

Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LA REVUE D'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR D'UAPUO

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Contract Faculty: An International Challenge

Andrew Robinson

A personal perspective of
contract instructing in Ontario

Jonathan White

Zero-hours contracts and precarious
academic work in the UK

Jeannie Rea

Organizing against the widening
gap in academic job security
in Australia



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Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
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Academic Matters is published two times a year by OCUFA, and is received by 17,000 professors, academic librarians and others interested in higher education issues across Canada. The journal explores issues of relevance to higher education in Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and globally. It is intended to be a forum for thoughtful and thought-provoking, original and engaging discussion of current trends in postsecondary education and consideration of academe's future direction.

Readers are encouraged to contribute their views, ideas and talents. Letters to the editor (maximum 250 words) are welcome and may be edited for length. To provide an article or artwork for Academic Matters, please send your query to Editor-in-Chief Graeme Stewart at editor@academicmatters.ca.

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Letters to the Editor

It has been two full years, but Carol Linnitt's article "Harper's attack on science: No science, no evidence, no truth, no democracy" continues to generate conversation and controversy on the Academic Matters website (www.academicmatters.ca). Here's a sample of some of the commentary:

University of Delaware physical oceanographer Andreas Muenchow posted a blog about how the terms to work with the Canadian government had become extremely restrictive.

It said that Andreas Muenchow didn't speak to the CBC, but I for sure heard a voice of an international scientist doing a radio interview with somebody at CBC.

He similarly mentioned that the agreement that had to be signed was more far more excessive than previous international projects that he had worked on for, and he felt like it was a military agreement.

JEFF KANG

Since the author works for a pure propaganda institution like DeSmog, there is no real reason to assume its contents have any value.

JOHANI KANADA

It would help me establish the quality of your insight if you actually referred to something in the article. Otherwise I can only conclude you don't intend to persuade anyone of anything.

JAN VAN DALFSEN (IN REPLY TO JOHANI KANADA)

As opposed to the pure propaganda and often empty static coming from the Federal government and its spokespeople?

DAR CHOUB (IN REPLY TO JOHANI KANADA)

Got something to say? Academicmatters.ca is open 24/7 for your comments, kudos, and brickbats. Or, if you prefer to send a letter to the editor directly, you can find him at editor@academicmatters.ca.

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A personal perspective of contract instructing in Ontario

Andrew Robinson

Contract faculty work in Ontario is unfair, ineffective, and ready for a shakeup.


Le travail contractuel pour les professeurs en Ontario est injuste et inefficace, et un remaniement s'impose.



I am a relative newcomer to contract instructing, having moved to Ontario from Saskatchewan in 2010, for family reasons related to health care for my younger son, who is a special-needs child. We moved from Saskatchewan because we were unable to get the health care we needed for him. My wife and I had a unique position at the University of Saskatchewan. We had a job share; she was on the tenure-track in Physics, and I was the teaching sidekick. This suited me, as I came late to university level teaching, working first as a research scientist in universities and then as a scientific computer programmer in the private sector. I did not have the conventional career trajectory of an academic employed in a tenured position at a university. We moved to Ontario without having jobs to move into, but I was fortunate to be able to find work immediately at Carleton University as a laboratory supervisor. I was then offered contract instructor positions, and moved to teaching five one-semester Introductory Physics courses during the course of the year. To put this in perspective, this is the teaching load expected of a full-time Instructor/Lecturer position, as defined in the Carleton faculty collective agreement. It would be extremely difficult to teach more than two of these courses in parallel—

the workload would then be 50-60 hours per week. With my special-needs childcare commitments, this would be impossible. Nor would it be possible for me to take on a tenure-track position. The hours of work typically required to develop, fund, and launch a research program were more than I could actually devote to it. My ambition is more modest: to obtain a full-time instructor position and be able to develop better pedagogy for the teaching of physics at the university level.

So what do I find, as a contract instructor in an Ontario University? The stipends vary enormously, from the low end (Carleton) to the high end (York). Contract instructors at Carleton's neighbour, the University of Ottawa, have a considerably better funding package and superior benefits. Yet the work is essentially the same, and each university receives a regulated amount of funding from the province, with the rest made up from tuition fees (also regulated) and donations. Given this relatively level financial playing field, the huge disparities in contract faculty pay between the different universities surprised me a lot. I originally hail from the UK, where there are unified national scales negotiated for the various faculty pay grades. Faculty pay in Ontario is highly



local, with each institution negotiating directly with its employees. This localization of negotiations heavily favours employers, as it is more difficult for the various disparate labour groups to lobby effectively at much more than the local level. I also note that there are two distinct philosophies of how to position the contract instructors within existing union structures. Around half of contract instructors in Ontario are unionized with the full-time faculty at their university. The other half are often unionized with CUPE and often in bargaining units which also include teaching assistants, research assistants, and other groups of students who are also employed by the university. My personal reflection on this is that having a combined faculty/contract instructor negotiating unit is vastly preferable, as it cuts out a lot of management divide-and-rule tactics, which we at Carleton experience regularly. Many of our proposals for reform are instantly blocked by management using the argument that “that would contravene our agreement with the faculty”.

Virtually all Canadian universities claim to be “research

intensive” and are fixed on the ideal model of the professor as both brilliant researcher and brilliant teacher. The snag with this hypothesis is that there is no evidence which suggests a link between performance as a researcher and performance as a teacher. Thus to correctly balance the twin objectives of the university, employing both teaching and research specialists would make more sense. The University of Toronto, for instance—easily described as the leading research institution in the province and in Canada (although UBC and the University of Alberta would no doubt dispute this national title)—does have “teaching stream” faculty. Employing full-time teachers apparently does nothing to deplete U of T’s research prowess. Ironically, most of the opposition to creating dedicated teaching positions comes from tenured faculty. Recalcitrant professors make comments about the “balkanisation of the profession” that will occur if both research and tenure streams are allowed to exist separately. This ignores the reality of what has actually happened over the last twenty years: we don’t have a balkanisation of the profession, we have segregation, or one might almost say, apartheid. On one side we have tenure-track faculty who both research and teach. On the other, the contract instructors, who teach much more, but are not paid to do any research. In some academic disciplines, research on your own time and at your own expense is possible. In the sciences, experimental science is an expensive thing to pursue, and no funding body will commit funds to precarious workers. There is also an enormous disparity in the level of pay of the two groups. The tenured staff are now mostly on the Ontario Sunshine List of those earning more than \$100,000 per year. The teaching staff will be lucky to earn \$25,000-\$35,000 at most universities (York being the most notable exception). Moreover, tenure-track faculty normally enjoy generous benefits, pensions, and strong job security. Contract teaching staff not only do not have stable employment, they also have vastly inferior benefits— if any.

Another striking thing about the universities in Ontario is their almost complete adherence to identical doctrines of management, funding, and interpretation of their core missions. They are not exactly shining examples of debate on, academic discussion about, or experimentation with new models in teaching or finance. The dreary uniformity of the same policy positions is quite astounding. The accepted wisdom among university administrators is that there is a perpetual financial crisis caused by provincial underfunding of education. It is true that the Government of Ontario funds students less than all other provinces on a per-student basis.

There are completely separate castes of administrators,
permanent faculty, and contract instructors, and the
latter group is most definitely the lowest in the pecking order.



However the universities have simply shifted their revenue source from government to students in the form of higher tuition fees.¹ Many universities have regularly reported financial surpluses (at non-profit organizations, surpluses are akin to profits, with the exception that they must be reinvested in the organization). A financial crisis does not really exist for the universities; the real financial crisis is the cost of education borne by students, and the debt levels they must incur to pay for their studies. Nevertheless, the narrative of institutions in financial crisis appears at every single contract negotiation. It is also notable that while faculty and administrative salaries have been rising at well above the rate of inflation, the contract instructor salaries have been struggling to even keep pace. The “dreary uniformity” of financial discussions at Ontario universities is especially frustrating when we see the administration, faculty, and students at Cape Breton University come together and propose that tuition fees should be abolished. This kind of out-of-the-box thinking is a rarity in our universities.

I also observe that there is an extremely rigid caste system in place in university culture. There are completely separate castes of administrators, permanent faculty, and contract instructors, and the latter group is most definitely the lowest in the pecking order. I personally find it extremely uncomfortable working with many tenured faculty, who although are civil and polite on a fairly superficial level, will, if pressed, always support their own tribe and not look out for the interests of a colleague who happens to be a contract instructor. The fact that we have a significant overlap of duties in teaching, but a massive disparity in terms of status, permanence, and salary does not help. It is sad that departments have no incentive to create permanent instructor positions to carry out teaching. In fact, every incentive at the department level is to maximize the number of research faculty. Departments gain resources by maximizing research output, not by delivering a better educational experience for their students. This makes for an uncomfortable and tense working environment for the contract instructor. In all fairness, many of the tenured faculty probably don’t realize that this is the case, but nevertheless the system as now constituted places a great deal of stress on contract instructors who are *de facto* full-time employees.

One of my big concerns is that, assuming there is some reform in the future and new permanent positions are opened up, the full-time faculty will insist on having the final say on who is selected, rather than offering these positions to long-serving contract instructors. It is all too easy to imagine this happening, given the apparent fondness of universities to hire from outside their own halls. This type of thinking is very common amongst faculty, and will always be justified by an argument that “it’s for the good of the department,” absolving the decision makers from any responsibility to the excluded persons. Robust negotiations and agreements with—and within—faculty associations will be needed to ensure that this is not the case.

The original purpose of contract instructor positions, intended for graduate students who needed teaching experience, subject experts employed elsewhere, and emergency replacements of faculty due to unforeseen circumstances, has been subverted. Contracts are now being given for essential core courses. It’s fairly obvious that these will not be taught by people such as lawyers, architects, and public servants, who will be at work in their “real” jobs. So this teaching will inevitably be done by faculty or professional university instructors. The fact that the university can simultaneously abuse the contract instructor system to deliver its core mission and claim



with a straight face that “nobody should try and piece together a living from these contracts” defies belief. Nevertheless, this is what we have to deal with. We are essential to the running of the institution and provide core services, yet we are paid a fraction of what tenured faculty and permanent instructors receive and the employer sees us as an easily replaceable interchangeable part to slot into a class schedule where necessary. It is telling that universities are coy about the number of contract teaching staff they employ, and how many courses are taught by contract, rather than permanent, staff. There is really no excuse for not having these figures available, except that no sustained government or public pressure has been placed on institutions to release these data. These figures should be made available, so that students can make informed choices about where to pursue their studies based on the general level of institutional support for undergraduate teaching. This would be very beneficial for both students and contract instructors (and probably rather embarrassing for most university administrations).

