

Compromising Quality

How Ontario is betraying its community
college students – and the people who help
them learn

I believe in

FAIRNESS

for part-time college workers!

*Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the
Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology*

Spring 2007

Bad jobs for part-time college staff mean a poorer education for all college students

By Roger Couvrette

Ontario community college students are being ripped off.

Over one-half of the college staff whose job it is to help students learn do not have the support they need to do the best job possible.

Because of a bizarre and out-of-date Ontario law, it is illegal for community college faculty and support staff to become union members. For students, this means that the people who help them learn have extremely poor wages and working conditions. And as this document shows in detail, poor working conditions for staff mean bad learning conditions for students.

Students are paying the price.

Compromising Quality tells the story of Ontario's college part-timers. In their own words, they tell how the way their college treats them has a profound effect on the quality of the education their students receive.

Education is our future. When our college students don't get the education they deserve, Ontario pays the price for years. And years. And years.

Luckily, there is a way out. You can help.

Educating yourself is the first step. Get to know the issues by reading this document. Then visit www.collegeworkers.org to join our campaign to win fair treatment for part-time college workers in Ontario.

Working together, we can make it happen – and stop students from being ripped off once and for all.

Roger Couvrette is President of the Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology



“When our college students don't get the education they deserve, Ontario pays the price for years”

Compromising Quality: How Ontario is betraying its community college students – and the people who help them learn

Contents

Bad jobs for part-time college faculty mean a poorer education for all college students ..	1
Ontario colleges are underfunded – and not just a little	3
Ontario colleges have cut costs by hiring more part-time faculty	3
Why colleges take advantage of part-time and sessional workers	4
Who’s a “part-timer”?	5
Doesn’t the law violate the constitution (or something)?	6
Part-time employees and graduation rates	7
The role of support staff in quality education	9
Compromising Quality: True stories of part-time teaching and learning	10
Mark Dion teaches science and health	12
Leanne Booth is a bookstore clerk	13
Samantha Jones is a customer service representative	14
Susan Cue teaches English as a Second Language	15
Anita Samskara teaches computer science	17
Dolores Finnegan is a test administrator	18
April Tempo is an educational assistant	19
Rebecca Wise teaches psychology and social work	20
Cindy Reasons teaches ESL and Continuing Education	21
Elaine Stein works and teaches as a technologist helping students with special needs and learning disabilities	23
Bill Smith teaches occupational health and safety	23
Stephanie Pro teaches English and writing	25
Rhonda Chong teaches Liberal Arts	26
George Electric teaches electrical trades	28
Holly Withers teaches computer science and English	29
Marsha Wellread teaches screenwriting	30
Summary	32
Recommendations for improvement	34
The OPSECAAT- OPSEU campaign	36
Questions and answers on the OPSECAAT - OPSEU campaign to make joining a union legal for college part-timers	Appendix

Ontario colleges are underfunded – and not just a little

Ontario has the second-highest per capita income of any province in Canada – second only to oil-rich Alberta.

If you had to guess, where would you say Ontario ranks among the provinces on per-student spending on community colleges? Are we first? Second? Fifth?

How about ninth?

It's incredible but true: Ontario's college funding per student is 9th among Canadian provinces. Among 60 U.S. states and Canadian provinces, we're ranked 47th.

It wasn't always like this. But beginning in the late 1980s, just as the demand for college education skyrocketed, government funding dried up. The recession of the early 1990s, followed by the election of the Mike Harris Conservatives in 1995, led to deep funding cuts.

New funding since 2004 has brought per-student funding in Ontario colleges up to 80 per cent of the national average, according to ACAATO, the colleges' lobby group. But we're still number nine in Canada.

Colleges have cut costs by hiring more part-time staff

As funding per student fell, the colleges went looking for ways to cut costs, and cut they did. Here's what ACAATO said in a 2006 report:

*This prolonged period of constrained resources has driven **reductions** in the amount of instructional time for students, **reduced** numbers of full-time faculty and staff, **reduced** academic support services, and **constrained** investments in learning resources and information technology.... Over the 15 years from 1988-89 to 2003-04, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students in Ontario colleges rose 53%, while the number of full-time faculty fell 22%.¹ (emphasis added)*

Ontario's college funding per student is 9th among Canadian provinces

¹ Ontario Colleges: Building a unique 21st century competitive advantage. Toronto: Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, February 2006, pp. 11-12.

*Today's
community
colleges employ
more part-timers
than full-timers....
Over 17,000
part-timers are
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across Ontario*

The colleges have used many methods to cut costs. Their favourite method by far has been to hire more and more part-time faculty and support staff.

Ontario operates 24 community colleges serving 150,000 students at any given time. These students are taught and supported by:

- ❑ 9,100 full-time faculty;
- ❑ 7,100 full-time support staff; and
- ❑ 1,800 full-time administrative staff (i.e., managers).

At one time, virtually all college employees worked full time. But today, the colleges employ more part-timers than full-timers. For most of the year, over 17,000 part-timers are on the job across Ontario. Based on October 2005 numbers, these include at least:

- ❑ 6,000 faculty teaching credit courses for six hours or fewer per week;
- ❑ 2,000 faculty teaching non-credit ("continuing education") courses for six hours or fewer per week;
- ❑ 750 "sessionals" who teach more than 12 hours a week but who have not worked more than 12 months of the last 24;
- ❑ 4,100 support staff working 24 hours or fewer per week; and
- ❑ 3,700 student hires working as support staff.

Why colleges take advantage of part-time and sessional workers (and how they get away with it)

Almost all part-time and sessional workers get paid less than full-timers who do the same job. Part-timers don't get health care, dental care, or life insurance benefits. They have no job security, and when they lose their jobs, they don't get severance pay.

It's no wonder colleges want to hire as many part-timers as possible: They're cheap.

Through union action, full-timers have been able to bargain good jobs. Part-timers can't do that, for one reason and one reason only: It is against the law for Ontario college part-timers to be

Who's a "part-timer"?

The *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* specifically excludes certain employees from union rights. Here's what we mean by "part-timer":

- part-time faculty (six hours or fewer of teaching a week);
- part-time faculty (Continuing Education, six hours or fewer of teaching a week);
- sessional faculty (more than 12 hours of teaching a week on a temporary contract for one or two semesters);
- part-time faculty working as counsellors and librarians;
- part-time support staff (24 hours or fewer a week); and
- student support staff (24 hours or fewer a week).

Sessional faculty cannot work more than 12 months in 24. If they do, the position must be converted to a full-time (unionized) faculty position.

Strangely, one group of part-time workers can be union members. "Partial-load" faculty are paid for seven to 12 teaching hours per week. Because they are unionized, they are paid on a wage grid in the OPSEU collective agreement. They also have employer-paid extended health insurance, a tuition subsidy, statutory holiday pay, and other benefits.

Under the collective agreement, partial-load faculty have the same rights no matter what college they work at. The wages and working conditions of other part-timers, meanwhile, vary widely – from college to college and within individual colleges. Many partial load faculty find themselves part-time one session, sessional another, and partial load another.

represented by a union.

