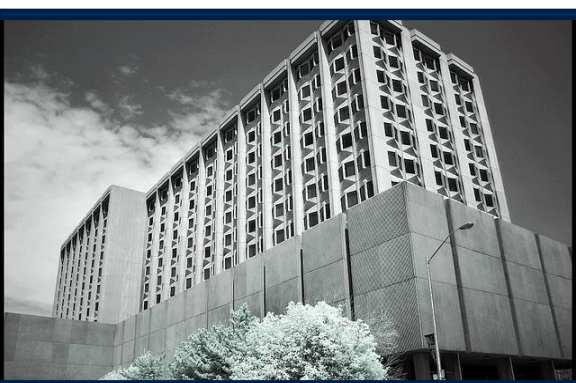


Governing Precarity: The “Problem” of Sessional Lecturers and the Role of University Governance



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Problems and Solutions

1. What are the problems associated with sessional teaching as a form of precarious work?
2. What role might university governance (broadly defined) play in addressing these problems?



The Problems

- Precarious work problem: Contractual nature of employment relationship
- Quality of teaching problem: Employing sessional lecturers lowers the quality of teaching or academic programs
- Support of teaching problem: Sessional instructors do not receive the support they need
- Academic working environment problem: Sessional instructors are not regarded as legitimate members of the academic community.



Precarious Work Problem

- The problem is embedded/framed in the contractual relationship between the University and the employee.
- A function of neo-liberal reforms
- Labour issue
- Governed by management, labour relations, governing boards



Quality of Teaching Problem

- Assumption that hiring sessional faculty will reduce the quality of teaching
 - Because full-time, permanent faculty are better teachers (in the classroom)
 - Because the part-time nature of their work means that students have less contact and receive less support (outside the classroom)
- Major concern of public, government, accrediting bodies



Quality of Teaching Problem

- Little research to support assumption that sessional lecturers are “Second-class teachers”
- Sessional faculty report that there may be access/support issues given limited availability



Quality of Teaching Problem

- This is a researchable problem that should be taken up by academic governance (department, faculty, senate)
- What does the employment of increasing numbers of sessional instructors mean for the quality of our programs?
- What can we learn from peer and student evaluations of teaching?
- Do students perceive differences?



Quality of Support Problem

- Sessional instructors do not receive the support that they need:
 - Ongoing access to LMS/email/library
 - Space to meet students
 - Educational development
- Some responsibility must be assumed by departments, faculties, support units



Academic Working Environment Problem

- Sessional lecturers are “invisible”
- Often excluded from program/department meetings
- May not be regarded as legitimate members of the academic community of the unit
- Requires action at the department level



The Problem

- Positioning the problem as a labour issue leads to the assumption that it can only be addressed as a labour issue (management, governing boards)
- Many of the problems need to be considered at the unit level (quality, support, working environment) by department chairs and collegial processes
- Voice in governance (at the local, faculty and central levels)

