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Roundtable

AMERICAN STUDIES IN PRECARIOUS TIMES: REFLECTIONS ON THE TEACHING-FELLOW EXPERIENCE

The following roundtable grew out of a set of presentations at the 2017 Historians of the Twentieth-Century United States (HOTCUS) conference at University College Dublin. The session provided the opportunity for those with experience of precarious employment as teaching fellows in American studies at UK universities to reflect on that experience. In doing so, the contributors used a combination of autobiographical and scholarly reflection to discuss issues of precarity, discrimination, inequality, career development and workload that provide a range of vital insights into the experiences of those temporarily employed to teach American studies, a category that is growing in number. As part of *JAS*'s commitment to publishing discussions of both pedagogy and early-career professional development, we hope that readers at all career stages will find thought-provoking information and ideas in the reflections that follow.

Editors, *Journal of American Studies* SINÉAD MOYNIHAN AND NICK WITHAM

RACE, PRECARITY AND AMERICAN STUDIES IN BRITAIN

When I first thought about putting a panel together with other teaching fellows and early-career Americanists at the annual HOTCUS conference in June 2017, I wasn't sure whether there would be similarities in our experiences. I knew that while I had enjoyed my time as a teaching fellow in American studies at the University of Birmingham, there were aspects to the position which I found troubling. However, as I began talking to Becca, Megan and Tom, as well as other early-career researchers in a similar position, it became clear that many aspects of these roles were endemic. These included, but were not limited to, the financial and professional precarity of fixed-term, fractional contracts; large teaching loads; and institutional marginality. Alongside such concerns, there was another similarity our panel unfortunately shared – as a

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group, we reflected the overwhelming whiteness of the British academy and of American studies in Britain.

The two teaching fellows and early-career academics from BME backgrounds whom I invited to our roundtable were either unable to participate or were unwilling to, given that they were still "too angry" about their experiences in the position. These were researchers whom I knew either personally or professionally through my small academic network, and I could certainly have tried harder to seek out a more diverse body of contributors. As the panel organizer, the racial homogeneity of our discussions was at least in part a personal failure. However, I do not wish to dwell on the limitations of our panel here, nor do I intend to speak for the individual experiences of BME scholars. Instead, I believe that the best use of my contribution to this roundtable is through highlighting some of the striking racial inequalities which persist in UK academia, and to demonstrate how these inequalities might have a particular impact for teaching fellows and early-career Americanists.

At all levels of lecturing, research and teaching, BME academics are underrepresented within the UK system. This is despite the fact that, at undergraduate level, BME students now make up nearly a quarter of all first-year students. A variety of factors, including the overlap between universities, BME populations and urban environments, and the average age of BME groups being lower than the national average, mean that the percentage of BME students entering first-year undergraduate courses across the country is significantly higher than the BME percentage of the total UK population. Yet at every stage in the university system – taught undergraduate, taught postgraduate, research postgraduate, early-career researcher, etc. – BME representation declines. The drop-off is particularly sharp between research postgraduates (17.1 percent) and those installed within the academy as lecturers, teaching associates or researchers (8.2 percent).[1]

The implications of this trend for early-career academics on teaching fellowships or similar fixed-term contracts are clear. Such positions are becoming entrenched at the exact moment in an academic career trajectory when BME researchers seem most at risk of leaving or being forced out of the system. As a group, BME academics are "less likely to occupy professorial

[1] For more on these trends see "The Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Staff in Further and Higher Education", *University and College Union*, Feb. 2016, 1–11; Richard Adams, "British Universities Employ No Black Academics in Top Roles," *The Guardian*, 19 Jan. 2017; Jason Arday and Heidi Safia-Mirza, eds., *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Kalwant Bhopal, "When Will Universities Start Taking Race Seriously", *The Guardian*, 31 May 2017, at www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jan/19/british-universities-employ-no-black-academics-in-top-roles-figures-show.

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positions, are more likely to encounter issues of wage disparity … and are less likely to benefit from a permanent [or] open-ended contract of employment."[2] This means that BME academics are more likely to have to pursue a career in academia through an assortment of fixed-term or fractional contracts, rather than by way of a permanent academic post, as well as the professional and financial security such positions provide.[3]

Certainly, financial precarity plays a significant role in shaping the experiences and professional opportunities of many teaching fellows. It is now routine for teaching fellowships to be advertised either as twelve-month posts on a point-seven or point-eight contract, or as full-time fixed-term positions of nine or ten months. Heavy teaching loads exacerbate the "publish-or-perish" mentality of many institutions, meaning that staff are often forced to rely on external financial support to carve out research time or to help plug the gaps in a less than full-time wage. These financial pressures can disproportionately affect BME academics due to racialized patterns of wage disparity within academia and the broader impact of wealth inequality across lines of race and ethnicity. Indeed, research from organizations such as the Trades Union Congress suggests that professional qualifications increase the racial wage gap, meaning that even as early-career academics from BME backgrounds are paid less than their white counterparts, they are less able to take advantage of financial support from familial or collegiate networks.[4]

