

## FEW Wrap Up Panel Notes

- D.A. Dirks, MRFA Contract Faculty Rep.
- Irene Shankar, MRFA Member at Large
- Lee Easton, MRFA President
- Marc Schroeder, CAUT Representative-at-large and former MRFA President
- Sarika Bose, Chair of the CAUT contract Academic Staff committee
- Moderated by Frank Cotae



## Welcome and Introductions

More than 50% of PSE Academic Staff are contract faculty and many of them live at or below the poverty line. This is not a situation we can stand within our communities and our country.

We have seen a drop in research output in Canada, we have seen a drop in the number of patents filed and we have seen a corresponding increase in reliance on contract faculty.

When faculty are not paid a fair wage it effects communities, economic growth, and local businesses.

In watching the film – [Professor Precarious](#) – we see that faculty do not have money to put aside for their kids’ education. Despite their dedication to their own education, they will not have the ability to improve the educational prospects for their children.

## Sarika Bose - Chair of the CAUT contract Academic Staff committee

### A Picture of Contract Academics in Canada



- CAUT’s 2018 Survey (“[Out of the Shadows](#)”) confirmed that approximately 1/3 of academics at universities and colleges in Canada are hired on temporary contracts; CCPA suggests higher numbers (note – this data was cross tabbed to MRU numbers and that analysis is available [HERE](#))
- Contract academic labour has risen by 200% since 1999; tenured positions have risen by 14% (CAUT)
- “Temporary jobs” continue to be temporary for 15 years or longer – defined by requirement for reapplication, lack of seniority, few or no rights to first refusal of teaching, or reappointment, temporary library and email privileges

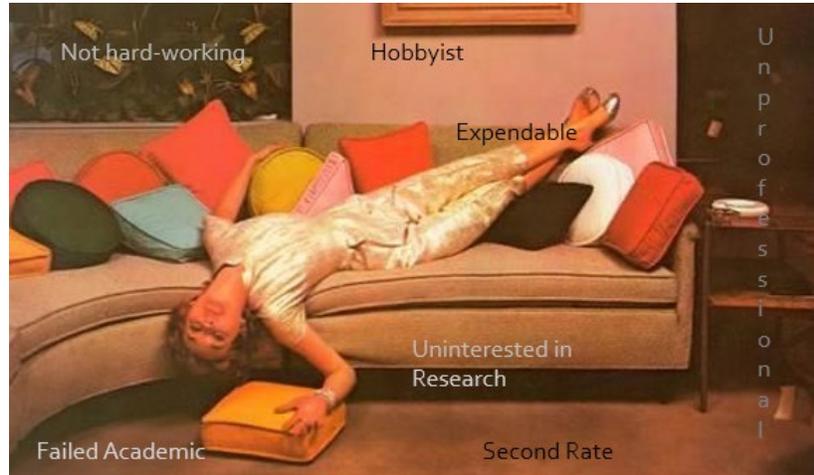
### Items not included in in Most Contract Faculty Contracts Across Canada:

- Research time, opportunities, funding
- Career path, job security
- Fair wages
- The benefits of full-time work, though we work for more than full-time hours (pension plans, access to grants, sabbatical leave, some scheduling flexibility, office space)
- A sense of belonging and citizenship in the Academy

At a recent meeting with a minister in Ottawa it was apparent that the minister was not informed about the status of CAS (Contract Academic Staff) in Canada. The minister asked how long it takes for CAS to become permanent employees and they were told never. The minister was surprised by this.

## Perceptions about Contract Academics

There are myths about CAS as not hard enough working, expendable, hobbyists etc. And these are very far from the truth!



## A Life in ruins

Contract faculty experience life with a big hole in it. Contract faculty have a loss of work life balance and etc. A loss of hope for a better future

Loss of financial stability = inability to provide for family and next generation

- Loss of work-life balance (large teaching loads in more than 1 place)
- Loss of health (e.g. eye, back, mental health)
- Loss of hope for a better future
- Loss of human dignity through repeated assertions of second class status
- Loss of self-worth through repeated affirmation that salary indicates worth
- Loss of identity from unique to replaceable
- Loss of dignity and self-worth

This lack of hope stops CAS from being advocates.



## Impacts on Students



- CAS do not have time for meetings with students during semesters as they are teaching too many courses often at multiple institutions,
- Students do not have access to CAS between semesters
- CAS do not have access to funding for scholarship or time to engage in it, and so the quality of education can be negatively impacted as a result.
- No access to mentorship (reference letters, tutorials) or continuity in education

## The Stakes for the Academy: A House in Ruins

- Chilling Effect on Academic Freedom
- Loss of Knowledge
- Loss of Intrinsic Value in Education and Education
- Conversion of Knowledge Economy to Amenity-Based Economy (save a penny; lose a pound)
- Knowledge Fracking (knowledge divided into marketable parts)
- Loss of collegiality and collective governance

