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Connecting

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Connecting

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CONNECTING

The Emotional Labor of Our Work

Christy I. Wenger

As I close out a particularly busy semester peppered with a bit more stress and tension due to increased financial constraints and a writing program stretched thin, I am reminded of the importance of normalizing discussions of emotional labor in our academic workplaces. Emotional labor—the control and management of emotions to regulate them in accord with public norms and expectations—has been theorized most rigorously as it relates to blue-collar service jobs like waitressing (Hochschild 7). But its impacts are felt deep within academia.

We teachers talk of serving our students, our colleagues, and our universities all the time. Yet, we less often talk frankly and meaningfully about the ways such service implicates us in the invisible labor of feeling. Sometimes this labor helps promote others' well-being and provides affirmation, like that extra-long meeting with a student who needs to talk to someone about the hard time she has meeting deadlines and teacher expectations. Other times, this labor is the smile we put on when our department chair or dean will not continue to support some task into which we have committed time and passion. Both types of emotional labor require us to act according to "feeling rules" (Hochschild 90), mustering the appropriate amount and type of feeling that should be experienced and performed in a particular situation.

In a personal narrative to follow, John Duffy gives a particularly poignant example of his decision to give up producing music after being issued a "friendly" warning from his university. On the tenure track and working to integrate his passion for music and writing, Duffy is warned away from his budding interdisciplinary attempts to bring music to the writing classroom and to work creatively within music production. He is instead told to focus his time and energy on more conventional publications that will count toward tenure and ensure his successful promotion. His tale of remediation is a reminder of the burden our jobs require when we must act "properly" and display the "right" kind of emotions (Cheung and Lun 255). While Duffy was rewarded for his appropriate behavior, even to the point of receiving praise from an insider on the promotion and tenure committee reviewing his case, the act of forfeiting his passion for research in music and writing for job security instead lingers for years until he composes this essay.

Of course our continuous labor to display what others expect of us, the "smile work" of our jobs, can deeply impact how we navigate our emotions on and off the job—increasing stress and negative feelings about our workplaces and creating dissonance between the emotions we experience and the emotions we're expected to show (Tierney and Bensimon 130). I've long been interested in how the practice of mindfulness, or moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness, can be a means of navigating the emotional labor of our work as academics.

If Duffy's piece makes transparent the emotional labor of academic workplaces, Jennifer Consilio's and Shelia Kennedy's piece reminds us of useful strategies to navigate that labor. They investigate how mindfulness can be used to create more compassion-

ate classrooms, and, eventually, more contemplative campus cultures. They share their journey of using mindfulness to help themselves as well as their colleagues and students deepen their awareness and resiliency. Resiliency and deepened awareness are themes carried over in the included poetry in this issue. Carl Vandermeulen's "The Way to the Falls" asks us to linger in the peace of nature, while Robert Randolph's, "A Good Rain" urges us to be like the teacher who has "turned her wounds/ into lessons."

Taking energy from these writers, who relate together how each step forward can add up to a transformative journey, we can take a mindful step forward in the larger conversation of how we acknowledge and navigate emotional work meaningfully within the academy and beyond its walls.



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Interdisciplinary Dangers: A Small Caveat

W. Keith Duffy

I realize it sounds apocryphal, but it's not: the highest and lowest points in my life as an English professor happened within a week of one another. First, I recount my proudest accomplishment (which requires some background)—then my greatest disappointment (which requires some teeth gnashing).

My earliest memories are musical. Charlotte Campbell, my larger-than-life grandmother, sang live on the radio (when that was a thing), and she loved appearing on the local stage. She even had a record pressed of one performance, long before I was born. Childhood summers consisted of sitting on the orange shag of my room, windows shuttered against the blistering sun, listening to records on my toy turntable. One July, an elderly neighbor down the street found God and abruptly unloaded all 200 of his unholy rock-n-roll LPs on me. The Velvet Underground, The Kinks, The Who, Neil Diamond—all the splashy album covers were foreign to me, but I spent hours digging through the mountain of vinyl, absorbing it.

In high school, I bought myself a cheap bass guitar and hammered away at it until my fingers bled. At some point, the noise I made started to resemble music. My college years involved gigs with two regionally successful bar bands—one post-punk and another jazz funk. My claim to fame during this time was playing at CBGB's in New

York City. Sure, it was a low-key Tuesday night affair attended by five local drunks slouched at the bar. But it was CBGB's, and I stared wide-eyed at graffiti scribbled on the dressing room wall by Joey Ramone. I mean, that's pretty cool.