A number of my fellow contributors have spoken to issues of institutional marginality experienced through their roles as teaching fellows – factors which exacerbate the broader marginalization of BME academics. As scholars such as Kalwant Bhopal have noted, career progression for BME doctoral students remains problematic, with both implicit and explicit forms of racial bias increasing professional marginality.[5] In a recent survey of BME doctoral students, Jason Arday found a striking tension in participant responses. On the one hand, many participants expressed a clear desire to pursue a career in higher education. On the other, many pointed to significant barriers to such progression, including the "paucity of BME academics," exclusion from the type of "informal mentoring experiences" provided to white academics, and "continuous micro-aggressions" from students and staff.[6] Such factors

[2] Claire Alexander and Jason Arday, *Aiming High: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2015).

[3] Jason Arday, "Exploring Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Doctoral Students' Perceptions of an Academic Career", *University and College Union*, June 2017, 1–11.

[4] "Black Workers 'Pay Gap in UK' Widens with Qualifications", *The Guardian*, 1 Feb. 2016, at www.theguardian.com/money/2016/feb/01/pay-gap-black-white-uk-workers-widens-more-qualifications.

[5] Kalwant Bhopal, *The Experiences of BME Academics in Higher Education* (London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2014).

[6] Arday, 6.

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diminish the chances of career advancement and increase the likelihood of BME researchers leaving academia altogether.

In confronting the limitations of teaching fellowships as a specific model of employment, we must recognize how these positions help to reinforce enduring hierarchies of power and privilege within UK academia. As a teaching fellow at the University of Birmingham, my experiences were rewarding, but also exhausting, challenging and at times deeply isolating. At the same time, these concerns were heavily mediated by my presentation as a white heterosexual male. When I looked for support, I was usually able to find advice from academics who looked like me and who, to a large extent, shared my personal and professional experiences. Ultimately, we cannot divorce the trend towards academic casualization and professional precarity for early-career researchers – something facilitated by the proliferation of teaching fellowships – from entrenched racial and ethnic inequalities which continue to characterize UK academia.

Northumbria University E. JAMES WEST

PRECARITY, GENDER, AND AMERICAN HISTORY IN BRITAIN

In the lunch break before the Teaching Fellows roundtable at the HOTCUS annual conference in June 2017, I facilitated a meeting of the Women in American Studies Network (WASN). In the midst of a hectic conference, these two events were inextricably linked – and by more than simple timetabling. I found that my contributions to both highlighted many of the same issues, indicating that matters affecting teaching fellows manifest differently, and some more acutely, for women.

At the first WASN event at the British Association for American Studies annual conference in April 2017, women from various career stages led discussions about issues in American studies, and in academia more generally. These issues included sexism and bias (conscious and unconscious) in hiring and promotions, visibility and mentoring, workload and the idea of "gendered" responsibilities (i.e. pastoral roles), and student perceptions and feedback. Though I had been approached to participate as a PhD student, by the time the event occurred I had passed my viva, had worked as a research assistant, and was teaching across three different institutions. As the most junior member of the panel, I tried to think about how I could bridge the gap between my experiences and still offer some meaningful contribution to the debate. The immediate parallel, I quickly noted, was that none of these

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positions had ever required me to work alongside or for another woman. Issues of visibility therefore became paramount in my contribution.

While WASN is focused on all aspects of American studies, I believe there to be an especially concerning scarcity of women in American history, at least in the UK. I studied for my undergraduate and master's degrees in two departments dedicated specifically to American studies. The gender balance was fairly even, but I began to wonder if this was due to the influence of literature and cultural studies, rather than history. I entered a new institution at PhD level, which offered an American studies undergraduate programme, but at a postgraduate and faculty level I gravitated around a US history cluster within a wider history department. When I began teaching elsewhere, I discovered a further, but presumably more common, structure: offering modules in American history, but no American studies degree programme or department. The shift to "more traditional" history departments was certainly a transition for me, both intellectually and personally.

Most importantly, there were no women working in American history at any of the three institutions employing me on hourly or sessional contracts. Even the one female colleague from my PhD institution had moved elsewhere. I jested that WASN was a desperate attempt to make female friends, but there was some truth to my jokes. I felt strongly that several of my experiences in teaching had been marked by sexism, and yet there were no women for me to turn to, even informally, about these concerns. Establishing WASN was therefore crucial for isolated women like me, and I relished the opportunity to help to launch it. However, I am also aware that while WASN primarily works for those of us already engaged in postgraduate study or pursuing careers in academia, there is important work to do amongst undergraduates and in schools.

