



Best Practices for a Non-Alienating Workplace: Treating Contingent Faculty with Respect.

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The CASCA Labour Committee is dedicated to examining labour practices and precarious employment in the discipline, educating the membership, and putting forward recommendations to encourage fair employment standards for all Canadian anthropologists.

Economic precarity tends to be a dehumanizing experience, isolating its subjects from meaningful interactions and relationships due to their marginal status. This is as true in academia as it is elsewhere. As we have known for a long time, universities in Canada are increasingly abandoning the tenure model and moving towards flexible employment arrangements for academic faculty involving short-term or part-time contracts. More than half of faculty appointments in Canada right now are contract appointments ([Pasma and Shaker, 2018](#)). Contract academic staff come up through the same systems of education as their tenured peers – they typically have solid credentials, active research programs, and ample teaching experience – but, often just due to the luck of the draw, do not have permanent full-time positions.

Contingent faculty regularly teach the same number of classes (or more) as their full-time colleagues, but at a fraction of the salary – especially when accounting for research and service activities which contingent faculty also perform but are not compensated for. They lack many of the sometimes unacknowledged benefits of stable work – private office space, a predictable schedule, timely pay, and consistent access to teaching and learning resources (library, printing and photocopying, learning management software, etc.) ([Field and Jones 2016](#)). Moreover, contingent faculty are often treated like academia's second-class citizens by administrators, other faculty and students alike: exploitable and disposable.

It does not have to be this way, and although full-time faculty members may be able to do little individually to reverse the overall trend towards precarious academic employment, there are things that can be done at the institutional, departmental and individual levels to push back against the more alienating aspects of contingent employment and make the lives of contract colleagues easier. Department chairs and associate/assistant Deans may be able to alter or mitigate certain policies that exploit contingent faculty. Tenured and tenure-track faculty can do more to make the workplace inviting, supportive and collegial. The American Sociology Association's Task Force on Contingent Faculty Employment (2019) has issued a recent report on labour conditions for scholars in their discipline (which is worth a [read in full](#)). Here we wish to highlight and build upon their list of recommended practices for full-time colleagues working with contingent faculty.

Appointment

Although part-time teaching positions are sometimes advertised well in advance, it is not uncommon for appointments to be made weeks or even days before a class begins. Contracts may also be dependent

upon enrollment – if not enough students sign up, the class will be cancelled. This type of uncertainty plays havoc with contingent faculty's ability to plan ahead financially and professionally.

- Department chairs should ensure that courses taught by part-time faculty are advertised, and instructors hired, as soon as possible. They should also work to make sure employment contracts specify, in clear terms, under what conditions and in what circumstances a class may be cancelled.
- Ensure access to office space and university resources as early as possible to assist with course planning
- For a course regularly taught by the same person, contingent faculty should be consulted about scheduling just as a full-time colleague would. Contingent faculty must often juggle multiple courses (sometimes at multiple universities), so working with their schedule can reduce stress and travel time.
- Alert relevant contract faculty when a course is being offered – it is a both a professional courtesy and ensures a qualified instructor can be found.

Compensation

A recent survey of contingent faculty (Field and Jones 2016, 25) reports that 83.6% of precariously employed respondents were dissatisfied with the level of remuneration – and only 3% were strongly satisfied with their pay. The range of compensation varies greatly across Canada and even between nearby institutions. By and large though, contingent faculty are paid a fraction of what their full-time colleagues make for the same work.

- Refusing to participate in the race-to-the-bottom of the academic payscale is the most crucial first step. Full-time faculty serving on academic senates or boards of governors can explain why low pay for part-time instructors harms the university's overall mission (or use the word "brand" if talking to an administrator).
- Department chairs can push Deans for a one-year sessional hire (at the full-time salary scale) rather than four or five part-time course contracts to cover sabbaticals or leaves.
- Departments can find creative ways to offer some benefits to their contingent faculty: make sure deserving candidates are nominated for teaching awards, make travel or research bursaries open to all faculty, or seek additional teaching assistants that can help contract faculty with routine tasks.

Evaluation

Course evaluations are sometimes the only metric used to assess teaching ability. Many part-time instructors hesitate to take risks or offer challenging assignments because it could lead to negative feedback from students. Precarity encourages rote teaching and can quickly drain an instructor's passion for the subject. By drawing on a range of assessment tools, the creativity and innovation of contingent faculty can be fostered and maintained.

- Treat numerical course evaluations as only one part of an overall teaching assessment when making decisions about hiring, renewal, promotion, etc. Department chairs may also wish to consider student letters and comments, participation in training courses or student mentoring, and, if agreed to by the instructor, in-class observation.

- Give clear guidance ahead of time about expectations or current practices for lecturing, pedagogy, length and difficulty of assignments, etc. Provide new instructors with previous syllabi to assist with course design.
- Give part-time teaching experience its due when making tenure-track hiring decisions. Part-time teaching should still be a viable pathway for career advancement, so take account of both the quality (through a variety of assessment tools) and the quantity (number of courses taught simultaneously) in a candidate's background.

Working Conditions and Culture

If you work full-time, do you know the part-time faculty in your department? Do you know what their research is about and what their career goals are? Being precariously employed at the university can feel like being shut out from the important conversations, decisions, and culture of the workplace.

- Invite contingent faculty to relevant faculty meetings and events to make sure they have input into the department. Provide opportunities for them to give feedback about teaching and working conditions.
- Include contingent faculty on the department's website, with information about research and teaching comparable to full-time colleagues.
- Help contingent faculty make connections with community organizations or research institutes relevant to their needs. Promote their expertise in media inquiries or with the university's external affairs department.
- Don't nominate contingent faculty to, or suggest they participate in, unpaid service activities (committee work, student advising, university promotion) unless there is a clear and tangible benefit to them. It only "looks good on a CV" if it means you would hire them on that basis.

The most important thing to remember is that contingent faculty are colleagues, not someone filling in for so-and-so's course while they are on sabbatical. They need mentoring as much as anyone else, and deserve to feel that they are part of the university community. They also need honesty – don't promise what the department cannot deliver, or hype a new job coming up that they have little chance of getting. In the long run, we can work towards universities and workplaces that treat all employees with value and respect.

Works Cited

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