

President's Report, *Two Rights Can Make a Wrong* – Melanie Peacock



Melanie Peacock,
MRFA President

The Collective Agreement forms the basis of our employment terms and working conditions. In short, this critical document is the foundation of our working relationship with management and helps to ensure greater clarity and transparency regarding how certain decisions are made and methods that must be followed when addressing various workplace practices.

The Collective

Members often advise me that certain parts of the collective agreement that do not directly impact them. For example, a colleague may tell me that they do not intend to apply for a leave or do not envision applying for promotion. While every article within our agreement may not seem applicable to

each individual member, it is important to remember the concept of strength in numbers and that our collective interests and our collective voice are what allow us to ensure that we have an agreement that represents the overall needs of our diverse faculty group. As well, I encourage members to think beyond the current context, as one never knows what the future holds. The need to rely upon the collective agreement may unexpectedly arise. For example, I've worked with many members who didn't envision filing a grievance, didn't anticipate responding to a disciplinary issue or didn't think they would require greater clarity around performance reviews. Yet, when circumstances changed these colleagues were grateful that they had the security of a collective agreement to rely upon. It is only by standing together that provisions in the collective agreement can be secured, ensuring better conditions both for our present *and* ongoing work.

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"Out of the Shadows", Cross Referencing MRFA's Census with CAUT's National Survey of Contract Academic Staff - Guy Obrecht



Guy Obrecht,
Contract Member Rep.

Karen Foster and Louise Birdsell Bauer's recent study, "Out of the Shadows", attempted to uncover some of the working conditions of Contract Academic Staff across the country. The title of their study speaks to the fact that there is a lack of nation-wide data on the use of precariously employed contract faculty and therefore a lack of understanding of the nature of their conditions and the level of their use across institutions. With a lack of data to support or contradict them, people are able to

maintain ideas that trivialize the use of contract faculty. These ideas hang on to narratives like "contract faculty are young academics beginning a career", or "they are otherwise employed professionals who teach for fun", or "they don't want to bother of service and scholarship". Studies like Foster and Birdsell Bauer's are beginning to point to evidence that challenges the gloss of such narratives.

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President's Report (Continued)— Melanie Peacock

Management Rights

Article 29 of our current collective agreement states that management retains the right to administer and address any and all issues not specifically addressed in the collective agreement but must do so in *a fair and reasonable manner*. This said, *how* these rights are used has great impact on our work. Are the expectations fair and transparent? Are processes in place to ensure that all faculty members are dealt with in a similar, equitable fashion? Just because management has the right to do something, doesn't mean that we, as faculty, should ignore our responsibilities in using our united voice to ensure that management utilizes their rights in an appropriate manner. We must remain vigilant and willing to express our concerns regarding this issue. If not, we run the risk of management rights creating inequity, confusion and conflict. Improper and/or inconsistent use and application of management rights hold the potential to ultimately lead to wrong outcomes.



What Should I Be Doing?

I encourage all members of the MRFA to be familiar with the collective agreement. Please take the time to read this critical document and be keenly aware of your rights. These terms and conditions of employment have been hard fought for and work continues in this regard. I also ask that you continue to be aware of the labour environment and context we are currently operating within. The MRFA is not unique in our pursuit of rights and protections for faculty. We are part of an increasing trend across Canadian universities of needing to press for appropriate employment terms and conditions (through negotiations in order to secure a proper collective agreement) and needing to ensure that management use their rights in an appropriate manner so that injustice and inequity do not occur.

Please stay involved with the MRFA. Attend regular meetings, support our negotiating team, wear your MRFA button, and ask questions. I, and the MRFA executive board, welcome the opportunity to speak with you and address your inquiries.

Together we are stronger.
Melanie Peacock PhD, MBA, CPHR

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.

Recent Strike Votes and Bargaining Updates at Canadian Universities

University of Western Ontario

As it advanced to job action with a strong strike mandate from its members, the University of Western Ontario came to a tentative settlement. "The deal was reached early Friday morning, Nov. 9, after 25 bargaining sessions...UWOFA was pushing for more job security for contract faculty and compensation for all faculty members."

Athabasca University

Faculty at AU continue negotiating for a new CA. The article [online](#) provides an overview of the current situation.

Mount Saint Vincent University

94% of faculty at Mount Saint Vincent University recently voted in favour of a strike mandate. The

main unsettled issues include "fair compensation, workload and support for caregivers and victims of domestic violence."

University of Regina

87.4% of faculty at the UofR recently voted in favour of a strike mandate. "Outstanding issues include job security for sessionals, protecting the academic mission of the University, maintaining the collegiality of performance review and tenure decisions, and compensation that keeps pace with the rate of inflation."

Saint Mary's University

80% of faculty at Saint Mary's University recently voted in favour of a strike mandate. The main unsettled issues are "fair compensation, workload and health/wellness benefits for retirees."

