilingual writers. Limit corequisite writing courses that support acceleration initiatives to no more than 12 students per section.
4. Limit the use of teaching overloads beyond the contracted level of employment and avoid using overloads as a regular practice to manage insufficient staffing. Eliminate the expectation that instructors must take overloads.
5. Give instructors the autonomy to adapt their teaching mode or schedule in order to manage their workloads. For example, support instructors in professional training for teaching in online asynchronous, remote, blended, or HyFlex models. Whenever possible, meet the scheduling needs of instructors in terms of time of day, days of the week, teaching location, and mode.
6. Reduce unnecessary program-level mandates (for example, required numbers of essays or numbers of pages per student text). Replace rigid rules with flexible recommendations that respect the autonomy and expertise of instructors. Give instructors flexibility in determining the times and modalities for their office hours.
7. Compensate instructors for (and reward in evaluation processes) the work required to adapt courses to new delivery modalities. As teaching in the pandemic has made visible,

the labor of designing courses or development shells for learning management systems is specialized, intensive, and not very visible. Ensure faculty receive appropriate training, time, and/or monetary compensation to support this curricular work (see CCCC and CWPA, 2020). Provide course development shells in a learning management system to reduce the workload for adjunct faculty who teach online or hybrid courses.

8. Ensure that departmental expectations are matched with resources. For example, instructors who are required to have office hours or hold conferences with students need office space that is private whenever possible. Instructors who are required to use technology for their jobs should receive a computer. Match professional development expectations to available funding.

9. Compensate faculty or provide reassigned time for developing, coordinating, implementing, and participating in training for reform initiatives and major curricular changes.

10. Support instructors in implementing disciplinary best practices in a way that accounts for their time and labor. For example, permit instructors to cancel courses for individual or small group conferences with students. Compensate adjunct instructors for the time required to prepare before teaching a course and to assess student learning at the end of a course.

These standards are derived from both the primary and secondary research conducted by the TYCA Workload. The next section offers strategies for how institutional and program leadership can help move their program toward sustainable and equitable working conditions.

Program Strategies for Workload Equity

The specifics of what should be in any given institution's workload will vary, so instead we offer some general principles that faculty and coordinators can use in two-year college English programs to create sustainable working conditions that are *both* good for student success *and* for managing instructor workload. In other words, the goal in this section is to bring "what is" in alignment with "what could be" for the material conditions of teachers and students in two-year college writing and English programs. We suggest five strategies that are (in many cases) within the control of individual departments, programs, or campuses to prioritize.

1. **Create sustainable policies that reflect material conditions.** Reducing class sizes is an important step towards recognizing the invisible workload of instructors and creating policy that recognizes and values this work. If institutional constraints prevent lower class sizes, English programs can still take a proactive approach to reducing faculty workload through their own policies. For example, reducing the number of required writing assignments and eliminating mandatory page lengths can give instructors more autonomy over managing their grading workloads. Survey respondents most frequently identified the grading load as a largely invisible portion of their workload (Hassel and Klausman). Respondents also identified the challenges of giving quality feedback to students with a large number of writing projects to assess.

2. **Create change in a sustainable way to give faculty both time and resources to implement reforms.** Responses to multiple open-ended survey questions indicated that developmental education reforms and similar mandates contribute to an increased workload for two-year college writing instructors. Reform initiatives and other program changes require a substantial investment in faculty time and labor. Programs can support a sustainable faculty workload by working with their institutions to compensate faculty through course releases or stipends for the work required for developing and coordinating program change work (for example, implementing new placement processes, integrating reading and writing programs, developing corequisite support

courses, working on Guided Pathways initiatives, or creating new online courses). When implementing reforms, programs should also work toward providing compensated training and resources for both tenure-line and adjunct faculty and avoid expecting instructors to make major changes to course structures, curriculum, and pedagogies without both compensation and sustained professional support.