The *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act*, over 30 years old, specifically excludes some categories of college employees from union membership (see box, above).

Sound unfair? It is. Ontario is the only province in Canada where it is illegal for college part-timers to unionize.

Inside Ontario, almost every kind of worker – with the exception of farm workers – can join a union. In the education sector, all faculty and support staff at school boards can unionize; so can all faculty and support staff at universities.

Ontario is the only province in Canada where it is illegal for college part-timers to unionize

Today, all colleges are involved in joint ventures with universities. In some cases, unionized university part-timers are working side-by-side with non-union college part-timers. Without exception, the unionized part-timers are much better off. And it's all because of the law.

To add insult to injury, college part-time workers are excluded from some of the basic legal protections of the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA). For example, college part-timers do not have the legal right to statutory holiday pay, vacations, or vacation pay.

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Doesn't the law violate the constitution (or something)?

The discrimination against part-time college workers under the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* is so obviously unfair that a lot of people can't believe it's legal.

In 1948, the United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration says, in Article 23, that "Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests." Canada signed the Declaration, but the Declaration is not law in Canada.

In 1982, Canada passed the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter guarantees the right to "freedom of association," but in test cases so far, the courts have not interpreted that to mean the right to bargain collectively.

The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination against people on the basis of "race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, disability or the receipt of public assistance." The Code makes no mention of work status.

In November 2006, a committee of the International Labour Organization (ILO), a UN body, reviewed the Ontario law. The ILO decision said that "the Committee fails to see any reason why the principles on the basic rights of association and collective bargaining afforded to all workers should not also apply to part-time employees" and urged Ontario to change the law.

Unfortunately, the ILO ruling has no legal force in Canada.

Part-time employees and graduation rates

By Scott Jaschik

If community colleges want to see more students graduate or finish programs, what should institutions do? Add new testing or assessment programs?

There may be a simple answer. A national analysis of graduation and program completion rates at community colleges has found that institutions with higher percentages of full-time faculty members have higher completion rates. The study was conducted by Dan Jacoby, the Harry Bridges Professor of Labor Studies at the University of Washington, whose paper on the research is forthcoming in the *Journal of Higher Education*.

The actual numbers vary by type of institution. But using regression analyses, Jacoby documented the relationship between full-time faculty and completion rates at community colleges with a variety of academic missions and student demographics. In an interview, he said he realized that graduation rates were an imperfect measure of community colleges because so many of their students don't seek degrees. So he looked broadly at measures of program completion, and believes that because some students do want to finish degrees, the analysis is a good measure of student success.

While the use of adjuncts¹ is widespread and growing in all sectors of higher education, it is particularly prevalent at two-year institutions. In many cases, community colleges seek out part-timers who are professionals in various fields to teach career-related courses. But community colleges also fill many sections (a majority in some subject areas on some campuses) with part timers. Administrators frequently say that given their institutions' enrollment growth and tight budgets, they have little choice.

¹The term "adjunct" used in this article refers to part-time and sessional faculty who do not have full-time jobs.

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“Many adjuncts don’t have offices, aren’t on campus when they aren’t teaching, and don’t have the consistent involvement in departments that makes them able to fully help students”

Jacoby said that he hoped his research might prompt more reflection on this practice. “People need to realize that the performance of colleges is not indifferent to the use of part timers,” he said. “By having a lot of part-timers, the college becomes less effective,” he said.

A former part-timer himself, Jacoby stressed that he didn’t think part-time instructors were any less effective in the classroom or less intelligent than their full-time counterparts. But other realities no doubt kick in: Many adjuncts don’t have offices, aren’t on campus when they aren’t teaching, and don’t have the consistent involvement in departments that makes them able to fully help students, he said.

Keith Hoeller, co-founder of the Washington State Part-Time Faculty Association, said he thought Jacoby’s findings were quite significant. “There is a fiction that you can cut costs with lots of adjuncts,” Hoeller said. “There’s a sense that as long as you have someone in front of the classroom in class hours, everything else is fine.”

Hoeller said that an important fact to consider is that low program completion rates are expensive — to students and their families who have paid tuition and to taxpayers who have subsidized instruction. Everyone saves money if students move through the system, Hoeller said, so the current use of part timers may not actually be saving money.

The study is also a reminder, he said, that there is a middle ground between having a full-time faculty and paying adjuncts for time leading classes. He predicted that the graduation rate gap would disappear if adjuncts were paid for time on campus generally, so they could have more office hours, more time to meet with students, and be more fully part of the campuses where they teach.

“Right now adjuncts are being underutilized,” he said. “Colleges are just paying them for classroom time, while tenured faculty earn for all hours.” If colleges started paying part-timers for non-classroom work, he said, “We would be happy to do equal work for equal pay.”

The role of support staff in quality education

By Jean Fordyce

The thousands of people who work as support staff in Ontario's colleges are dedicated to one common goal: to make sure students get the best education possible. Here are just a few of the jobs support staff perform to help students:

- **Technicians and technologists** run labs and assist students with equipment so that computer hardware and software work the way they are supposed to. But the work of technicians and technologists is about much more than computers. In culinary labs, for example, technicians and technologists work with students to make sure student work stations have the right ingredients available for Chef or Culinary Management courses.
- **In Early Childhood Education, support staff** work directly with students and the children, showing students how to set up day programs for children and evaluating students' performance in lab settings.
- **Library Technicians** help students with research skills and help them find the information they need for courses and assignments.
- **Reproduction Equipment Operators** provide students with copies of course materials they need. This includes specialized copying such as blueprints for architectural students.
- **Support Service Officers** are there when students need them. Student Success Advisors help students succeed by teaching them good study habits and how to make work plans to get them through their studies successfully.
- **Co-op Officers** match employers to students and students to employers in co-op programs. The officers visit workplaces and evaluate students' on-the-job learning.
- **Placement Officers** help students find jobs after graduation.
- The work of **Clerks and Secretaries** forms the backbone of every student's college experience. Financial Aid Officers work with students to help them get financial aid from the Ontario Student Assistance Plan. Admissions clerks help students get

The full-time staff who are left behind spend too much of their time training new part-timers instead of doing their own work and helping students succeed.

into classes, pay their fees, drop out of courses, and get refunds. Secretaries help students understand the full range of college policies and procedures, e.g., how to appeal a low grade.

College support staff who work 24 hours a week or less are doing their jobs under less-than-ideal conditions. Part-time support staff have lower pay than their full-time counterparts, no benefits, and zero job security. As a result, many skilled and knowledgeable people quit their college jobs at the first opportunity. The full-time staff who are left behind spend too much of their time training new part-timers instead of doing their own work and helping students succeed.

Jean Fordyce is president of OPSEU Local 109 at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario.

Compromising Quality:

*True stories of part-time work
and learning*

The stories on the pages that follow give a part-timers' view of college life. They show, better than numbers ever could, how both staff and students pay a high price for the colleges' cost-cutting ways.