Simultaneously, I became interested in producing and recording electronic music (in between studying for finals in comparative literature and Shakespeare as I pursued my bachelor's in English). My bedroom studio steadily grew; drum machines and multi-channel mixers were more important than furniture. A few years later while working on my master's degree in writing and language, I produced tape after tape of original electronic music, continually foisting them onto patient, smiling friends and mailing them to any record label I thought might listen. Flinging my blood, sweat, and tears into the void got no response.

However in 2001, two years after finishing my Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition and working my first job as a composition professor, it finally happened. I signed my debut record deal with Neurodisc, an independent label that was distributed through Capitol Records—nothing to sneeze at! On release day, I was hyperventilating when I entered the massive Tower Records store on the corner of Mass Ave and Newbury Street in Boston and saw half a dozen customers, headphones clamped to their ears, sampling my CD on the listening station. Friends from around the country called to congratulate me, saying they too were standing at those Tower Records listening stations in their own towns and cities. My head was spinning.

Commercially, the record met with moderate success and received a few nice reviews, but my proudest moment didn't happen until several years later. For family reasons, I changed jobs from the University of Massachusetts to Penn State. Eventually, I entered my fourth year on the tenure track; I knew publishing academic research in peer-reviewed journals in English was required to successfully jump the tenure hurdle, and I had a few pieces to my name at that time. This was the point where my interdisciplinary approach to research evolved. I wrote several articles such as "Sound Arguments: Composing Words and Music," and "Digital Recording Technology in the Writing Classroom: Sampling as Citing" exploring ways to utilize musical composition in the first-year writing classroom. These essays appeared in established pedagogy journals like *The Writing Instructor*. For instance, my article titled "A Pedagogy of Composing: The Rhetoric of Electronic Music in the Writing Class" was based on a pilot program I designed and implemented in my honors composition course at Penn State. Blending my professional training (teaching academic writing) with my personal drive (making electronic music), I thought I had hit that sweet spot—especially since I had been told by numerous administrators that pedagogical research in my field was acknowledged and respected by the promotion and tenure committee.

Of course, I continued to make music too—frankly, I couldn't help myself. In 2006, roughly five years after my first record, lightning struck again and I signed my second album, this time with Bar-None Records, a highly regarded independent label. However, on February 7, shortly following the release date, I received a curious email from Glenn Morrow, president of Bar-None. The subject line simply read "Sopranos!" but the short message inside was momentous:

"Hello Professor. We just got a request to use a track from your CD in an upcoming episode of The Sopranos on HBO. The fee is \$5K all in. Call me if you have any questions. Congratulations! G."

Staring at the screen, I stopped breathing for at least five minutes. I was unaware at the time, but Bar-None was very actively distributing free copies of my CD to clients for potential licensing in multimedia outlets—television, movies, internet. And their efforts paid off. Over a period of years, six or seven tracks from my second CD were licensed and used. One song appeared in the romantic comedy *The OH in Ohio*, a film directed by Billy Kent and starring Danny Devito, Liza Minelli, and Paul Rudd. Another track was used in The Oxygen Network's show *Tempting Adam*. Other music was used to sell high-end ski goggles by Spy Optic and various fashions by Korean clothier Lucky Chouette. Other licenses got issued, but I've honestly forgotten many of them. For each use (once all the various players were paid, of course), I earned a little scratch—not much, but I wasn't in it for the money.

However the *singular moment* occurred when I actually heard my song on *The Sopranos*. It's right there in season 6, episode 66, which is titled "Members Only." As described by HBO's website, my song is playing in the background as "Tony eats sushi."

Okay I admit it. That doesn't sound particularly sexy. After all, I'm playing second fiddle to raw fish. And the song runs for a mere 45 seconds before the scene changes to something else. I guess it's really no big deal when you think about it. But it isn't the 45 seconds of sound that matters, and it's not the \$5,000 licensing fee (of which I saw maybe a hundred bucks). It's the work, dedication, deal-making, and risk-taking it represents. And it's *The Sopranos*. I mean, FUHGEDDABOUTIT!