3. **Provide flexibility and autonomy for instructors.** Instructors' responses to open-ended survey questions indicated that they are more likely to be able to manage their teaching workloads when given flexibility and autonomy over when and how they teach their courses (Giordano and Wegner). Decision-makers in writing and developmental English programs can help create sustainable workloads for instructors through changes in policies and program culture that reflect the material realities of teaching at a two-year college. Two-year college English Departments can regularly conduct an assessment of how their culture and practices help or hinder instructors' abilities to manage their workloads as part of annual assessment activities or periodic program reviews.

4. **Support professional development.** Another significant finding from our survey was that organized, supported faculty development and consistent funding for professional development—where it was available—was regarded as an important source of strength, motivation, and direction. It also generated a sense of common purpose among colleagues. This finding can provide support for departments looking to embrace professional development as an ongoing part of their departmental work, in particular supporting professional development activities that are relevant to and responsive to the work tasks of department members (Suh, Tinoco, and Toth). Simultaneously, professional development activities that are relevant to the work tasks of department members help build capacity and competence that contribute toward achieving departmental goals and maintaining the disciplinary integrity of a program.

5. **Create compensated program coordinator positions with permanent budget lines rather than coordinating programs through service.** Writing programs, developmental English and ESL require more intensive work and coordination compared to most other programs at two-year colleges or writing programs at four-year universities. Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt's work, along with a recent special issue of the *WPA Journal* reveal how challenging it is to negotiate the workload of a WPA at a two-year college as a distributed responsibility (Calhoon-Dillahunt; Spiegel, Jensen, and Johnson). The lack of dedicated coordinator positions can create unsustainable workloads for faculty who coordinate programs through committee work and other uncompensated service. Two-year college English programs can also create more sustainable working conditions for all instructors when one or more individuals within the program have compensated time to mentor instructors, develop resources, work on curricular issues, and coordinate program changes as well as the authority to evaluate and assess the work.

Advocacy Strategies for Effecting Change

Throughout the TYCA Workload Task Force's data gathering and survey analysis, clear themes emerged about what works for students and teachers, and how to create conditions that allow them to succeed in their educational and professional goals. However, a common refrain that persists is how to effect change—how do individual faculty, staff, or individual programs bring about changes in their teaching, learning, and working conditions? In this section, we offer a series of strategies that are consonant with the values outlined in Patrick Sullivan's 2015 article, "The Teacher-Scholar-Activist," in which he argues "that we deliberately frame our professional identity, in part, as activists—accepting and embracing the revolutionary and

inescapably political nature of our work. This activism might, in fact, require some front-line, in-your-face political work as we seek to create positive change in our communities and on our campuses" (327–328).

What we suggest here is that the work of two-year college instructors often involves work outside the classroom that includes advocating for student needs and instructor working conditions, as well as for disciplinary best practices. We discuss rhetorical strategies and logistical strategies along with case studies to illustrate how they might be implemented.

The use of rhetorical strategies for creating sustainable instructor workloads can be required for multiple types of communication with colleagues, leaders, or stakeholders who need to be "on board" for new initiatives, or who have the authority to grant resources to new projects. For example, the rhetorical strategies (and tools) that faculty might use to propose a new placement process, a shift in course assignments, or a new program are different than those used to bring colleagues on board through a change in policy, workload allocation, or department practice. Likewise, proposals for change may require the support and assistance of staff colleagues who have their own priorities and concerns.

- **Example 1:** Hancock and Reid (2020) emphasize the importance of shared WPA labor and what Hassel and Cole advocate for as "service activism," urging faculty "to become engaged actors in their institutions, with the intention of energizing the faculty in higher education to participate in, reimagine, and transform their institutional and professional work" (15). This communication and true collaboration with colleagues can make, if a consensus can be reached, a collective agenda shared by a "facu-ministra[tive]" team (Hancock and Reid 24). There is strength in numbers and strength in collective agendas that are reinforced through collaborative work.
- **Example 2:** At their community college in the desert southwest, Snyder and Lee (forthcoming) describe the "Students First" rhetorical strategies that the president of the college used to reprioritize the college's strategic plan and messaging to the community. This rhetorical move of making sure that students' needs were the first reason for any curricular or service model created unity in negotiating pedagogical goals with a co-requisite model, and allowed effective arguments to be made for smaller co-requisite class sizes (12 students in one class and 24 students in the co-requisite) with appropriate equated load (1:1 for both of the three-credit classes) (Snyder and Lee, forthcoming).
- **Example 3:** Del Principe (2020), a two-year college WPA, describes program change work that emerges from collaboration, clarification of expectations, classroom research, and governance structures to move work forward within her program at a large urban community college. Del Principe offers practical strategies through department governance, research, professional development, and tactical communication (Del Principe).