Staff members' names have been changed for their protection.

Mark Dion

teaches science and health

As an instructor in classes that equip students with the basic scientific literacy they need to go on to programs like nursing, Mark plays a significant and foundational role in the lives of many students. He has a Master's degree in biology and professional laboratory experience. Since beginning at the college six years ago, Mark has also worked within the college to improve and essentially overhaul the bits and pieces of curriculum he inherited. He was not paid for this.

“We’re propping up a rotten system just because we can’t bear not to be professional. I mean, we’re training future nurses – it’s kind of important”

Despite the fact that Mark and several other part-timers have played a major role in designing his college’s basic sciences program, Mark cannot cite a single example of a part-timer at his college being promoted to full-time status.

You shouldn’t have to apply for a job at which you’ve already been putting in full-time hours for five or six years. This is just unprofessional. There is no consideration of what part-timers face, and that things can – and should – be done differently.... This amounts to a very serious human rights issue.

Mark says he will not apply for full-time work at the college again. He is looking elsewhere. In the meantime, he is dealing with large class sizes – averaging between 30 and 35 students but sometimes as high as 50 – and the stress of having to work so many unpaid hours. By his own estimates, Mark’s hourly wage is actually about 25 per cent of what the college pays. All of this takes place in an environment where there is no room to even offer constructive criticism, or to organize a union so that part-timers can press to improve things.

We look at each other, and we say that we just can’t bear it. We’re propping up a rotten system just because we can’t bear not to be professional. I mean, we’re training future nurses – it’s kind of important that we go above and beyond.

Leanne Booth

Bookstore clerk

Leanne has worked in the college bookstore for 14 years. She's demoralized, and so, she says, are her other part-time co-workers. It's not necessarily just the pay that's the problem (she's had a recent raise, but this was offset by a loss of hours). And, unlike some part-timers, she has some benefits and is part of the pension plan.

The problem is this: After devoting almost half her working life to the college, Leanne hasn't seen any commitment from her employer in return.

In the past, Leanne has worked as many as 32-38 hours per week (though part-timers are only supposed to work 24) but now she sees her hours dropping below 18 per week. And that's just the quantifiable part.

Leanne sees nepotism as the real problem in the workplace; a problem she has no power to change.

The friends of the bosses get the hours and the senior employees don't. This harms morale. If attitudes are negative, the students can sense this. It would also be good to have more customer service training, so we could better help the students.

One thing that would go a long way to change this, she says, is a union seniority list. Workers with 10 or 15 years on the job could finally achieve some security and certainty in their hours of work, instead of being shuffled around like pawns.

She has seen full-time jobs in the bookstore come and go, and has long since given up trying to apply. Ten years ago, she tried to apply for full-time work, but another person who she initially mentored in the job, a friend of the boss, got the position.

Leanne is a capable and dedicated worker, but she is tired of being patient. She wants real change in her work situation.

“The friends of the bosses get the hours and the senior employees don't. This harms morale. If attitudes are negative, the students can sense this.”

Samantha Jones

customer service representative

Samantha is a customer service representative in the Registrar's Office. This is her first year of work in the college, but already she sees the inequities faced by part-time support staff.

Fortunately, she has another job with a well-known retail chain, where she gets benefits. But she's not sure how long she can keep working two jobs just to make ends meet.

In her college job, Samantha has become an expert at multi-tasking. Not only does she work with students at the front desk, helping them get information about their courses and timetables, she also processes payments to the college and works at the call centre. It's really three jobs, she says.

Samantha is considered a part-timer, but works 54 hours every two weeks (24 one week and 30 the next) so technically, she should be paying OPSEU dues and be covered under the support staff collective agreement. But she isn't.

This means no benefits, no student discount, and another year to wait before she joins the pension plan. It also means she works next to a full-timer who starts at four dollars an hour more than she did. Besides having to work two jobs, Samantha finds a number of on-the-job frustrations as well.

It's satisfying to help the students, but it's frustrating that sometimes when the students come back for help, I'm not there or I am doing one of the other jobs. With the telephone system we have in place, I'm virtually unreachable. I have no way to tell when I have messages. It's hard to actually help the students.

Working in the registrar's office is instructive in other ways. She sees the number of students who pay their fees and then drop out because they get no support from the college.

"I'm virtually unreachable. I have no way to tell when I have messages. It's hard to actually help the students."

You really see what the college is all about. The students pay their fees and get nothing for it. It would be interesting to see how many people fail and drop out or are forced to repeat courses and pay again.

Despite this, Samantha enjoys her work, and hopes to get on full-time. But there's a vicious circle at work here. Working two jobs is tough, and she's had to take sick time, which of course is not covered by her college employer. Not only that, but she suspects that the college might not consider her for full-time work, because of the number of sick days she has taken.

Susan Cue

teaches English as a Second Language

Susan is passionate about what she does. She is a dedicated young teacher, firm and unwavering in her belief that education is the foundation of real social progress. With over seven years' teaching experience in Canada and abroad, fully certified to teach ESL and with an M.A. in linguistics, Susan isn't just passionate, she's experienced and qualified too. And while finding work teaching ESL in Ontario's college system wasn't initially hard, Susan has been subject to the "10-Month Rule": To avoid hiring teachers on a full-time basis, several of Ontario's colleges offer close to full-time hours, but for only 10 months out of any 24. This is because OPSEU's collective agreement (for full-timers) requires that sessional instructors who work more than 12 out of any 24 month period must be converted to full-time positions.

While some part-time faculty find temporary work elsewhere, or travel the circuit between colleges, most don't last long, says Susan.

There's something very demeaning about working for an organization that is so willing to use and abuse you, to leave you stranded for a full year every 10 months. I'm a young teacher, and I really like my job, but I'm going to leave this industry – I'm simply not willing to waste my passion. Having to deal with the insecurity is impossible. I don't have kids yet, but

"I really like my job, but I'm going to leave this industry – I'm simply not willing to waste my passion"

if I did, this would be intolerable.

When I was hired, I was given the impression that there was an abundance of work, and then other sessionals told me about The Rule, that there was only an abundance of work every 12 months.

The Rule, according to Susan, has a serious impact on quality:

The teaching could be so much better. My second term was miles better than my first – it's just common sense that practice makes perfect. And I'm still continuing to improve. Having someone slam the brakes on your progress would throw any teacher off.

Class sizes, particularly for a language class, are certainly higher than they should be and the amount of unpaid prep and marking time she is forced to work in order to provide a high-quality experience is high. Susan puts in about 12-15 hours a week outside of her 20 hours of in-class time.

Anita Samskara

teaches computer science

Anita comes to college teaching after 16 years as a technologist at one of Canada's largest corporations. Anita's combination of skill and experience have made her a valuable commodity to the college. Nonetheless, she feels used, not valued:

You have no job security. You may as well be a slave.... I could be gone tomorrow. You don't have any rights.... My fate is totally in the hands of the administration. I'd be happier if I was a volunteer, because you don't have the pressures – it's easier to give your time than to constantly feel cheated. Some other lucky organization is going to get me, because I don't want to put up with this.

