

Out of the Shadows

Experiences of Contract Academic Staff

Karen Foster (Dalhousie)
Louise Birdsell Bauer (CAUT)

Non-generalizable?

- Survey of CAS at Universities Colleges and Polytechnics across Canada
- 2606 respondents
- Small sample (high turnover, current address lists)
- Mainly Universities
- Mainly associated with CAUT (Distribution across country = CAUT membership)
- Different classifications across PSE
- Respondent bias

Comparing demographic data

Demographics	MRFA census %	CAUT survey %
Age 36-65	81	77
PhDs	32	38
MAs	45	42
Teaching over 5 years	61	59

Challenges some myths about CAS

Myth 1: CAS are a diverse group ranging from grad students beginning a career, to retirees sharing a lifetime of experience, to professionals and industry workers who enjoy a little teaching on the side, “happy moonlighters”.

- Desire for full time work: MRFA 66% would apply CAUT 60% would apply (diminishes only slightly over time)
- Primary source of income: MRFA 72%, CAUT 72% (rely on income to maintain livelihood)
- Equivalent to Full load: MRFA 35% (4 or more in Fall), CAUT 40% (5 or more per year)

Challenges some myths about CAS

Myth 2: CAS do not do any Service or Scholarship

Scholarship: MRFA 42% do, 31% would if funded (73%)
CAUT 67% actively maintaining scholarship in peer reviewed publications
79% agree that they would do *more* if they were paid for it

Service: MRFA 43%
CAUT 75% (40% departmental)

Job security

Number 1 issue in CAUT survey

Number 1 issue for MRFA (Negotiations survey)

Type of employment contracts

Sessional: MRFA 71%

CAUT 70%

Mental Health

42% believe their mental health was impacted by the PSE, 87% of whom believe it to be negatively affected by their work.

MRFA q: workload pressures cause me to worry about my physical and/or mental health and wellbeing (strongly agree and agree) 71%

Diversity and inclusion study (few contract faculty) shows mental health as almost half of the of the 17% of employees experiencing disability issues

Mental health is underreported

Qualitative analysis

Shame and humiliation: themes of feeling othered and patronized by working conditions: second-class, stigmatized, disrespected, tainted, etc. Our census has some of this kind of sentiment in it as well: second class, subtle harassment, overlooked etc.

Self-identity: respondents say that they “teach” at a university, or otherwise place the precarity of their working conditions within their descriptions of what they do: part-time, sessional, side line.

Loving the work: Feeling competent in their abilities, finding intrinsic value in teaching. In the MRFA census we heard this too, love of teaching, commitment to teaching.