So how does this situation impact teaching in Ontario universities? Students do not benefit from large classes, taught by harried and stressed temporary faculty. They may lose contact with instructors who know them well, but are then forced to leave the institution. This denies many students access to good academic references. In some cases, sufficient meeting times, or even meeting spaces, are often not available to meet student needs. I am fortunate to have a shared office, whereas many have no dedicated office space at all. Face-to-face meetings with students are an exceptionally important part of the education process, and the responsibility to provide adequate resources to facilitate direct contact rests squarely with the university administration.

How long this system will remain in place is questionable. The universities have absolutely no incentive to reform themselves. The provincial government, reluctant to hand over more money as operating grants, has also adopted an extremely hands off approach to the general operation of the universities. I have received an official statement from my own Member of the Provincial Parliament, saying that “the universities act as autonomous institutions, and the provincial parliament does not interfere with their labour or hiring policies.” This is all well and good, and nobody would want external political control of individual appointments in the university system. But surely, guidelines or even legislation to force equitable employment practices should carry some weight? After all, the government is one of the major stakeholders and is the largest contributor to the university coffers; it has the influence to be an activist “shareholder.” The other major stakeholders are the students and their parents. This is where I think the pressure for reform will come. They have been paying ever increasing tuition fees, and have not realised until now that an estimated 33 to 50 per cent of the courses are not being taught by scholars in permanent jobs, but by temporary, precarious workers, employed on much less favourable terms. Class sizes have increased, course options have decreased, and so it is very difficult to argue that the quality of undergraduate teaching during the twenty-first century has maintained standards, let alone improved. At some point, students will start to dig in their collective heels and demand more resources be put into actual undergraduate teaching, rather than research which completely dominates the agenda in the Ontario university system. We can see the beginnings of this in the recent strikes by teaching assistants at York and the University of Toronto. In both cases, the university made frankly ridiculous offers, and were forced to climb down because of action not only of the strikers, but also a significant number of undergraduates who quite clearly realize that their education is being compromised. I suspect that this will embolden union negotiation teams elsewhere in the province.

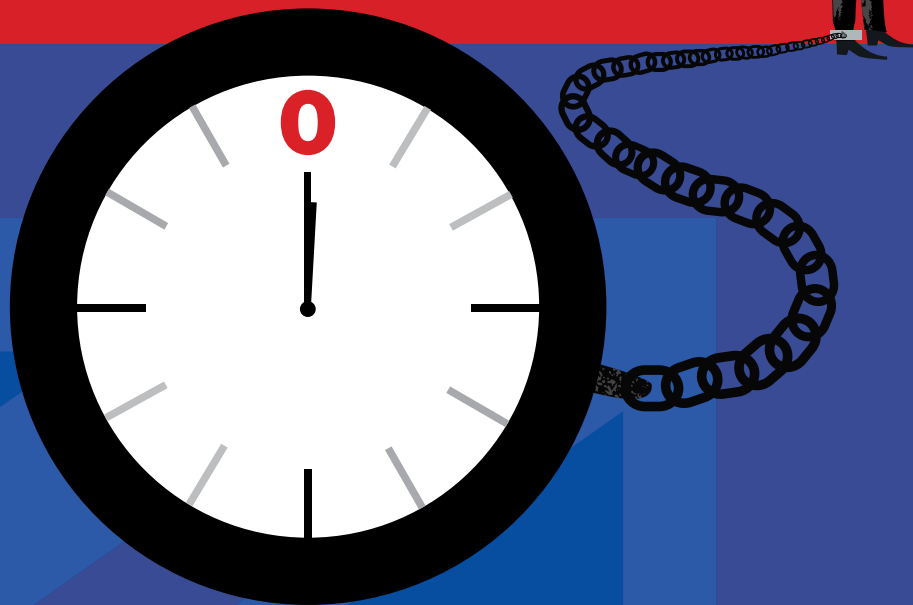
To sum up, I am encouraged by the recent signs of activism bringing concrete results into the working conditions and remuneration of precariously employed university employees. However, I am dismayed by the rigid orthodoxy of university management, and the lack of emphasis put on one of the core missions of the Ontario universities—to provide a high quality, affordable undergraduate education. A shakeup is needed, and it may have to be a grass-roots movement, given the inertia of both university administrations and provincial governments. The time for committed activism is upon us. ■■

Andrew Robinson teaches physics at Carleton University.

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1. Editor’s Note: Even when net tuition fees (fees minus scholarships and bursaries paid from operating funds) are included, Ontario still is eighth out of ten provinces in terms of operating revenue per student.

Zero-hours contracts and precarious academic work in the UK

Jonathan White



The University and College Union is fighting back against zero-hour contracts that trap thousands in casualized work.

L'University and College Union lutte contre les contrats zéro heure qui piègent des milliers de professeurs dans le travail précaire.

"Zero-hours contracts mean that you can't make plans because you don't want to be 'unavailable' when the call comes in. So in the end you are just hanging on, not being able to plan anything for months on end."

This quote could be from any worker on a zero-hours contract in any sector of the UK economy. As it happens, it's one of the people delivering frontline teaching in a UK university responding to a survey conducted by the University and College Union (UCU).

In the UK there are tens of thousands of people working on zero-hours contracts with no guarantee of work from semester to semester. Many of them are students, recruited

into doctoral programmes by universities hungry for their course fees and then used to teach fee-paying undergraduates. They often work long hours at the expense of their studies and are paid poor hourly rates.

Worse still is the condition of the tens of thousands of lecturers who attempt to piece together a living with zero-hours contracts, often deceptively cloaked with grand sounding titles like 'Associate Tutor' or the even more disingenuous 'Teaching Fellow'.

Beneath these job titles is a reality in which teaching staff are expected to be available to work whenever called on. However, at the same time, the university has no obligation to ensure they have work or, as a consequence, an income.

Organizing teaching through the deployment of casualized labour is a recipe for a chaotic student learning experience.

A UCU report in July 2013 revealed that 53 per cent of UK universities made use of contracts like this to deliver frontline teaching. Many had hundreds of staff on insecure contracts, while some were maintaining reserve armies of precarious workers numbering in the thousands.

For the lecturers themselves the experience is one of constant uncertainty. Unable to know whether they will have ongoing employment, they cannot plan either their careers or, more painfully, their family lives. As another lecturer told us:

"Life on a casualized contract is very uncertain and precarious as one never knows until shortly before the academic year starts what work you are going to be offered, and frequently extra work can then be offered during the year at very short notice. It becomes impossible to plan your life. It is difficult to feel fully integrated into the life of the rest of the academic department because of the temporary nature of the contracts. You feel very much at the mercy of senior administrators who want to cut costs by axing part-time budgets."

The organization that negotiates with the trade unions on behalf of UK universities on issues like pay and terms and conditions—the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)—dismisses these concerns as the grumblings of a few disgruntled individuals.

UCEA prefers to quibble with figures and definitions and use the defence favoured by politicians, including the UK's Prime Minister David Cameron, which suggests staff appreciate the flexibility these contracts offer.

There are doubtless some people for whom casual work suits their lives, but as every survey indicates, this is a very small minority and universities are hiding behind them to justify the mass casualization of their teaching workforce. The vast majority of people on casualized contracts would gladly trade the flexibility so valued by their employers for the security of predictable employment patterns and a guaranteed income. Like so much that has happened in higher education, this hyper-casualization of the teaching workforce has deep roots in the changing political economy of the sector. Encouraged and coerced by successive governments pursuing a neoliberal public sector reform agenda, UK universities, especially English universities, have attempted to reconstitute themselves as lean, mean competition machines, pressed out of the standard business mold and geared to the bottom line.

Under the Conservative-led coalition government, this process has been ratcheted up. Since 2010, the English higher education sector has been subjected to a form of shock therapy as the government transformed its financial base almost overnight.

The removal of block grant funding from the state and the introduction of £9,000 a year tuition fees has left universities subject to the uncertainties of a competitive student fee market. Their sensitivity to fluctuations in student demand has of course made universities more committed than ever to their new workforce models: keep a lean core of permanent workers and a big flexible margin of precarious casualized staff, which can expand and contract as required.

The problem is that this comes at a heavy cost. Part of that cost is measured in the unfairness of exploitative casualized contracts. The lives of people on these contracts are characterized by anxiety, stress, and a constant fear that the next assignment will be their last.

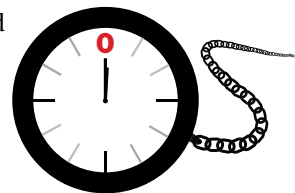
University managements have shown themselves remarkably resilient when faced with such arguments. Unfairness and exploitation they can live with; what really bothers them is the damage that casualisation can do to their public reputations.

Partly, that's about the wider public furore around zero-hours contracts in the UK. Zero-hours contracts have, on the whole, had very bad press in Britain. Along with rising private debt, they've come to symbolise the paradoxes in the government's so-called economic recovery: a recovery of consumer confidence built on private debt and a recovery of employment based on part-time, flexible jobs that has done nothing to repair household incomes.

Official statistics published in the UK in February 2015 revealed that there were at least 1.8 million active contracts that guaranteed no hours and at least 700,000 people who were dependent on zero-hours contracts for their main employment. Britain's union federation—the TUC—has made zero-hours contracts and casualization a central campaigning issue, reflecting the fact that these contracts are found right across the economy, from the retail, hospitality, and social care sectors, to higher and further education.

The public and political profile of zero-hours contracts became a key issue ahead of the general election on May 7, 2015 and this looks set to endure. The Prime Minister David Cameron found himself in some discomfort in a televised interview recently when asked if he could work on a zero-hours contract. Then-opposition leader Ed Miliband promised security for anyone who works more than 12 weeks on a zero-hours contract in the Labour party's platform.

All this is very embarrassing for universities who are furiously marketing themselves to potential students as prestigious institutions. They don't particularly like being named in the same sentence as high street bargain retail stores.



No matter how committed and excellent they are, teaching staff on zero-hours contracts struggle to make up for the inadequacies of a system built on casualization.

The reputation damage is compounded by the fact that students, who now have to pay £9,000 a year for their education, have high expectations of the education they receive. Organizing teaching through the deployment of casualized labour is a recipe for a chaotic student learning experience.

Lazy management workforce planning leads to classes with no lecturers; staff finding out they are expected to teach unfamiliar course material two weeks before the start of term; and overworked, underpaid lecturers working themselves flat out to try to repair the damage. No matter how committed and excellent they are, teaching staff on zero-hours contracts struggle to make up for the inadequacies of a system built on casualization.

As you'd expect at a time of such huge upheaval, higher education in the UK is a turbulent sector at the moment. Campaigns against various manifestations of the neoliberal offensive have emerged from staff, students, and even from the upper echelons of the university establishment. Not even the rarefied atmosphere of the Oxbridge common room is immune to spasms of revolt.

