



TRENT UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATION

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Open Letter: Making Trent University a Better Place to Work

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The ability to find a good job is one of the most important issues of our time. Good jobs can look very different, but they all share the same four characteristics: security, fair pay, equal access to adequate benefits, and respect.

In the last decade, Ontario has experienced a shocking trend towards work that is insecure and unfair, what many call precarious employment. According to the United Way, over 40 per cent of people are working in some form of a precarious job. This type of work has a negative impact on individuals, families, and our communities.

Many people may be surprised to learn that our universities have been hit hard by the rise of precarious work. People think that being a university professor means good pay and job security. But more and more, our students are being taught by contract professors who are underpaid, have poor access to benefits, and often don't know if they'll have a job one semester to the next. It is estimated that the number of courses taught by contract faculty in Ontario has nearly doubled since 2001.

Trent University is no exception to this harmful trend. Increasingly, precarious employment is hurting the quality of education on our campus. Contract faculty are talented teachers and researchers, but they simply do not have the support or the working conditions they need to deliver the best possible learning experience to students.

Trent University has a long and proud history of providing opportunities for part-time faculty to become full-time tenured professors. Many professors – myself included – began their careers as contract faculty. By providing a path to becoming a full-time professor with teaching, research, and service responsibilities, Trent created full-time and secure positions for many professors. More good jobs at Trent means more good jobs in Peterborough and Oshawa. In Peterborough, the university is one of our community's largest employers. Good jobs for faculty and staff help keep the local economy healthy.

Across Ontario and throughout North America, there is a movement starting to fight for good jobs. The Trent University Faculty Association (TUFA) is joining this movement. We recognize that there are now more contract employees, and fewer

opportunities to transition into a full-time position. That's why we are calling on the Board of Governors and the University Administration at Trent to adopt a leadership role to address the issue of precarious work at our university.

One of the causes of increased precarious academic work is the persistent underfunding of our universities by government. Ontario provides the lowest per-student funding to universities in Canada. This means that there are not enough resources to hire the full-time professors needed by our institutions. This, coupled with the desire of university administrators for a more "flexible" (or dispensable) workforce, has played a huge role in the rise of precarious academic work. The Board of Governors and the administration must therefore lobby the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities for greater public investment in our universities. Faculty, staff and students can all have a voice in lobbying for improved funding. Adequate public funding will allow for more hiring of full-time faculty at Trent, while equipping both full-time and contract instructors to fulfill our important social and economic missions: to educate students, produce excellent research, and create an environment in which the free exchange of ideas is not just tolerated . . . but encouraged.

Increased public investment is only part of the solution. Contract faculty have little voice in the governance of our university, through Trent's Senate, faculties, schools, and departments. We must aim to promote more inclusivity of contract professors within these decision-making bodies.

Trent University already has some governance/advisory structures in place, such as Faculty Council, where all teaching faculty – both full-time and contract – are members. Faculty Council could provide a useful forum for discussion with the Administration and teaching staff, potentially producing innovative and creative ideas to support all teaching faculty.

The TUFA Executive wants to work with the entire Trent community, with the Peterborough and Durham communities, and with our affiliates at the provincial and federal levels to create more good jobs. We want to confront, challenge, and change the trend of rising precarious work at Trent and in our broader community. Most of all, we want to ensure that everyone has job security, fair pay, equal access to adequate benefits, and the respect of their employer.

In solidarity,



Geoff Navara
President of Trent University Faculty Association