

Fair employment week on university campuses

The Canadian Association of University Teachers' (CAUT) campaign, Fair Employment Week, is held this year from October 18 to 22. Every year, in October, Canada's public university academic faculty associations draw the attention of our political leaders and the public to the working conditions of university teaching staff with precarious status, our colleagues hired to teach either part-time or full-time under a contract of limited duration.

The underfunding of universities, which has persisted for several decades, forces them to take various drastic measures in order to compensate for this chronic lack of funds. One of the easiest ways used by universities, but also one with the most damaging mid – and long-term consequences for the education of young New Brunswickers, is to not replace permanent academic staff members when they leave for retirement or any other reason, and to contract teaching staff on a short-term basis instead. This state of affairs has been deplored also by the rector and vice-chancellor of the Université de Moncton, among others.

The recourse to precarious contract academic staff also has a negative impact on students, their permanent academic colleagues, and the university as a whole. The recourse to a greater number of precarious contract academic staff has as a result, a lack of faculty resources to help and assist students outside of class hours, to supervise students in learning activities that are prerequisites specialized studies (directed readings, dissertations, theses, internships, laboratories, etc.), to design courses and update study programs or to participate in the collegial management of university institutions.

Very often, these precarious status teachers do not know until the very last minute whether they will get a contract to teach next semester, making it impossible for them to plan their professional and personal lives. According to the CAUT, the number of university teachers working part-time, part-year grew by 79% from 2005-2015.

It should also be noted that the various measures (confinement, distancing, virtual teaching, etc.) decreed in order to counter the COVID-19 pandemic have had the effect of increasing the tasks of teaching staff; and this has only made the situation worse for teachers with a precarious status who are not compensated for the efforts required of them. The vulnerability exacerbated by COVID-19 of precarious contract academic staff puts their mental health at even greater risk of deteriorating, worsening an unfortunate phenomenon observed even before the pandemic.

We appeal here to the Government of New Brunswick, in particular the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labor, to seriously consider the issues and benefits in the short, medium, and long term of adequate funding of New Brunswick public universities.

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