

Quality Jobs Quality Education Better Futures

PART-TIME AND TEMPORARY WORK IS ERODING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION. FULL-TIME WORKERS WITH FAIR CONTRACTS DELIVER HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION AND SERVICES TO STUDENTS.



CUPE

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Precarious Work is Rising in the Post-Secondary Sector

In our fast-paced, technologically driven 21st century economy, many experts are pointing to higher education as the key to a secure future with good jobs.

Yet ironically, our colleges and universities are depriving many of the workers who support and deliver high quality education in Canada of the chance to have a steady job with decent pay. Instead, precarious work is on the rise on university and college campuses across the country.

Precarious work is work that is temporary or based on short-term contracts, with low pay, few to no benefits, and no job stability. A growing number of the people employed in the post-secondary sector – those who teach our students, serve them food, clean and maintain university and college campuses, and deliver clerical and other support services – are now in precarious positions.

This rising precarity impacts the quality of education our students receive. And it is hard on workers, personally and professionally.

Academic workers and support workers are passionately committed to high quality education and services for students. But they need fair and decent working conditions to make that happen.

That's why we're calling on universities and colleges to make every post-secondary job a good job!

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is Canada's largest union, with 643,000 members. CUPE workers take great pride in delivering quality public services in communities across Canada through their work in municipalities, health care, social services, schools, universities, colleges, and many other sectors.

Nearly 68,000 CUPE members work in the post-secondary education sector. We represent instructors, researchers, teaching assistants, and support staff working in grounds and building maintenance, libraries, food services, caretaking, information technology, clerical support and administration.

cupe.ca/post-secondary-education

For more information on precarious work in the post-secondary sector:

- Jamie Brownlee, "Contract Faculty in Canada: Using Access to Information Requests to Uncover Hidden Academics in Canadian Universities," *Higher Education*, Vol. 70, 2015.
- Cynthia C. Field and Glen A. Jones, *A Survey of Sessional Faculty in Ontario Publicly-Funded Universities*, Report to the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, April 2016.
- Sarah St. John, "Precarious Work in BC's University Sector," *Tabletalk*, September 2015, <http://cupe.ca/precarious-work-bcs-university-sector>.



Use of Contract Instructors is Expanding

Many college and university professors have good, stable jobs with decent pay and benefits. They are protected by tenure, which allows them to teach and pursue research without fear of being fired for their perspective.

But alongside tenured professors, there are a growing number of temporary, contract, and part-time instructors struggling to eke out a career and make ends meet.

In fact, while universities and colleges are reluctant to release any information on hiring, the evidence suggests that contract instructors may be teaching as many as half of all undergraduate courses.

Lack of security

Contract instructors – who are also sometimes called sessionals, contingent faculty, or adjuncts – generally go from one short-term contract to the next. They have no idea whether they will be working the next semester and often receive very short notice that they will be teaching a class.

Some contract faculty teach a full course load at one school but are still labeled part-time by the institution and therefore do not receive the rights and benefits that would normally accompany full-time employment. Other instructors wind up working multiple contracts at several different schools to try to cobble together full-time work.

Contract academic workers often earn only a fraction of what those doing the same work in permanent positions are paid. For instance, full-time, tenure track faculty at Canadian universities earn on average between \$80,000 to \$150,000 a year. Contract faculty with the same teaching load will earn as little as \$28,000. But in many cases, it's even worse. In a survey of contract faculty in Ontario, nearly half reported that they were making less than \$20,000 a year.

Difficult working conditions

Contract faculty also don't get research funding or support. They are expected to conduct research on their own time. Without tenure, their academic freedom is in jeopardy. Contract faculty can be fired or simply refused a new contract because administrators or donors don't like the subject or the results of their research.

In some cases, contract faculty don't even receive the basic tools they need to do their job. They may not have access to an office on campus, an email address, or previous course outlines. These conditions can make it very difficult for contract instructors to provide the guidance and support students need.

According to data obtained through Freedom of Information requests:

- Use of contract faculty by Ontario universities increased 68.5% between 2002 and 2010.
- The number of tenure track positions increased by only 30.4% over this same period, while full-time enrollment increased 52%.
- In 2001-02, Ontario universities hired 637 more people for tenure track positions than for contract positions.
- By 2009-10, the number of sessionals hired exceeded the number of tenure track appointments by 113.

Support Workers Are Increasingly Precarious

Support workers are essential to the smooth functioning of a university or college. They oversee admissions and financial aid, provide clerical and administrative support to faculty and administrators, keep buildings, labs, and classrooms maintained and functioning properly, ensure that needed technology is available, prepare and serve food, and offer important support services.

But universities and colleges are increasingly relying on contract and casual staff to carry out these roles. Full-time positions are being eliminated and replaced with part-time or temporary positions. Part-time workers are not being given the option to pick up additional hours to become full-time, with institutions preferring to distribute the workload to casual staff instead.