Visibility for young women is an obvious concern. HESA data show that 54 percent of students taking their first undergraduate and/or postgraduate taught degrees in history and/or philosophy in the 2016–17 academic year were female. However, male candidates made up 54 percent of doctoral researchers, 60 percent of academic staff, and 80 percent of professors in those same disciplines.[1] Many female historians lack institutional role

[1] HESA, *HE Student Data*, "What Do HE Students Study? HE Student Enrolments (Including on AP Designated Courses) by Subject Area and Sex 2016/17," at www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study, accessed 13 March 2018. It is important to note that while the percentage of female professors is woefully low across British academia, history is actually worse than the general average in this regard. See Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2016/17, Figure 3, academic staff (excluding atypical) by employment conditions, at www.hesa.ac.uk/news/18-01-2018/sfr248-higher-education-staff-statistics, accessed 13 March 2018.

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models, i.e. women working in their field of history at their university who show that an academic career is possible. This can be especially disheartening for women juggling precarious contracts and personal responsibilities, wondering if there is a permanent job at the end of the tunnel.

There are also obvious problems surrounding child care and academic culture. While these issues affect all parents in the sector, the burden (still) largely falls on women. Female interviewees for the Royal Historical Society's report on Gender Equality and Historians complained that maternity leave is often not taken into account when candidates are considered for promotion, with some explicitly advised that it would hold them back.[2] Perhaps more pervasive are the informal requirements of an academic career: aggressive pressure to publish and/or secure grants whilst already working overtime, attendance at conferences over weekends and school holidays, and a drinking culture that sees friendships and allegiances formed in exclusionary environments. For many women with children, the uncertain nature of short-term contracts is understandably unthinkable. For others, the question whether to even have children is often on hold indefinitely. The financial and geographical uncertainty of short-term contracts – having to be able to take work anywhere and for limited time periods, or to cobble together an existence across multiple locations – makes starting a family completely impossible for those without considerable financial support from a partner or family members. It also requires an at least temporary, but often full, withdrawal from academic employment, meaning fewer women securing full-time lecturing or research positions.

These issues of visibility affect male and female undergraduates, and, in particular, their perception of what makes a US historian. This can be especially important for teaching fellows, many of whom are recruited at the last minute to cover existing faculty illness or research leave. Given that men outnumber women in senior academic roles, it is highly probable that teaching fellows and other precarious staff are replacing male colleagues, as I have always done. While I accept that all newly minted PhDs probably face some feelings of anxiety and inexperience when establishing themselves as lecturers, the hurdles are considerably greater for young women. Research indicates that students judge female teachers more harshly, and that it is harder for women to be accepted as knowledgeable.[3] These problems are likely to be magnified when a young woman is perceived to be "standing in" for a senior male colleague.

[2] Royal Historical Society, *Gender Equality and Historians in UK Higher Education*, Jan. 2015, at https://royalhistsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/RHSGenderEqualityReport-Jan-15.pdf, 15, accessed 1 June 2018.

[3] See JoAnn Miller and Marilyn Chamberlin, "Women Are Teachers, Men Are Professors: A Study of Student Perceptions," *Teaching Sociology*, 28 (Oct. 2000), 283–98; Lillian MacNell,

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The only issues I have ever had with students have been as the result of male students protesting their grades, and therefore my marking. I have received aggressive emails from male undergraduates questioning "my personal marking style" and been copied in to emails in which students attempt to undermine me to (male) heads of department and demand that another member of staff "oversee" my grading decisions. On all of these occasions, the coursework in question had, of course, already been second-marked or moderated by senior (male) colleagues, and so, in retrospect, it was easy for department heads to dismiss these inappropriate student demands. But, as a teaching fellow on a year-long, semester-long, or even hourly paid contract, it is rarely clear that the department will take your side or support you. You are in a precarious position and may not know anyone in your department personally, while fee-paying undergraduates are perceived to have a lot of power. I certainly felt considerable anxiety in the wake of these interactions with students – not because I doubted my academic judgement on their assignments, but because I had no idea what the departmental response would be. In my experience, teaching fellows rarely live in the cities they are working in, and are seldom invited to participate in departmental proceedings or social occasions. While many senior colleagues see this as protecting their junior comrades from a ballooning bureaucracy, it can leave teaching fellows feeling isolated, as if they occupy a liminal space between student and staff. Many have few, if any, interactions with their colleagues other than when marking and moderation demands it. I write this not merely because it reflects my experience, but in the hope that it encourages established staff members to reach out to teaching fellows and other adjunct teachers in their departments. I am confident that even the smallest gesture or acknowledgement will be appreciated.