## The Stakes for Society



- Erosion of academic freedom = erosion of knowledge and taking risks with critical thinking = politically vulnerable society
- Increase in surveillance society + commercial indicators of worth
- Financial precarity in formerly stable demographic = expansion of provincial and national financial precarity and need for more government-based social services
- Cycle of Poverty: Fewer opportunities for children of precariously employed academics

## Fair Employment in the Time of COVID

- Fair Employment Week + Make It Fair campaigns bring awareness to existing issues amplified by COVID:
  - Invisible labour
  - Emotional labour (equity-seeking groups)
  - Disappearing jobs vs. Extra (unpaid) workload
  - Financial burden in tech + teaching investments
  - Increased health vulnerabilities for “Road Scholars” + F2F teaching contracts

## Serving the Common Good: Solutions

- Current systems lose us the core mission of higher education to serve the Common Good

### SOLUTIONS: Local Tasks

- Learn of local campus working conditions
- Do small scale mitigation for local needs
- Learn of local contract conditions
- Find and work on common cause with allies

### SOLUTIONS: Big Tasks

- Push for federal/provincial investment
- Bargain for equity
- Work Towards Collegial Governance

**53%**  
of contract academic staff want a permanent secure job position.

// To learn more, visit [ourfuture.caut.ca](http://ourfuture.caut.ca)

For our **future**

## D.A. Dirks – Contract Faculty Representative on the MRFA Executive Board

It can be very different how faculty are treated at different institutions.

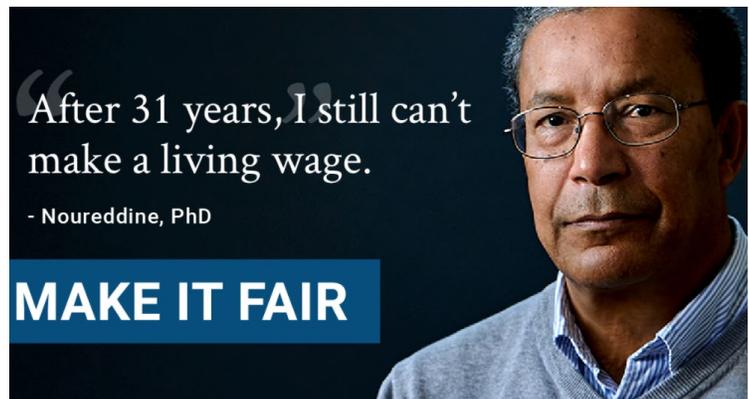
Contract faculty feel pulled in many different directions teaching in different departments and different institutions and trying to serve in the community in which they hope to be full participants as academic scholars.

It is also important to be aware of the fact that Precarity intersects with minoritized or equity seeking groups which are over represented in Contract Academic Staff cohorts.

We recently did a survey of our members in which we heard from our members on what it is like to be a contract faculty member especially during this time of pandemic. From this survey, it is apparent that the pandemic is adding to the stressors of contract faculty across the country.

Alberta specifically has its own challenges relating to being in a unionized labour environment. However, hope can be found in the ability to build coalitions across labour groups and across the country.

The idea of equal pay for equal work is inspiring but this is a consistent challenge in the PSE sector wherein contract faculty are exploited as cheaper labour.



## Lee Easton - MRFA President and former VP Negotiations



We have seen the increase in the work of contract faculty over the years at MRU. Part of the transition from a College to a University was largely subsidized by our contract faculty. When the Government did not follow through on funding promises for the transition, Mount Royal University increased its reliance on contract faculty to make up for the funding shortfall. The hope was that more full time positions and permanent positions would open up for our contract members over time, but this has not been fully realized.

Not only do we have an increase in contract faculty but we are also losing the core of tenure and tenurable positions which are not increasing at the rate of growth of institutions.

### **Bargaining for Mitigation**

This is a big process wherein we do what we can do to fix this or that while we pursue larger goals. While some improvements have been made for some of our contract members, there is still much work to be done.

### **Mitigation we have engaged in:**

- Developed a grid for contract faculty to recognize the time contract faculty have dedicated to MRU,
- Refined this grid to adjust movement on the grid to be based on the number of courses taught rather than the number of semesters, and
- Some progress made on regularization (though not enough):
  - Fixed Term Faculty – these positions provided some job security with pension and benefits

- Senior Lecturer – similar positions with a shift to permanence
  - These are mitigating efforts which do not address the core problem, which is how do we grow our institution to ensure there is FT work so that we do not have all the negative impacts (personal and societal) of over reliance on contract faculty

### **Continued Efforts at Mitigation**

- We are still seeking to arrive at a pro-rata model to better, and more equitably, compensate contract faculty members.
- Regularization – this is a long term strategy and we are continuing to try to work toward this.
  - To achieve this, we need to put the onus on FT faculty to hire contract faculty with a view to having them become permanent. Contract faculty are not just filling in a temporary gap: we know that their positions are not temporary.
  - The problem with a lot of regularization clauses is that they can be circumvented by administrations and this needs to be addressed carefully in negotiations