Some workers are being kept in “temporary” positions indefinitely, without the security of knowing whether or not their job will continue to exist into the future. Casual employees, who are working very short-term contracts, are usually the lowest paid workers and do not receive benefits. Their hours can vary significantly from one week to the next, with no stability for the employee.

Contracting out

At some institutions, entire sectors such as food service and custodial services have been contracted out to companies that pay workers very low wages and fail to provide good benefits and pensions. For instance, 75% of Canadian universities and colleges have contracted out their food services. Although these workers are on campus every day, delivering essential services like every other member of the university or college community, they are not considered employees. They are also excluded from accessing the institution’s pension plan or benefits.

In some cases, contracts flip frequently between companies. Every time the contract flips, workers are forced to start over again with no seniority, losing vacation time, wages or bonuses they have accrued through years of hard work.

A CUPE report on precarious work in BC’s university sector revealed that 25% of outside workers at the University of Victoria (CUPE 917) are casual. At the University of British Columbia (CUPE 2950), casual contracts are supposed to be for a maximum of three months, yet 17% of inside workers on casual contracts were employed for longer than three months.

For 9 straight years, Katie, a CUPE post-secondary member, has been working as an administrative assistant on short-term contracts. Katie is proud of the work that she has done in the Registrar’s Office and how she has developed her job from a six-week annual term position to full-time work. In that time, she has helped in all areas of the office: at the front counter and in records, registration, timetabling, and admissions. Yet despite her years of service, the hiring system used by Katie’s university puts her at a disadvantage when applying for permanent positions. As a young professional, Katie has been unable to buy a house since short-term contracts make it very difficult to qualify for a mortgage.

Precarious Jobs Hurt Workers

Contract faculty and support workers are committed to high quality education and services for students. But the conditions in which they are forced to work are very hard on workers, personally and professionally.

Lack of security

Precarity often means poverty. A survey of contract faculty in Ontario found that 45% were making less than \$19,930 a year, or in other words, less than the poverty line. Two-thirds of those surveyed said they did not feel comfortable making a large financial commitment such as buying a car or a house.

Similarly, many part-time support workers or employees whose jobs have been contracted out are earning poverty wages. For those with no pension or benefits, it can be very difficult to weather an emergency or to plan for any kind of retirement.

But the element of precarious work that has the biggest effect on workers is the lack of job security. Workers never know whether or not their job will continue to exist into the future. Many sessionals and support workers are hired on semester-by-semester contracts, with no guarantees of being hired again in the future. Without job security, it is nearly impossible to get a bank loan or a mortgage. A majority of contract faculty in Ontario said they experienced “considerable personal strain” due to the short-term nature of their employment.

The ongoing stress can take a significant toll on workers’ health. Workers in precarious positions are more likely to experience mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, frustration, and a sense of powerlessness.

They are also more likely to experience poor physical health, including a greater likelihood of workplace injuries.

No professional advancement

Professionally, precarious workers are more likely to feel isolated from their colleagues. Contract faculty are often excluded from departmental meetings or faculty events. While some instructors receive support and friendship from tenured faculty, others report that they are neglected or looked down upon as though they are inferior teachers.

Keeping support workers casual or temporary and changing their hours regularly also makes it harder for these workers to build relationships, to participate in workplace committees, and to develop a sense of belonging.

It is also difficult for precarious workers to progress professionally. Instead of allowing part-time workers to become full-time or temporary workers to become permanent as jobs become available, institutions are simply hiring more part-time and casual workers.

For contract instructors, who are forced to carry out research and to publish on their own time without funding or institutional supports, it can be very difficult to move towards a tenure track position. Even though it is the fault of the institution and not the individual, over time being a sessional begins to be a hindrance in being considered for tenured positions. With so many options available, schools prefer to hire recent graduates with exciting research portfolios for tenure track positions. In the Ontario survey, 15% of contract faculty said they had been working as sessionals for 15 years or more. However, many contract faculty also end up giving up on a career in academia after multiple years of stress and instability.



Precarious Jobs Hurt Education

The working conditions of staff at universities and colleges are also the learning and living conditions of students. Precarious work can have a significant impact on the education of students and the quality of services.

Impact on learning

Contract instructors are passionate about teaching. That's what motivates them to do the job despite the difficult conditions. And all the evidence suggests that despite their precarious positions, contract faculty are excellent teachers.

But the precarity of contract faculty still impacts students. Studies have shown that students do better when they are able to build relationships with their professors, but it's much harder to get the necessary one-on-one time with faculty who have to split their time between multiple schools or who have no office on campus. It can also mean a lack of privacy for students when meetings end up happening in the hallway or in a shared office space.

It's also very difficult for students to get reference letters when the professor's email address is cut off the moment the semester ends and that professor is not offered a contract again in the future.