Between preparation and marking time Anita estimates that she makes little more than \$10 an hour.

“There's something very demeaning about working for an organization that is so willing to use and abuse you”

At the core of Anita's frustration is the reality that part-timers are never consulted when courses are re-designed, they never receive professional development opportunities, and they have no ways to voice concerns or criticism without significant risk to themselves. The end result is a system in which turnover is high, frustration is constant, and insecurity and anxiety are just a part of the job.

This just doesn't make any sense, treating people like robots or slaves. It really has an impact on our ability to teach, to excel. And if we can't excel, our students can't. Yet the powers that be just protect the system. They use and abuse their power. I feel a real sense of fear and insecurity offering up even the mildest of criticisms at work. I feel like I might be targeted.

In the private sector, Anita spent over a decade as a shop steward at a private sector union. She knows how much better it is to work in an environment where workers have rights.

Conditions at the college are like 19th century conditions. This is just not a responsible way to let things go.

Dolores Finnegan

is a test administrator

Dolores has worked as a test administrator in a large college for six years. Her job is considered "permanent part-time" – she works 24 hours from Tuesday to Friday every week.

She has not had a raise in four years. Needless to say, she finds it hard to live on \$460 a week in a major urban centre.

Out of that I have to pay \$45 every two weeks for parking, but that is nothing compared to what I have to pay for personal medications per month. I am not covered by any benefit plan, so I have to pay hundreds of dollars each month in pharmaceutical costs (\$162 a month just for one specific medication), never mind all other medical and dental costs.

An equivalent full-time job at the college would give her higher wages and access to a benefit plan. It would also give her job

"I know I am a good worker; I work my butt off and everyone knows that. Why couldn't the college just give someone a chance to break through the barriers?"

security and proper access to the Colleges Pension Plan. Right now she cannot afford to have any amount taken out of her paycheque towards the pension even though her service makes her eligible.

Recently the college hired two retired full-timers back into this program instead of encouraging Dolores to apply for the job. She has been told that she does not have the necessary computer skills to apply for the full-time jobs but she has indicated to her boss that she is more than willing to take courses if necessary. Although Dolores gets on well with her immediate supervisor, he can do whatever he wants, she says.

I know I am a good worker; I work my butt off and everyone knows that. Why couldn't the college just give someone a chance to break through the barriers?

"I want some sense of security in my life. At present, we could all be fired tomorrow if the boss didn't like us!"

April Tempo

is an educational assistant

April has been at the college for eight years and she is tired of having no voice at work. The only person she can go to if there is a problem is her boss. Although he is constantly saying workers can go to him if ever there is a problem, when they do he puts them down and says their "attitude" is bad.

It's a question of respect and protection. I just want to know that there is someone there for me when I have a problem. And I want some sense of security in my life. At present, we could all be fired tomorrow if the boss didn't like us!

In April's department, there are two full-time and two part-time educational assistants. April works one-on-one with students with disabilities for 20 hours per week. The students have regularly scheduled hours which are slotted into a calendar. However, April does not actually get paid until the students have confirmed these hours with the department. Sometimes it is three weeks before the student confirms, even though she has been working with them the whole time. If a student misses two dates on the calendar, they are ousted from the service. This affects April's hours and her pay – she loses those hours for the term. As well, April gets paid at least \$5 an hour less than the full-time person doing the same job.

Some of the other things she has witnessed lately have made her angry about the overall injustice within the system. One woman she knew has just “quit” after 13 years at the college. Management hired a new person to do the very job that she had been doing for 13 years and told her she would get the “leftover” hours!

They are getting more and more sinister in their dealings with us here. Recently they hired a full-time invigilator working 35 hours a week. That work used to be divided among other part-timers... They have been reduced from 24 hours per week to 10 hours – suddenly, just like that, no warning, nothing! And, of course, they did not have any rights to the job; there is something very rotten in the system and the way people are being treated.

April has been standing up against management and has the support of the OPSEU support staff local at the college. As a result, some changes have been made in recent years. But the main concern is that part-time staff never know from year to year whether they will have a job or not.

You have no idea how this affects all of us. They could take our jobs away tomorrow and the insecurity of this is really wearing us down. We need the protection of a union for security – and for some kind of seniority. Currently, if they like you, they will give you hours; if not, too bad!

Rebecca Wise

teaches psychology and social work

Rebecca’s first year of college teaching has been an eye-opener – so much so that she’s not sure there’ll be a second. Rebecca is well qualified to teach and has ample experience. But two Master’s degrees and seven years of teaching experience haven’t translated into a decent teaching environment.

Rebecca was hired just a week before she was to begin teaching a course she had never taught before. This meant she was forced to devote much more than full-time hours to getting ready. Of course, being well prepared and taking the time to offer more than multiple-choice tests to her students meant that the workload

“This college is potentially an amazing place. But now the system is so tense and exploitative that whatever potential there might be is being lost.”

issues she encountered didn't go away. By her own estimates Rebecca generally puts in two hours of preparation and marking time for every hour she spends in class, and this, she notes, doesn't include contact time and e-mail.

Rebecca has never had a class with fewer than 45 students, and she's had as many as 65 more than once. And while her efforts were recognized by full-time faculty, the administration offered no support or acknowledgement whatsoever.

I spent my entire Christmas holiday, I mean my ENTIRE Christmas holiday, getting prepared for my second semester, which I was, again, only told about very late in the term. For this there was no monetary or verbal acknowledgement. All I got was the sense that this was expected, it was the norm. And my experience and expertise were also never really used by the Administration; I just got a textbook and a set of learning outcomes, all of which I was never even asked about. I have valuable expertise and experience. I should be asked to contribute.

"I'm comfortable teaching part-time. I like the flexibility. But lots of people don't, and things don't operate very fairly. There should be a chance to unionize"

Rebecca's willingness to teach in Ontario's college system depends on having the protection of a union.

This college is potentially an amazing place. But now the system is so tense and exploitative that whatever potential there might be is being lost. I don't want to be subject to that kind of environment, particularly not in a capacity where I feel threatened every time I try to do something about it.

Cindy Reasons

teaches ESL and Continuing Education

Having been around Ontario's college system for 14 years, Cindy is comfortable negotiating the terrain:

After 14 years I know what to expect. I'm lucky – I know people and I know that I can find work. But if you don't know people,

things are much more difficult. That's why new people tend to have a difficult time. And it's probably why there are so few people that have been around for any length of time.

In her tenure at several colleges, Cindy has seen some objectionable practices: jobs that are never advertised, people whose contracts evaporate without explanation, and hiring decisions that are based on personal relationships.

My one colleague was never rehired by one of the previous administrators – they didn't get along. Since that administrator left, she's been able to find work with some consistency. She's very qualified, and gets good reviews. It was a personal thing.

