

## NARRATIVE 5.

# STUDENT, TEACHER, TEACHING ASSISTANT: JANUS AND INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

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Before I was a GTA I was an adjunct—in the same department and program—at the same school. As a result, I didn't think much about how shifting to a TA position would affect my job: I was still teaching the same classes to the same students. To me, it seemed like a lateral move with the added benefit of covering my Ph.D. course costs. To my peers, I joked it was a “demotion” (and who ever knew you could be demoted from adjunct?).

But the reality was different—mostly in ways I never anticipated. Less books from the library, less copies from printing services, no parking discount, a new ID, etc. Little things you don't think about until they aren't there anymore. The truth was that even though in a strictly functional sense the labor at the core of my job (teaching) had stayed relatively stable, in the eyes of the institution I was now a “student” and not an “employee”—and this entailed a subtle but significant shift in not just my status as an employee, but so too the nature of my work.

(Many of) my students took notice, now regarding me as less than a professor. My bio on the department web portal changed to “Graduate Teaching Assistant” and not “Professor” or “Instructor.” Never mind the fact that I had spent years teaching the class—to them, as to the institution, I was now merely another student. Caught in special type of bureaucratic and professional purgatory; at once a teacher *and* a student (I would point out). But only one part of that identity seemed to matter once I became a GTA.

This isn't a plea for reparations or even a promotion. I'm not angry or feel owed anything. There are advantages to being a TA (free access to the gym!). Yet, caught in these shifting webs of institutional employment status are the lived experiences of **real people**—teachers, admins, professionals, and yes, students. How can an instructor *who also takes classes* be denied a part of their own identity? It's not an either-or situation—the Ph.D. classes come *in addition to* my responsibilities as an instructor (or GTA, whatever). The responsibility hasn't lessened; in fact, it's increased significantly. My identity simply doesn't match

the latticework of institutional designations which amalgamate to comprise my status as a member of the school.

In ancient Roman mythology, Janus was the god of beginnings, transitions, and endings. For him, as for the other deities of ancient mythology, beginnings and endings were indistinguishable. For the TAs and GTAs of modern higher education, Janus represents an important referent—we are at once facing outward to the institutions we serve much as we face inward to our own selves *at the same time*. Caught between beginnings and endings, perpetually in transition, like Janus before us.