Established colleagues also have a role to play in managing student expectations and behaviour. I have never seen or heard of any consequences for students who disrespect members of staff and question their academic integrity. While their grades may not improve as a result of their outbursts, their disrespect, which many have advised me would never be directed at a man, largely goes uncorrected and unpunished. An obvious strategy for combating aggressive or disrespectful responses to female teaching staff is to hire more women, thus undermining the stereotype that US historians are male. But there must also be steps that departments can take to highlight and combat the unconscious bias that we know affects student perceptions of lecturers,

Adam Driscoll and Andrea N. Hunt, "What's in a Name: Exposing Gender Bias in Student Ratings of Teaching," *Innovative Higher Education*, 40, 4 (Aug. 2015), 291–303.

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whilst upholding and spotlighting the integrity and academic value of female teaching staff.

University of Edinburgh MEGAN HUNT

"YOU CAN TEACH THIS, RIGHT?" MODULE DEVELOPMENT AS A TEACHING FELLOW

One of first things any PhD or early-career researcher (ECR) will encounter shortly after they accept a temporary teaching position will be an old module handbook with the instruction to "get it ready" before the start of term. Frequently received before contracted hours start, these handbooks can range from the most meticulous and detailed plans that helpfully map out every lecture, seminar reading and question, to handbooks that provide the vaguest blueprints of a course with a list of suggested readings, often not digitized, and the encouraging message that "students really like this course." Whatever the state of the course you inherit, the labour that you are required to provide is the same. Often, and at very short notice, you are expected to be on the front line of university teaching, standing in front of a group of students who may or may not ask you where the "real lecturer" is.

To an extent, this is what we signed up for. By accepting a teaching-fellow position, we understood all too clearly that our job was to teach long hours on a variety of courses frequently outside our own expertise. And, as with any job, there are positives and negatives. I left the experience feeling like I was a better, if more exhausted, researcher and teacher. Luckily the institution I worked for did an outstanding job of supporting me during my time, but I know quite clearly from huddled conference conversations between ECR colleagues and friends that this experience is far from universal. With this in mind, the purpose of my portion of this roundtable is to offer some advice, as best I can, to those about to embark on, or who are in the middle of, a temporary teaching fellowship. Since others have offered excellent advice on the personal and political aspects of teaching fellowships, I thought it would be beneficial to write about the tasks that most of us will face on a day-to-day basis – module design and course development – as well as the three most important aspects that shaped my experience as a teaching fellow: time management, life in the classroom, and how your time as a teaching fellow can also support your research.

First, and as I write this way past the deadline, let us discuss time management. How to effectively manage and organize your time may sound like the title of an overly optimistic self-help guide, but for many teaching fellows this

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will be the biggest issue we face. Out of all the aspects of being a teaching fellow, making sure your working days do not extend into working weekends will be a persistent problem. During my time as a teaching fellow, I was encouraged to take on everything from first-year survey course lectures to specialist postgraduate seminars, supervising dissertations, providing personal tutor sessions, and leading essay-writing workshops. From someone who is fresh out of their PhD, the step up in responsibility and demands on your labour is considerable. However, what many do not anticipate is all the "extra work" that suddenly appears on your timetable. From open days on weekends to training workshops on your research day, and the inevitable post-teaching pub trips to complain about it all. While work loading is a concern at every level of academic employment, the burden on teaching fellows is especially notable, as the temporary nature of their contracts, coupled with the often increasing teaching hours they are committed to, results in a constant erasure of what little free time they have. Teaching fellows will see the free time they had scheduled to finish writing that lecture disappear, or a couple of free hours to write an article or book proposal vanish. While it might seem that working a seven-day week is a depressing inevitability, and that train carriages will become your mobile office, there are things we can all do as ECRs to help ease the burden. The most obvious example is sharing teaching material between ourselves. I know that for some the idea of sharing seminar plans might feel alien. After all, why should you share your intellectual work? But I also know all too clearly that I have benefited from the advice and experience of my fellow ECRs.

Being able to run a seminar plan past someone, to ask for help on what reading went down well for a particular topic you might not be familiar with, or finding out what seminar exercise worked well and, more critically, what did not, are incredibly valuable. As teaching fellows, we do not have the years of material and lecture slides gathered from a course running for ten years and must therefore constantly generate a lot of material afresh. The effort to come up with yet another "creative and exciting" seminar plan can be tough. Yet finding out that another ECR has just run an amazing session on Reconstruction can free up an hour that is sorely needed. Recently, Twitter has become a great source of advice as ECRs happily share advice or suggestions on reading for certain weeks. The problem is that most of this advice is informal in nature. Other contributors to this roundtable write all too clearly about the precarious nature of teaching fellowships. Yet the sort of support ECRs offer each other on social media can be readily supported by organizations such as the BAAS through the provision of spaces for ECRs and PhDs to meet at major conferences.

