

Untangling management spin on college faculty salaries

By Paddy Musson and Phil Cunnington

The strike by Ontario college faculty is not about salaries.

When talks broke off March 6, the two sides were not far apart on wage costs. Management was offering wage hikes of three per cent a year, more or less. The union was seeking four per cent a year, more or less.

When the strike ends, salaries will rise by three or four per cent a year, more or less.

The real sticking point in these talks is quality. The union wants smaller classes, more faculty, and more faculty time for each student. It's what the Rae Commission recommended. It's what Premier McGuinty insisted on when he promised \$6.2 billion in new money for post-secondary education.

Nonetheless, college management can only talk about one thing. The colleges say, *ad nauseam*, that their offer will bring salaries to \$94,277 by 2009.

They keep repeating this number to make it look like the strikers are rich and unreasonable. If only!

Right now, the starting salary for a college instructor is \$32,077 a year (Yes, you read that right). Getting from the bottom to the top rate of \$54,459 takes **10** years.

The starting salary for professors, counselors, and librarians is \$44,285 a year. (Yes, you read that right). Getting from the bottom to the top rate takes **18** years.

The top step on the salary grid for professors pays \$82,299. However, just 27 per cent of faculty are actually at this level. Most teachers, counsellors, and librarians are nowhere near it.

College management uses the \$94,277 number to imply that hiring new faculty costs too much. In fact, new faculty start at or near the bottom of the grid. Sadly, college hiring practices over the last decade mean only about 14 per cent of faculty are in the bottom half of the pay grid. As senior faculty retire, a steady influx of new hires would actually bring average salary costs down.

A realistic estimate of the cost of a new hire is \$70,000 a year, including benefits. For \$70,000, students and taxpayers get the services of a well-schooled professional who can help turn Ontario's young people into skilled, effective participants in today's knowledge economy. It's good value for money.

Besides trashing the strikers, management's fixation on full-time salaries serves another purpose: to hide their exploitation of part-time faculty.

About 2,000 of the 9,100 striking faculty members are "partial-load" faculty, teaching seven to 12 hours a week. They are paid by the hour, and only for the hours they teach. They don't get paid for course preparation. They don't get paid for course evaluation. They don't get paid to talk to students outside of class.

Partial-load faculty are far from well off. A typical partial load professor with 10 years service, teaching nine hours a week, 32 weeks a year, would earn just over \$23,000 annually.

"Part-time" faculty are even worse off. About 6,000 part-timers are teaching one or two courses at our colleges.

Part-timers are not on strike. Because of an inexplicable oddity of Ontario law, they can't unionize. As a result, their pay rates are unregulated and vary widely. Many students are surprised to learn that the prof who prepares their course, answers their e-mails, meets them after class, gives feedback on assignments, and decides their mark is earning the princely sum of \$120 a week – for a credit course on their transcript.

Another 800 or so "sessional" professors are also paid by the hour, for in-class time only. They may actually teach full-time, but sessionals are barred from unionizing, too. They're underpaid and overworked as a result.

The demand by faculty that college management hire more faculty can only help part-timers **and** students. A full-timer with reasonable class sizes who is paid for all of the 44 hours a week he or she works has more time for preparation, evaluation, and student feedback. That means a better learning experience, and a better education, for each and every college student.

Which, by the way, is what the strike is really about.

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