UCU, which organizes academic and professional support staff in the university and college sector, is at the forefront of many of these campaigns. On casualization, we have used the window provided by the public profile of zero-hours contracts to shine a bright light on the reality of precarious work in our sector.

We are the only organization who has tried to quantify casualization in higher education. We recently mobilized members to lobby their members of parliament in support of proposed legislation that would have placed strict limits on the use of zero-hours contracts. We have taken every opportunity to highlight in the media that casualization is as endemic in higher education as it is in the retail, hospitality, and social care sectors. Effecting longer term political change is dependent on maintaining this pressure and increasing its mass. UCU is in a unique position within the sector of being able to use this campaigning pressure as leverage to effect real change for people on casual contracts now.

As the recognized union for academic and professional support staff for the purposes of collective bargaining, UCU's job is to maximise this opportunity to turn public pressure into real and meaningful change on the ground through organizing, campaigning and negotiating.

UCU's national strategy for tackling zero-hours contracts operates at two levels. First, we want to turn up the heat nationally, using it to shape the political debate and change the overall context in which universities operate. We then need to use this context to put pressure on local universities, turning their competitive prestige consciousness to more laudable ends.


The union has identified a series of priority universities where campaigning and negotiating resources will be concentrated. Making progress at these institutions will put more pressure on others to follow suit. We also held a national day of action in November—events aimed at highlighting the issue of zero-hours contracts were held on over 50 campuses. There are signs that the pressure is beginning to work. In late 2013 the University of Edinburgh, which maintained more than 1,200 zero-hours contracts, said it would end that practice and has moved its staff onto contracts that guarantee hours. In December 2014, the University of Glasgow agreed to a new policy that discourages the use of zero-hours and other casual contracts. It has also put all its existing casual contracts under review with the aim of moving staff onto better ones.

With negotiations under way at several other target institutions, the union's task is twofold. First, we have to export these advances more widely across the sector. Every example shows that there is a better way to organize the higher education workforce if we can change the university's calculations of cost.

Second, we need to use these advances to widen the issue to capture the broader casualization of academic work of which zero-hours contracts are only the nastiest manifestation. We have to tackle the use of hourly-paid contracts where fractional or variable hours contracts make more sense. We also have to address the insane situation whereby 70 per cent of the UK university sector's research community is employed on fixed-term contracts.

We have to be realistic. This is hard and often slow work and there is a disconnect between the timescales involved in changing university practices and the career lifetime of many of our university staff. The embedded complacency and neglect of university human resources departments means that thousands of university teachers will pass through the system on casual contracts by the time more fundamental change can be achieved.

It took decades to build the neoliberal university sector and its current human resources practices. It will take decades to unpack it and build something better. Nonetheless, UCU is making a real difference for academic staff in the UK now. Every advance we win not only changes conditions on the ground for our staff in the immediate term, it also helps to erode the claim that there is no alternative and adds force to public arguments for change.

On casualization, as with so much else, there is a better way. We have to build it now. 

Jonathan White is a policy officer at the University and College Union and leads the union's campaigning on casualization.



Organizing against the widening gap IN ACADEMIC JOB SECURITY IN AUSTRALIA

Jeannie Rea



Precarious academic work is an important issue in Australia, and the National Tertiary Education Union is making it a priority.

La précarité du travail universitaire est une question importante en Australie, et le NTEU lui accorde la priorité.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, teaching at Australian universities has become casualized with tens of thousands of academics employed on an hourly basis for just a few hours a week during a teaching period.

This is having severe consequences for the next generation of academics who are increasingly abandoning any thought of an academic career. The major interaction for many students with the university is through alienated casual tutors and they cannot get support when they need it unless their casual tutor works unpaid hours. University management cynically rely upon the casual academics putting in volunteer hours because of their loyalty to students and the need to secure their next contract.

Precarious employment in Australian higher education is higher than in most other sectors of the economy with four in five new jobs over the last decade being casual or fixed term. Today, only one in two university staff has an ongoing, or permanent, position.

With teaching substantially casualized, those in tenured academic jobs have to take on all the other parts of an academic workload. Casual teaching staff are not paid to undertake writing and reviewing courses, postgraduate supervision, university service, or collegial practices such as peer reviewing, which are all part of the usual role of academics.

Compounding the issue is that research is increasingly being carved off from academic positions with a 50 per cent

increase in research-only positions in the last decade. However, these jobs also are increasingly precarious with over 80 per cent of grant funded research positions now fixed term contracts for both academic and professional staff.

The latest federal department of education higher education staffing data highlights the continuing decline in teaching and research categorised positions, with an almost 35 per cent increase in teaching-only positions. Over 80 per cent of teaching-only staff are casual and the situation continues to deteriorate. The latest data also show that the number of casual academics increased 3.4 per cent just between 2012 and 2013.

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) represents staff employed in universities and allied institutions. The NTEU is an industry union and includes academic and general staff in ongoing and insecure jobs. The union negotiates collective agreements in all universities and has a track record of keeping salaries internationally competitive and maintaining decent conditions, including pioneering breakthroughs in areas like parental leave and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets.

Job security has become a critical priority for the union as higher education jobs have become increasingly precarious, and even those workers in ongoing positions face continual restructuring and redundancies. The workload for remaining ongoing and insecurely employed staff across all university areas continues to escalate as student enrolments increase. Attempts by corporatized university managements to break with collective agreements and isolate the union also continue to escalate.

Late last year the NTEU held a national conference on insecure work with delegates from all universities. While the union has always organized and bargained to contain insecure work and to protect those in such jobs, the problem has blown up in recent years. The conference provided a platform for the union leadership to make a public commitment to prioritize organising around precarious work and with precarious workers. While contract and casual employment is rising across most areas of the university, the priority focus is presently upon academic teaching casual staff and research contract staff.

In 2014, NTEU conducted a survey to investigate how the move to 'blended' and online delivery was impacting upon the working conditions of academics employed casually (hourly) at Australian universities.

"I think casual academics are often the "face" of the university's learning programs, as they are the people having regular communication with students about their

learning and providing feedback about assessment tasks. This does not seem to be supported by the working conditions... I am operating in a relatively isolated context, with little contact with an opportunity to learn about the school's core staff development, discussion or planning. There is no formal process of performance review, so that, as far as I know, there is no documentation that records the quality of my teaching."

"My contract is a year-by-year proposition, with no security beyond that. If (the) uni is repeatedly hiring someone like me to do the same thing year after year on a series of 1 year contracts, should there be some requirement to offer to make the position permanent after a while?"

These comments are indicative of what we hear from casually employed academics in the survey.

This survey was not a piece of abstract research, but integral to the NTEU's ongoing campaign to bring justice to the increasing numbers of academics employed by the hour, who are now doing more than half of the teaching in Australian universities. The NTEU's campaign has had for many years a dedicated website, www.unicasual.org.au, as well as the regular journal *Connect*.

The findings of the latest survey confirmed those of previous NTEU surveys, were consistent with findings in similar international surveys, and echoed academic research. The findings also support the ground-breaking doctoral thesis of Robyn May (Brown et al, 2010; May 2011, May et al 2013). Dr. May's thesis overturned the widely held misconception that casual academics only work casually for a short period and are mainly people finishing PhDs or others not seeking an academic career.

Over the past two decades, the profession of the teaching and research academic has gradually been eroded. The old career path of completing a PhD, then moving into an entry level lecturer position, and if all went well, tenure after three years is now only for a privileged few. In the old days, casual lecturing and tutoring was shared by graduate students (who were often also on scholarships), professionals providing specialist input, and some dipping their toe into academia. Most teaching was done by tenure or tenurable academics.

The NTEU won a landmark case two decades ago that restricted the use of contract staff to categories of genuine fixed-term replacement or grant-funded positions. This improved job security for existing academic and general staff, many of whom were converted to ongoing positions. What has changed is that now, despite enormous growth in the university system, new academic jobs are more likely to



be casualized, and old jobs when vacated are also replaced with casual staff.

Australia has a public university system, which was always funded significantly by the government, secular, and co-educational. Just over twenty five years ago, the federal government drew together public tertiary education institutions into a unitary system of universities. This opened up opportunities for those staff who had taught in technical and teacher training colleges to pursue more traditional academic careers with time and resources to undertake original research. The NTEU, also the product of the amalgamation of separate unions representing university and college academic staff as well as administrative, technical, and other support employees, fought hard in its early years for a common career structure for academic staff.

Over this period, Australia also moved firmly to a mass higher education system with expansion of university places and campuses, including new opportunities in relatively sparsely populated regions. With, for example, nursing education moving into universities, a university degree was now necessary for professional and sub-professional careers.

To fund the teaching of undergraduate domestic students, universities receive a block grant from the federal government composed of direct government funds plus a component (currently around 40 per cent) funded by students through a deferred loan scheme (called the Higher Education Loan Program or HELP). Students pay back their debt when they reach a certain income level. The fee levels are capped. The current Conservative government is attempting to cut funding and allow universities to charge whatever fees they want. However, fee deregulation legislation has been twice defeated in the national senate.

Government funding is inadequate and universities have compensated by increasing class sizes, casualizing teaching, increasing workloads, and relying upon income from international student fees. Arising out of the recommendations of two independent reviews commissioned by the federal government, the NTEU has been campaigning for several years for a conservative ten per cent increase in the government's base funding grants to universities.

The Union also calls upon the government to increase public investment in higher education to at least one percent of GDP. At present Australia lags amongst OECD countries in terms of government investment, and is near the top in terms of the level of tuition fees charged.

The post-doctoral students attempting to eke out a living as casual academics are still accumulating debt on their undergraduate loans—as they have not reached an

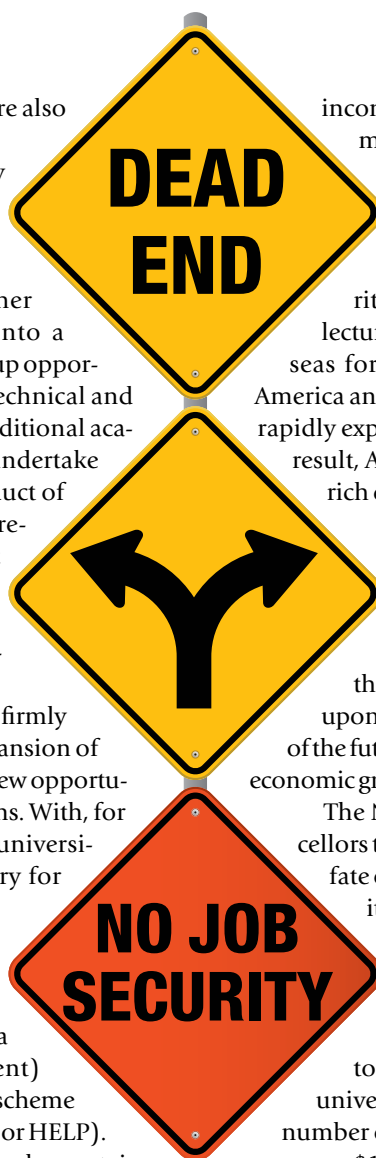
income level to start repaying their debt. The other major route of employment for doctoral graduates who want to work in academic education and research is to take on fixed-term research positions, which while better paid still leave people with no income security or opportunity to plan ahead. Australian lecturers and researchers have always looked overseas for career advancement, especially to North America and Europe. Now there are opportunities in the rapidly expanding higher education sector in Asia. As a result, Australia does, rather spectacularly for such a rich country, suffer from a brain drain.