Some resistance to bringing up change or implementing new approaches can be overcome by using existing structures in new ways. For example, campus committees are often annually convened but with potentially new priorities each year. We encourage faculty to identify ways that standing service responsibilities can be used and charged to address issues of equity and inclusion. Academic councils or senates may be charged with regular business, but they are also typically endowed with the capacity to identify their own priorities so that service responsibilities at this kind can be repurposed for purposes of addressing and bringing about change related to social justice and equity issues.

- **Example 1:** Two faculty used a required annual campus project focused on assessment (broadly conceived) to pilot a new placement measure aimed at increasing student success in their first year (Hassel and Giordano).
- **Example 2**: Writing program leaders recognized their campus's request to align staffing with a new set of Higher Learning Commission faculty qualifications was an opportunity

to increase professional development support for instructors in composition pedagogy (Schoen and Ostergaard).

● **Example 3:** Department, college, or other governing bodies typically have bylaws or constitutions that are used to govern their operations. Attention to and revision of those documents with a values and equity mindset can be an important source of codification (see Gindlesparger).

Initial efforts to bring about change may take place as part of a senate, council, committee, or task force, and take some sustained service work to implement. However, we encourage faculty engaged in that kind of work to develop a specific timeline for completion, as well as a plan for codifying or institutionalizing the work, including any proposed or necessary budget support for the work. As "TYCA Working Paper 4:Two-Year College English Faculty Service Workload" reported, "Manageability appeared frequently as a code in the open-ended responses. Frequent responses noted that service work is exhausting or endless" (Griffiths et al. 6). Including a plan for supporting ongoing work on a priority or initiative is essential to creating a sustainable workload.

The strategies and cases above, we hope, provide some pathways to effecting change and bringing about best practices in workload and programs that will benefit our classrooms. However, having both a seat and a voice at the table is critical, which is why we advocate for the values expressed in Patrick Sullivan's foundational 2015 "teacher-scholar-activist" article in *TETYC* as well as Brett Griffith's "Professional Autonomy and Teacher-Scholar-Activists in Two-Year College: Preparing New Faculty to Think Institutionally." Both pieces lay out maps for how to use disciplinary expertise to bring about positive change.

We echo the call in Hassel and Cole's 2020 *Academic Labor beyond the Classroom: Working for Our Values* for "service activism," or "engaged strategies around radical inclusion," (9) and that change work must emerge "from the instructors in departments who identify a need, build a structure, and set goals to meet that need" (9). More specifically, we call for two-year college English faculty to conceive of themselves as "academic workers [who] can create capacity through transparency, collaboration, and rethinking our connections within institutional structures" (17). A culture of activism that is coupled with the understanding of ourselves as workers who have a deep knowledge of the needs of our students and classrooms is required to bring about change for equity. In short, a collective action must be taken.

Data gathering about two-year college English teacher workload reveals that instructors have a staunch commitment to equity and student success, and they find pleasure in the parts of their work that focus on student learning and student success. Material contexts of that work, however, can greatly influence how effectively instructors feel able to fulfill their teaching responsibilities and contribute to their campus and disciplinary communities. As the TYCA Workload Working Papers and Report show, many instructors have employment conditions that make it difficult to thrive. TYCA strongly encourages individual instructors, department and program coordinators, and campus administrators to view sustainable teaching and service workloads for instructors as an important tool in achieving student success, creating equitable working conditions, and supporting the open-door mission of two-year colleges.

TYCA Workload Committee

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