

**A world without precarity: The
generational impact of precarious
academic work and possibilities for
the future**

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Survey of Contract Academic Staff in Nova Scotia

- Acadia University
- Cape Breton University
- Dalhousie
- Mount Saint Vincent University
- Nova Scotia College of Art and Design
- Saint Francis Xavier University
- Saint Mary's University

Survey of Contract Academic Staff in Nova Scotia

Population (across all surveyed universities):

- 638 sessionals (hired for one course at a time)
- 285 “limited term” instructors (hired for 4-36 months)

Survey responses:

- 353 started it
- 228 completed it
- < 20 were LTAs
- Response rate ~32%?

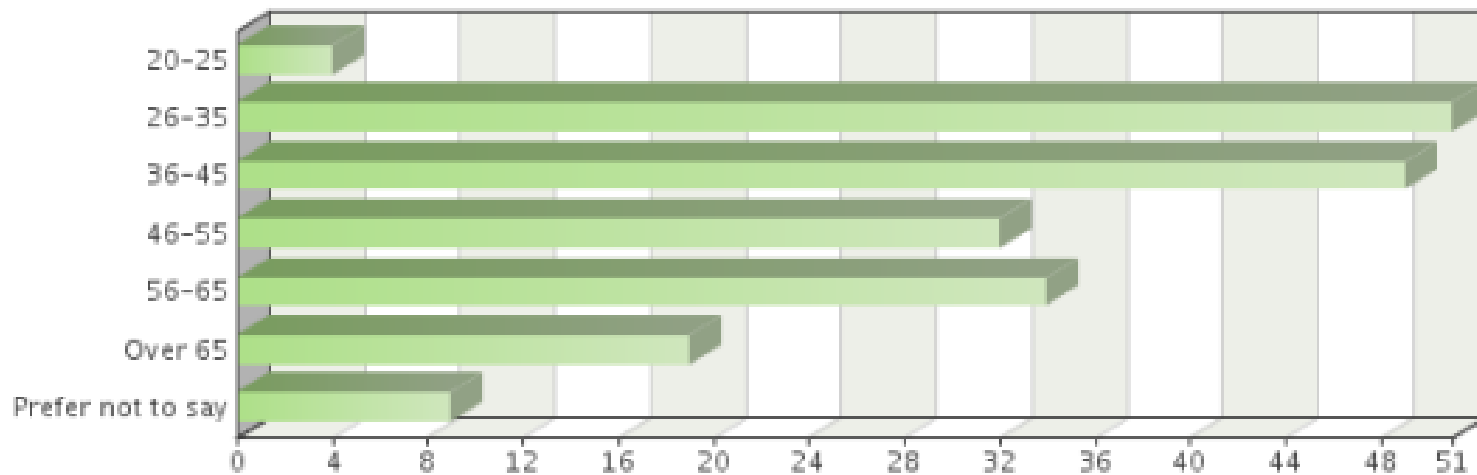
The Sample

- 65% are “sessionals”, hired to teach on a course-by-course basis
- 29% are in Limited Term Appointments
- Nearly half of respondents were teaching only one course in Fall 2015 (47%). One-quarter were teaching 2 courses; 15% were teaching three.
- 91% were teaching at only one university.
- Over half were teaching at Dalhousie.
- Only 20% were students themselves.

The Sample

- 39% worked another job in addition to their contract instructor job(s).
 - Of those, 20% worked a salaried, full-time, permanent job;
 - 28% did ad hoc contract / consulting work
 - 35% of them held *multiple* other jobs.

