

## NEGOTIATIONS SURVEY

Your input is required by the Negotiating Committee. Please take a moment in the next couple weeks to respond to the survey which will be emailed to you on November 24!

### Change is in the Air—Marc Schroeder, MRFA President



Marc Schroeder,  
MRFA President

Our Communications Committee has chosen “change” as the theme of November’s Newsletter. For me, this presents a non-trivial challenge, given that we’ve experienced so much change of late: on what particular aspect should this report be focused, and within about 600 words no less? To mind comes a flood of options, such as last spring’s move to a new statutory context for our labour relations model (and all the work that has entailed, positive as that change may be), the return to bargaining under a strike/lockout regime (unlikely events

but now again eventualities for which it is responsible to be prepared), change in the MRFA office, very high levels of recent or upcoming turnover in administration, including a new Provost, an almost complete turnover in Mount Royal’s Board of Governors, Mount Royal’s stated intention to transition to a new budget model, an upcoming round of bargaining in a climate of provincial belt-tightening, and a new academic plan to be implemented, to name just a few (and I haven’t even delved into all the myriad aspects of our recent – and some will argue still ongoing – transformation to life as a university community).

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### What’s in a Name Change? —Guy Obrecht, MRFA Contract Member



Guy Obrecht  
MRFA Contract Rep.

One of the questions on the recent national survey of contract academic staff was “When asked what you do for a living, how do you respond?” It turns out that many respond with “I teach at university x”. This seems like a reasonable answer considering the nature of the sessional work, but it also presents an underlying issue. Consider what your answer was when you were a student, did you say “I am a student at university x” or “I take classes at university x”?

Being a student is more than taking classes; there’s the implication of research, self discovery, student groups,

recreation, argument, and the free pursuit of ideas. Similarly, the vocation of the university professor involves a degree of research, exploration and pursuit of ideas that are outside of a strict understanding of “teaching”.

Contract faculty rarely refer to themselves as professors, despite the fact that both are academics with research interests and practical specialties working at the university. The difference is that contract faculty do not have the job security that is usually associated with the professoriate. We teach the same students in the same classrooms, but the lack of job security challenges our identity as professors.

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Bargaining Update, November 20, 2017—Lee Easton

**Bargaining updates are only provided in the print edition of the News to Use. Please refer to your print edition or email [office@mrfa.net](mailto:office@mrfa.net) for a copy.**



Lee Easton  
VP Negotiations

Some Things Never Change – take time to relax and attend our upcoming annual holiday parties. You deserve a break after this busy semester!!



## What's in a Name Change? (Continued) – Guy Obrecht

In the collective agreement a few rounds ago, the definition of contract faculty as “part-time” was changed to “Contract Employee”, and we are now usually referred to as contract faculty. This was an important change because it dealt with the fact that many “part-time” faculty members were actually working full-time, often including nights and weekends, in order to make a living.

The change didn't extend to Full-time Employee though; this category remains for tenured and tenurable faculty or full-time lab instructors. It doesn't really make sense that temporality is associated with one group and contract with another. One way to reconcile this inconsistency would be to change the designation of “full-time” to “regular”. Such a change would be more congruent with the idea that we are all faculty equally committed to the principles of the academy, including open discourse, teaching, knowledge, critical thinking, and fairness. Some of us are on short contracts while others are tenured and

contractually obligated to do other things. The difference is the contract, not the amount of time we devote to our vocation.

Ultimately, it is the nature of the contract, not the name, that is challenging the identity of the faculty member. One thing that we have been talking about on the executive and the negotiations committees is “regularization” language that would lead to more job security and a pathway towards academic rank. Wording the CA in a way that is logically consistent over employment categories might be a symbolic first step in this direction.