The bottom line is that Australian governments—whether Labour or Conservative—are enmeshed in the international neoliberal trend towards cutting government investment in public services and institutions. At the same time, they are increasingly dependent upon universities to educate the tertiary workforce of the future and undertake research critical to national economic growth and social stability.

The NTEU has not allowed university vice-chancellors to get away with wringing their hands over the fate of the next generation of academics, claiming it is out of their control and all the federal government's fault. University leaders are in thrall to neoliberal management mantras and embrace cost-cutting measures and workforce flexibility. University administrators make choices in their expenditure. Most universities are still accumulating surpluses and a number of vice-chancellors have remuneration packages over \$1 million.

When negotiating collective agreements, job security is a key issue. Australia's internationally competitive salaries and conditions are being eroded due to increased precarious employment. Pursuit of anti-worker and anti-union agendas by successive governments have undermined the efficacy of hard won limits on casual and contract employment. It is increasingly difficult to win conversion clauses and cases. However, the NTEU has succeeded in getting better remuneration and conditions for academic casuals in our agreements. Currently, a case is being developed challenging the basis of work being determined "casual" if it is continuously done in the same way by the same employee.

In the recent round of collective bargaining, the NTEU won around 1000 new academic teaching positions, which will start to provide secure jobs to some casual academics. There was a heated debate within the Union about supporting teaching-focused positions as delegates were reluctant to cede the integrity of the traditional teaching and research academic position. However, with the reality of half of the teaching already being done by teaching-only casual staff, such a position has become untenable.



The job for the Union is to force the employers to create more secure jobs as well as to continuously improve the wages and conditions of casual workers. This has become a discussion point amongst casual academics and NTEU activists. There is concern that putting too much focus on improving casual conditions and remuneration further institutionalises casual employment. The NTEU does not intend to prop up an alternative (and inferior) career track, but casual academics need short-term relief.

Immediate conditions of work mobilize casual academics to start agitating and joining together with the Union. Organizing on the ground wins improvements, and success on one site soon spreads to others. Issues like being paid on time; access to training, to libraries and IT; adequate working space; and payment to attend meetings are all winnable demands that improve the day-to-day conditions of casu- als. After some campus-based wins in the previous round of collective bargaining, the NTEU successfully won extra payment for marking across universities, crushing the employers' argument that this is built into the hourly casual rate. This has forced universities to pay up, although many have tried to get around this by offering to pay for only a proportion of the time marking really takes.

As one respondent explained in the online teaching survey:

"Never enough time allocated. One course - the same assignment went from a 20 minute allocation at complex rates to 10 min at simple rates. Of course expectations about feedback etc. did not change. It doesn't seem to matter to some coordinators, unfortunately..."

The NTEU is also focusing on publicizing the unpaid and unrecognised, but nonetheless expected extra work of casual academics. Experienced casu- als find themselves coordinating and even writing courses and hiring other casu- als. And the hourly rate does not change. There is no promotion or merit increments for casual teaching academics in Australia.

This is a significant difference with fixed-term research contractors where some people are promoted and yet still continuously employed on fixed-term contracts. The university will not offer them an ongoing position even though the research work continues. This can only be about control. Our employers want a frightened and hopefully docile workforce, constantly worried about retaining employment and getting the next contract.

In a NTEU survey on research contract employment in 2014, respondents explained:

"I have signed over 13 yearly contracts and this creates a lot of insecurity for me around contract time as I am the family bread winner. Some colleagues have not had their contracts renewed after over 15 years of service and they receive minimal payout for this (approx. 8 weeks' pay). Yearly contracts make you very vulnerable to the commitment of your supervisor to like you and bother to find work for you."

"I have repeatedly been surprised at how few people, including senior management, actually understand what it means to be a research-only staff member at [name of university] and to have to earn your income from external sources. We even have to cover any time spent on university committees and even earn our own holiday pay..."

For the NTEU, insecure work is also an academic freedom issue. Insecure workers are less likely to criticize, do anything adventurous, or tackle controversial issues. Academic casu- als usually have no say in what they teach, or how they do so. They cannot follow through on issues like student plagiarism. If they propose setting further work to test underperforming students, they are likely to be told there is no money to pay for it. Academics, tenured or casual, constantly worry about quality and the maintenance of standards.

For fixed-term researchers, the message is that it is better to stick to the safe projects where results are assured, along with, by extension, the next grant. There is a reluctance to speak out and risk being dubbed a troublemaker as this is likely to mean an end to employment.

This environment does drive a wedge between insecure and more securely employed academics, as tenured academics are reliant upon the casu- als to do the teaching that frees them up to do the research that advances their careers. One higher education and research commentator provocatively recently wrote in a mainstream daily newspaper:

"There's a growing divide among university staff between the haves and have-nots. Some academics are just hanging onto to their jobs; others are losing them while some lead a charmed existence"... (Erica Cervini, the Age, November 3, 2014).

Surveys conducted by the National Union of Students repeatedly report that students cannot get the amount of teaching or support they need. In the past,

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there would be criticism by students of their casual lecturers and tutors. But with the greater knowledge of the circumstances of casual academic staff, students have become much more sympathetic and are developing as important allies. Students joined unionists on picket lines during the last collective bargaining campaigns.

Student organizations are focusing their complaints toward university management and are particularly angry about universities that are increasing class sizes and even cancelling face-to-face classes to further bring down teaching costs. Students recognize that their casual tutors are volunteering much of their labour and yet students are still paying hefty fees.

When the union staff and activists join with casual and contract staff in organizing at a local level, and other union members join in, small changes are won and bigger challenges taken on. This year, increased effort is being made to organize academic casuals in and across their workplaces. Targeted campaigns to organize in research centres are planned. Academic casuals and research contractors (often the same people) are also very active on social media, and are monitoring what is going on in other countries and are encouraged by actions in Canada, the US, and UK.

Australian activists are always looking for more novel ways of making their case, drawing upon examples like the clever “yoga action” of the Sydney University casuals network a few ago where they performed a yoga class in front of the university dignitaries and at a public rally, with renamed positions like “bending over backwards” and “standing in solidarity.”

The NTEU has long recognized that we have a responsibility to organize precariously employed workers in our industry. We must for the good of us all. Two old union adages constantly remind us that “an injury to one is an injury to all” and “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.” We expect our public universities to act for the public good. This includes modelling decent work practices. The NTEU intends to make sure universities follow through on their obligations. **AM**

Jeannie Rea has been the national president of Australia's National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) since 2010 and has studied, worked, and agitated in post-secondary education since the halcyon days of the 1970s.

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FROM DEFERENCE TO DEFIANCE: The evolution of Ontario faculty associations

Craig Heron



Faculty associations are behaving
more and more like unions,
transforming labour relations at
universities in Ontario.

*Les associations des professeurs
adoptent un comportement de plus
en plus syndical, ce qui cause la
transformation des relations du travail
et des coalitions sur les campus.*

Faculty associations in this part of the world are a little more than six decades old. Yet we know relatively little about where they came from and how they have evolved. As they become ever more important in the world of postsecondary education, it is useful to look back over the terrain that professors have mapped out as they created and recreated organizations to promote and defend their collective interests.

There is a phrase that often floats over faculty discussions about the latest outrage perpetrated by our senior administrations: we like to refer to “our *traditional* rights as faculty.” Some time ago, we seem to believe, there was a golden age when faculty collegiality ruled the university and administrators would never dream of acting the way they do now. This may be good political mythology or demonology, useful in our confrontations with our employers, but it is not good history.

To get closer to the way it used to be, we might actually want to talk about the “bad old days.” Until at least the 1960s, university governance was closely controlled by the presidents and the boards of governors. Below them hierarchy, paternalism, and patronage reigned. Senior faculty exercised a great deal of power over decision-making in their departments and faculties, and junior faculty dared not open their mouths. Hiring flowed through old-boys’ networks, as people recruited in the late 1960s and early 1970s will readily admit. Disruptive or controversial faculty could be privately punished, quietly squeezed out, or, on rare occasions, more publicly dismissed, as Harry Crowe was at United College in Winnipeg in 1958. Professors were overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Canadian, and male. The few women who found their way into academic jobs were paid less than their male counterparts and were marginalized. There were virtually no visible minorities. Assumption University in Windsor recruited the country’s first African-Canadian professor in 1959 when it hired biologist Howard McCurdy. This was not an environment conducive to negotiation between faculty members and administrations, let alone for professors and their associations to confront their administrators directly.

Issues were nonetheless percolating away. The most pressing was professors’ growing concern about their general social status, much like many other public-sector employees in the postwar period. In essence, their rallying cry was relative deprivation (although they probably never used the term). They believed that their salaries and benefits were falling behind comparable groups in Canadian society. The new Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), founded in 1951, helped to substantiate these concerns by disseminating information on faculty salaries and salaries in comparable professions across the country.

There was also growing interest in consolidating more faculty control over the professional standards of aca-

demia. As part of the intensification of professionalism within individual disciplines, professors set out slowly and cautiously to consolidate the right to control their own curriculum, to train the practitioners of their discipline in graduate programs, to make their own decisions about recruiting new faculty, and, probably most importantly, to have their right to tenure and the processes for granting it respected. These became new privileges and prerogatives, not age-old traditions. The Harry Crowe case, however, revealed how fragile these new rights were, and how much lingered on from an earlier era. Crowe, a history professor, was fired after the administration deemed him at odds with the supposed purpose of the college and disloyal to the administration, accusations based on improperly obtained private correspondence.

So, in the 1950s, haltingly, cautiously, professors began to form faculty associations that could defend their status in the university and the wider society—McMaster in 1951, Toronto in 1954, Western in 1955, Waterloo and Ottawa in 1957, Waterloo Lutheran (later Wilfrid Laurier) in 1958, and so on. These were anything but militant unions. They steered clear of the larger labour movement and never darkened the door of the Labour Relations Board to be legally certified as bargaining agents. Instead, they engaged in what some association leaders would later refer to as “collective supplication,” which meant informal practices of consultation with senior administrators, hoping that their request for higher salaries or better pensions would be received positively and passed on to the board of governors for ratification. The associations were generally controlled by senior faculty, and operated on the assumption of unity of interest between faculty and administration. They were nonetheless often ignored by paternalistic university presidents.