Furthermore, the establishment of mentor schemes can provide another level of support from those academics who have been in the system for a

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while and know exactly how it works. On the topic of mentorship, the support that senior academics can offer teaching fellows is vitally important. Joining a university as a teaching fellow and getting used to all the administration processes can be a surprisingly difficult experience. Not only is time taken up in the classroom, but you must also get used to a range of obtuse systems very quickly. Being able to sit and have a coffee and ask honestly and openly how exactly to prepare for an open day, how the external examination system works, or what an acronym used in group email means, saves a huge amount of time.

Second, and as most teaching fellows already know, the majority of our time is spent developing our skills in the classroom. This should not be sold short on CVs or in interviews. When it comes to teaching, we all have different methods, but one of the strongest aspects of the experience is that teaching fellows on the whole tend to hone skills that allow them to empathize easily with students, give stellar lectures, and run strong seminars, a fact which is often reflected in module evaluations. As a teaching fellow, you will often be in the company of experienced and skilled lecturers and being able to sit in and observe their classes is an incredibly useful experience that should be taken up. While it may also seem daunting, asking someone to observe your teaching is equally important. This feedback is notable considering that Higher Education Academy (HEA) accreditation is now an increasingly important part of Teaching Excellence Framework and job applications. Having a senior academic able to write feedback on your teaching practice is a critical part of the HEA accreditation at both associate and fellow levels. Being able to end a contract as a teaching fellow with HEA qualification in hand is important, and if you are not sure how your institution approaches HEA accreditation, make sure to ask.

Third, being a teaching fellow often means taking on course design for the first time, planning assessments and generally overseeing the daily operations of a course in a way most of us are not used to. Getting a library induction to familiarize yourself with the resources held by your institution should be the first thing you do after accepting the job. Of course, things will go wrong. Reading material will suddenly disappear from the library. You might be thrown into a classroom teaching something you have not thought about since your time as an undergraduate. Or the speakers in the lecture room will give up, meaning that the perfect Bruce Springsteen song you planned to play as you started the lecture on Reagan will no longer work, prompting you to do an out-of-tune rendition. Sharing stories about what went wrong with other ECRs is an important part of the teaching-fellow experience. Keeping in contact with colleagues both inside and outside the institution is vital in helping you keep things in perspective. Unfortunately, the community of teaching fellowships on temporary contracts is growing all the time. And

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while we should do everything we can to end the casualization of academic contracts, there is a strong sense of solidarity among the ECR community.

Finally, we need to discuss one of the major concerns of teaching fellows: balancing research with teaching. There is no easy answer to this. To conduct any meaningful research as a teaching fellow is difficult, if not impossible. While I know this is the same for senior academics during the teaching year, the difference is that teaching fellows end the year facing the daunting prospect of applying for a job based on our research output. During my teaching fellowship, I was in the position of having my viva in the last week of a long term of teaching just before Christmas. Having to read over my thesis while preparing for a seminar posed a unique set of problems. However, it is all too easy to forget that the departments teaching fellows work in are research hubs, with reading groups and research clusters that provide important spaces for sharing ideas and asking for feedback. Asking senior academics to read over the article you have been drafting or the book proposal that's nearly but not quite finished should be encouraged by the institutions that teaching fellows work in. If your institution runs a speaker series, going along for the dinner afterwards is a great way to meet other academics without having to worry about the time or expense of attending a conference. When it comes to teaching, students, especially those in their later years of study, are an infinite source of research inspiration, especially when they ask a question in a way you haven't thought about before. If offered the opportunity to supervise dissertations, you should take it. Having a student work on a topic closely related to your own offers up a host of opportunities for you to revisit old texts, archives and debates you haven't looked at for a while.

The message to take away from this is that while my time as a teaching fellow was incredibly important it was also a time of stress and uncertainty. For many teaching fellows, there is no real opportunity to produce an output ready for the REF. Of course, this is far from an ideal solution. The simple fact remains that teaching fellows will always be at the mercy of both the REF and their temporary contracts. The question that followed me through most of my time as a teaching fellow, often asked from an enthusiastic student who had just finished a seminar they loved, was "What are you teaching next year?" I was asked this time and time again. My response was always a mumbled "I'm not sure." When I talk to other ECRs, I always get the sense that despite the outstanding job we do in the classroom, the year itself is overshadowed by the prospect of unemployment and uncertainty. Often it is the overworked and vastly underpaid teaching fellows and postgraduate teaching assistants who are keeping the teaching in a department afloat. They deserve all the support they can get.

University of Lincoln TOM BISHOP

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WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A TEACHING FELLOWSHIP?

Faculty at every institution I have worked for have always told me the same story: "we don't like temporary contracts." Without exception, colleagues and acquaintances decry unpaid summers, 0.7 full-time equivalent contracts and overloaded teaching schedules. All assure me that – where the powers that be allow – they always hire to permanent positions. They tell me that they only hire to short-term positions when circumstances dictate; they do not choose to exploit early-career researchers (ECRs). No one has ever suggested to me that the creeping trend of casualization is positive, or that it is anything but detrimental to higher education.