**“we are all faculty equally committed to the principles of the academy, including open discourse, teaching, knowledge, critical thinking, and fairness”**

## PSE in the News: Ontario College Faculty Are Seeking Change

Karen Atkinson Leadbeater

On October 16th 12,000 faculty (including professors, instructors, counselors, and librarians) at 24 Ontario colleges went on strike. This strike affected approximately 500,000 students and continued for five weeks<sup>1</sup>. The job action was initiated when a proposal from the Ontario Public Service Employee Union calling for full-time faculty to match the number of faculty members on contract, as well as improvements in job security and a louder voice for faculty in academic decision making was denied by the College Employer Council<sup>2</sup>. This strike has shed light

**“This strike has shed light on the scale and impact of precarious labour in academia in Canada. In particular, the detrimental effects of the poor working conditions that accompany part-time unpredictable work”**

on the scale and impact of precarious labour in academia in Canada. In particular, the detrimental effects of the poor working conditions that accompany part-time unpredictable work were highlighted. Kimberly Ellis-Hale, a contract faculty member from Wilfred Laurier University describes a “constant grinding level of stress and worry” that hangs over non-permanent faculty at her institution<sup>3</sup>. She also points out that “Universities are public institutions that should be model employers, but they’re not leading

by example.” Frankie Cachon, from the University of Windsor notes the irony in the current situation as she says “We draw people to post-secondary education on the promise that you will get a good job, and the people who are teaching you do not have a good job.”<sup>3</sup> Full-time faculty and those outside of academia may be tempted to respond to the plight of precariously employed academics by urging them to just quit and do “something else with their PhDs.”<sup>4</sup> However, as a recent opinion piece from former part-time professor John Warner states “Telling Adjuncts to Quit Is Giving Up on Education.”<sup>5</sup> He argues that we must “protect the value of academic labour” and this begins with improving the plight of contingent faculty with better pay, and increased job security. So, while I didn’t celebrate the Ontario college faculty strike, for the challenges it posed to students and faculty, I was hoping that it would force at least a small improvement in the working conditions of contract faculty and maybe a reduction in our reliance on a completely flexible work force in the academe. Unfortunately, on November 19, the Ontario government passed back-to-work legislation, which likely diminished the opportunity for improvement.<sup>6</sup> As Andrea Horwath, leader of the ON provincial NDP said “We still have a broken college system to deal with where 70 per cent of the faculty are not earning decent wages.”<sup>6</sup>



1. Rushow K, Gordon A. Striking faculty, colleges resume talks after. Toronto Star. Nov 16, 2017.
2. Denette N. Faculty at 24 Ontario colleges going on strike. Globe and Mail. Oct 15, 2017.
3. Fitzpatrick M. Ontario college strike spotlights 'new norm' of precarious labour in academia. CBC. Oct 22, 2017.
4. Potter CB. Angry about adjuncting? Inside Higher Ed. Oct 16, 2017.
5. Warner J. Telling Adjuncts to quit is giving up on education. Inside Higher Ed. Oct 17, 2017.
6. Ibrahim S. Ontario college strike ends as back-to-work legislation passed. CBC. Nov 19, 2017.

## Change is in the Air (Continued) —Marc Schroeder, MRFA President

Actually, I'd like to use this column to remind our members of another upcoming change; one that is important to me, if not to you. Specifically, my last year as MRFA President ends on June 15. It is hard for me to believe

### **“My last year as MRFA President ends on June 15”**

that the time has passed so quickly, but I am indeed well into my second year of my second (two-year) term and will hit my term limit under our Bylaws this spring. Lest there be any doubt, I consider our Association's term limits to be healthy things. There are several reasons, but for me the most important is that a President's view of the institution shouldn't be allowed to drift too far from the realities of day-to-day academic work. In short, you have to see yourself as nothing other than a member of the group you happen to be (temporarily) representing. I continue to find this job endlessly fascinating, challenging and rewarding. It's equally true that I'm very much looking forward to getting back to my department colleagues and students, my teaching, and some research. After all, passion for teaching Computer Science is why I decided to build my career at Mount Royal in the first place. To be clear, this column isn't a swan song. I still have many initiatives to see through this year, and goals to pursue before summer, and then plans to do all I can to assist the Executive Board into 2018-2019 as Immediate Past President. I'm certainly not going to check out of Association work.