When instructors are only informed a week or two before the semester begins that they will be teaching a course, that has an impact on curriculum development. Preparing to teach a course is a lot of work and takes time to do well. With little notice, it's difficult for professors to ensure the material is up-to-date and that all the necessary resources – such as textbooks – are in place for students.

Impact on services

Reducing support workers to part-time or casual status, or contracting services out altogether, also has a major impact on services. Services are scaled back, or corners are cut, because there aren't enough people to do the job properly. Lower wages and lower job satisfaction also means higher turnover and a lack of continuity in staffing.

Service quality may not be as high from a contractor, but there is limited recourse and accountability. Decisions about staffing and service provision are no longer being made by administrators acting in the best interest of the institution, but by corporations seeking a profit regardless of the circumstances.

Contracting out food services or cleaning services can also have a significant impact on health and safety. Forcing workers to rush, failing to provide proper training, and refusing to provide proper tools can compromise quality and put the health and safety of staff and students at risk. When thousands of people are living and working together in close quarters, stringent health and safety procedures are necessary to prevent the outbreak of communicable diseases.

Finally, contracting out means less transparency and less control over what services are provided and how. For instance, for colleges and universities that want to move towards providing higher quality, locally and ethically sourced food options, contracts with corporate food service providers can be a major obstacle.



Fighting for Better Futures

Workers and their unions are fighting back against precarious work. They're demanding better jobs, fair working conditions, and safe, healthy environments that foster the best learning possible. Quality jobs for faculty and support staff mean a high-quality education for students and better futures for everyone.

Here are just a few examples of how CUPE Locals have created better working conditions for precarious workers:

- **Organizing Precarious Workers**

In 2007, Best Facilities Services acquired the contract for custodial services at two of Simon Fraser University's campuses. Before a single employee was hired, the employer worked with a scab union to negotiate a collective agreement that provided very low wages, no benefits, and no recognition of seniority. The new Best Facilities employees approached CUPE Local 3338 for help. Local 3338 undertook a successful organizing drive, making the Best Facilities employees CUPE members.

When the collective agreement came up for renegotiation, CUPE was able to win a wage increase, some paid benefits, and seniority rights (which give workers greater stability). CUPE has also been able to resolve a number of workplace issues with the employer.

When Best Facilities won the contract for the Harbour Centre campus in downtown Vancouver, CUPE organized those workers as well, bringing all the Best Facilities employees at SFU the support and protection of a union.

- **Good Wages and Benefits**

At the University of Toronto, approximately half of the food services provided on the St. George campus in downtown Toronto over the last decade have been run by Aramark, a giant for-profit food company which paid very low wages and limited benefits.

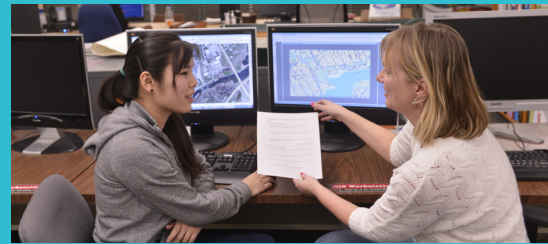
In 2016, U of T decided to end its contract with Aramark and directly provide all food services at the St. George campus. Because CUPE Local 3261 already represented the workers at food services run directly by the university, by law the employees of the newly "contracted-in" services became CUPE members.

CUPE worked with U of T to ensure that all the former Aramark employees would be offered jobs. Thanks to the strong CUPE collective agreement developed over 40 years of bargaining with the employer, the former Aramark employees immediately received significantly improved wages, health and other benefits, paid time off, tuition credits, and access to a defined benefit pension plan. Perhaps most importantly, thanks to the CUPE collective agreement, workers received protection from having their jobs contracted out again in the future.

- **Greater Security**

One of the hardest things about being contract faculty is not knowing whether you will be hired back in the future. CUPE Local 3909 at the University of Manitoba has been able to gain some protections for sessional workers through successive rounds of collective bargaining. Sessional instructors at U of M now receive the "Right of First Refusal" – the right to be first in line to teach a course – if they have previously taught the same course at least three times. Sessionals who have the Right of First Refusal also receive a higher salary.

Local 3909 has also worked hard to ensure that all teaching done, including during the summer session, counts towards the minimum number of hours required to access health and dental benefits.



Precarious work hurts workers and students. But CUPE is fighting back.

Here's How You Can Get Involved

1. Organize an event to talk about how precarious work is impacting your school. We've got posters, postcards, buttons, and booklets that you can distribute at a townhall or info fair or any event you can think of at your own institution.
2. Talk to your colleagues, students, friends, and family about the impact of precarious work on workers and on post-secondary education.
3. Send a message to your local university or college president that you expect them to stop compromising the quality of education by making workers so precarious.

To order resources or let us know about an event you're hosting, email us at postsecondary@cupe.ca.

To learn more about our campaign, visit cupe.ca/quality-jobs-quality-education.



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