When I began my first teaching fellowship, I found this narrative comforting. I believed that higher education as a sector was working towards bridging the employment gap for ECRs. For better or worse, I have become jaded in the intervening years. When I hear it today, I find remarks of this sort either infuriating, irritating or deflating, depending on how much energy I have for outrage on each particular occasion. I have learned that these statements do not mean that an institution is actively addressing the issue of casualization; they also do not always mean that colleagues actually recognize or understand the unique, important and relevant work that teaching fellows actually do, or the conditions under which they do it. What this narrative really means, to the ECR at least, is little more than lip service primarily designed to comfort the speaker, not the recipient.

Teaching fellowships are a necessary element of the academic landscape. Buy-outs, study leave, parental leave and long-term sickness must be covered, and often offer a welcome opportunity for ECRs to join a department and develop their teaching and administrative skills. Yet this form of contract is also now increasingly being used to cover "ordinary" teaching cheaply in departments where there simply aren't enough staff available; again, in many ways this is a positive development for ECRs as under these circumstances there is more opportunity for "ownership" of courses and an increased likelihood of longer contracts or yearly "extensions," as no one is expected to return to the role.[1]

It is no secret that teaching fellows can often be underpaid and overworked. I'm not going to focus on that here. I'm more concerned with the perceived value of working as a teaching fellow. How do today's teaching fellows turn their temporary existence into a permanent contract? The answer is relatively simple: they can't. Permanent contracts are predicated on publication records,

[1] Some 43% of teaching staff are on fixed-term contracts. Ana Lopes and Indra Angeli Dewan, "Precarious Pedagogies? The Impact of Casual and Zero-Hour Contracts in Higher Education," *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 7–8 (Fall 2014–Spring 2015), 28–42, 30.

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and research and publication do not form a part of the modern teaching fellowship. As Lopes and Dewan noted in 2014, "the teaching experience casualized staff amass is of limited value in terms of career progression, and … undertaking research and publications are the main route to securing long-term and permanent positions."[2] More recently, an "Anonymous Academic" testified in *The Guardian* that, "seeing how it all works, I have now become more certain of an earlier suspicion: academia is a hustle and most graduate students and fixed-term contractors are getting played."[3] There is a disconnect between the jobs the academy expects – and needs – ECRs to "apprentice" in post-PhD, and the jobs they then move into. Of course, teaching experience is taken into account by hiring panels, but only after candidates' publication records have been scrutinized – a pursuit that forms precisely no part of the "stepping-stone"; a pursuit that is often almost entirely unachievable whilst working as a teaching fellow.

The heavy teaching and administrative loads associated with teaching fellowships preclude ECRs from making significant progress with their research. There is no workload allocation for research and often no money available for research trips or conferences. Where a position is shorter than two years, or demands an unrealistic teaching load that takes over evenings and weekends for the duration of the contract, spending meaningful time on academic research is a pipe dream. If an academic has caring responsibilities, a second job, or a health issue, the same applies. Positions are also often too transient to allow for the development of meaningful mentoring relationships with senior academics that could help ECRs navigate this complicated landscape; this problem is compounded for women and academics of colour.

Universities continue to expect teaching staff to apply for permanent positions with research profiles that they refuse to offer support for or help pay to develop. This issue can be particularly disheartening to teaching fellows who have worked in the same institution for two or three (or four or five …) years – the regular renewals of their temporary contracts an endorsement of their ability – only to see their post finally be made permanent and given to someone with a publication record that they could not have hoped to develop because they were busy doing the job the institution paid them to do.[4]

[2] Ibid., 37. For further information see Kimberley Peters and Jennifer Turner, "Fixed-Term and Temporary: Teaching Fellows, Tactics, and the Negotiation of Contingent Labour in the UK Higher Education System," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 46, 10 (2014), 12; Academics Anonymous, "I Just Got a Permanent Academic Job, but I'm Not Celebrating," *The Guardian*, 22 June 2018.

[3] Academics Anonymous, "I Just Got a Permanent Academic Job."

[4] "I've watched brilliant friends be employed for two or three consecutive years with demanding teaching loads … only to be dropped for someone else with a more illustrious

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The candidate hired should always be the best candidate for the job – hiring practices that arbitrarily favour internal candidates benefit neither institution nor academic. How can departments be sure that they are hiring the "best candidates," however, when the metric utilized to determine who that is is woefully out of date. Research output is disproportionately valued over teaching excellence, thus incumbent teaching fellows are prevented from using their hard work, and their dedication to and success in the post they were hired to perform, as currency for moving up the ladder. At most institutions, teaching fellowships offer no direct pathway to permanent employment; they are merely perceived as a mechanism through which to make money whilst working on one's research – their "real" job – in the dead of night. In order to really make a difference to the lot of the teaching fellow, however, the number of permanent positions based on teaching ability and experience must be increased.