In the wake of the Harry Crowe case, there was a new interest in academic freedom. At the University of Toronto, for example, the faculty association’s pressure led to the creation of a committee in the mid-1960s to reform tenure and promotion procedures and appointment processes for chairs, deans, and directors. As the CAUT pursued more cases of



faced steady **resistance** from the businessmen who **controlled** the boards.

discrimination in tenure and promotion procedures across the country, faculty associations turned new energy towards reforming university governance. There was much talk about having faculty on boards of governors, but that faced steady resistance from the businessmen who controlled the boards. In practice, reform meant strengthening the central institutions of collegiality, faculty councils, and senates.

Everything about this polite, relatively informal kind of relationship was disrupted after 1965 by five convergent forces of social, economic, and political change:

- the reshaping of government policy toward postsecondary education that put more emphasis on closer integration with the labour market;
- the consequent emergence of the mass university with thousands more students, many of whom began to demand a change in their status within the education system;
- the secularization of older religiously-based institutions and the creation of several new universities without longstanding academic traditions;
- the recruitment of hundreds of young, newly minted professors, many of them from the United States, at least some of them touched by the new youth rebellion that was exploding throughout the western world, and more than a few bringing experience with faculty unions in the US;
- and finally, the concomitant growth of university bureaucracy to handle the transformed university in new ways that paid less respect to the fragile, relatively new processes of collegiality.

In this context, faculty began to feel buffeted and vulnerable, especially as the expansionary government plans of the 1960s contracted into the budget-cutting and soaring retail price inflation of the 1970s. After doing reasonably well in the boom years of growth, professors were once again worried about their economic status. Their associations' annual treks of "collective supplication" to the university president were not paying off. Moreover, as postsecondary funding shrank, there were even threats of layoffs. That was what motivated my predecessors at York to create a faculty association in 1976. So, faculty associations became more aggressive in the 1970s in raising

important issues about the terms of professorial employment, especially salaries and pensions.

Money wasn't the only issue. Faculty associations were also concerned about the vulnerability of the professional practices that they had been struggling to nail down through the 1950s and 1960s. Administrative bureaucracies mushroomed along with the expansion of enrolments, and new managerial practices threatened to diminish professors' collegial practices. As the former president of the Carleton University Academic Staff Association argued, "It is this feeling of powerlessness, the perception that Senate was being reduced to symbolic and often manipulated legitimizers, and the belief that professors must retain a real role in institutional decision making, which has convinced many professors to accept collective bargaining." As Norman Rosenblood, president of the McMaster University Faculty Association in 1971-72, later recalled, "It appeared that the concept [of 'collegiality'] was perpetually on the brink of disappearing or at least being ignored by the administration and that the faculty association was the only force that prevented its demise."

In this context, a deeply divisive debate unfolded on many campuses in the 1970s over whether to turn faculty associations into full-fledged unions, legally certified to engage in formal collective bargaining. The proponents of this decisive shift argued that university administrations would only listen to the concerns of professors and librarians once they were compelled to negotiate in good faith. The opponents were adamant that unionization was alien to university life, that as professionals professors had nothing in common with the blue-collar workers who had traditionally formed the Canadian labour movement, nor with the many public-sector workers who were flooding into unions in the 1960s and 1970s such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Ontario Public Servants Employees Union.

In fairness, there was more than class snobbery involved in the resistance to unionization—there was a genuine concern that formal collective-bargaining processes would diminish the status of the professoriate to mere employees who had ceded management rights to the university administration. They clung to a belief that professors had a right and an obligation to be centrally involved in running the university, and should not have that status demeaned. In the words of the McMaster Faculty Association President in 1984, "the University is its faculty," a sentiment expressed many times elsewhere as well. Perhaps some of them were aware that the US Supreme Court had ruled in a precedent-setting case in 1980 that the professors of Yeshiva University could not unionize because they were part of management. Their opponents, of course, saw this position as naïveté that failed to recognize the fragile status of professorial autonomy and the profound changes that were



sweeping through the university system. Their status as professionals had always been vulnerable, and in practice, the terms of their employment had been at the whim of senior administrators for decades.

This was a debate that echoed through other groups of salaried professionals, notably teachers and nurses, who used their associations (in the case of the nurses, a brand new Ontario Nurses Association) to engage in much more militant actions. The nurses were barred by law from striking, but the teachers undertook some high profile work stoppages that shut down schools in whole cities in the 1970s. They nonetheless felt uncomfortable identifying themselves with the older image of the male blue-collar unionist, and for many years kept their distance from the rest of the labour movement.

Teachers and nurses made decisions to build organizations that included all their fellow workers across the province, but faculty associations remained creatures of individual campuses. Despite their affiliation with CAUT and the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), they decided on the nature of their organizations locally (note that here, unlike in the US, teachers' unions did not try to organize university faculty). As a result, the decisions about whether to make the important step to get certified as a union proceeded unevenly, and created a patchwork of certified and uncertified associations. After forming its first Collective Bargaining Committee in 1971, CAUT became an important resource for associations considering certification. OCUFA helped too. The first associations to get certified in Ontario were Carleton and Ottawa in 1975, then York in 1976. Within four years, Windsor, Laurentian, Lakehead, and Trent had taken the same step. Not surprisingly, these were some of the hardest hit in the funding crunch of the 1970s. By 1980, 30 per cent of Ontario faculty were represented by certified collective-bargaining agents. Even more shocking were the first faculty strikes, notably for six days at Windsor in 1982.

The option of becoming a certified union proved unpopular on several campuses, however, especially at the older universities. An alternative form of *voluntary* collective bargaining was slowly worked out at most of these places. At the University of Toronto a painfully slow process of bringing the senior administration to the table to sign a formal Memorandum of Agreement evolved over the 1970s until a regular set of practices, including grievance procedures and a mediator/arbitrator during negotiations, was finally in place by 1977. It took McMaster almost another decade to reach a similar point.

So, beginning in the 1970s, and more aggressively in the 1980s and 1990s, Ontario professors insisted that a host of issues, formerly dealt with informally and often arbitrarily, become subject to some kind of formal negoti-

ating procedures, albeit diverse and specific to each campus. But, despite the involvement of many lefties in the unionization efforts, Ontario's faculty had not made a great leap into more radical, class-based confrontation. They were instead trying to use their faculty associations to shore up their sense of professional entitlement—to good salaries and collegial self-governance. What was happening was a collision of proud academic traditions and growing fears of proletarianization, a result of changing relationships between faculty and the institutions within which they worked, but also with provincial governments, who set so many parameters for what happened in public universities. Unionization was usually triggered by some sense of crisis and a spirit of indignation.

Within these new frameworks, faculty members used the bargaining mechanisms that their associations, certified or not, had worked out to push important new issues, including better pension and benefit plans, but also, more notably, equity. For the first time, there were serious efforts to confront the systematic discrimination against female professors in hiring, salaries, and promotion. Sexual harassment, affirmative-action hiring, and employment equity found their way onto negotiating tables.

The bargaining agenda began to get more defensive in the 1990s as provincial governments began to turn down the screws. In 1993, Bob Rae's NDP government imposed the third set of legislated wage controls on the public sector in twenty years. Even more menacing was the budget-slashing of Mike Harris' Progressive Conservative government that began two years later. The process went deeper than the miserliness of particular politicians. The university was being reconfigured within the larger ideological onslaught that has become known as neoliberalism.

For senior university administrators in Ontario, those pressures accelerated a trend towards a new managerialism that was more centralized and increasingly modelled on private-sector practices. Their vocabulary



sense of crisis and a spirit of indignation.

began to ripple with terms like “productivity,” “input and output,” “flexibility,” “accountability,” and, my personal favourite, “measurable deliverables.” All of these terms became a cover for closer scrutiny and micro-management from deans and vice-presidents; more demands for bureaucratic reporting; and more administrative interventions in hiring processes or tenure and promotion procedures. Processing ever larger numbers of students through bigger and bigger classes became a priority. Research won respect only if it brought in big research dollars. Links to the corporate sector multiplied in various kinds of funding partnerships. The administrative portion of university budgets mushroomed, as more middle and upper-level managers and their support staff, often with little or no work experience in universities, proliferated.

Administrators also began to restructure academic labour markets. As a result, faculty associations have found the turf over which they are bargaining constantly being more tightly circumscribed and diminished. More and more of the teaching is thus now done by faculty on part-time contracts, who are typically recent graduates of PhD programs, and who in many cases belong to different unions. Among the so-called full-time faculty, contractually limited appointments have also proliferated. Within the ranks of tenure-stream faculty, the longstanding assumption that teaching and research are closely related is being pulled apart by the appointment of a growing contingent of faculty to teaching-only streams. These individuals teach considerably more than their colleagues and are assessed only on their teaching (and perhaps service), but not their scholarly output. In fact, what has emerged is a much more complex hierarchy of academic teaching positions, far more of them insecure and precarious. Currently, there is more pressure to put courses online, where it appears they will be handled on a long-term basis by part-time or contract faculty. Casualization

obviously cuts into good, well-paying jobs, but it also threatens tenure and the academic freedom that it was intended to protect. Precariously employed instructors are more vulnerable and have little recourse to the processes that full-timers have to buttress their rights.

By the turn of the millennium, the work world of university profes-

sors was thus being profoundly shaken up. Three new trends in faculty responses to this new working environment had become evident. The first was the growing number of faculty associations that turned themselves into full-fledged unions. Jaws dropped when Queen’s got certified in 1996 and Western two years later. The voluntarism of the so-called Toronto model had rapidly lost its appeal. Across Canada, half the university faculty were unionized in 1998; ten years later the proportion was around 80 per cent (the public sector in general was around 70 per cent and the private sector at about 17 per cent). As university senates got weaker and thus became less reliable defenders of faculty rights, the collective agreements that faculty associations negotiated became the new bulwark of collegiality and academic freedom, with clauses guaranteeing fair tenure and promotion practices and sometimes specifying faculty rights in the process of appointing senior administrators.

Second, many faculty associations began acting more like traditional unions. Probably most dramatically, professors found themselves on picket lines much more often. Faculty strikes had been unheard of until the 1980s, but have since become more common. There would have been many more but for eleventh-hour settlements, as associations were preparing to throw up picket lines around campuses the next morning. Early in the 2000s, several Ontario faculty associations also took the opportunity to affiliate with NCUA, the arm of CAUT that joined the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), and thus association representatives began attending conventions of the CLC and Ontario Federation of Labour, as well as monthly meetings of their local labour councils. A different kind of collective identity began to emerge from all these developments—a sense of connectedness as academic employees, but a distinct separation and distance from and distrust of administrators, in marked contrast with the pre-1970s years.