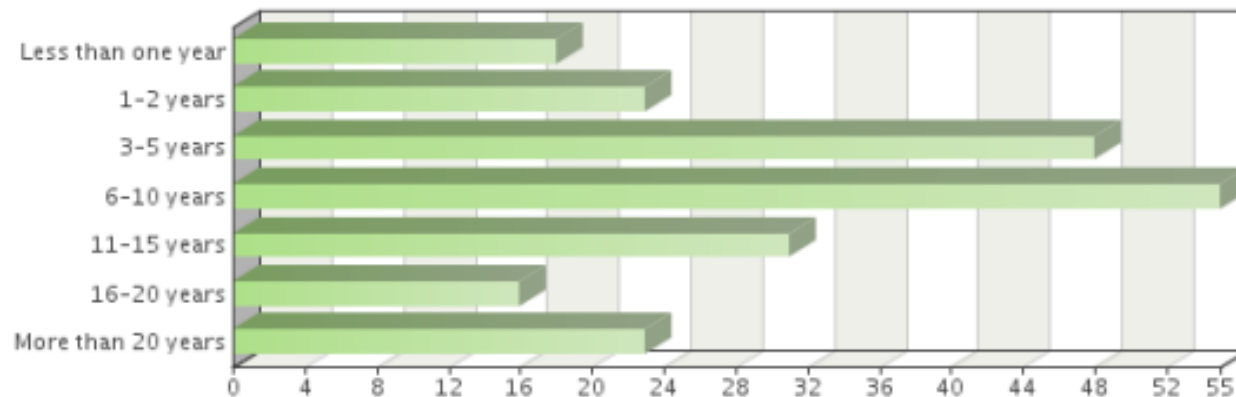
The sample: Age



The Sample

Question 38

How long have you been teaching at the university level?



The sample

- Over half do NOT have a PhD—they're most likely to have a Master's.
- Most are married or in common-law couples.
- 39% male, 57% female.

Precurity and Insecurity

- Standing: 7 dimensions/forms of insecurity:
Labour Market | Employment | Job | Work | Skill
Reproduction | Income | Representation
- Lewchuk's PEPSO study—having security, even at low incomes, is a buffer; even at high incomes, insecurity still hurts.

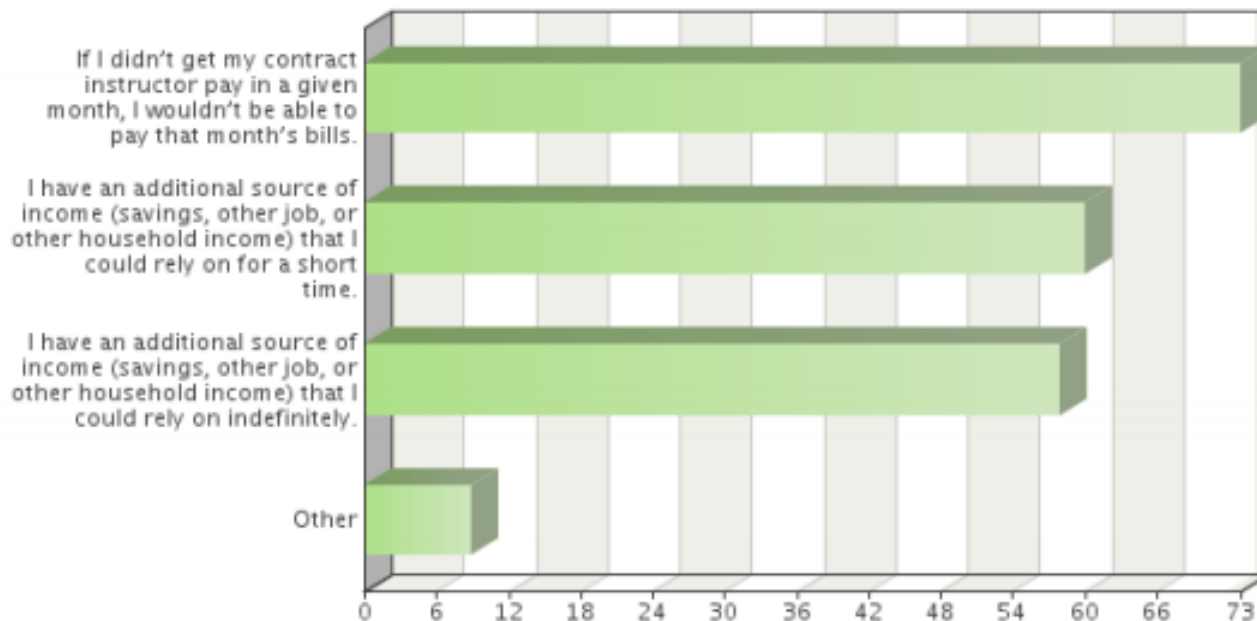
Dimensions of Insecurity

- 1 in 5 respondents only had 3-6 weeks notice re: whether or not they would be teaching in the Fall.
- 30% had at least 6 weeks notice.
- Greatest challenge: (1) Insecurity (2) Time (3) \$\$

Income Insecurity

Question 72

How would you describe your reliance on your contract instructor pay?