In the end, my real objective in writing this report is to remind you that it's time for potential candidates to start imagining themselves in the role. To be honest, I hadn't considered running in 2014 until it was suggested to me by one or two colleagues. At first I balked. But then I played with the idea and, eventually, the excitement of the challenge grew to outweigh the trepidation. I'm hoping that some of you start to give this some consideration in the safety of your own, private thoughts. I could list the names of many of you (although I won't), from all walks of life, who would make outstanding leaders of our Association. Remember also that there's not one, perfect preparatory pathway or set of experiences that qualify a member for this or other executive officer positions.

The next MRFA President, as well as the next VP Policy and Senior Grievance Officer, the next Contract Faculty Representative, the next Treasurer, the next Communications Officer and the next Member at Large (not all of which are filled by incumbents hitting term limits) will be elected at our Annual General Meeting on May 11, 2018.

**“there's not one, perfect preparatory pathway or set of experiences that qualify a member for this or other executive officer positions.”**

**The Mount Royal Faculty Association provides a collective voice for faculty, promotes tenure and academic freedom, advocates for the highest standards of professionalism in higher education, and upholds the values of diversity, equity and human rights.**



## Taking Time to Listen—Karen Owen



MRU faculty in class



Alice Kaquitts, Stony Nakoda Elder

This summer about 20 MRU faculty changed things up a bit.

We were the students and our class was a field just outside the town of Banff surrounded by the Rocky Mountains.

The goal was to explore Indigenous ways of knowing with the help of elders from the Stony Nakoda nation.

The Stony Nakoda nation has a strong oral tradition and the faculty members were invited to listen and learn. Alice Kaquitts, an elder, said while she values the oral tradition it means her culture is written from an outsider's perspective. Therefore, "I do believe it's time we start sharing our culture and knowledge from our perspective," said Kaquitts.

She also hopes more people, including faculty and students at MRU, will appreciate oral traditions and added, "I know from an academic perspective" oral narratives aren't valued as highly as written material.

One of goals of Mount Royal University's Indigenous Strategic Plan is, "to respect and embrace Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing".

Listening rather than just reading has to be part of that plan according to the elders.

Kaquitts added elders are willing to come into MRU classrooms, "You can hear directly from us. Let us be part of the institution. We can share our culture from our perspective."



## The Obesogenic Environment—Joyce Woods



Joyce Woods,  
Nursing & Midwifery

A new term is getting attention as it is closely linked to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, depression and certain types of cancer - that term is "obesogenics." It is linked to an environment that tends to generate, create or cause people to become excessively overweight. This means..., environments that increase stress, promote increased food intake, especially of

unhealthy foods, type of work and workload, sedentary work, lifestyle and physical inactivity.

We can't ignore this, as obesity has become the second highest cause of preventable death following tobacco use. Of course, this also includes the vast amount of mechanized labor-saving and entertainment devices designed to decrease our activity. This not only has huge implication for the economy and the health care system, but the employer should be equally as concerned since obesity is closely linked to employee lost time at work due to illness and injury (ergonomics), stress leading to excessive eating, weight gain, and often results in decreased productivity.

**"research has shown that chronic stress exposure can affect the brain's response to high calorie food cues and predispose to obesogenic eating habits including a heightened response to palatable food cues and habitual comfort eating"**

It is interesting that the numbers are worse with skilled professionals. Some analyses estimate the cost to employers of obesity-related presenteeism is greater than the direct costs of the medical care required by those employees. It is well-documented that obesity is closely associated with increased rates of absenteeism, reduced productivity, longer sick leaves (requiring job replacement), and increased workers' compensation claims. In addition, research has shown that chronic stress exposure can affect the brain's response to high calorie food cues and predispose to obesogenic eating habits including a heightened response to palatable food cues and habitual comfort eating (Tyron, et al., 2013).