That new consciousness connected with a third development. Elsewhere on Ontario university campuses, other groups of workers were unionizing and occasionally striking: secretaries, groundskeepers, plumbers, library technicians, and, probably most emphatically, teaching assistants—the future faculty members. Faculty associations now had to situate their own work and their agendas within this larger framework of academic collective bargaining. There were agonizing debates about honouring the picket lines of other unions versus continuing to meet students. Many faculty members nonetheless joined the lines of other workers on their campuses. At York in 2000-01, most professors refused to cross the picket lines of CUPE 3903, the union representing teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and contract faculty, even though the strike lasted nearly three months. Faculty associations are now far more likely to express solidarity with workers in

other occupational groups than they were twenty or thirty years ago.

Together, universities have become among the most unionized workplaces in Canada. This reality has exposed campus unions to both new opportunities and a new vulnerability. The collapse of so much of the country's industrial sector, and the declining membership of the unions in that sector, has shifted the composition of the Canadian labour movement. Public-sector workers now make up a majority of union members in Canada, and, for the first time ever, women form a slight majority. The problem is that public discourse in a neoliberal Canada is now turning on the alleged "fat cats" of the unionized public sector, with salaries, benefit packages, and pension plans far better than the large numbers of unorganized workers in the private sector.

In closing, let me play labour historian. In so many ways, the unionization of the professoriate was akin to the response of 19th and early-20th century craft workers whose manual skills appeared to be threatened by the first wave of capitalist industrialization. The comparison suggests two lessons that emerge from the distinct but still similar histories of professors and craft workers. When machinists looked around at the giant factories of the early 20th century, they saw a second industrial revolution under way—scientific management, assembly lines, and so on—and found their established workplace practices under attack. In that context, they tried to defend what skill they still exercised and spoke eloquently about the value of their craftsmanship. They also reached out to organize the less skilled workers working alongside them known as specialists or handymen and brought them into their union. They also saw that there was a unity of interest in the metal-working factories that required cooperation with the moulders, patternmakers, blacksmiths, stationary engineers, and so on, and created Metal Trades Councils to bring them all together in an organizational federation. The famous Winnipeg General Strike started because Winnipeg metal shop owners refused to deal with the local Metal Trades Council as the bargaining agent for all metal workers. Today, unity across occupational groups within our academic workplaces will also be just as important. We should be sitting at common bargaining tables with other unions on our campuses as often as possible, on a wide range of issues.

Secondly, machinists also recognized that there were government policies that needed to change, and worked within the broader labour movement and with other allies on campaigns for mothers' allowances, minimum wages, and the eight-hour work day. Faculty associations today have to be prepared to participate actively in the local, provincial, and national labour movements to support campaigns for social justice and to build alliances for future battles.

Our challenge then is to find a way to hold onto what we value in academic freedom and collegiality without

retreating into an elitist defence of our own narrowly circumscribed interests. There is too much at stake, and the destructive forces of neoliberalism are all around us. From what I've seen in recent years in my own association and in meetings with people from other institutions, there are a lot of academic workers out there who are already committed to this task, and the battles are already raging around us. **AM**

Craig Heron is Professor of History at York University.

Author's Note: In preparing this paper, I have leaned in particular on William H. Nelson, *The Search for Faculty Power: The History of the University of Toronto Faculty Association, 1942-1992* (Toronto: University of Toronto Faculty Association and Canadian Scholars' Press 1993); B.W. Jackson, *MUFA's First 50 Years: The Presidents Reminisce* (Hamilton: McMaster University Faculty Association 2001); Michael Horn, *Academic Freedom in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1999); Paul Axelrod, *Scholars and Dollars: Politics, Economics, and the Universities of Ontario, 1945-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1982); Judith Wagner DeCew, *Unionization and the Academy: Visions and Realities* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers 2003).


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The political challenge of academic commitment

Robin Vose

As we approach this year's federal election, professors and academic librarians have a responsibility to speak out.

Alors qu'approchent les élections fédérales de cette année, les professeurs et les bibliothécaires universitaires ont la responsabilité de s'exprimer.



Academic life and politics don't always mix. There may be times when we can just keep our heads down, teach our courses, conduct our research, and attend committee meetings with little thought to spare for policy decisions being made off-campus. But not always, and never for very long. Academic life is in many ways *inherently* political, and a commitment to the integrity of higher education obliges us to act accordingly.

Like it or not, political decisions impact us all. And in 2015, as we head towards a federal election, we are faced with an especially stark set of political realities. After years of ideologically-driven cuts to university and college funding, along with all the gradual yet unmistakable harm to academic missions that we have seen trailing in their wake, it is time to take a stand and demand better. For our profession, for our students, and for the sake of society as a whole, Canadian academic workers need to loudly, and repeatedly, remind candidates from all political parties that postsecondary education (PSE) is an essential public asset, and one that is currently in dire need of more principled public support.

Few would deny the importance of education in modern society. An educated, well-trained and versatile

workforce is obviously beneficial to overall economic health, and we depend on such a workforce if we are to confront both immediate and future challenges: from social problems to environmental degradation, international conflict and technological advancement, to name just a few. Ensuring the integrity of a strong PSE system that is fully accessible for qualified and interested students is in our long-term common interest. It is not simply a matter for private investment, nor should it be pursued for the sake of enjoying private returns.

Failure to fully grasp this reality has allowed many of our political leaders to assume that government can, and indeed should, increasingly divest itself of responsibility for PSE funding at both the provincial and federal levels. Calls for ever-deeper tax cuts, accompanied by the ubiquitous mantra of "austerity", provide further reasons for such divestment. And as government funding dries up, our institutions have come to rely more and more on private sources of revenue: chiefly tuition fees paid by individual students, but also in the form of corporate investment and sponsorships. This has resulted in a mounting crisis of student debt, with economic implications that may not be fully understood for generations

Truly formative education cannot be reduced to the mere purchase of data and technical skills from privatized knowledge providers, and the more it is allowed to drift in that direction the more we all lose out.

to come. It also has serious political consequences for the sort of work that academic workers are expected to do, and the ways in which we are expected to do it.

Teaching and research for the public good, in a publicly-funded system, is a vocation. It differs fundamentally from being contracted to provide educational and/or research services, on a for-profit basis, to paying clients. Yet increasingly we too are expected to pander to the market by competing for raw student enrollment numbers, or by ensuring that our research is profitable to a corporate partner. We have made a political choice if we continue to permit the encroachment of this notion that PSE is essentially a private commodity. And we make a political choice when we choose to register our disagreement with it.

Education in the public interest

Political assumptions that undermine the public character and utility of our colleges and universities must be questioned, resisted, and reversed if we are to defend and improve a PSE system that has already benefited so many of us. Students of the 21st century will continue to need committed and properly resourced educators who can help guide and form their intellectual development—perhaps more than ever before—if they are to navigate the complexities of modern life. We owe it not only to them, but to ourselves and our neighbours, to ensure that they can do so effectively.

Academia is never simply a producer of commodities, and attempts to apply business or industrial models to PSE generally fall flat. Truly formative education cannot be reduced to the mere purchase of data and technical skills from privatized knowledge providers, and the more it is allowed to drift in that direction the more we all lose out. Anyone who expects education to be carried out on a rationalized “just-in-time” basis, for example by eking out maximum “productivity” from technology-based mass delivery systems or through the exploitation of a precarious and casualized labour force, clearly does not understand the true value of PSE or its underlying purposes.

Sustained public investment is therefore crucial to the maintenance of a healthy PSE sector. Students require and deserve mentorship from professors and other academic workers who have the time and institutional support to facilitate *meaningful intellectual discovery*, as opposed to proscriptive rote learning. Truly unfettered academic freedom is essential to achieve this mandate, as is stable employment, and the ability to develop one’s scholarly interests. And these essential conditions cannot be provided on a system-wide basis without decent levels of reliable core funding.

PSE funding is for the most part a provincial responsibility, but the federal government has an important role to play. CAUT and others have long called for a Post-Secondary Education Act, modelled on the Canada Health Act, which would ensure that predictable levels of provincial funding are made available to public universities and colleges across the country. It is time for this initiative to move forward. Politicians need to realize that education is not something we can afford to treat as an afterthought; it is an ongoing, permanent commitment that Canadians have a right to expect from their governments.

Demanding such a funding commitment is a crucial first step. But it is not just a matter of asking for money. More importantly, the demand is based upon a principle: that PSE is a publicly funded undertaking, and that it is to be managed and directed accordingly—with respect for the rights, the working conditions, and the intellectual integrity of all participants.

Research in the public interest

The federal government also has a role in ensuring that the research side of academic life is properly funded and sustained. Research is essential to the public nature of PSE, both in terms of the benefits derived by the community at large from the sharing of new developments in knowledge and practice, and in the opportunities it affords for the training of future researchers. Here too we see the negative impact of corporatization and privatization. The public interest, and in some cases public safety, can be seriously endangered when choices regarding research topics, research practices, or the interpretation and publication of results are not controlled by expert scholars whose primary motivation is intellectual curiosity as opposed to financial gain.

There is a place for business-led research in our economy, but it would be poor science policy to leave our national research agenda entirely in the hands of corporate leaders whose first concern is to ensure profit for shareholders, rather than to consider the long-term interests of all citizens. It is therefore a matter of national importance

Get
Science
Right



We call for a
Post-Secondary
Education Act

that governments be consistently reminded of their duty to ensure that a vibrant research culture continues to flourish at the heart of our publicly funded PSE system.

New policies are urgently required to increase the funding of basic academic research in Canada.

Since the Harper government took power in 2006, there has been a net reduction to base funding for every one of the federal tri-council granting agencies: a loss of 10.5 per cent for SSHRC alone in real dollar amounts, and six per cent overall. This is simply unconscionable in the modern context, where research and development are key to societal well-being. Funding shortfalls also have a serious impact on individual academic workers' ability to do their jobs: success rates for major SSHRC grants fell from 40 per cent in 2006 to 21 per cent in 2013, for example, while those funded through CIHR fell from 31 per cent to only 13 per cent over an even shorter period.

Worse still, federal monies made available for research are increasingly directed by government toward pre-selected priority areas such as energy extraction, which are expected to yield profits for industry partners—rather than being awarded through open, peer-driven and expert evaluation of overall intellectual merit. Basic curiosity and discovery-driven research lose out in this process. Yet it is precisely this sort of research that underlies all but the most short-term developments. No government has ever been able to successfully direct its scientists to solve problems of fundamental importance and complexity without supporting a solid and constantly evolving base of knowledge for those scientists to build on.