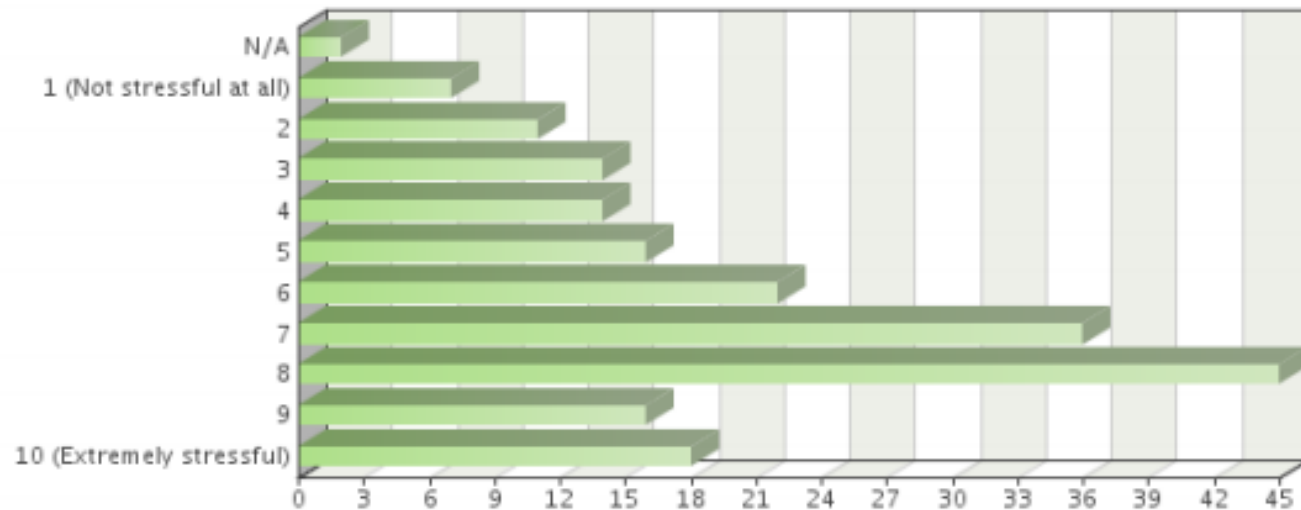


N=200

Stress

Question 71

On a scale of 1-10, where 1=not stressful at all and 10= extremely stressful, how stressful is your work as a contract instructor?



Stress and insecurity

- “It isn't necessarily the work itself. It's dealing with past, present, and future all at the same time that makes things stressful. In some regards, I am still dealing with my previous course at a different university, my current job, and also trying to secure employment for the winter term.”
- “The work, and workload, aren't particularly stressful - I'd be doing equivalent work as a tenure-stream, just of a different (and more personally beneficial kind). The insecurity, not knowing if I'll be able to provide for my family in a few months, having to move every few years, etc., is extremely stressful.”

Stress and Insecurity

“It's stressful not knowing if you will have a job next year. You can't plan for the future and lay down roots in a community. You know you are delaying retirement, since you are not contributing to a pension plan.”