Cindy estimates that she spends about 50 per cent as much time preparing and marking as she does in class. And she doesn't do what many other instructors do. She's simply not willing to make herself available to students any more than she absolutely has to – she refuses to bear the burden of an inequitable system.

Cindy has never had any professional development opportunities except for one unpaid afternoon at one of the colleges every semester – and not in anything focused on either ESL or continuing education. Cindy sees little chance of things improving significantly unless college part-timers can bargain collectively.

I just believe that things would be better. I'm comfortable teaching part-time. I like the flexibility. But lots of people don't, and things don't operate very fairly. There should be a chance to unionize.

Elaine Stein

works and teaches as a technologist helping students with special needs and learning disabilities

Elaine's work mostly revolves around helping students with special needs, or students who come to college not sufficiently familiar

"I'm paid for 24 hours, but I work 34 to 37. I have to be very flexible to meet the students' needs, to accommodate their schedules. I don't get paid for any of that, but if I'm around less, it does affect the students' performance"

with the basic software (like word-processing programs) to really excel. What this means is that Elaine is constantly trying to meet the needs and schedules of others, particularly since she is the only technologist at her satellite campus. If Elaine cannot make herself available when students are available, people fall through the cracks. And so, although she is only paid for the hours that she actually assists students, she is frequently forced to wait around between appointments.

“If I’m around less, it does affect the students’ performance.”

I’m paid for 24 hours, but I work 34 to 37. I have to be very flexible to meet the students’ needs, to accommodate their schedules. I don’t get paid for any of that, but if I’m around less, it does affect the students’ performance.

When it comes to professional development, Elaine says that the college’s rhetoric and the follow-through just don’t add up. All too often Elaine investigates and tries to pursue professional development courses only to find that whatever she decides to do is on her own time and with her own money.

For example, my boss encourages us to enhance our learning techniques, but I have to pay for it out of my pocket. I’m made promises about professional development, but it never happens. As soon as I start talking seriously about doing a course, the encouragement stops.

Fortunately, Elaine feels she has some room to offer constructive criticism. Though her boss is unwilling to provide Elaine with a full-time position, he does maintain an open door, and encourages Elaine to use it whenever she feels the need. But Elaine is less interested in therapy than in being able to translate her experience and advice into real improvements, and this just doesn’t happen.

I feel like I can offer some criticism but that it falls on deaf ears. My boss is more concerned about responding to the needs of his full-time unionized employees, the ones that have a grievance process available to them, before he responds to the needs of someone that he doesn’t have to rehire next semester.

Over her 10-year tenure at the college, Elaine has been relatively

happy because she enjoys the students and likes the work. But her patience has worn thin: She feels she isn't properly valued, respected, or included. And after so much time and energy, she is beginning to feel very insecure.

It's not the money – I mean, I want to be paid for the hours that I work, but what I get paid on an hourly basis is OK. What I really want is some protection, a little respect for my efforts. I'm working just as hard if not harder than some full-timers, and contributing my experience as well. I just feel that should be protected somehow.

Bill Smith

teaches occupational health and safety

Bill doesn't just teach the basics of reading, writing, and effective communication, he also teaches critical front-line skills to people who will one day be counted on to save lives. The sheer importance of his job should mean Bill gets the resources and support necessary to perform outstandingly, but that just isn't the case. There are normally about 20 students too many in each of his classes. Even when it comes to occupational health and safety, he just doesn't have the kind of time he believes is necessary to devote to each student.

When class sizes go up, Bill's wage remains the same. What this means is that while grading and preparation loads often increase, Bill doesn't see any additional support or pay. And the college keeps Bill on edge by moving him between sessional work and part-time work from semester to semester. He never knows what the coming semester holds.

To keep myself alive I've had to move back in with my parents. The way they treat their staff, the college really makes your life chaotic, constantly insecure. I mean, one semester I can support myself, and the next it's impossible. It doesn't really breed much in the way of incentive or loyalty or even confidence. You're constantly made to feel expendable.

“To keep myself alive I've had to move back in with my parents”

After three-and-a-half years of teaching, Bill is looking elsewhere for work.

This was good to get my feet wet, a little experience teaching. But this isn't a career. It's not a life anyone would want long-term...The way they're treating me now is absolutely intolerable. I may as well be working at McDonald's. That's the way I see it.

In terms of curriculum development, Bill is rarely consulted – textbooks are handed down along with outdated course outlines, and instructors are expected to fill in the blanks. When the support is there, Bill will go the extra mile, but when it isn't, he isn't willing to put in so many unpaid hours:

Last semester I was a sessional instructor, and because I wasn't constantly scrambling for cash, I was able to do a complete overhaul of the course. I updated everything and got rid of the old, outdated PowerPoints. But before that, and now, when I have been left without anything approaching full-time work, I'm simply not able to devote the time to keeping things current. Quality suffers, I know, but I don't have time to do unpaid work.

Despite obvious frustration, Bill notes that he's not the one who pays the largest price. "Students have become used to a kind-of customer service model, to the school as a factory," says Bill. "Their education gets cheapened. Their experience just isn't as good as it could be."

Stephanie Pro

teaches English and writing

Stephanie is a part-time instructor whose professional experience is what makes her invaluable. Her day job as a training and development specialist for the government means she is well-equipped to teach college students. Still, all her knowledge,

"What I really want is some protection, a little respect for my efforts. I'm working just as hard if not harder than some full-timers, and contributing my experience as well"

passion, and experience don't mean she can deliver quality education:

The systemic barriers to doing an outstanding job are huge. When every single one of the working conditions you encounter – from curriculum development, to class time, to contact hours, to office space – is designed first to save money, and only second to deliver quality, what do you think is going to happen to quality? You could bring in the very best teacher in the world and they'd still be hard pressed to do an outstanding job.

Stephanie was initially hired on short notice to teach four sections of the same course. While that meant Stephanie was classified as a partial-load instructor, and thus a member of the union, her position was made part-time in her second semester. From a workload of four classes she dropped to just one. Stephanie did an enormous amount of unpaid work on the front end, without any remuneration on the back end – not even the promise of continued employment.

When I was initially brought in, I had no idea what I needed to teach. With less than a week before classes began, I was simply handed a course outline and expected to generate a class on that basis. They didn't even give me a textbook. I spent hours and hours, all unpaid, preparing for four sections, only to have my income cut by 75 per cent the next semester.

Stephanie spends at least 11 hours a week working, of which only four hours are paid. Tied up with marking and preparation, Stephanie doesn't have time to maintain regular contact hours and can't always respond promptly to students' e-mails. "I just can't continue to do unpaid work," she says. Most part-timers suffer for other reasons, Stephanie says.

We have no staff meetings, no support for skills development, no level of commitment from the administration. I don't even really have a relationship with the administration, save for one of fear and apprehension. I don't really feel comfortable voicing my concerns, even though I'm not a shy person.

Stephanie won't consider the possibility of full-time work at the College where she works. "The environment there is just poisoned."