CAUT has dedicated much effort over the last few years to generating conversations around Canadian science and research policy with its *Get Science Right* campaign. We have consistently heard from the scientific research community that current government attitudes toward science desperately need a major overhaul. Not only is the quantity of scientific funding in danger federally, and not only is it being increasingly directed to serve private rather than public ends, but there has also been a worrying tendency in recent years for the federal government to seek control over scientific discourse. In the social sciences the elimination of a national long-form census, combined with major cuts to Statistics Canada, have dramatically reduced the types of questions academic researchers are able to ask about socio-economic issues. There have also been well-publicized instances of federal government communication policies being used to muzzle and silence public scientists, including those employed by the National Research Council (NRC), Environment Canada, or Fisheries and Oceans Canada, whose contribution to scientific discourse is needed more than ever.

One of the most crucial functions of a publicly funded academic community is to carry out unbiased and non-partisan research without fear of reprisal, and to freely publish the

results. Science policy should never be informed more by ideology than by sound expert advice, yet since the removal of the National Science Advisor in 2008, Canadian parliamentarians have lacked the benefit of an authoritative independent voice on the subject. CAUT supports the creation of a new Parliamentary Science Officer, who could provide expert advice and analysis on the adequacy and effectiveness of the nation's scientific policies, priorities, and funding. Again, the point is that publicly funded scientific research, like PSE as a whole, should be managed in the interests of all Canadians. It is a public trust, and should not be owned or directed by any particular investor or political party.

Education and research are spheres of government policy that most directly impact us as academic workers. But they are by no means the ends of the story when it comes to our political commitment—not just as ordinary citizens, but also as citizens who care passionately about the integrity of our PSE system. For even if we manage to ensure a greater degree of political sensitivity to the immediate need for increased public funding of teaching and research, the well-being of our families, neighbours, and friends must also be taken into account. Without adequate childcare, our colleagues and students struggle to participate fully in academic life—or give up it entirely. And without decent, stable employment that pays a living wage, too many otherwise promising Canadians will continue to find themselves unable to ever attend a university or college. The overall shift in our economy toward precarious, underpaid employment, accompanied by attacks on Employment Insurance and labour rights, should give us all pause not just as academics, but as members of our communities.

Politicians need to be held to account for the decisions they make, and the policy directions they decide to follow. For too long now, too many politicians have been making wrong turns when it comes to support for postsecondary education, public science, and general social well being. It is incumbent on us, as academic workers, to let them know that we expect better; that Canadians deserve better. As Canadians prepare to vote this fall, we have a unique opportunity to intervene in the public dialogue around higher education in our country. If we don't speak out—who will? **AM**



PSE
is an essential
public asset

Robin Vose is the President of the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

MORE THAN A BARGAINING UNIT: York University Faculty Association's commitment to social unionism

Natalie Coulter & Lorna Erwin

A look inside YUFA's innovative community projects committee

Un regard sur le comité des projets communautaires novateurs de la YUFA.



Every month two dollars comes off the payslips of York University's 1,500 professors, librarians, and postdoctoral visitors, a deduction that most members don't even notice. Listed between union dues and pension plan contributions, it is just one of the many such items that appear on our monthly statements. But it is a deduction that does a lot. The two dollars is directed toward the York University Faculty Association's Community Projects committee, or YUFA-CP for short. Guided by a commitment to social justice and social unionism, the committee's purpose is to advocate for a broader political agenda that is responsive to the needs of the community in which the university is located. Referred to as Jane/Finch, it is usually stigmatized as a neighbourhood of guns, gangs, and high levels of poverty. And, indeed, it contains all of these conditions. But it is also—and more saliently—one of the most ethnically diverse communities in Toronto, and one marked by a deep commitment to activism and social justice.

HISTORY & STRUCTURE

YUFA's interest in community engagement dates back to the late 1990s, when cuts to public education associated with Premier Mike Harris' "Common Sense Revolution" were darkening the horizon of low-income communities across Ontario. It was at that time that our association, acting on a long-standing commitment to social justice, began supporting a number of community-university projects (academic enrichment, adult and community education, advocacy research, and other similar initiatives). But it was not until a meeting in 2002—billed as a "Local Hearing on Education"—that the idea of pursuing this interest locally, and especially in connection with the neighbouring Jane/Finch community, occurred to us.

The meeting was part of a series of open forums on the future of postsecondary education organized by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) on university campuses across the country. YUFA, in seizing this opportunity to initiate a dialogue on issues of access and equality in education, insisted that the hearing take place off campus at a local community centre, and was rewarded when more than 100 people, most of them Jane/Finch residents, showed up.

What ensued was a meeting that was lively and at times disturbing—especially in light of what it revealed about the uneasy relationship between Jane/Finch and York. Indeed, the university was roundly castigated as an "absentee resident," one that regarded the community "as a guinea pig to be talked about and discussed in classrooms." Serious concerns were likewise raised about the increasing inaccessibility of postsecondary education. Funding cuts to public education, it was bitterly noted, were making it more difficult for local students to transition to university or college, or even to complete their

high school degrees. As the meeting drew to a close, support for a grassroots collaboration between the union and the community emerged. It was the kind of collaboration that promised not only to address these issues head on, but also to do so in ways that could redefine the relationship between the community and the university.

Identifying community goals and perspectives, and establishing YUFA's credibility as a communal resource, thus emerged as central to the creation of the partnership we had in mind. It was a slow process—the union needed to gain trust in the community as both an advocate and a resource. In fact, it was only in 2004, after two years of discussion with community groups, that we felt confident enough in the objectives of our joint project to ask for approval of the YUFA Community Projects Committee at our annual general meeting.

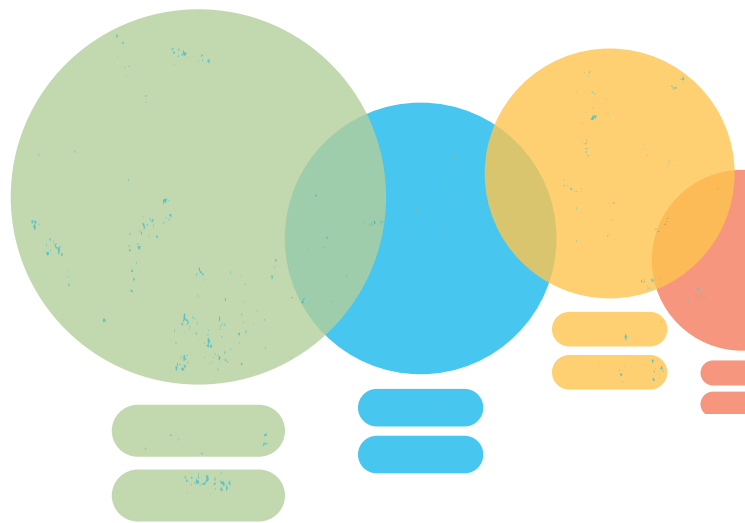
In its current form, YUFA-CP, a standing committee of the executive, is funded entirely by the association, which pays for half-course releases for the committee's co-chairs and likewise for some administrative support. The money that goes to advance its projects comes from both YUFA core funding and from the two-dollar special levy. First approved by a membership vote in 2009, this levy has been reconfirmed annually ever since.

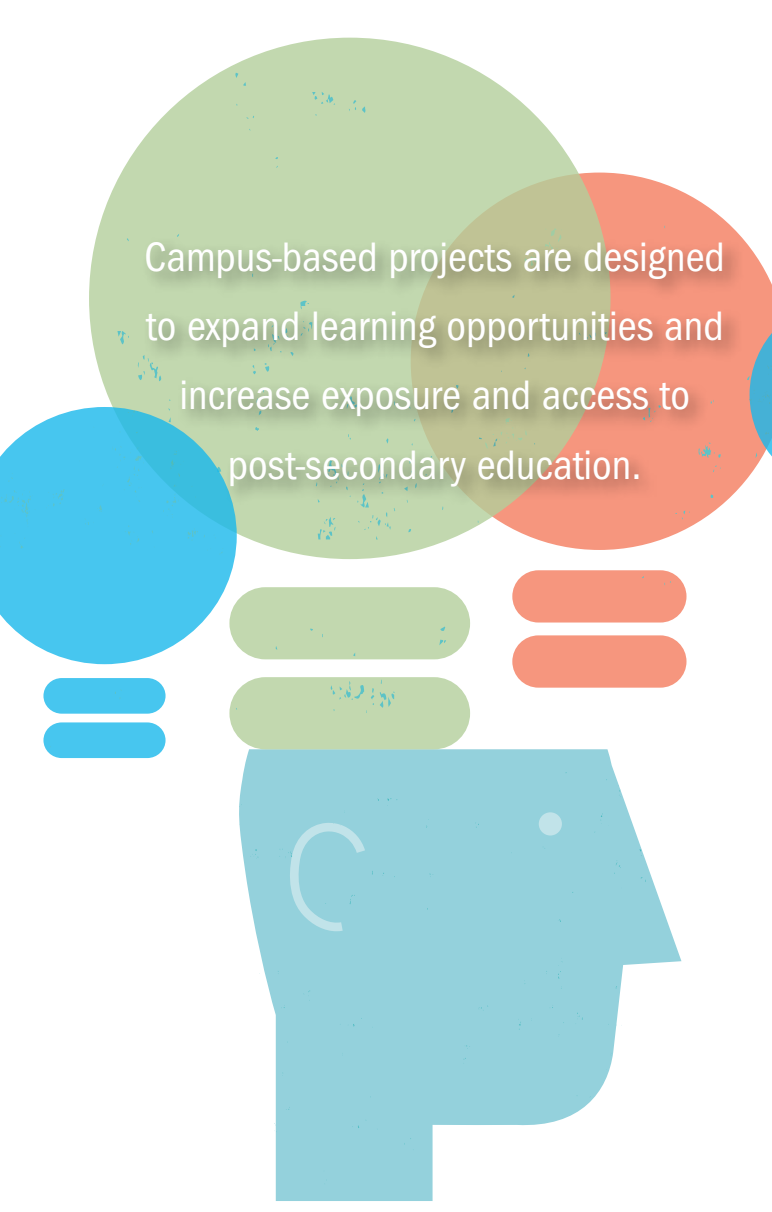
YUFA-CP'S MANDATES

The YUFA-CP committee meets regularly to review ongoing projects and to consider new initiatives. Broadly speaking, its projects fall under three separate mandates, which are described in detail below. Suffice it to say here that YUFA-CP is distinct in its emphasis on a democratic model of engagement in both process and practice. In carrying out our mandates, we collaborate with community networks on local strategies to strengthen neighbourhoods as well as on broader efforts for systemic social change. This has required forging partnerships with groups and agencies both internal and external to York.

