



the modernist studies association

Advocacy Handbook

Presented by the MSA's Caucus for Contingent and Independent Scholars

The Modernist Studies Association *Advocacy Handbook* presents recommendations for individuals, departments and institutions, professional societies, and event organizers to address the urgent need for support, advocacy, and action in the face of rising precarity and contingency; restructuring, retrenchment, and downsizing in the humanities in higher education; and the casualization of academic labor.

This handbook was compiled by members of the Modernist Studies Association over the course of two workshops held online on April 8th, 2022 and in person on October 28th, 2022. The workshops were sponsored by the Caucus for Contingent and Independent Scholars. Organizers and panelists included Emily Bloom, Kate Schnur, Charlotte Jones, Sejal Sutaria, Megan Faragher, Erin Kappeler, Karen Weingarten, Lisa Jong, Laura Hartmann-Villalta, and Laura Tscherry. During the workshops, participants brainstormed short- and long-term goals for addressing issues of contingency and precarious employment.

MSA members and nonmembers alike are asked to use the guidance provided by the handbook to commit to action that might effect positive change against the precarity that impacts us all.

Conferences:

- Frame conference panels to explicitly reserve spots for a graduate student or contingent faculty member.
- Create expectations for those reviewing CFP submissions/panel proposals to value contingent representation and to encourage all-contingent panels (i.e. dismantle expectation that full-time faculty members lend credibility to the submission).
- Position discussions about contingency and labor conditions as an integral part of the conference; consider keynotes, town halls, and other formats that ensure that these conversations play a central role in our annual meetings.
- Consider the extra burdens that NTT faculty face when it comes to conference participation and think of ways to lessen these burdens. These burdens include travel time, lack of funding, the fact that some contingent faculty need permission to cancel classes, childcare, and registration fees. Would a given conversation make more sense in a digital format? Are there other ways to broaden access?
- Offer conference travel grants and fellowship programs that build in structured opportunities for networking and mentoring (e.g., roundtable devoted to featuring that year's fellows, ongoing networking meetings throughout the year after the conference). Fellowships should cover travel, registration, and membership.

Professional organizations:

- Change the due structure to make membership easier for contingent faculty and graduate students.
- Adopt an activist stance regarding issues of casualization and precarity.
- More discussions within our organizations about contingency.
- Utilize NTT mentors for graduate students and early career scholars; consider how such mentors may help colleagues navigate contingency and build a scholarly profile outside traditional mentorship channels. Lunches and other meet-and-greets between graduate students, NTT, and TT colleagues would also allow for information sharing about labor conditions.
- Invite your NTT colleagues to participate in scholarly and advocacy-oriented endeavors (they can always say no if they are too busy or are not interested). For contingent faculty, service opportunities are often more rewarding when they contribute to scholarship or labor advocacy rather than departmental or university-wide service, which can sometimes feel exploitative. If you have funds to pay them for their service, even better.
- Compile data on our changing membership. What are the figures of TT, NTT, graduate students, and independent scholars? Where are our members employed and what do their conditions look like?
- Create support networks for departments that are being threatened with cuts ([like the NWSA does](#)).
- House a repository of documents that faculty and graduate students can use to advocate for themselves and others to their respective administrations. Some documents might include:
 - White papers on topics related to precarity to document best practices and share information.
 - Practical guides for graduate student mentorship that can be used across institutions.
 - Facts and statistics about the negative impact of contingency on the student experience and other metrics that are meaningful to college administrators.
 - List of faculty within the organization who are aware of labor conditions and who would be willing to serve as external reviewers for your department. These colleagues would be in a position to help you advocate for your NTT colleagues and graduate students to your administration.

Departments and universities:

- Prioritize teaching needs of contingent faculty and graduate students; designate a staff member or faculty who is responsible for administrative support for contingent laborers.
- Include contingent faculty and graduate students into discussions of “post”-COVID transitions.
- Continue to push for accessibility as a priority.
- Review policies on flexibility for teaching modalities and share with contingent faculty and graduate students..
- Include contingent faculty in meetings.
- Transparency and education on budgets.
- Shift mindsets in our departments -
 - What’s one thing that the department can do to support adjuncts?
 - What’s one thing that the department can do to help adjuncts add a meaningful CV line w/out exploiting them?
 - What are the compelling storylines that communicate what organizing/working for change can do? (open people’s minds, think about interests other than their own, aligned with their own)?

- Building communication channels between faculty and boards/upper administrators; teaching non-academics how academics work.
- Push back against creeping cap numbers for classes.
- Push back against one-year visiting positions and reliance on part-time adjuncts.
- Contingent faculty voting rights locally.
- Provide faculty development for instructors whose academic training differs from the subjects of classes they are expected to teach. This is especially true for faculty trained in literary studies who are hired to teach primarily rhetoric and composition. Provide resources, workshops, and mentorship to support pedagogical training and further professional development.
- Codify departmental positions on adjunct labor with faculty agreements. Steer departments towards more explicit conversations about the climate for contingent faculty and work to create institutional structures that can better support faculty in the face of austerity measures.

Educating ourselves and others:

- Build repositories for institutional memory - policy documents, etc - that can help faculty and graduate students advocate for themselves.
- Explore why it is that conversations about labor conditions are often disproportionately falling on disadvantaged groups or those already tasked with unpaid service work.
- Use social media to generate more attention to these issues..Create “memes” to change the narrative around university labor.
- Share information about adjunct salaries/ campaigns for university budgets/ seeing all universities as related in terms of labor conditions.
- Share strategies that have worked to improve labor conditions across our universities
- Increase undergraduate awareness of faculty labor conditions. Speak to student newspapers and involve undergraduates in the conversation.
- Participate in long-term studies and conversations about flexible pedagogy, modality, and accessibility. Talk to students about how they view accessibility.
- Educate senior colleagues and administrators on the changing job market. Challenge rhetoric about short-term positions as a “springboard” to tenure-track jobs.
- Acknowledge that this is hard labor and support our colleagues doing the work.