



Precarious Employment Impacts Nova Scotia's Universities

October 20, 2016

Halifax – Survey results on the effects of precarious employment endured by over 900 contract and sessional instructors at Nova Scotia universities were recently released by the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT). The survey, 'Precarious U', was conducted by Karen Foster, a sociologist from Dalhousie University, to generate data on the personal, political, social and educational consequences of these conditions, for contract instructors across Nova Scotia's universities.

The majority of the short-term contract staff surveyed has taught at the university level for over five years. Foster's research indicates that continued precarious employment comes with a price for the employee. "If you ask university administrations to rationalize their reliance on short-term contracts, they'll say it's necessary to fill gaps in curriculum planning, to ensure that courses keep getting taught even when faculty go on sabbatical or maternity leave or move temporarily into administrative positions," says Foster. "But our survey suggests that many contract instructors at our province's universities are working for *years* on short-term contracts, and that this precarious work, in the long term, is having a detrimental impact on their well-being, from mental health right down to their ability to participate in community life."

ANSUT president, Marc Lamoureux says NS universities could benefit by hiring these individuals as tenure-track faculty, where their contributions to the academic community would be lasting for students, staff and administration. "The research conducted by Dr. Foster suggests that many part-time and limited term faculty currently being hired by NS universities are well qualified to teach and conduct academic research. Hiring them as tenure-track faculty would result in benefits such as continuity with students, teaching and research collaboration with academic staff and lower administration costs associated with filling contracts."

Foster also sees significant impacts for students. "What kinds of lessons are our students absorbing about fairness and equity at work, about the value of a university degree, and about the economy they're going to graduate into. I think the university should be a model of fair employment—equal pay for equal work, and most importantly, job security—rather than a demonstration of exploitation and austerity."

The report concludes that faculty associations/unions can play a key role in integrating part-time or limited term faculty in non-teaching activities such as departmental meetings and seminars, and Lamoureux agrees. "Our university campuses would be enhanced in general by the active presence of the part-time or the limited term contract faculty in non-teaching activities. Of course, there should be a fair compensation for their valuable non-teaching activities and collective agreements can be adapted to reflect this new synergy. The academy should welcome these colleagues as academics who have a valuable non-teaching, academic contribution to offer."



Foster will share the results of her study during a panel discussion on Precarious Work on Thursday, October 27 at the Scotiabank Auditorium, Sobey School of Business, Saint Mary's University, beginning at 7 p.m. She will be joined on the panel by contract instructor Karen Harper, UBC sociologist Sylvia Fuller and CAUT Executive Director David Robinson. The event is moderated by journalist Claire McIlveen and is presented by ANSUT, Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) and Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). Everyone is welcome to attend.

The full study is available at: <http://ansut.caut.ca/2016/09/precarius-u-contract-faculty-in-nova-scotia-universities/>

ANSUT represents over 1,400 full-time faculty, librarians, and contract academic staff in Nova Scotia. ANSUT's vision is to provide its member Associations with the strongest possible voice on Post-Secondary Education issues in the province of Nova Scotia, and to advance its mission by engaging the active participation of its members, both individually and institutionally, to achieve that end.

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