But here's what I didn't know. Though I was riding high, this proudest moment of my professional life would cause me trouble. And that trouble would finally manifest itself only a week later when I received my official evaluation letter from Penn State discussing my fourth-year tenure review, which had been completed earlier that year.

A short explanation: In the Penn State system, faculty can be discontinued on the tenure track at any point (be granted a terminal year of employment) for certain reasons—poor classroom performance, lack of professionalism, questionable research, or other shortcomings. That means while Penn State follows the typical six-year probationary, pre-tenure period with formal review every two years, that timeline can be stopped by administration at year two, or year four, or finally at year six when tenure can be denied. For this reason, when tenure-review letters arrive in the mail, the tension rises—will I get to keep my job? Of course, like most tenure processes, the final year is the big reveal where faculty either permanently join the team . . . or pack their bags.

While luckily my fourth-year review letter recommended "continuation on the tenure track" due to "solid teaching and satisfactory service to the university," there was a very clear, very stern warning which upset me enough that I had to literally lay down on the floor of my office to collect myself:

Regarding your work in music publishing: While we understand your personal interest in this area Dr. Duffy, we recommend you focus your professional, scholarly energies instead on publishing more academic research in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals. Having your research vetted and accepted by peers in your disciplinary community at this point in your career is key to attaining tenure at a research-one institution like Penn State.

So, there you have it. I had tried my best to gather my varied interests around me and to approach them in a serious, productive, interdisciplinary way. But the message here was undeniable: Stop making music Dr. Duffy . . . at least at the expense of doing research. My heart sank.

You might call me a sellout; you might even label me a spineless, mutable company man without faith. It's fine. I can take it. But when I read that *helpful suggestion* about how I should be spending my time (while simultaneously imagining being denied tenure in a few short years), guess what I did? Returning home after a long day of teaching—a mere week after having one of my songs licensed for use on a top-rated, critically-acclaimed television show—I carefully unplugged all my equipment, snapped pictures of each piece, and promptly posted it all on eBay. Keyboards, sound modules, microphones, cables—each piece was placed into cardboard boxes, drowned in packing peanuts, and expedited into the hands of eager music producers around the country. Within a month, my home music studio (which had grown exponentially over the years) was a largely empty office containing a computer and a desk. Most important, there were no musical distractions to be found whatsoever. I was ready to begin writing. I was ready to start behaving.

At this point you might be thinking: 'There's no way I would have betrayed myself like that, at least not without putting up a fight.' And I get that. I think about that myself on some days. But at this very moment, my interdisciplinary dream faded, and I was operating on fear—fear of not having a future. In fact, I didn't shed a tear as I slapped postage on each box. I wasn't even angry as my studio quickly emptied out. After the initial shock of the letter wore off, my first instinct was to behave . . . to do as I was told. And actually, that response worked. For the next two years, I made no music at all, and I focused on simply getting as many peer-reviewed rhetoric and composition articles published as humanly possible. Several years later (after receiving my sixth-year letter granting tenure), I was actually told by someone who was on the promotion and tenure committee during my case that my compliance—in other words, ditching the music-making and surrendering my interdisciplinary approach—is what worked. Her words went something like this: "In the previous year's letter, you were told what to do. You were told to stop making music and start writing more articles. And you did it; you behaved. That's what we like to see."

Chilling? Big Brother wins again? No, not really. In case the ending to my interdisciplinary tale of woe is too woeful, keep this in mind: Sometimes you've got to play the long game. (Hey, that sounds like something Tony from *The Sopranos* may have uttered at some point!) All of this is *nearly* ancient history for me—I got tenure nine years ago. Can you guess what I did as soon as the letter arrived? Of course, I spent my raise on rebuilding my home studio, and I'm right back to where I started. These days I freely make music when I can. I even apply for research and development grants through Penn State to do small production runs of my music. My third CD was released in 2014 by the French electronic record label F4T Music. It's being sold on iTunes, Amazon, Rhapsody, and other online venues. I'm still teaching writing amidst all of it, and I feel lucky. At the same time, I'm acutely aware that my professional life as it is now rests on the luxury of tenure, which so many of my colleagues have no access to or are currently struggling with. I hesitate to offer any "Big Lesson" here, other than to say that if you

live in—or hope to live in—an interdisciplinary space within academia, just be aware of your institution's culture regarding such endeavors. Ask around. School yourself on how much weight interdisciplinary work carries—or the liabilities it might create—while maintaining your grasp on the big picture. Even if interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary work might be detrimental to your professional life now, you always have the possibility of greater freedom somewhere down that cross-disciplinary road as your career evolves . . . or as the institution evolves around you. Take it from Tony and me: Sometimes you've got to play the long game.