**Bargaining is one way through to fix problems but there needs to be a better understanding amongst all internal and external stakeholders of why we need to rely less on contract faculty.**

## **Irene Shankar – MRFA Member at Large & Disciplinary Focus on Sociology of Health**

### **Precarious work and health impacts**

Health of precarious labour overall is affected by:

- Inability to negotiate work
- Lack of autonomy around work
- Inability to refuse unsafe work conditions
- Denigration of work done by precariously employed workers (deskilling- not adequate of adequate compensation – i.e. the faculty member does not have enough degrees or publications)
  - These matters are particularly prominent with respect to gendered impacts

Workers who do not have autonomy or sense of security are more likely to:

- Have more workplace incidents
- Have more chronic health issues
- Be victims of harassment and bullying
  - You can get medication for these things but they are symptoms of a problem that is not being addressed (i.e. overreliance on precarious labour)

Effects of the Pandemic:

- Exacerbated exploitative work conditions while at the same time making them less visible
- Exacerbated health conditions
- Increased rate or risk of Covid infection
  - Contract faculty may be working on multiple campuses and their risk for exposure is higher
  - Contract faculty are less able to say no to face to face classes
- Lack of protection for those who have to be on campus
- Less protection for contract faculty as they are seen as expendable
- Contract faculty are more likely to experience loss of employment and this heightens stress
- Contract faculty are teaching classes with higher enrollment and higher workload (with corresponding impacts on physical and mental health)

- This is worse for contract faculty who are teaching more classes than FT faculty and have no protections at MRU in terms of registrant caps.
- Unpaid work during the pandemic (i.e. unpaid course prep)
  - Those with dependent care were even more severely impacted as they had to pay for child care while doing their unpaid course preps. Doing this unpaid labour for the university actually cost them money



**We need to recognize these very serious health impacts on contract faculty**

Tracing back the origin of illness – what is the etiology – what is the source of the illness?

- We cannot be overly generic in this
- How is the source of the illness generated by all of us and how are the exploitative conditions enabled by all of us.
- We are all part of it and it is up to us to determine our roles in it.

**Marc Schroeder – CAUT Representative at Large and Past MRFA President**



As MRFA President (2014-2018), Marc met with contract faculty on a daily basis and the problems which are occurring day after day were palpable. These are people, these contract academic staff members, who are dealing with serious illnesses and injuries and have no job security and little to no access to benefits or disability coverage. These are the heartbreaking stories that are playing out on our campus, and every campus very likely, and we are all harmed by this. Also, some of us benefit from this system of exploitation: FT Faculty have to reckon with the fact that they benefit from the exploitation of contract faculty.

When we critique the reliance on contract faculty we are accused of denigrating our contract faculty and indicating problems in the academy. Our position can be skewed. In critiquing the systemic problem we are not criticizing the merits of our colleagues, we are pointing to the problems inherent in their employment conditions: the problems of precarious labour.

**The casualization of the academic and the emergence of the precariat is a central issue and it may be *the* big issue of our time that we need to confront.**

Simply dismissing this as a symptom of capitalism or neoliberalism, or the commodification of education and commercialization of the academic, is insufficient. While the casualization of the academy is related to those large societal and sector wide contexts, we cannot express this problem in overly broad terms as that makes it very difficult to address and resolve the actual problem which is the human cost, the many interrelated and long lasting impacts, and the real overall inefficiency of this model.

Related Concerns and General Comments:

- While contract faculty do have the same academic freedom as tenured faculty they do not have the real ability to exercise these rights in a real way.
- Inherent sexism and racism that is inherent in precarious employment and this is intersecting with classism – classism is inherent in the academy with hierarchies all over the place

#### **How do we address these issues?....In Bargaining**

- In the MRFA Collective Agreement, we do provide some good things for contract faculty that we can be proud of but we need to recognize that, to the extent we rely on contract faculty, **we need a better articulation of workload including contract hours but more specifically for the number of registrants (this is missing in our CA).**
- Long Term Structural Changes
  - We need to have a FT complement that will be added to over time
  - We need more pathways to permanence for long serving faculty
- The answer is in bargaining and we need to build solidarity to do it: **these issues need to become strikable issues and all faculty (including all FT professors) are willing to go to the wall for these matters.**
  - We need to build broader solidarity in the labour movement – precarity is a problem across sectors and industries we are workers with the same kinds of issues that we have elsewhere.
  - We need to engage more in public facing advocacy
  - To build solidarity we need to have a mobilizing model within the Association – **the MRFA is the Membership** and we need to engage in the hard and long term work of building power so that it can be concentrated and wielded
  - We need collective power and we need to put it behind the bargaining team. Without this power we cannot achieve gains. We need to be able to apply power and our only power as academic staff is to be able to withdraw our labour collectively

**Over reliance on and exploitation of Contract Academic Staff is bad for the academy, it is bad for our society and it is hurting our colleagues: we cannot stand by and watch it happen anymore.**