Compromising Quality • Spring 2007

"They could take our jobs away tomorrow and the insecurity of this is really wearing us down. We need the protection of a union for security – and for some kind of seniority. Currently, if they like you, they will give you hours; if not, too bad!"

Rhonda Chong

teaches Liberal Arts

“With less than a week before classes began, I was simply handed a course outline and expected to generate a class. They didn’t even give me a textbook”

Rhonda is upset and angry about the condition of part-timers at Ontario’s colleges. With eight years of experience in the public sector, Rhonda got used to human resources practices that were applied evenly and aimed at improving working conditions, not simply exploiting workers.

Things are so unbelievably arbitrary at the college. Administrators frequently twist the truth; they don’t offer feedback in professional ways, or through official channels. You hear rumours and you feel like you can’t trust anyone. And I’m not even talking about actual hiring practices. I have only been hired with little better than a week’s notice. And this is the norm, they’re so disorganized.

They keep promising me that there’s always an abundance of work. Next thing I know a colleague who was told exactly the same thing isn’t rehired because enrolment is down. Rather than share the load, certain individuals are targeted. Who’s to say I’m not next?

For Rhonda these practices are not only unethical, but also inefficient. “Smart, educated, capable people can only be fooled for so long,” she says. Rhonda isn’t willing to stick around for long unless she gets a full-time position. If she goes, she’ll take two graduate degrees, four years of teaching experience, and eight years as a senior government manager with her.

Rhonda feels it is difficult to reach every one of the 40-plus students she has in each class. She isn’t able to hold official office hours; she doesn’t have an office. So after class, in the hallways, Rhonda provides students with whatever time they need and she can spare. She spends at least two hours a week on the phone to students and responding to e-mails.

Rhonda’s time is also eaten into by unpaid orientation meetings

that (because she's interested in a full-time position) she feels obliged to attend. She has also undertaken a voluntary peer evaluation program which adds an additional 14 unpaid hours to each semester. Despite her remarkable level of commitment, Rhonda says she still can't meet the needs of her students, particularly those with special needs.

There are facilities available to students with special needs, but navigating them as a part-timer is close to impossible. It's time consuming and no one seems to care that we aren't full-time faculty, that we aren't paid anything extra for coordinating this kind of stuff. So there's unnecessary tension, and that makes the whole job more difficult.

George Electric

teaches electrical trades

As with so many trade-related skills, electrical work is not child's play. "Maybe it's obvious," says George, "but we have to worry about making things turn on and off safely, both during the installation and after. Where and how we run wires and cables and conduits is really significant stuff, and the details really matter."

After a lifetime spent working as a master electrician, George knows what he's talking about – fortunately for his students. Rather than relying on the income he earns from teaching as a college part-timer, George teaches because he enjoys the work and because he loves the students and loves seeing things done right and well.

To teach the critical skills a good electrician absolutely has to know, I should never have more than 35 students in a class, but I average around 42 and have been as high at 74. With 74 students in a class I'm concerned not just about how they'll do in terms of safety once they graduate; I'm concerned about safety during the class.

Despite years of experience George found himself initially putting in

*"Smart,
educated,
capable people
can only be
fooled for so
long"*

as many as three times as many hours outside of class as he was inside the classroom. And while that number has dropped, he doesn't see it as much of an improvement.

I do office hours by appointment. If they need me they can get hold of me. I make sure the students understand what the situation is. I don't depend on this, so I can tell myself that the prep-work is for my own enjoyment, for the students I work with. But if I depended on this stuff, you can bet I wouldn't be around for long. I'd get angry.

“With 74 students in a class I'm concerned not just about how they'll do in terms of safety once they graduate; I'm concerned about safety during the class”

Professional development is another area of significant concern for George. Constant change in his industry means that instructors need to stay current. And yet no resources are made available, nor is any money. More than this, teaching skills are not generally updated and developed, at least not unless part-timers take it on themselves without additional pay.

How do I keep updated if I don't have access to the skills development tools I need? This year was the first year that we got paid for an introductory session on some teaching aids – webCT and that sort of stuff. But you can't do much with an introduction, and nothing else was offered.

More upsetting for George, however, is the fact that part-timers have no mechanism of recourse.

The single worst concern is the lack of protection. My situation is kind of special in that I know the Dean and they asked me to come here. I didn't have to look for this work. But what if I have a beef with my upper level people? What do I do? What if I'm protected one semester when I'm partial-load and not the next when I'm a part-timer? It's a bad recipe.... I know a part-timer who came up to me after seeing me raise some concerns and he asked me, “Aren't you afraid that you aren't going to get work next semester?” That's what happens here – you have no

recourse. That's what messes with people's lives.

Holly Withers

teaches computer science and English

Holly has just finished her first year of teaching Computer Science and English and she's not sure she'll be back. Though she's passionate about teaching, the obstacles she's encountered early on in her career have made her wonder if the college system is for her.

I'm never going to pay back my student loans at the rate I'm getting paid. I'm nowhere near earning a living wage...with all the work that I'm putting into I'm making like two dollars an hour.

Outside of pay, the first issue that Holly is quick to raise is prep and marking time; she does not receive much in the way of support or advice, and got virtually no acknowledgement of her efforts to revise and update the course material she inherited.

I didn't quite understand it at the time I was hired. When I went into the English class I was supposed to have a week of meetings beforehand to get me prepared, but that never happened. I was just thrown the course outline and told "Here you go." I thought they'd have the first lesson or so, but there was nothing. That seems to be the norm, though. Anyway, I spent about three times as much time preparing and marking as I did actually teaching.

The computers on which she trains her students are "ancient" and the software was totally outdated, too.

I was told that I didn't need to change the curriculum, but that I was free to do so. I did it because the course was totally outdated. I was teaching students on outdated software and on outdated machines. I wanted to show students the skills that can help them to get ahead when they finish school. I just couldn't sit by and see them trained in irrelevant skills.

"Part-timers are never consulted when courses are re-designed, they never receive professional development opportunities, and they have no ways to voice concerns or criticism without significant risk to themselves"

Worse, Holly doesn't feel comfortable offering feedback to the college – she feels intensely insecure.

When things go wrong I I don't feel comfortable to offer any criticism. I know I'm nothing there. I'm entirely expendable.

Marsha Wellread

teaches screenwriting

“When I went into the English class I was supposed to have a week of meetings beforehand to get me prepared, but that never happened. I was just thrown the course outline and told ‘Here you go’.”

With degrees in art history and film production, a diploma from the National Film Centre, years of experience as a writer and director, and two years as a college instructor, “Marsha” is a valuable resource. But her skills can't be properly used at her college:

At the absolute most I should have 20 students in a class, but I often get classes with as many as 38 students in them. For a subject like creative writing, where it's important to offer detailed criticism, that's just insane.

Marsha feels she cannot possibly provide the care and attention her students need. Marsha works three times the number of hours she gets paid for, so her hourly wage is roughly one-third the rate specified in her contract.

