

WE ATTENDED

A JOINT Session OF

“SITUATING SESSIONALS”

AT ACCUTE and the Commit -

tee for Professional CONCERNS

AT THE CONGRESS

OF THE SOCIAL Sciences AND

Humanities, UNB FREDERICTON, MAY 2011.

THE FOLLOWING

is a RESPONSE to ideas raised at this SESSION. THE INSIGHTS and SUGGESTIONS BELOW are shaped by HAVING BEEN SESSIONAL LABOURERS at various universities over the years and by COMMENTS BY other SESSIONAL LABOURERS.

A SESSIONAL MANIFESTO

BY

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This DOCUMENT is intended, if possible, to be an errata slip for collective agreements and is infused with the reflection that although working conditions of sessional labourers affect everyone in a department this panel did not attract that kind of broad audience. There is a need to disseminate as widely as possible the problems that beset sessional workers at universities.

THE SESSIONAL MANIFESTO

Institutional POWERS have aligned to discipline sessional instructors: administrations that exploit sessional labour for increased institutional profit; departments that unload supra-contractual work on sessionals under the auspices of professional development; TENURED FACULTY members who treat sessionals as second-class intellectuals, failing to respect their contractual limitations; students who are increasingly aware of, and eager to exploit, the relationship between course evaluations and the renewal of sessional contracts.

In the face of the above facts, two new realities must be articulated:

I. Sessional instructors have emerged as a primary component of contemporary secondary education.

II. Sessional instructors, in the face of exploitation and alienation, must proclaim their RIGHTS within the context of Canadian postsecondary institutions.

The time has come for a sessional manifesto that defines contractual RIGHTS, discusses professional concerns, and provides a voice of solidarity for the benefit of the thousands of academics working without the psychological and economic security of tenure-track positions.

SOCIETY OF THE SESSIONAL

The sessional instructor is under constant interpellation by the disciplinary gaze: those colleagues whose surveillance leaves sessionals feeling like future employment is at stake with each conversation; those students who, based on signifiers such as

shared office space or a roster full of first-year courses, intuit that their professor is of lesser value than the “real” professors who teach upper-level courses; those friends and family who wonder why, after obtaining PhDs, sessionals continue to earn less per annum than entry-level government employees. The society of the sessional is dystopian.

THE PARADOX of the INSTITUTIONAL PARADIGM

The CAPITALIST MODEL that drives universities is in opposition to democratic values. While sessional instructors teach students about EQUITY, JUSTICE, ETHICS, and DIVERSITY, they do so in the knowledge of a crippling hypocrisy: the institutions that ask them to promote these values refuse to practice them. Cynicism bred by this hypocritical environment threatens the integrity of postsecondary education.

Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty Must Help Improve Working Conditions for Sessionals.

Those who have been sessionals and who are now tenure-track or tenured have an OBLIGATION. In stable positions, they can speak for those who do not feel comfortable speaking (for fear of threatening their jobs or potential letters of reference).

THE RIGHTS DENIED to Sessionals or the Problems which Beset Sessionals

I.

Access to intra-university funding is often DENIED to sessionals; therefore, the inability to travel to key forums means that many sessionals are not able to showcase their work and bolster their professional reputations within the job market.

II.

Too frequently, sessionals are equipped with office space that FAILS to meet the requirements of a full-time academic.

III.

Often, sessionals are required to teach overload courses with little, or no, remuneration. This adds to burn-out. As well, sessionals are often required to TEACH a large number of different courses. Preparation time, therefore, is more demanding for the sessional than a permanent hire. Sessionals might also teach summer courses in order to pay bills when a contract ends; this detracts from research time.

IV.

Often, departments suggest that it will benefit sessionals to engage in work outside teaching because such “experience” might “look good” when sessionals apply for tenure-track positions. The latter WOULD create significant problems:

1) sessionals, because of such pressures, might not draw attention to the fact that they feel (and are being) exploited and will, therefore, sit on committees, engage in departmental reviews, do “extra.” Deeming such participation to be in their best interests when it comes to letters of reference, re-appointment, and potentially landing a tenure-track job, sessionals burn out and take time away from researching and publishing and 2) if sessionals are not encouraged to uphold contractual limits, then universities do not feel the brunt of not having an exploited labour force and will be less willing to make changes in future. Furthermore, the argument that departments need more tenure-track appointments becomes weakened.

V.

Emotional damage (an inferiority complex) is often a result of extended contractual labour.

WHAT UNIVERSITIES SHOULD Be Required To Do to Ensure Sessionals are not Being Exploited and to Start Working Toward COLLEGIAL EQUALITY

I.

Universities, across departments, need to provide an outline/list of what sessionals are *NOT* required to do. This task is most urgent.

II.

Sessionals should find ways to SECURE job protection within collective agreements.

III.

If compensation for summer teaching earns sessionals a sum that is marginally different than employment insurance, universities, or sessional mentors, should advise the sessional of this DISCREPANCY.

IV.

Sessionals should have access to research and travel funds; tenured and tenure-track faculty should help LEAD the way in insisting that this access be granted to sessionals.

V.

While the “emotional damage” of contractual labour is not an easy problem to address, universities should ensure that sessionals can also be recipients of awards during their contracts (that is, teaching awards and research awards); they should also, wherever possible, give sessionals PRIME and private office space.

VI.

Where it is apparent that the sessional labourer is simply RESTRICTED by a poor and inequitable market (and is intent on becoming a full-time professor), courses should be split up equally between tenure-track, tenured, and sessional instructors.

VII.

Equity should exist amongst sessionals, too. INEQUITY among sessionals creates a lack of cohesiveness amongst sessional labour that is needed if sessionals are going to effect change. Universities should offer a minimum of one-year contracts so that workers are covered (medical included) year round.

VIII.

Universities should keep the POWER imbalance between student and sessional lecturer in mind when assessing student evaluations.

IX.

Departments should advise sessional lecturers of opportunities for reappointment or new job competitions at the earliest possible date.

WHAT HAPPENS to the Former Sessional when She/He is Offered a Tenure-Track Job or is Being Considered for a Tenure-Track job?

1. When SEARCH COMMITTEES are assessing potential tenure-track candidates, they must remember that sessionals who choose not to sit on committees or do other tasks outside of their immediate contractual obligations cannot be penalized or put in a lower standing than other candidates.

2. When letters of REFERENCE are requested by sessionals, those in charge of

the terms under which sessionals have been working and stress that they were not required to sit on committees, contribute to departmental reviews, and the like.

3. When university administrators ASSESS previous teaching years to determine a newly hired tenure-track's payroll entry level, full years should be given for sessional appointments (eight to twelve months).

LARGE/OVERALL GOAL

A COLLECTIVE/SESSIONAL UNION that operates Canada-wide to represent and protect sessional rights.

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