Teaching fellows have earned PhDs, and likely have some research available to demonstrate their abilities, thus an unachievable record of publication does not need to be a necessity for entry-level academic posts. Probation periods also offer institutions a safety net. Furthermore, permanent teaching-only posts, which are rare in HE and even more so within Russell Group institutions, need not be a dirty word. Such posts would enable young staff members to commit to their position without having to worry about finding and competing for the next contract, about whether they are being paid over the summer, or whether they have the strength of mind to up-sticks and start all over in another city, on another campus, with another roommate, *again*. They also offer significant benefits to departments, easier and longer-term planning for workload allocations, continuity, training opportunities, the chance to invest in the development of the next generation of academic staff. Such a shift may even increase retention and flexibility and offer a variety of pathways for both new and established academic staff and contribute to a wider conversation over what academia should look like, and what it is for. More teaching-only or teaching-focussed positions in HE will enable teaching fellows to convert the years they spend developing into truly superb examples of pedagogical excellence into meaningful and mutually beneficial permanent employment. Better and more flexible promotion criteria could also allow them to transition into research-active members of staff further down the line.

These ideas are not mythical, however, but are based on my own experiences at my current Russell Group institution, where hiring practices are being proactively altered in order to adapt to the changing landscape. In the past year,

publication record." Academics Anonymous, "Enough of Exploiting Academics, Now Pay Us Fairly," *The Guardian*, 14 July 2017.

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two teaching fellows have been hired to permanent teaching-only roles based on their demonstrable record of teaching excellence within the institution. They are not the first to be hired on this basis. There is also a clearly delineated process for promotion from senior teaching fellow to associate professor, should those on such contracts wish to pursue a more research-active role in the future.

Permanent lecturing staff, without exception, are the success stories. Thus many could be forgiven for believing that the current situation is workable and even survivable without seemingly "radical" shifts in the makeup of HE. Our current situation tells a different story, however. The ability to inspire a class should not be considered a second-rate skill; researchers with little demonstrable teaching experience should never be hired to positions that require them to teach; the discovery of knowledge should not be valued more highly than its dissemination, as both are equally vital to the lifeblood of our sector.

I love being a teaching fellow and am proud of my achievements in the roles that I have held. Teaching matters, and it should matter more to HE.

University of Warwick REBECCA STONE

AMERICAN STUDIES IN PRECARIOUS TIMES: REFLECTIONS ON THE TEACHING-FELLOW EXPERIENCE

To read the smart, eloquent, often pained reflections of the young Americanists on the roundtable – indeed, to listen to them in person, as I did at HOTCUS 2017 – is to dissolve any illusion that the humanities in British academia embody a model community of liberal solidarity and egalitarianism. It clearly does not feel like such a community to those seeking to enter it, to the point that I began to wonder why anyone now would try. Is this really a career that you would recommend to the child of your best friend? At the same time, it is heartening that bright, committed people still look at the work that humanities scholars do and perceive enough opportunity to make a difference in the world that they persevere through seasons of precarity, some short, some long, in the hope of securing that opportunity for themselves. These days, an academic career brings only modest economic rewards and not much in the way of social status; what make the job worthwhile are the intrinsic satisfactions of teaching well, producing significant new knowledge through research, and participating in the constructive, creative, critical exchange of ideas with others who take ideas seriously. But, for many accomplished young scholars, as the roundtable indicates, the path to

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such satisfactions seems increasingly convoluted and hazardous, disfigured by road signs misdirecting them down blind alleys or along twisting detours, progress stalled by periods of exploitative labour or no labour at all, exhaustion and anxiety mounting as other wayfarers crowd the route, the final destination receding all the time.

The broader causes of such precarity are well understood. In particular, the decision of the British government to remove admissions caps on individual universities from 2015–16 has made it much harder for academic departments to be confident that their roster of established full-time staff will consistently match actual student numbers year after year. Across the sector, the awareness that the outcomes of annual admissions rounds can be prone to significant fluctuations has encouraged a conservative, short-term approach to investing in staff, with recourse to temporary and/or fractional teaching contracts in seasons of plenty rather than to permanent appointments, limiting liabilities should future harvests fail. But though this is a national trend, it appears to have had unusually marked effects within the field of American history. As a recent comprehensive survey conducted by HOTCUS, BrANCH and BGEAH revealed, casualization and underemployment are common experiences amongst British-based scholars of the United States. A quarter of the 185 respondents to the survey were in the position of having finished their PhD without having yet secured a permanent, full-time academic appointment. American history – as a field popular with undergraduates – may be especially subject to casualized employment positions: departments with restricted resources know that, in this field more than most others, they can maximize the returns on short-term fractional hires. So young Americanist scholars may have a better than average chance of acquiring teaching experience, but the opportunities frequently made available to them generally offer something less than a golden ticket to a permanent academic post. The teaching fellow, in most cases, is not being paid to conduct research; if the doctoral thesis is to be converted into a book, it must be done in the fellow's own time, whatever meagre ration of that remains after classes have been prepared and the grading of coursework has been completed.