Contract Faculty Illness Leave Entitlement Chart

Contract faculty are entitled to full salary during illness for a maximum of 25% of the contracted SICH per semester (Article 17.2.4). The following table provides examples:

Contracted SICH	Maximum Illness Leave
48	12
64	16
96	24
144	36
192	48
240	60

If you teach one 48-SICH course in a semester and are absent due to illness, you will continue to receive full salary for up to four missed classes. Please note that Human Resources will require medical documentation for absences that are for a period of five or more consecutive days.

“Out of the Shadows”, Cross Referencing MRFA’s Census with CAUT’s National Survey of Contract Academic Staff - Guy Obrecht

The authors claim that the study is not generalizable because of the relatively low rate of participation (2600 respondents in a country where there are around 37 000 in total). High turnover rates and lack of up to date contact information made it hard to reach out to contract faculty, who are often working in the shadows. The authors also considered the idea that the most dissatisfied faculty are more likely to participate in the survey. Considering these potential biases, I took the liberty to compare some of the results to the contract faculty responses in MRFA’s census. What I found was a high degree of correlation between them, therefore suggesting that the survey might be more representative than they think.

“This data is important because it challenges the idea that contract faculty are young academics garnering experience or retirees sharing a lifetime of experience.”

In terms of demographics, both surveys reveal that the majority are between the ages of 36 and 65, have similar distributions of credentials and have mostly been teaching for more than 5 years (table 1). This data is important because it challenges the idea that contract faculty are young academics garnering experience or retirees sharing a lifetime of experience. In fact, most of the contract faculty are looking for full time employment (66% of MRFA respondents and 60% of CAUTs) and in both surveys, 72 percent of the respondents rely on their contracts for their livelihood, and many (35-40%) teach the equivalent of a full course load (which varies across Universities).

Table 1: Demographics

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

A second myth that the data counters is that contract faculty don’t do research or service. The results show that in Canada, 67 percent of contract faculty are currently maintaining scholarship in peer reviewed publications and 79 percent agree that they would do more if they were not funding it themselves. At the MRFA, we found that 42 percent do service and an additional 31 percent would if it were funded. In terms of service, 43 percent of contract faculty at MRFA do service compared with 75 percent of the national respondents (much of the service in the national statistic was departmental [40%]).

Another area where the MRFA aligns with the survey is around job security. The number of respondents working on sessional contracts was 70 percent, similar to the 71 percent in the MRFA census. Sessional contracts are ground zero for precarity: the contractor has to reapply for their position each semester. Not surprisingly, the number one ranked issue for CAUT’s respondents was job security, the same ranking it had in our negotiations survey (when contract faculty was looked at as a group).

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The effects of precarious employment are particularly troubling. Almost half of the respondents felt that their mental health had been impacted by their work (42%) and most of those (87%) felt that the impact was negative. We didn't ask a similar question around mental health in the MRFA census, but when ranking the statement "workload pressures cause me to worry about my physical and/or mental health and wellbeing", 71 percent of contract faculty strongly agree or agree. These rates are far above the national average in the area of mental health which should be a cause of concern, especially in the context of mental illness normally being underreported and more prevalent in academia.

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The researchers did a qualitative analysis of the responses and found a lot of instances that they refer to as shame and humiliation. Common themes of feeling othered and being patronized by their working conditions came up: feeling like second-class people, being stigmatized, disenfranchised and generally disrespected. While not everywhere, our census has some of this kind of sentiment in it as well: feeling second class, experiencing subtle harassment, or feeling overlooked.

A related point regarding self identity emerged in the responses to the question of how they describe

their work to others. Many respondents remarked that the liminal nature of their contracts made answering this question fraught with personal anxiety. Answers often included the precarity of their employment in the response. For example, some would say "I teach part time at University X" or "I teach on the side". Identifying as a part-time teacher is a far cry from the many elements that go into the rich vocation of being a full time professor where teaching is informed by original and unique research that counts as only one part of an academic career. We don't have a similar question on the MRFA census but my guess is, that especially in the context of a teaching focussed university, we would hear similar characterizations of a contract faculty career.

One of the surprising finds of the CAUT survey was that despite the apparent feelings of mental and social strain associated with precarious work, most respondents actually felt that their work had had a positive impact on their career. Leaving aside the possible problems with the question, this seems counter intuitive except when you consider the fact that respondents often reported a genuine love of teaching and a confidence in their competence as teachers. In our census there are several references to this kind of confidence in and love of teaching as well, which helps to explain why we pursue research without funding, why we engage with service, and why we continue reapplying to teach.

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SPoT – MRU’s Student Opinion Surveys—Karen Owen

It has been a year since Mount Royal University started using SPoT, Student Perceptions of Teaching. Representatives from the MRFA worked hard to change the student opinion survey.