**"Employers need...look for areas where they can systematically, and legitimately, affect behaviour in order to encourage and assist employees."**

Effects of an adverse environment in the workplace are daunting. These include heavy workloads, long work hours, work environments (noise, air quality, etc), stress related to job performance and evaluation, management style, role conflict or ambiguity, lack of appreciation or valuing, and morale in the workplace, to name a few.

Of course, we must all take responsibility for our health by maintaining good eating habits, get proper sleep and rest and be active, but is there also a responsibility of the employer? Employers need to survey their environments and look for areas where they can systematically, and legitimately, affect behaviour in order to encourage and assist employees in a direction that will make their lives go better. Literature abounds on actions the employer can do to help reduce stress in the workplace, the most common being keeping job demands reasonable, recognizing individual results and skills, valuing, involving employees in decision-making, being transparent, and perhaps most important of all, have an understanding attitude.

Of all the advice given to employers to improve the workplace environment, I am most impressed with the actions taken by Google. Google is amongst the most successful businesses in the world and provides a great example of workplace satisfaction and healthy workplace environment. Google allows their employees to spend 20 percent of their time working on their own projects, stating that this policy encourages innovation and creativity - something every employer should want. That may not be something every company or organization can do, but giving employees just a few minutes away from their desk to clear their heads and rejuvenate, works wonders.

If you were asked two questions, 1) what can you do to improve the workplace environment, and 2) what can your employer do to improve the workplace environment, I wonder what you would say. Think about it, and better still, be pro-active and share it.

**MOUNT ROYAL  
FACULTY  
ASSOCIATION**

Room W315  
4825 Mt Royal Gate SW  
Calgary, Alberta  
T3E 6K6

Phone: 403.440. 6103  
Fax: 403.440. 6752

Website: MRFA.net  
E-mail: office@mrfa.net

To book  
meeting rooms call:  
403.440.6193

The MRFA's  
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Learn how at:  
[mrfa.net/](http://mrfa.net/)  
[Google](#)

## MRFA Contacts

### President

#### Marc Schroeder (Mathematics and Computing)



The President is available for consultations, including of a confidential nature, concerning the Collective Agreement, institutional and evaluative policies and processes, matters of faculty welfare and working conditions, Association Bylaws and polices, and regarding any other questions or concerns about which the Association might be of assistance to our members.

Phone: 403.440.6191

Email: mschroeder@mtroyal.ca

Please call Lana Funke (6103) to make an appointment with Marc.

### Vice President Policy and Senior Grievance Officer

#### Sabrina Reed (English, Languages and Cultures)



Contact Sabrina for matters related to grievances and MRU policy changes which impact faculty members.

Phone: 403.440.6797

Email: sreed@mtroyal.ca

### Senior Administrative and Faculty Relations Officer

#### Chantelle Anderson (MRFA Staff)



Call Chantelle for information relating to MRFA Committees, Events, Elections, Finances, and other matters relating to MRFA governance, administration and member services.

Phone: 403.440.6192

Email: cpanderson@mtroyal.ca

Office Hours: Monday – Thursday, 6:00am – 2:00pm

Friday: 9:00am – 5:00pm

### Office Assistant

#### Lana Funke (MRFA Staff)



Call Lana for scheduling, meeting room booking and general inquiries.

Phone: 403.440.6103

Email: lfunke@mtroyal.ca

Office Hours: Monday – Thursday, 12:00 – 5:00pm

### Faculty Centre Coordinator

#### Bob Mariani (MRFA Staff)



Call Bob to book meeting rooms and arrange events and/or catering.

Phone: 403.440.6193

Email: rmariani@mtroyal.ca

Office Hours: Wednesday – Thursday, 7:30am – 3:00pm

Friday: 9:00am – 7:30pm