One Mindful Step

Sheila M. Kennedy and Jen Consilio

Over the last several years, we became interested in mindfulness for a variety of reasons, including finding ways to slow down our overloaded worlds and over-active minds, and we began practicing it regularly. As a result, we experienced the transformative benefits of a regular mindfulness practice, such as greater calm and awareness, increasing compassion and sense of freedom. We educated ourselves, reading both ancient texts and recent research on mindfulness, and completed formal mindfulness training. And we became inspired to share what we learned with others so they too might learn about and enjoy the benefits of mindfulness practice, potentially transforming themselves and those around them.

Our initial step was to bring mindfulness practice into the classroom by integrating it into our pedagogy. For example, we offered focused concentration practices, a variety of breathing exercises, and invited our students to develop attention and awareness of the writing process. As a whole, students responded positively, encouraging us to consider other ways to offer mindfulness opportunities within our broader campus community. We see this work as seeking to connect with one person at a time, and, in turn, helping to create a more mindful campus culture.

Encouraged and enthusiastic about the possibilities of helping to cultivate more mindfulness on our university campus, we discussed the possibility of offering a half-hour group practice on our campus. But we were full of questions:

- *How do we get people there?*
- *What do we call this mindfulness practice?*
- *How do we do mindfulness justice?*
- *How do we explain mindfulness so participants understand what it can do for them?*
- *How do we convey what mindfulness can do, when the only way they'll understand the benefits is just by practicing it?*

All of these questions drew us to the central rhetorical challenge of this work: How do we frame mindfulness for a campus audience?

While we felt comfortable incorporating mindfulness practices into our classrooms, we weren't sure how to connect with a larger audience outside the classroom. As such, we brainstormed the best ways to frame it, deciding first what to call it—meditation?

mindfulness? something else about quieting the mind and awareness? We struggled with which benefits we should emphasize—stress relief, learning readiness, or emotional regulation? Finally, we discussed how to acknowledge religious and secular practices. As we explored and analyzed our choices, one central question guided us: How do we just get them in the room?

Based on our discussion and initial problem-solving, we decided to call our practice a “guided mindfulness practice.” We emphasized the benefits of relaxation, awareness, clarity, and compassion, and we identified both secular and religious origins in our group discussions. While we were getting clearer about our frame, we still experienced some “negative mind” (a Buddhist concept reflecting the mind’s tendency for negative thinking), wondering if we had framed it effectively enough to get people in the room.

But, we just needed to take that first step. And that first step led to another, and another:

First step: We created a weekly guided mindfulness group practice, offering thirty mindful minutes to students, faculty, and staff.

Second step: We created a research project integrating mindfulness and the evaluation of students’ writing, naming it the “Mindfulness Grading Agreement Process,” or MGAP, on which we have a forthcoming article.

Then another step: We facilitated a faculty development reading group to help create more support for understanding and integrating mindfulness in pedagogy across the disciplines.

One more step: We integrated mindfulness into our Summer Bridge Program for incoming first-year students, in two ways: first, by establishing a mindfulness-based Common Reader, *Into the Magic Shop: A Neurosurgeon’s Quest to Discover the Mysteries of the Brain and the Secrets of the Heart*, by James R. Doty, with related reading and writing pedagogy; and second, by offering student workshops led by a team of interdisciplinary faculty-practitioners, based on the book’s mindfulness practices.

Then another step: We created and implemented monthly, fifty-minute Writing and Mindfulness workshops through our university-wide “Arts and Ideas” programming, which offers students myriad academic, artistic, and cultural events and experiences throughout each semester.

Then another: By request, we offered mindfulness practices for other groups on campus, such as student athletic organizations.

And another: Throughout this time, we shared informally with numerous colleagues, offering practical and pedagogical support for how to effectively integrate mindfulness activities into their teaching.

We share our journey here in hopes of helping others who may benefit from understanding how even small mindful steps can lead to a more contemplative culture on a campus.

Ripples from Pebbles

From one step to many. And what have we achieved?

