



THE BEACON

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The *Beacon* is an information bulletin for StFXAUT members

Fair Employment Week

This week – October 21-25 - has been Fair Employment Week, an initiative of the CAUT to draw attention to the working conditions of contract academic staff (CAS). By definition, these are people who are neither tenured nor in a tenure-track position, and include anyone working as a part-time instructor or with a limited-term appointment. Unlike the larger urban universities in Canada, where often the majority of teachers are CAS, St.FX seems to have avoided this situation. In fact though, about 25% of our members are in this category, and many others have continuing appointments of less than 12 months a year.

St. FX's administration seems to have conflicting feelings about CAS. On the one hand it boasts about students being taught from day one by full-time faculty, as if there were no such thing as anything less. On the other hand, if you keep track of Human Resources job postings, it is not for lack of trying.

The fact is that contract academic staff are cheap to hire and easy to get rid of. CAS earn less money than regular academic staff and receive fewer benefits. They have no job security, little time for course preparation, and less access to proper office space and the resources to do their job effectively. Because annual

salary levels are prorated for less than full-time positions, CAS often have several months each year with no income and may have to rely on EI. So, one reason the university administration can expect to have people stick around and work seasonally is by depending on them using EI to subsidize their income.

Yes, there is a financial benefit to the university, but what about the human cost – to students and to the CAS? Students may have difficulty meeting with part-time instructors because they are not expected to keep office hours, and, because they work other jobs, they are often not on campus during the day. Limited term appointments have heavy teaching loads which can cut into research time. And, this year, they have lost their travel grants.

Stable continuing work enables people to build careers and lives that ultimately benefit the university, students, and the community. Contract academic staff research, publish, receive grants, and present at conferences. Students pay full tuition to study with them, and the credits they earn are worth exactly the same as any other credit from any other course. Sometimes you can't even tell the difference between a CAS and regular faculty – let's start treating them fairly.