



## Pathways to Permanence at MRU

Hosted by the Academic Appointments Support Committee

January 22, 2024

Below are some of the key points from speakers at this event. Members can view the full recording [here](#).

### Kris Hans, Continuing Contract Faculty, General Management and HR

- As Sessional Faculty, it is important to never turn down opportunities to teach to make ends meet, and, also, to be there to apply when a full-time position comes available.
- Continuing Sessional Contracts at MRU are valuable as it helps to provide more stability in employment; however, the prorated pay over the 12 months can be difficult to accommodate from a financial perspective.
- As a sessional faculty member, you are competing with national and international candidates for tenure track positions – this can make it difficult when you have a heavy course load and little time for research.
- The pathway to permanence provided by the Senior Lecturer position is helpful in providing some job security that Contract faculty do not have otherwise.

### Shweta Chugh, Senior Lecturer, Earth and Env. Sciences

- There are advantages to having a Senior Lecturer position over being on a sessional contract:
  - Some stability is provided,
  - There is a guaranteed income,
  - Enhanced flexibility in terms of your teaching hours (as a Full-time faculty member, you have much more say in when you will teach and what classes you will teach) and
  - There is better access to FDC funding for Senior Lecturers.
- However, Senior Lecturers have a heavy course load: they teach 9 courses over the year, and this can be split into fall and winter and also in fall / winter / spring
  - The major challenge in this role is the number of courses being taught: there is very little time left for curriculum design and preparation. Fridays are taken up by all the department, institutional, and Association meetings.
  - It is very difficult to teach new courses as a senior lecturer.
  - There is no time for senior lecturers to engage in research or scholarship to remain current in the discipline. It is difficult, therefore, for a Senior Lecturer to be deemed eligible for moving to a tenure track role. You are at a disadvantage when you are competing with individuals coming fresh out of their PhDs and Postdocs.
  - The number of accommodations required is also a large demand on time.
  - It is unclear how much service is needed to achieve permanence.
- Accessing and Enhancing Pathways to Permanence:
  - Chairs can be very supportive in helping contract faculty find more permanent roles.
  - The barriers that are created in the distinction between tenure track/tenured and the permanent faculty should be removed – we are all permanent faculty and should be treated more equitably. There should be more avenues available to provide access from senior lecturer to the tenure track roles.

## **Jason Tang, Tenure Track, Accounting and Finance**

- Having started as a Senior Lecturer in 2020 and moving to a tenure track role in 2023, I had positive experiences and a lot of support from my department.
- I went through the same interview processes as the external applicants went through when I applied for the tenure track position. I did two rounds of interviews and a teaching demonstration and went for a campus tour etc.
- There are benefits to serving as a Senior Lecturer prior to the tenure track appointment as there can be experience credited to the probationary period.
- It was important to maintain professionalism in the hiring process – to keep the hiring process separate from the working role as a Senior Lecturer

## **Brenda Lang, Fixed Term Faculty, General Management and HR**

- Fixed Term Faculty member – I have been at MRU since 2002 and have had many different employment categories in my time at MRU
- Right now, the only pathway to permanence in the CA is the Senior Lecturer position and this is not a perfect solution. Regardless, this was still a significant accomplishment at the time. Moreover, while this position is in the CA, it is still a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
  - There was a relationship between the Senior Lecturer and the Fixed Term Contract positions. What was negotiated was that there could be at least 25 but no more than 25 which could be funded out of the available fixed term positions.
  - The MoU expires in August 2025 so this will be something that will be discussed this year.
  - The Senior Lecturer MoU has been a success because we have 18 senior lecturers and 8 Fixed term faculty remaining. Of these 18, 5 of them had previous fixed term positions so they had worked their way through to permanence with the various available positions.
- With respect to the workload taskforce, the topic of pathways was discussed as was the MRFA's desire for a reduction in FT workload, including the growing service load. However, The Board and the Association did not agree on these points.
  - The conversion of Sr. Lecturers to tenure track positions is an MRFA priority.
  - One of the biggest reasons for the University to not make a conversion from Senior Lecturer to a tenure-track appointment was because of the required credentials and the University's need for TSS positions (focusing on scholarship).
- Workload of Senior Lecturers:
  - In bargaining, the Board argued that the Senior Lecturer position was the same as the TS position, so it had to be differentiated from the TS role. To accomplish this, the teams used the 9-course load which had been the regular FT teaching course load that all FT faculty had when there was no rank system at MRC.
- Ongoing efforts will continue to be made in this regard. And there need to be more clear pathways and working condition improvements are needed.

## Question and Answer

**Question:** as a Senior Lecturer – 2 years were transferrable into the Tenure track process – does permanency need to be reached first for the years to be credited to a probationary period?

**Answer:** No, you do not need to have achieved permanence for the years (up to 2) to be applied to your probationary period. However, there is some strategy around this as you may want the full number of years available in order to meet the requirements of the probationary period.

**Question:** What is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the bargaining context?

**Answer:** An MoU is agreed to and appended to the CA when there is an item that is really complex to negotiate and there is insufficient time at the table. MoUs may be agreed to in order to continue the work and carry the item forward to the next round of bargaining.

**Question:** Are there any suggestions/recommendations for new to sessional employment. I am currently trying to figure out if this journey is the best for me and my family moving forward.

**Answer:** This is difficult to consider as the pathways to permanence are not incredibly clear. For some individuals you are not in a position to say no to any courses that are available and sometimes this requires a lot of additional work to get up to speed on the coursework and course prep needed.

- It is not easy being a sessional instructor and there is no guarantee of workload.
- Whether or not you end up with a permanent position is, in part, based on luck – a position may or may not open for you – and this is the same for any sector.
- It is still rewarding to be a teacher and your hard work will be noticed by your peers. If you love to teach, then hang on and something may open up for you.
- The continuing contract appointments can be helpful as they provide some guarantee for income (but it may be difficult to pay bills with the prorated pay).

**Question:** At other universities there is a clause in the CA preventing the hiring of a contract faculty member when there is an expectation of the continuation of work. How do you keep going as a contract member when you do not ever have a guarantee of a full time / permanent role?

**Answer:** There are contract faculty at MRU who have been on contract for as many as 40 years. We know from our annual MRFA census that there are many Contract members who want a Full time / permanent role and there are many who do not want that.

- We have tried to get language in the CA for there to be a ratio of FT:CAS positions. Without this proscribed ratio in the CA, the ratio has never changed at MRU (despite some years of large numbers of FT hiring).
  - o Due to the reassigned time provided for research and other roles, there is still an overreliance on contract faculty.
  - o Contracts are supposed to backfill the courses made vacant by FT faculty; however, this does not seem to always be the case as there are contract faculty who have taught the same Full-time course loads for years.
  - o MRU is heavily reliant on contract faculty to balance its budget when there are no Teaching assistants and PhD students available to work for less.
- The Senior Lecturer position should have been a pathway to permanence but for many Contract faculty members this pathway to permanence will be inaccessible.

**Advice to new faculty** – If you want a full-time permanent tenure track position, reduce your course loads, do your scholarship, get your PhD, and focus on that path. If what you want is to be a teacher, then you can focus on the sessional course loads and aim for the senior lecturer position.

While the senior lecturer position should be TS faculty, it has the benefit of giving some job security for contract faculty, benefits, and pension (along with an excessive teaching load).