In reflecting on each one of our steps, we note that we've created opportunities for mindfulness practice and learning in a variety of pockets around campus, from classroom experiences to university-wide projects. We've incorporated and offered mindfulness practices and support to various populations at our mid-sized university—students (including first-year students), faculty, staff, and administrators. More specifically, our efforts have helped normalize the language and activity of mindfulness and meditation on campus—no small rhetorical feat. People express curiosity about we do and why. People express appreciation, even if they're not able to participate. And finally, potential alliances are forming.

And yet, we haven't made the kind of culture-change impact we're aiming for. For example, we neither have as many people committed to a communal campus practice as we'd like, nor do we have a community-wide, explicit privileging of mindfulness as a useful way of knowing, one that can truly enhance learning and living. Campus culture is a big ocean, and we've created only a ripple or two so far. Without these initial steps, though, we wouldn't have learned all that we have about how to make effective change toward more mindfulness practice. For example, we recognized the need to discuss mindfulness from a variety of perspectives, both contemporary secular and ancient religious. We've discovered how to communicate the important connections between recent neuroscience findings about brain development and mindfulness practices (see e.g., Siegel's *The Mindful Brain*, 2007). Most importantly, we emphasize the importance of regular practice both formally and in everyday activities. All of these lessons speak to the rhetorical challenge of cultivating an authentic ethos for the work.

What are our next steps? We're in the process of forming a Professional Learning Community for interested faculty to share and create research and pedagogy. And we're generating ways to motivate more interest and participation in regular group practice for students, faculty, and staff.

So what began as two individuals who used mindfulness practices to create space in our respective lives has transformed into a rich and ongoing collaboration to theorize and share the practices with others, one mindful step at a time. We'd love to learn about your mindful steps, your ripples from pebbles.



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The Way to the Falls

Carl Vandermeulen

Bypass the bend with the Scenic Turnoff sign.
Farther upstream, in terrain too wild
for roads, a foot trail skirts the edge
of the river's canyon. Find that trail.
Park your car in the shade
so upon your return
it will not bake from your skin
the moist memento of white water
plunging through mist.

What weaves the memory,
places it both within the world
of your address and somewhere out beyond,
is the trail. It follows, as I said, the canyon,
twists with the sweep of the canyon's slope, crossing
along the way, sometimes on limbs of fallen trees,
smaller canyons with tributary streams.

Listen as you walk for the sound of rushing water.
What likely you will hear at first instead
is the whisshhh of the wind in the trees high above,
insect buzz, and clack; chock and chirrrr
of squirrels, chipmunks; or the cries of birds
soaring out from a canyon edge,
seeking response from the leafy veil on the other—
all gifts for your attention.

When you hear the sigh of water it will be
the stream below the falls, not the falls—
but still a sign that trail and stream converge.
Keep measuring the length of the trail
by the swing of your arms, the sweep of your stride,
the rhythms of footfall, heartbeat, breath.

On the best trails, the coming
is simultaneous: insistent rush in the air,
steady thunder abruptly, simply, there,
then vibration of earth itself up through muscles
and bones and veins and the turn of the trail
toward light: suddenly shining

through rifts between leaning trees,
the plunging rumbling froth
of high bright water.

Approach slowly. Rocks, logs, and leaves
offer veils and frames through which to see.
Then find a good place, stay still there; take it slowly
in, or cry out softly again with an Ahhhhhhhhhhhh
as tall as the falls fall, an Mmmmmm resonating
with rumble and strum of the plunge,
or an Ohhhh as round and moist as the mist
sifting cool to your arms, your face.

Pause a while longer there, in that place
planted, as though you belonged. Merge
the coming to be with the being
by reciting slowly words you know for waiting:
linger dawdle dally tarry,
abide stall stay.
Know all the while that you will
in due time turn to retrace your way
back to the road that leads to the road
that leads to your numbered place;
but for now, for this while yet, in this space,
linger, tarry, stay,
and let one wild chord play.



A Good Rain

Robert Randolph

There is an old teacher
folded inside this rain. She whispers
about pearls that were eyes,
and roads in a yellow wood.

Her heart is a mirror
reflecting her students.
She has turned her wounds
into lessons. She asks why

we are all so beautiful.
She asks the night, like a friend,
if the gloves of rain want to touch our hearts
as they touch the sea.