Cheryl Techentin, an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, was a member of the Task Force for Student Evaluation of Learning. She says, “They’re not an evaluation of effective teaching - they are an evaluation of student satisfaction by a group of people that, although their feedback is important, are not qualified to assess how well we are doing our jobs”.

That being said, the surveys are still used for tenure and promotion evaluations. However, Techentin says the criteria for using information from student surveys in tenure and promotion assessments is more transparent than it was previously. “When I go into my review I should be able to anticipate the feedback I’m going to get and the only way you can really do that is by having very clear guidelines and that are in the collective agreement, it can’t be changed at will” says Techentin.

CAUT (the Canadian Association of University Teachers), issued a policy statement in 2016 which says in part, “student opinion surveys should not be used in any career procedures and decision making involving academic staff”.

Techentin says ideally, she would like to see a time when it is only the faculty member who has access to the course evaluations and that,” they could be added to a teaching dossier if a faculty member so decides, however, if a faculty member doesn’t include them there is to be no interpretation of that”.

She adds, “I think we will probably continue to use them because a lot of faculty like them when they are constructive, but your tenure or promotion should not depend on those.”

In addition, Techentin says the Task Force did its best to eliminate the possibility of personal attacks by students. “It used to be students could make any kind of comment and some of the comments were so cruel”. It now states clearly that comments must be relevant.

SPoTs are “not an evaluation of effective teaching - they are an evaluation of student satisfaction by a group of people that, although their feedback is important, are not qualified to assess how well we are doing our jobs”.

Celebrating the Achievements of our Colleagues—Tenure, Promotion and MRFA Teaching Excellence Award Recipients

Members are invited to join us in celebrating the achievements of our colleagues at the annual Tenure, Promotion and Awards Celebration.

**November 30, 2018
4:00—7:30pm (LPR then FC)**

Members being recognized this year include:

Tenure Recipients:

Caroline McDonald-Harker, Christian Cook, Deanna Wiebe, Gwen O’Sullivan, Kendra Hart,

Mark Ayyash, Monica Pauls, Natalie Badenduck, and Sarah Banting.

Promoted Faculty

Joe Pavelka, Miriam Carey, Randy Schroeder, and Timothy Haney.

MRFA Teaching Excellence Award Recipients:

Gülberk Koç Maclean and Susan Morante

Collective Voice – Guy Obrecht, Contract Member Representative

One of the biggest strengths of the Canadian context of academic work is that union membership is mandatory. This is a good thing for many reasons, number one being that we hear all voices. We hear voices that don't believe in the value of the union and its representation alongside those that are strong defenders of union principles and fairness. We hear those polar voices and all the ranges between them.

Our collective voice is tempered by the extremes and thus cannot be dismissed as a few radicals or supplicants. To some, our voice may sound radical, to others, that same voice sounds overly conservative. Our voice is informed by clear discussions and debates at meetings and analysis of member data from surveys and our annual census. We take action and mobilize arguments only where there is consensus and/or a majority vote.

"Our voice is informed by clear discussions and debates at meetings and analysis of member data from surveys and our annual census. We take action and mobilize arguments only where there is consensus and/or a majority vote."

The value of this collective voice in the Canadian context can be seen in our salaries and benefits. In comparison to the United States, where optional union membership and "Right to Work" (for much less) legislation is decimating any kind of collective voice, our compensation

seems pretty fair. In the States, adjuncts can make as little as \$15 000 a year teaching a full course load—less than most unskilled labour jobs, particularly those with unions.

A collective voice, and the collective agreement that it maintains, allows us to protect the vulnerable, speak truth (or speak period) to

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power, and maintain the core values of post-secondary education.

Of course, there are venues like Senates or General Faculty Councils that ensure bicameral governance of the academy, and these include faculty voices. But in the absence of job security, the asymmetries of power in these bodies would grow and render them devoid of meaningful consultation and debate. Without job security, we lose our voice.

According to our census, the majority of contract faculty rely on their contracts for their livelihood and would apply for a full time position if one became available. Extending job security to contract faculty would only strengthen our collective voice.

The MRFA Negotiations Committee met with the Board's team on November 8 and 9 for two more days of informal enhanced mediation. No agreement was reached although the number of issues outstanding was reduced.

Updates will be provided, in camera, at the upcoming MRFA Meetings:
 Regular Meeting, November 28, 4:00—6:00pm, Lincoln Park Room (J301)
 Special Meeting, December 11, 1:00—3:00pm, Jenkins Theatre (I115)

Your Questions

Why Does the Association Send Print copies of News to Use?