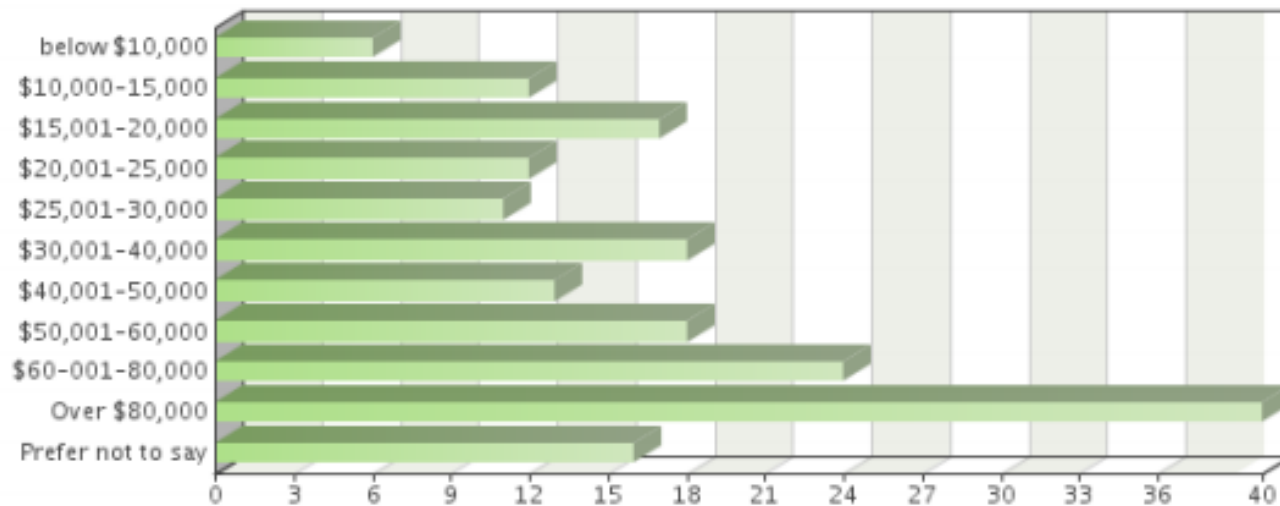
Money Matters

- 62% don't think they're paid fairly;
- several pointed out the hourly rate—usually way below minimum wage, when they really do the math);
- Several pointed out that NS wages are much lower than in other provinces;
- Many used the word “exploitation” throughout the survey;
- But in the comments they explain that the *amount* of pay is less important than not knowing how long it will continue.

Money Matters

Question 85

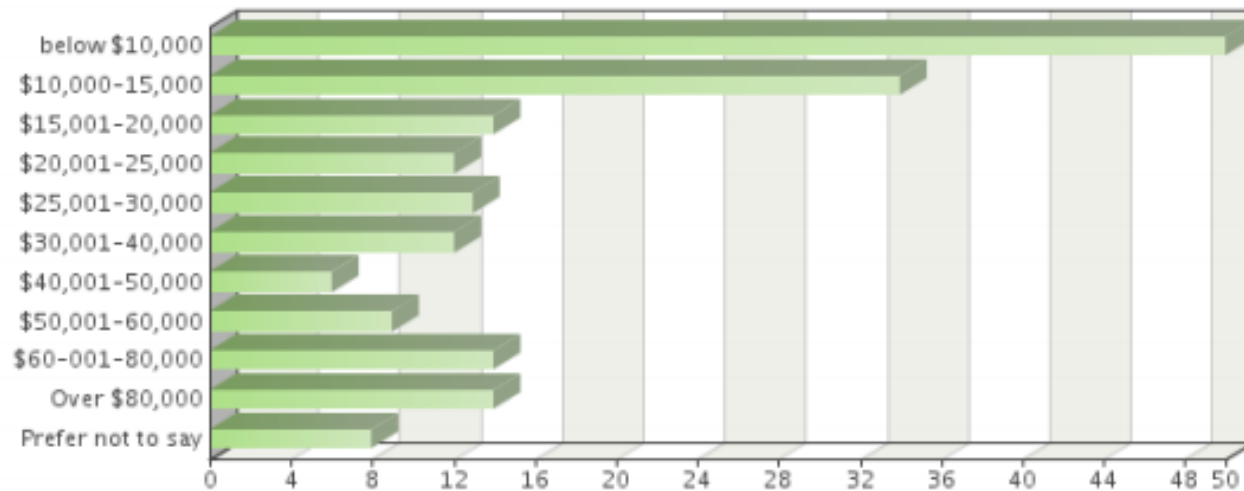
To the best of your knowledge, what will your total personal yearly before-tax income, from all sources, be in 2015?