The truth is, I simply can't afford the time to keep office hours – so I don't. To compensate, I've had to cut back on my in-class teaching time. I shorten my classes, have students do in-class assignments, and then rotate through the class so that I can spend some face-time with every student. Still, it's never enough.

Such conditions don't provide much time to build critical-thinking skills. Marsha also doesn't have the time to work on developing and enhancing her own skill set either. As a part-timer, Marsha gets no support whatsoever for skills development. Though her student and supervisory evaluations are constantly outstanding, Marsha feels she could do more. “It's sad that I don't work in an environment where I feel I have to room to do my best work, let alone grow and develop.”

Fortunately Marsha's department supervisor is a strong union activist

and she does not have to constantly fear for her job. Still, low pay means that Marsha doesn't spend any more time at the college than absolutely necessary:

I'm not part of a community here at this college. In fact, the work environment is absolutely poisoned. We're all demoralized by the conditions we encounter. And without childcare, or parking, or medical coverage, we're stressed out about other things too. So there is not really a strong feeling of collegiality at the college. I think we all feel pretty isolated, under-appreciated, and anxious to go.

Two weeks of directing work will pay me about the same at one semester of teaching. And while the work is no less stressful, it certainly isn't much more so, and then I get respect, support, and some benefits too. I can only allow myself to consider my work at the college a short-term thing. In the end, I'm going to take my experience and go somewhere else.

"The truth is, I simply can't afford the time to keep office hours – so I don't. To compensate, I've had to cut back on my in-class teaching time"

The OPSECAAT - OPSEU Campaign

In 2005, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union launched a campaign to improve the working lives of part-time and sessional employees at Ontario's community colleges. The goal of the campaign is to force a change to the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* to allow part-timers to unionize and bargain improvements for themselves.

Since the campaign began, the union has:

- launched a web site at www.collegeworkers.org with an online petition for supporters to sign;
- published a campaign newsletter called *The Part-Time Times*;
- prepared a Question-and-Answer background document on the part-timers' issue (see Appendix);
- produced numerous campaign materials, including posters, flyers, postcards, fridge magnets, coffee mugs, banners and

- even Frisbees bearing the campaign's "I believe in FAIRNESS" logo;
- lobbied Cabinet ministers and MPPs;
- worked with New Democratic Party MPP Rosario Marchese to table a private member's bill in the Ontario legislature;
- worked with the National Union of Public and General Employees to file a complaint against the Ontario government with the International Labour Organization of the United Nations;
- sponsored part-timer activists to take the campaign's message to communities across Ontario in the summer of 2006;
- collected thousands of postcards for delivery to the Liberal government; and
- marched in Labour Day parades to promote the part-timers' issue.

For 2007, OPSEU sponsored the creation of OPSECAAT, the Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology. A voluntary organization, OPSECAAT will seek to give part-time and sessional college workers a voice of their own in relations with the colleges and with the Ontario government. The first activity of the association is a membership drive to reach out to every part-time and sessional employee at every college.

For more information on the campaign, visit www.collegeworkers.org.

Summary

In 2006, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union conducted an extensive study of part-time workers in Ontario's community colleges. The interviews on the preceding pages are taken from that study. Overall, the study found the following facts:

Part-timers are over-worked and underpaid

While part-time instructors and teachers are paid only for in-class hours, most spend about three times as many hours preparing for classes, evaluating students' work, and providing guidance feedback to students outside of class time.

Class-sizes are too large

Part-timers – and their students – are frequently forced to endure excessively large class sizes. This is a challenge to high-quality instruction and, in some cases, a threat to safety.

Contact-hours outside of class are either unavailable or limited

Out-of-class contact time between part-timers and their students is severely limited or not available at all. Part-timers simply cannot afford the time.

Colleges don't hire far enough in advance of term

College administrators tend to hire with little more than two weeks' advance notice. This increases the burden of preparation and has a negative impact on quality. Teachers feel rushed and "stressed-out." They can't pay the kind of attention to detail that they feel is necessary to deliver high-quality in-class instruction.

Professional development of part-time college workers is inadequate

In Ontario, few community colleges make provision for the professional development of part-timers. Those opportunities available to full-time faculty and support staff are not available to part-timers.

Teaching outcomes barely scratch the surface

With overcrowded classrooms and little in the way of constructive consultation, many part-time faculty and support staff say they are barely able to help their students develop basic competencies in the subjects being taught.

Part-timers feel insecure in their jobs

An astonishing number of part-time college workers say their working environment is “poisoned.” In most cases, there are deep divisions between part-timers and administrators, and part-timers feel a pervasive sense of disrespect. This makes it difficult for part-timers to take pride in their work.

The turnover rate among part-timers is high

Faculty with valuable professional experience routinely leave the college system after short periods of time. Many leave once they realize that the chance of landing a full-time job, with benefits, is next to nil.

Recommendations for improvement

To improve the quality of education in our community colleges, OPSEU makes the following recommendations:

Change the law to allow college part-timers to unionize

Changing the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act to allow college part-timers to unionize is the surest way to give these workers the tools they need to begin to improve their working conditions – and the quality of education they deliver.

Pay part-timers for all the hours they work

Paying part-timers for the enormous amount of time they spend preparing, marking, and dealing with students’ needs outside of class will allow part-timers to devote the time and energy that is required to provide high-quality education.

Convert part-time positions to full-time positions

No good educational purpose is served by hiring excess numbers of part-time faculty as a cost-saving measure. For the sake of education quality, replacing part-time work with full-time jobs must be a high priority.

Put a lid on class sizes

Reasonable class sizes make it possible for teachers to teach and students to learn. This is why full-time faculty have been able, through collective bargaining, to achieve limits to class sizes. Unfortunately, this has limited the size of classes encountered by part-time faculty. Class size limits must apply to all classes.

Provide professional development opportunities for all faculty

All faculty need the opportunity to keep abreast of changes in their field. High quality learning outcomes mean a commitment to constant improvement. That commitment can only be nurtured through professional development programs.

Provide protection against arbitrary hiring and firing

Detailed and fair human resources policies would minimize anxiety and insecurity that part-timers no feel. Fair treatment can only improve part-timers' focus on and commitment to their work.

Provide mechanisms for review of programs and courses

All disciplines taught in our colleges are constantly evolving and always in need of review and revision. Those responsible for delivering course content need to be consulted about how material is received, how learning outcomes can be improved, and what new resources can aid in teaching new material. The colleges must develop mechanisms to give part-timers the opportunity to have input on curriculum development.

Questions and Answers

Second edition

on the OPSEU campaign to make joining a union legal for college part-timers

1. Why is OPSEU launching a campaign to make unionization legal for community college part-timers?

Ontario is the only province in Canada where it is illegal for part-time college employees to join a union. As a result, Ontario colleges exploit part-timers (both academic and support) as a source of cheap labour, denying them the better wages and working conditions collective bargaining provides. This is blatantly unfair and a violation of the basic human rights of part-timers. They do the same work as full-time employees; they deserve the same right to unionize.