Knowing that members' inboxes tend to be flooded by other messages, the Association identified printed Newsletters as one additional means by which we could connect with members. Over the years, the Association has received significant positive feedback on the News to Use, but every year we receive one or two suggestions that these be emailed rather than printed. Likewise, over the years, the Communications Committee has determined to continue sending these via hard copy as there is still value in this. Having these around gives members the opportunity to look at them when they have time versus an email which is all too easily, justifiably, deleted. The Committee acknowledges members' concerns about the use of paper, and the Committee continues to consider the matter in light of all member feedback. If you would like to add your comments on this matter, please submit them online (<https://goo.gl/hz7VUg>).

[We welcome your questions for upcoming issues of *News to Use*.](#)

Please submit your questions online via the link provided on the Communications Committee webpage on mrfa.net or directly at <https://goo.gl/hz7VUg>

Did you Know you Have this Right....?

Access Your Personnel File

You have the right to access your Personnel File in its entirety and you are entitled to copies of all documents in your individual file (Article 26.2). As well, the only anonymous material that may be kept in your Personnel File is student evaluation of instruction (now referred to as Student Perceptions of Teaching – Spot) results (Article 26.3). There are clearly identified conditions under which the Personnel File contents may be made available, and these are noted in Article 26.5. Furthermore, once per year, upon written request to the Provost and Vice-President, Academic (with a copy to HR), you may have documents related to performance or conduct issues removed from your File if these documents pertain to issues that were resolved at least seven years prior (Articles 26.6 & 26.7).

10th Annual Canadian Labour International Film Festival

Join the MRU Advocacy Committee and working people from around Calgary, Treaty 7 for an evening of popcorn, politics, and FREE labour films from around the world. The Mount Royal Faculty Association, the Calgary Chapter of the Alberta Labour History Institute, the Calgary and District Labour Council, and the Alberta Federation of Labour proudly present a FREE screening of the 10th Annual Canadian Labour International Film Festival (CLiFF).

November 30, 2018. Doors open at 6, films start at 6:30.

"CLiFF hopes to bring about social awareness and action by bringing the issues that matter to workers to a broader audience, helping to stir up positive change in Canada," said Frank Saptel, Festival Founder.

IMAGINE A WORLD where thousands of films are made about workers and the conditions under which they live, work, fight, and succeed in their daily lives! 2009 marked the first-ever Canadian Labour International Film Festival (CLiFF). This also marked the first ever labour-oriented film festival in Canada.

The world of labour has found it increasingly difficult to communicate its message as fewer and fewer people have greater control over the means of communication – the media. It is more important than ever that working people be able to tell their own stories in their own words and in their own images. With the wide availability of digital still and video cameras, camera-phones, and other tools, activists can now make their stories – but still find it difficult to exhibit their narratives. CLiFF is that venue – the first of many throughout Canada, and, we hope, around the world.

Learn more about CLiFF: <http://labourfilms.ca/>

Facebook Event Page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/189950675269970/>

Local, Provincial and National Collectives Supporting Labour and PSE

Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) - caut.ca

Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) - cafa-ab.ca

Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculty Association (ACIFA) - acifaweb.com

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) - canadianlabour.ca

Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) - afl.org

Calgary District Labour Congress (CDLC) - thecdcl.ca/your-labour-council

Public Interest Alberta (PIA) - pialberta.org... etc.

**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

Highlights from Recent MRFA Regular Meetings

In Camera Negotiations Updates:

These reports are in camera and members are required to sign confidentiality agreements to attend this part of the meeting. In the current context, it is important that members attend when possible to remain informed.

Facilitated Discussions:

This fall the MRFA has begun providing additional opportunities for members to engage with each other and their Association in facilitated discussions at Regular Meetings. Topics have included Full time Workload Assignment (September) and Job Action Preparedness (October). These discussions provide opportunities for us to learn from each other and provide input to our Association on matters which are of high importance to all of us.

- A key takeaway from the September discussion was that, in accordance with the CA, workload is assigned through consultation between the members of the department and the Chair following initial consultation with the Dean.
 - Regardless of variance between departments, workload allocation needs to be a consultative process
 - Workload allocation can be appealed
- The discussion in October was brief, due to time constraints, but members were informed that ongoing work is being done to ensure preparedness and that this work would be done regardless of the current state of negotiations.
 - While we do not want to go on strike, we must be willing and prepared to do so to defend our common interests and rights and to protect the quality of Education at MRU.
- At the November meeting we will be discussing Member Engagement.

Comparative Analysis of MRFA Census data in relation to CAUT Study of Contract Faculty— *Out of the Shadows: Experiences of Contract Academic Staff*, by Karen Foster and Louise Birdsell Bauer.

See pages 1 & 4-5 for a full report on important study.

Grievance Reports

Brady Killough, the MRFA's Vice-President Policy and Senior Grievance Officer, has provided regular updates on ongoing grievances. Members are encouraged to attend Regular Meetings to remain apprised of current issues and challenges. Find out how the MRFA is defending your rights in its ongoing work to uphold the provisions of the Collective Agreement.