What, then, can scholars more established in this field do to improve the conditions of labour for those just starting out? Expressions of regret tumble easily from our tongues, almost always with the intention of pinning responsibility on forces and actors other than ourselves. We will point, not without some reason, to powerful institutional pressures encouraging austerity. Many of us in senior managerial roles will know that a pared-down business case for an hourly paid tutor, or term-time teaching fellowship, is more likely to survive the scrutiny of the faculty accountant than one requesting a year-long lecturership with a 40 percent allowance for research. We sign our name to that business case not because we are indifferent to the state of

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wearied subsistence in which it will confine the person appointed, because on the whole we are not. But it still represents the path of least resistance: the costs of such positions fall disproportionately on the appointee, not on us or our institution.

One potential solution, then, would be for members of organizations working in the field to encourage a rebalancing of those costs and of the distribution of power between potential candidates and institutions. Universities are deeply allergic to reputational damage, particularly in the era of TEF, where – one assumes – an institution would find it harder to convince Office for Students assessors of the claim that it is investing in teaching excellence when it is widely known to rely on short-term, high-turnover, fractional contracts. An advertisement for an academic post placed by an institution is advertising the institution as well as the post. It is not unreasonable to expect that those reading the advertisement – and the contractual provisions specified therein – would regard it as expressive of the institution's values. Some universities have already been embarrassed by the attention that social media has directed towards their efforts to recruit new tutors on rather less than optimal terms.

But any strategy on the part of our learned societies to influence the employment practices of academic institutions should encompass more than sporadic twitter flamings, which are not famed for their power to change the world. Inspired in part by the perspectives presented on the roundtable, HOTCUS – for example – has adopted a TEF-inspired Job Excellence Framework, incorporating gold, silver and bronze standards for advertised employment opportunities in its field. All jobs advertised through the organization's network will now include a key, indicating whether the position is permanent or temporary, full- or part-time, involves administrative responsibilities, and provides access to mentoring and funding for research. The HOTCUS website will indicate what sort of conditions – a full-time permanent contract, with clearly defined workloads and benefits – would constitute a gold-standard employment opportunity; ditto silver and bronze. The bronze category articulates the minimum acceptable conditions for short-term – often fractional – posts, recognizing that such appointments are sometimes unavoidable and can offer some useful early experience in the classroom to those seeking to enhance their academic CVs. These conditions are likely to include allowances for preparation, marking, and travel and a time-efficient teaching schedule. HOTCUS will not circulate advertisements for positions that obviously fall below the bronze standard. The key will flag any significant ambiguities in the advertisements, enabling candidates to seek clarification from the employing institution during the hiring process, prior to signing a contract. Through this system, early-career researchers and teaching fellows might more easily identify which employment conditions are reasonable and

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which are not and be empowered to negotiate enhancements in instances on the margin. But it might also empower those academic managers writing up business cases for new appointments to set their face against the chill currents of austerity. Here would be an alternative, more generous set of norms to cite in the business case; here too would be corroboration that anything less generous would markedly shrink the candidate field.

The survey conducted by HOTCUS, BrANCH and BGEAH indicated that women and members of minority ethnic groups are underrepresented within the field of US history in the UK, as measured against their presence in the UK population and, in the case of women, the broader historical profession. There are many reasons for such underrepresentation, but the pervasiveness of precarity may be a significant part of the mix. The logistical, material and psychological pressures that accompany extended seasons of short-term, part-time work will rub with particular force against those who have caring commitments, who cannot draw upon financial support from parents and partners with means, who lack access to mentors and role models with experience of negotiating similar challenges to find a secure home in the field. We can't satisfy the need for progress on gender and racial inclusion without also addressing the problem of precarity. But it is also in everyone's interest, however far their feet stretch under the table, to take the problem seriously. Precarity is contagious; it may make life difficult and unpleasant for many more than just its original victims, by subverting established norms for all tiers of academic employment, dissolving relations of trust between different generations of scholars, and guttering with the rank breath of bad faith the candle of communication, empathy and hope that the humanities is commissioned to keep alive in the world. How we treat those immediately around us – in our professional lives, our students and early-career colleagues as well as our more established peers – is a pretty good measure of who we are and how well we embody the change we want to see. This roundtable serves notice that we are not currently measuring up.

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