2. Why is unionization against the law for college part-timers?

The rules around unionization and collective bargaining in Ontario community colleges are set out in the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* (CCBA), passed in 1975. The CCBA sets out who may be in the Academic or Support bargaining units - and who may not.

As with most bargaining units, managers and those who deal with labour relations issues for the employer are excluded. The CCBA also excludes certain professionals (architects, engineers, dentists, doctors, lawyers) and the following people:

Academic staff:

- teachers who teach six hours or fewer per week;
- part-time counsellors and librarians; and
- teachers, counsellors or librarians who work fewer than 12 months in any 24-month period.

Support staff:

- people who are regularly employed for not more than 24 hours a week;
- students employed in co-op educational programs;
- CAAT graduates who, within 12 twelve months of completing their course of study, are working for a college as part of a certification, registration or other licensing requirement; and
- people hired “for a project of a non-recurring kind.”

3. How many college part-timers are there in Ontario?

The number changes daily and varies widely from college to college, but in total we estimate there are about 17,000 part-timers right now. That’s more than the 15,000 full-time academic and support employees OPSEU represents.

4. How many college part-timers could be unionized if the law were changed?

OPSEU estimates that about 16,000 people are being deprived of union rights because of the CCBA. The number varies widely throughout the year, but in general the numbers are probably something like this:

- 6,000 faculty teaching credit courses for six hours or fewer per week;
- 2,000 faculty teaching non-credit (“continuing education”) courses per week;
- 750 “sessionals” who teach more than 12 hours a week but who have not worked more than 12 months of the last 24;
- 4,100 support staff working fewer than 24 hours a week; and
- 3,700 student hires working as support staff.

5. If the law is violating college part-timers’ basic human rights, why not challenge the law under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Premier Dalton McGuinty does not need a Supreme Court ruling to give college part-timers the right to unionize. He could do it any time.

Charter challenges take a long time, and there is no guarantee that the courts would force McGuinty to bring in a new law. Here’s some background on Charter challenges in Canada:

- In 1999, an RCMP Staff Sergeant argued that the Canada Labour Code and the *Public Service Staff Relations Act* violated his Charter rights because they barred RCMP officers from joining a union and bargaining collectively. The Supreme Court disagreed.
- The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) challenged the legislation that barred Ontario farm workers from unionizing, but in 2001 the Supreme Court ruled that, while farm workers had a Charter right to freedom of association, this did not automatically mean a right to unionization and collective bargaining.
- On Oct. 2, 2005, the New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees challenged the provincial law which bars casual employees of the province from joining the union until they reach six months of service. A victory for the union could set an important precedent for Ontario college part-timers, as the cases are similar. Victory is not guaranteed, however. And no one knows when the case will be heard.

6. What is the government’s position on union rights for college part-timers?

The Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities, Chris Bentley (formerly Minister of Labour) says changing the law is not on the government’s agenda. During the 2003 election campaign, Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty gave this answer:

“We are very sympathetic to concerns about treating part-time college instructors differently from teachers, professors and other workers in terms of their right to organize. We look forward to discussing with workers and the colleges options for amending the governing legislation to allow part-time instructors to exercise their right to accept or reject union certification, while recognizing the financial constraints facing the institutions.”

Translation: McGuinty doesn’t seem to know that not all college part-timers are “instructors,” but he does know three things: 1) it’s wrong to bar part-timers from unionizing; 2) unionization could cost more; and 3) he’d rather “discuss” the issue than just go ahead and change the law.

7. Won't unionization of part-timers increase costs for colleges? Why should taxpayers support changing the law?

"It's too expensive!" Employers have said the same thing about the abolishing slavery, bringing in the minimum wage, and introducing pay equity. Higher cost is not a valid reason to trample on basic human rights. Ontarians want their friends, neighbours, and relatives to be treated fairly, no matter where they work.

In any case, no one expects that the unionization of part-timers would create unreasonable demands on the public purse.

8. Do part-time employees at Ontario universities have the legal right to unionize?

Yes. Now that colleges are entering into partnerships with universities, many college part-timers are working closely with university part-timers. The former can't unionize; the latter can. It's no surprise the university part-timers have better wages and working conditions.

9. How will changing the law affect full-time employees?

In itself, changing the law will have no direct effect on full-time employees. If and when part-time employees do unionize, however, the employer will find it harder to use part-timers as pawns to undercut full-time wages and working conditions.

10. If part-timers really wanted to change the law, wouldn't they be launching this campaign themselves? Why is OPSEU taking this issue on?

By definition, part-time college employees have no job security and no protection if they speak out in favour of unionization. None have the time or money to mount a campaign to organize 16,000 people across 24 colleges. OPSEU is second to none when it comes to mobilizing people around issues that matter to them, and we have the resources to do it.

11. What can we do internationally?

The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that "Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests." Through our national union, NUPGE, OPSEU has filed a complaint with the International Labour Organization, an agency of the U.N. NUPGE is asking the ILO to put pressure on the Ontario government to allow unionization of college part-timers.

12. How long will this campaign take?

We don't know. Dalton McGuinty could end it tomorrow by changing the law. OPSEU intends to do whatever it takes – for as long as it takes – to win justice for college part-timers.

13. Are there other Ontario laws, besides the CCBA, that affect college part-timers in particular?

Yes. Most people think of the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) as the floor for worker rights in Ontario. And for most people, it is. But because they are deemed to be “Crown employees,” college part-timers are not covered by certain parts of the ESA and actually have fewer rights than other workers. Unlike most workers, college part-timers are not entitled to statutory holiday pay, vacations or vacation pay, or other benefits most workers take for granted.

14. Does OPSEU support changing the ESA to strengthen the rights of college part-timers?

Yes. With union rights, however, part-timers will have a means to bargain for improvements that are *better* than what is in the ESA.

15. What are the next steps in the campaign?

At this stage, the two key tasks in the campaign are: 1) getting in touch with part-timers; and 2) lobbying of MPPs. The two are closely linked. Politicians need to hear from part-timers about their experiences and their issues. Over the next few months, part-timers and their full-time colleagues will be meeting with MPPs. If you want to get involved, send a message to collegeworkers@opseu.org and we will put you in touch with your local lobby committee.

16. How do I get involved?

1. **Send a message to collegeworkers@opseu.org.** OPSEU is working to organize committees at every college. Drop us a line and we'll hook you up with the right people a.s.a.p.
2. **Get informed. Read this backgrounder.** Become a regular visitor to www.collegeworkers.org.
3. **Sign the online petition at www.collegeworkers.org.** Have your family members sign as well. The petition will be presented in the Ontario Legislature.
4. **Talk to all the college part-timers you know.** Tell them about the campaign and the web site. Ask them to sign the petition, too.
5. **Contact your MPP, your nearest Cabinet Minister, or the Premier.** Ask for their support. Get your family and friends to do the same (MPP contact information is on the web at www.ontla.on.ca. Just click “Members” and then click the right link under “Current members.”).



Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology

www.collegeworkers.org