

## Fair Employment Week 2018

### Make It Fair

Canada's Finance Minister, the Honourable Bill Morneau, made headlines in 2016 when he asserted that Canadian workers will simply have to get used to precarious work, or the "job churn" as he called it. Sadly, one of the sectors in which part-time and precarious employment has increased the most since the 1990s is **educational services**, according to a 2018 report by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada entitled "Navigating Precarious Employment in Canada: Who Is Really at Risk?"

Canadian universities are no exception to this trend. Just last month, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) released the results of its first nation-wide survey on contract academic staff, and many of its findings are quite alarming. To provide some context, the survey found that contract academic staff are a swiftly growing segment in the Canadian academic workforce, with the number of university teachers working part-time, part-year expanding by 79% from 2005 to 2015. In contrast, the number of full-time professors increased by only 14% and, in the same period, the number of students grew by 28%. Not surprisingly, this trend is having negative effects on the financial, professional and mental well-being of contract academic staff, and on the quality of post-secondary education in Canada.

To say that this trend is ironic would be an understatement. **How is it that the institutions dedicated to improving opportunities for our youth are simultaneously providing fewer and fewer fair opportunities for their own employees, our country's educators?**

These professors and librarians often have the same levels of education and other qualifications as their full-time counterparts. Yet, they are denied job security, and most must re-apply for their jobs each semester. They are denied the opportunity to participate in research and service which, in addition to teaching, are the core components of academic work. Many earn less than a living wage, and all are paid less than their full-time colleagues doing the same work. Not surprisingly, a disproportionate number of these professionals are women and members of ethno-minority groups.

The CAUT survey also found that, in addition these negative financial and professional consequences, precarious academic work also has negative impacts on the mental health of contract academic staff. In fact, two-thirds of respondents said their mental health has been negatively impacted by the contingent nature of their employment, citing issues such as a lack of respect for their work, exclusion, shame, and the significant stress and concern that comes from chronic job insecurity. For example, over half of respondents agreed that the contract nature of their employment impacts their ability to make long-term plans such as having children or purchasing a home.

This reality has serious implications not only for our contract academic staff, but also for students, full-time academic staff, and the integrity of our universities. Contract academic staff

often lack the most basic working conditions such as office space in which to meet with students. They may only receive their course contracts a few days before the beginning of the semester, leaving them little time to prepare courses. Most find it very challenging to carry out research while teaching a high number of courses, especially when they find themselves having to create and teach new courses every year as previously taught courses can be cancelled, sometimes at the very last minute. They are not paid to do service work such as student advising or serving on student Honours committees; therefore, a greater proportion of this work falls onto the shoulders of full-time faculty. These consequences of precarious work in universities weaken the overall quality of our post-secondary institutions.

October 22-26 is Fair Employment Week on university campuses across Canada. We draw attention to the unfair working conditions of so many of our faculty and librarians, and advocate the rights of our contract academic staff members to fair opportunities, security and respect in the workplace. Educational institutions must lead the way and serve as examples when it comes to fair working conditions, for the health of our employees, the strength of our communities, and the quality of the opportunities that Canadian universities will be able to provide to future generations.

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Dr. Mary Lou Babineau is the President of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations (FNBFA). The Federation represents the interests of professors, contract academic staff, professional librarians and researchers at New Brunswick's four public universities. It advocates the advancement of the standards of their profession and seeks to improve the quality of higher education in the province.