Teach First, Research Questions Later: Understanding the Role of the College Teacher-Scholar
for "The Spectrum of the Professoriate and the Rise of the Teaching Stream"
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** Disclaim my use of "community college" and the political nature of that term in the changing post-secondary climate in Canada.

Last year at Congress, I presented a paper titled "Off the Sides of Our Desks: Research in a Community College Context" on a Professional Issues panel here at ACCUTE. I'm heartened to be asked back to this panel to discuss these issues further as part of a larger conversation about teaching-centred work in the academy, and I'm grateful to the organizers for the opportunity. I think we are at a crossroads in the profession wherein we can either find a way to support teaching-focused academics in remaining part of the scholarly conversation, or risk losing recent PhD graduates from our community. This short paper is a bit of a meditation on why that is, and what comes next.

I'm a community college instructor working at Douglas College in Metro Vancouver. Life at a community college is not exactly like the sitcom *Community*, except for when it really, really is. We're the largest public college in the province and the fourth-largest post-secondary institution, period. I don't have an academic rank, much of a travel budget, graduate students, or access to sabbaticals, but I do have a stable income, a reliable (if reliably large) teaching load, and an institution that tells me they would like me to be doing research, as long as I don't need anything to make that happen. The language we use, within ACCUTE and in other places, tends to lump together college and contingent teaching as though they are one and the same — indeed, many who choose college sector teaching do so because they are avoiding the contingent academic faculty game. Combining these disparate groups into one — as though all non-tenure positions are the same — elides the unique differences for each group. This is the position in which teacher-scholars in the community college sector find ourselves: we are

teachers by trade and researchers by training, and increasingly we are looking to make both roles work. This is often seen as a more natural fit in so-called applied research fields, like health sciences and community services, but with increasing numbers of humanities and arts PhDs finding work at community colleges, it's an issue for those of us with an academic or "pure" research focus, too.

Community colleges are one of the few places still seeing substantial growth and opportunity for employment of new PhDs. Recent numbers show that about half of all post-secondary students in Canada are now attending colleges, and colleges across the country are hiring full-time faculty in larger numbers than universities. Anecdotally, I arrived at Douglas College in 2010, and since then we've hired 11 new faculty members in the English department alone — all doctorate holders, most continuing to pursue their research agendas, albeit off the side of their desks. As I have been saying in various forums here at ACCUTE for the last few years, finding a way to support these early-career researchers in maintaining research agendas, lest we lose a large number of new, highly engaged voices from the discipline. Permanent, tenured, research-focused jobs are, we all know, few and far between and greying quickly. Considering those positions the gold standard for PhD bearers — even those who want to stay in the post-secondary sector — is not a recipe for a vital future for literary studies in this country. We need to do a better job of understanding the pressures on teaching-stream faculty and supporting their desire to do research, be it applied or "pure."

Teaching remains the primary duty of all community college faculty, but as part of a larger community of post-secondary educators, it's worth thinking about how we talk about these jobs and the people in them. One thing I notice, time and again, is that in advice for new PhD graduates, college teaching is usually listed as an option *after* adjuncting; being in a university offers status so compelling to academics that we advise new graduates to pursue contingent, precarious work in a university over permanent work in the college sector. For

examples of the kind of language we use to describe college-sector employment, it's worth looking closely at Linda Muzzin's 2010SSHRC-funded findings into the working conditions in community colleges for Academic Matters, the journal of OCUFA; it's a thorough and thoughtful article that also typifies the kind of language common to these examinations:

> The teachers we talked to in these elite colleges (outside Quebec) were generally happy with their full-time work and benefits, as well as with the substance of their work. **As it turns out, this kind of position can be quite rewarding if your passion is teaching**.
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> [Discussing communications positions:] **But even in these situations**, we found arts doctorate holders who, like their science counterparts, enjoyed the college atmosphere of collegiality and the challenge of teaching students with needs and backgrounds different from many students in the university sector.

There is always this incredulity that people could be satisfied by teaching-centred work, and it's a sentiment that we would do well to abandon. I remember being at Congress 2009 and telling a past professor who I had worked closely with that I was seriously considering a career in the college sector. His response? "You don't have to settle, you know. You're good enough for a real job."

I think we can't be surprised at this attitude when we consider the devaluation of teaching in our institutions as a whole, as though teaching and research are not mutually beneficial tasks towards the same end goal. Our engagement with research invigorates our teaching and keeps us from losing touch with our fields, but teaching is how we learn to disseminate research effectively and meaningfully to people who might actually make use of it. The idea that these are separate skills or that either can or should exist in a vacuum is one I find

baffling. And in truth, I've never known it to be true — the scholars I most respect are often also dazzling teachers, and the teachers I seek to learn from are always up-to-date in the scholarly work of their field. And yet, the distinction persists, and it creates structural barriers particularly for those of us whose positions explicitly define our roles as teachers first and researchers not just second, but something that comes after service and other commitments in the priority list. What can we do, as a scholarly community, to support and advocate for supports for colleagues working in these roles?

The staggering, unfortunate, and problematic reality that the teaching stream dilemma underscores is that as an industry we do not value teaching. It's why we exist, and it's not our first priority. The sheer economics of this issue — that we pay post-secondary teaching professionals less, on average, than those hired to do research — is the clearest indication of this devaluation. But this devaluation can be seen in other, subtler ways, too — the hierarchy of research often places SoTL, the scholarship of teaching and learning, at the bottom of the pecking order, when it's a field that each and every one of us could stand to stay on top of. The contingent nature of much of the undergraduate teaching load in our research universities and the institutional disinterest in the hows and whys of teaching and learning signals to students that the priority of the institution is not them. So professions that prioritize teaching — whether university teaching stream, positions at teaching-focused universities like the new undergraduate institutions in British Columbia, or community college teaching — being consistently looked down upon should not surprise us.

The topic of this panel is "The Spectrum of the Professoriate and the Rise of the Teaching Stream." We know that our institutions have pursued teaching streams largely, though not exclusively, for financial reasons. But we don't have to accept the institutionally- and governmentally-defined terms that a teaching-centred career is somehow a lesser life of the mind. I know I started this talk by saying that my job isn't like an episode of *Community*, but

there's one episode that I think about a lot when I think about the way we frame teaching and learning in the academy. In the season one episode "Advanced Criminal Law," Professor Duncan and Señor Chang fight over whether Chang — a mere Spanish language teacher, and not a PhD — is allowed to call himself Professor. Both characters are rendered ridiculous in this moment: Chang is overstating his worth and status within the institution, and Duncan is pretending that status matters in an institution that, the episode reminds us repeatedly through the Dean's insecurities, is not a "real" college (the table they sit at, the Dean points out, is better than the table at Princeton). We will never be rid of these machinations of status and power within the academy, but it might be worth thinking about the message we send when we devalue and delegitimize the work of members of this community who devote themselves to teaching undergraduates: those who teach first and research questions later. As we consider the demographic shifts and the lay of the academic land in 2016, it's not an overstatement to suggest that the strength of the future our discipline depends upon it.