Money Matters

Question 86

Approximately how much of your yearly before-tax income will be from your employment as a contract instructor?



The Grind

- 24% actively working on submissions to peer-reviewed academic journals; 9% on peer-reviewed academic book manuscripts
- 11% applying for external research grants
- 17% serve on at least one departmental committee; 20% attend departmental meetings (15% are not invited).
- 2 department chairs (!!!), 10 undergraduate advisors and 14 other roles (ethics advisor, honours coordinator, etc.). Only 10 were remunerated for this work.
- Access to conference/research travel funding and allowances for necessary supplies (e.g. computers): insufficient at best. Sufficient access to library loans and an email address.

Today's Work Ethic?

“Just as the Protestant ethic encouraged workers to treat their work *as if it were* a calling, today one noteworthy management technique involves asking workers to approach their work *as if it were* a career” (72). **It's not, in both cases; it's not, but approach it *as if it were!***

Kathi Weeks, The Problem with Work (2011)

Aspiration and Pessimism

- On *average*, respondents had applied for 13 TT jobs and 5 LTAs to date.
- 47% *want* a tenure track job.
- Most were willing to relocate to another city/town in NS or another province in Canada for a TT job.
- 65% of them said it was “very unlikely” they would get a TT job within 2 years. A common sentiment:
 - “My eleven years as a contract instructor have added age and a ‘stain’ I think, to my reputation.”
 - “I think I am now too far from my PhD...mostly they are looking for young researchers soon after their PhD”

“I prefer to be realistic.”

- Of the 30% who said they *do not* want a TT job, reasons varied:
 - “I’m too old”
 - “The system is broken”
 - “Not qualified” / No PhD
 - “Retired”
 - “Don’t want to do research”

Advice to aspiring TT professors

- buy a lottery ticket
- Throw out all hopes of work-life balance (especially if they identify as a woman--don't have kids!)
- Magic? Prayer?
- Be male and never disagree with anybody who is tenured.
- Marry a TT professor

What keeps them going?

Almost everyone said that what they liked most was their interactions with students—helping them learn, watching them grow, learning from them.

“I love teaching, I adore my students. It feels incredibly satisfying when I know that I've explained a difficult concept in a relevant, lucid, and interesting way. I truly believe that my students enjoy my class, and that makes me proud.”

Framing Generational Impacts

- Generations as age-defined groups? (We have another word for that: *cohort*.)
- More interesting: Generation's "relational" faces:
 - As classes (in themselves or for themselves)
 - As the "pivot" on which history turns
 - As the intersection of biography and history
 - As kinship structures of exchange and interdependence over time

Generational Interests

- **“Employers have historically used differentiations within the labour pool to divide and rule”** (Harvey, 2005:168). (Part-time vs. full time? Old vs. new?)
- Different groups also seek to **“monopolize skills and, through collective action and the creation of appropriate institutions, seek to regulate the labour market to protect their interests”** (Harvey, cited in Caraway, 2016:260).

The “kinship exchanges” of teachers and students

Contract instructors “embody and perpetuate” the political economy of the modern university.

What impact does this have on our students as citizens, workers, “the next generation” being socialized and taught our culture(s)?

Generations and Relationships to Work

- Faithful: believe hard work → success, borne out in their own experience; “live to work” and benefit from it. Work is fulfilling.
- Ambivalent: hard work → success, but somehow it didn't pan out for them; “live to work” but feel cheated and alienated from work. Work is not fulfilling.
- Disaffected: hard work no guarantee of success or fulfillment; better to find those things outside work.

(Foster, 2013)

The way forward

- Fight for higher wages? *Not without or before fighting for security.*
- Return to postwar consensus? Tenure track for all/more? *We cannot undo the deskilling that has happened.*
- Overwork for some and starvation for others
OR a redistribution of work.
- Basic income?