Reducing educational barriers

The committee's first mandate is to support place-based programs that increase the participation of underrepresented





Campus-based projects are designed to expand learning opportunities and increase exposure and access to post-secondary education.

populations in postsecondary education. Some of these initiatives, which also promote leadership and civic engagement, bring the community to York; others take York into the community. Campus-based projects are designed to expand learning opportunities and increase exposure and access to post-secondary education.

Among the initiatives that fall under this mandate are *Readers to Leaders*, a literacy enrichment and leadership program for students in Grades 9 and 10 and the Advanced Credit Experience (ACE). ACE was developed jointly with the Toronto District School Board and York's Faculty of Education. It brings Jane/Finch students to York campus, where they are enrolled in a university course and also register in a co-op program. The goal is to increase the participation rate of Jane/Finch students who might not otherwise consider attending university.

Perhaps the two most formidable examples of YUFA's commitment to social unionism is our role in creating the Transition Year Program (TYP) and Success Beyond Limits (SBL). Established in 2010, TYP (<http://transitionyear.info.yorku.ca/>) provides special access to postsecondary educa-

tion for youth and adults who, due to various barriers, lack the formal credentials to qualify for admission. Every year TYP helps about 40 individuals find pathways to college or university. Roughly half attend York University as full-time students in the Transition Year Program, while the others are directed to college programs or to university bridging programs. In the spring of 2016, members of the first graduating class of TYP will complete their undergraduate degrees.

As for Success Beyond Limits (<http://www.successbl.com/>), YUFA-CP has supported its evolution from a Grade 8 transition initiative that was piloted in 2006 into a community-based, holistic program that aims to reduce the impact of systemic barriers to educational achievement. It aims to expand opportunities and "support youth in Jane/Finch along their individual paths to success." In addition to a six-week summer program on the York campus and an on-site youth space at local high school Westview Centennial during the academic year, SBL has developed several highly acclaimed initiatives that provide mentoring, employment, and leadership opportunities for youth in Jane/Finch.

YUFA-CP continues to work closely with SBL. Recently we have provided funding for in-school and community activities, including the expansion of after school programming from Westview Centennial to Emery Collegiate, another area school. We also funded a TEDx event for youth in Jane/Finch, and are supporting their 2015 summer credit and mentorship program at York University. Support of SBL is critical in a time of cutbacks to education and in situations where financial support increasingly requires measurable indicators of success. With fewer strings attached, YUFA-CP's funding provides a certain degree of continuity.

Outreach and political action

Our second mandate is to create alliances on social justice issues. Hence our organization of and participation in an array of initiatives that brings York faculty and students into the community as part of a broader support network (community meetings, town hall forums, neighbourhood advocacy, educational workshops, etc.).

In this connection, one of YUFA-CP's strongest allies is Jane Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAAP), a group that emerged in 2008 amidst a demonstration in support of the

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. With more than 150 community residents participating in this inaugural event, JFAAP has developed into a locally led, grassroots coalition of community residents, activists, and organizations working to eliminate poverty and oppression in their own community and beyond.

Over the past three years, YUFA-CP has supported JFAAP's mobilization around a number of campaigns, including: Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020, Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Mayworks at the Yorkwoods Library Theatre, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and the panel on the Community Assessment of Police Practices in Jane/Finch.

The YUFA-CP co-chairs have been participants in JFAAP's bimonthly meetings and strategic planning sessions. JFAAP, for its part, has made presentations on community issues to the YUFA membership, participated in *Pushing Forward*, a YUFA-CP symposium on austerity, and, most recently, joined picket lines on campus in support of CUPE 3903 strikers. Indeed, it is not too much to say that working with JFAAP has been the key factor in developing our relationship with the community.

Advocacy & research

Our third mandate is to facilitate collaborative research that enhances the effectiveness of YUFA-CP community partnerships. As part of our work in this area, the committee assembled a team of graduate students to carry out focus group and individual interviews for an evaluation of Success Beyond Limits—an evaluation undertaken at the behest of the executive of that organization. In a similar vein, the committee is currently supporting a focus-group study entitled *Fortress York?: The Impact of Racial Bias and Neighbourhood Stigma on Educational Experiences & Outcomes*. Here the point is to assess the impacts of neighbourhood stigma on those York undergraduates who come from Jane/Finch.

Finally, we do well to mention one of our specific efforts to report on research that was carried out with our community partners. In this instance, YUFA-CP members joined with Success Beyond Limits to organize a panel discussion, *Decolonizing and Re-inhabiting Places of Learning in Toronto's Jane/Finch Community*. This session, with its SBL student and staff participants, fulfilled all of our ambitions. It certainly facilitated a lively discussion of the strengths and challenges of place-based community engagement models of urban education.

Much to our dismay, however, we discovered that our non-academic collaborators were expected to pay full conference and association fees for their involvement in this single event, a prohibitive \$400 per participant. For many, the choice was not to attend, or else not register and sneak in. These limited options—which, we feel, clearly delegitimizes our community partners' right to participate in research as active agents—needs to be changed. And they need to be changed especially in light of the Social Sciences and

Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) commitment to what it calls "community engagement." Hence our current lobbying efforts to create a registration category—Community Partner—that waives the SSHRC fee for single-day or single-panel participation.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS SOCIAL UNIONISM

In the October 2014 issue of *Academic Matters*, Stephanie Ross and Larry Savage make a case for faculty associations to act beyond the bargaining and representational needs of their membership. It behooves such associations, Ross and Savage argue, "to create opportunities" for disadvantaged groups in initiatives that "build connection and common cause with each other." Indeed, this call strikes us as all the more timely and urgent as the pressures of corporate governance bear down on our universities. With students increasingly being treated as customers whose rising tuition fees account for a growing proportion of university revenues, faculty associations have a responsibility to push back. And they should do so in ways that chiefly address—but are not limited to—growing inequalities in access to education.

Since its inception, the goal of YUFA-CP has been to encourage both faculty researchers and students to work with our Jane/Finch neighbours and agencies, and to do so in collaborations that advance the goals of social justice. That this commitment to community engagement has enhanced teaching and research efforts on issues of education, poverty, and political efficacy goes almost without saying. In short, the benefits of our social unionism have been substantial.

And, significantly enough, YUFA-CP's Jane/Finch commitments have unfolded at a time of increasing popularity of community partnerships in university mission statements. Such recognition, limited though it has been, does allow a space for us to problematize what "community" means. Yet while taking some credit for the long-term alliances we have forged and the minor impact we have had on the York administration, we have clearly fallen short of communicating the importance of these achievements to the members of our association. While activists in the community are often aware of our union's practical activities in support of social justice, this commitment tends to go unnoticed by the dues-paying members who generously fund the community projects being advanced in their name. Clearly, if this kind of pushback against the neoliberalism that is restructuring our universities is to have any measure of success, then we must find ways of identifying and gaining more active support for our communal work. This is a goal that YUFA-CP has set for itself in the coming year. **AM**

Natalie Coulter is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at York University. Lorna Erwin is an Associate Professor and the Director of York's Graduate Program in Sociology. Both currently serve as the co-chairs YUFA-CP.



The reality of precarious academic work around the world

ON FEBRUARY 25, 2015, many adjunct faculty members in the United States walked out of their classrooms to protest their working conditions. Just days later, contract faculty at York University were out on strike. Across North America, reporters and media outlets began to wake up to a sorry reality: for thousands of professors across North America, academia no longer means a stable income or a good job.

To those of us who pay attention to higher education, this is not a surprise. Precarious academic employment has been on the rise for decades. The reasons are simple enough. The gradual erosion of public funding for higher education has forced universities to seek cheaper teaching models. Administrators, seized by an increasingly corporate focus, have moved towards more “flexible” labour models. Unfortunately, cheaper and more flexible faculty come at the expense of access to benefits, job security, fair pay, and academic freedom.

It’s a grim situation for the talented faculty members trapped in precarious work. Andrew Robinson’s article in this issue is a powerful example of the kind of frustration—and the on-campus conflicts—bred by the vagaries of contract employment. But for all the gloom, there are hopeful signs everywhere.

I’m encouraged by the activists working to bring attention to contract faculty issues. National Adjunct Walkout Day is the most visible recent

example, but there are also promising initiatives closer to home. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is spreading the word through its Fair Employment Week. Here in Ontario, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)—the publisher of this magazine—recently launched the “We Teach Ontario” campaign to highlight the important contributions made by contract faculty in the face of difficult working conditions.

The Spring/Summer issue of *Academic Matters* also features some heartening international stories of people and organizations pushing back against precarious academic work. From the UK, Jonathan White of the University and College Union (UCU) writes about the rise of zero-hours contracts in British universities, where individuals are given a position without any guarantee of actual paid work. He traces the work of the UCU to combat this trend, and highlights the success they’ve had putting this issue on the public agenda.

Similarly, Jeannie Rea describes the casualization of academic work in Australia, and how the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has been active in the fight to keep up employment standards in the academy. These articles make it clear that the rise of precarious academic work is a global phenomena. It also hints at the immense benefit of sharing stories, tactics, and solidarity

across borders can help ensure that academic jobs remain good jobs.

On the subject of solidarity and defiance, this issue also features a new history of faculty unions in Ontario by Craig Heron. This article was originally given as a lecture at OCUFA’s Faculty Associations in the 21st Century conference, held in the fall of 2014. Natalie Coulter and Lorna Erwin provide an overview of the social justice work done by the York University Faculty Association (YUFA) in Toronto’s Jane and Finch neighbourhood. This type of social commitment is a template for how faculty associations can engage with issues in the broader community, such as the rise of precarious work in all sectors of the economy.

This issue also contains a call for professors and academic librarians everywhere to engage with the wider world of politics. Author Robin Vose explains that political engagement is a core component of academic commitment, and a responsibility we cannot shirk in a federal election year. Altogether, this issue of *Academic Matters* presents a stark view of some of the serious issues facing higher education. But it also presents ideas for facing up to these challenges, from personal political commitment to deeper engagement in faculty associations to engaging our associations with social and political issues beyond our institutions.

As always, we want to know what you think about *Academic Matters*. Send me an email at editor@academicmatters.ca with your comments, criticisms, and thoughts. You can also find all of our issues online at Academicmatters.ca, where you can leave your comments and join the discussion directly. As a nice bonus, the website academicmatters.ca also features web exclusive content, blog posts, and other online goodies.

Thanks for reading, and we’ll see you again in the fall. **AM**

Graeme Stewart is the Editor-in-Chief of Academic Matters, Communications Manager for OCUFA, and a PhD student at the University of Toronto.



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