

WLUF ADVOCATE

Building community through dialogue, discussion, and debate.

Laurier's Joint Health and Safety Committees: A role for full-time faculty

Timothy Gawley, Health Studies

I am one of two full-time faculty members of the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) for the Brantford Campus. I have been on the committee since 2013. Laurier's two JHSCs (there is second committee that serves the Kitchener/Waterloo campuses) are committed to making sure that Laurier is a safe place to work.

You may not be familiar with these committees. Admittedly, I was not familiar with them either until a wide call for Brantford campus volunteers was made a couple summers ago. Coincidentally, I was looking for something other than the usual academic management sort of University service and I thought this committee would give me an opportunity to see Laurier from a different perspective: as an institution concerned with risk and safety. I am very happy that I took this opportunity. It has been a great way to uniquely serve the University. I have learned much about our institution from the health and safety perspective. It has enabled me to interact with University staff, whose perspectives I always admire, and it has allowed me to have a tangible effect on workplace fairness and dignity.

Potential immediate- and longer-term injury hazards continually emerge for faculty and staff (e.g.,



slips, trips and falls; handling of chemicals, muscular-skeletal injuries associated with office work). JHSC members work diligently to identify and negate these hazards through regular workplace inspections, reports and improvement recommendations. Full-time faculty participation acknowledges that faculty are not immune to these vulnerabilities, and that faculty can make a difference in the health and safety of our campuses. *Our JHSCs can really benefit from full-time faculty representation.*

Representation on the JHSC can benefit not only full-time faculty, but also the wider Laurier community. Having full-time faculty representation can assure less secure colleagues of our community, such as university staff and contract academic faculty, that a full-time faculty member is speaking with, and perhaps for, them when situations arise. Full-time faculty membership ensures that institutional collegiality is extended to matters of health and safety. It shows that university faculty are concerned and want to advocate for the health and safety of *everyone* in our community.

If you are interested in a different sort of University service experience and are concerned about health and safety in our community, then consider membership on one of our campus JHSCs. Our JHSCs work within the duties and responsibilities defined in the Ontario Health and Safety Act, which specifies that workplace health and safe-

ty must be monitored by employees (as there is a potential conflict of interest if monitoring is left solely to the employer). If you have an interest in becoming a full-time faculty JHSC representative and want more information about its purpose, duties, and contacts, please visit [Safety, Health, Environment & Risk Management's \(SHERM\) webpage](#).

It's about fairness

In this series of articles, the Advocate explores the relationship of Contract Faculty members with the University, taking on prevalent misconceptions or "myths" about their working conditions, and providing some hard facts and figures so readers can assess the fairness of the two-tiered employment standards that are now well entrenched at Laurier. As we prepare to renew the Part-time Faculty Collective Agreement this spring, all faculty have the opportunity to press the Administration to address these and other issues.

Myth #2: Benefits just don't make sense for Laurier's "temporary" workers

Kimberly Ellis-Hale, Sociology

910—that's the magic number of hours that most Laurier employees must work in order to qualify for at least some benefits. Office, bookstore and writing centre staff, special constables, ITS employees, custodial staff, grounds-

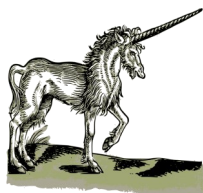
keeping staff, administrative assistants and Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Education staff can all choose between extended health or dental benefits once they have worked a total of 910 hours at Laurier. And, [after working 1,250 hours](#), they are entitled to both. (This, at least, is the case for all but the most recently hired employees, who—due to a two-tiered plan introduced in some of these groups’ latest contracts—now need to put in more hours to see the same benefits.) Still, the vast majority of Laurier employees (unionized or not) can be pretty sure a root canal, and the painkillers needed to endure it, won’t burn too deep a hole in their pockets.

The same is true for Laurier’s managers and for the largest group on campus, Laurier students. In fact, full- and part-time Laurier students receive benefits simply by virtue of being a member of the Wilfrid Laurier University Students’ Union.

Hmm. Who’s not at the benefits table? Let’s see, that would be Contract Faculty (CF), who receive four percent of their salary in lieu of benefits. Benefits for these “temporary” workers might not, at first glance, appear to make sense. After all, aren’t they possibly collecting benefits

elsewhere, from other paid gigs? And wouldn’t they take advantage of Laurier’s generosity and run up all sorts of bills for prescription meds, dentists and massages during their short four-month stint here?

Aside from being uncharitable and ignoring the 910/1,250-hour qualification period, such an argument presumes that CF are not already a stable part of Laurier’s workforce. According to a 2014 WLUFU survey, 43 percent of CF identify Laurier as their primary place of employment, while 56 percent believe their work here constitutes permanent employment. That is, they do not see it as a stepping stone to something else. With three quarters of CF willing to teach at least three courses per term, and almost half already teaching at least five courses per year, this sector of Laurier employees is anything but “temporary.” And even if it was, why shouldn’t Laurier treat them like every other temporary worker it employs? According to WLUFU Employment Data, 25 CF teach the equivalent of 1,050 hours, and 71 teach 1,260 hours or more. Were they working in any other employment group on campus, they would have access to at least some form of benefits.



Contract Faculty do receive four percent of their salary in lieu of benefits. For many, the \$279.41 per course before taxes is quickly gobbled up by a single dental check-up, a new pair of glasses, treatment for a strained back or the costs of medication. Or it is easily diverted to paying the rent or buying groceries. While salaries need to increase so that CF do not need to choose between healthcare and basic necessities in the first place, a proper (in-kind) benefit package would also provide insurance against unanticipated health related expenses, and some security that they can go on working into their 60s or beyond.

Contract Faculty have recently gained one benefit, but its provision points to a bitter irony. Remember the layoffs last year? In delivering the sad news to those affected, the Administration counselled them to take advantage of services provided by the Employee and Family Assistance Plan, only to learn that CF were not members of said plan. It has since rectified that oversight, and going forward, all laid off CF will have as much access to counselling as other members of the Laurier workforce. As sad as it sounds, perhaps CF should use their meagre tuition benefit (up to \$1,000 a year if the member teaches enough courses to qualify) to officially audit one course per year . . . at least that way they will be eligible for some coverage through the Students’ Union!

Access to Benefits by WLU Campus Group							
	Extended Healthcare	Dental Care	Basic Grp Life	LTD	Optional Grp Life	Accidental Death	Dismemberment / Loss of Sight
Management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WLUFU - FT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WLUSA - FT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WLUSA -910-1249 hrs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
CUPE - FT	✓	✓	✓				
CUPE-910-1249 hrs	✓	✓	✓				
UFCW - FT	✓	✓	✓				
UFCW-910-1249 hrs	✓	✓	✓				
SCS - FT	✓	✓	✓				
SCS-910-1249 hrs	✓	✓	✓				
Students - FT	✓	✓					
Students - PT	✓	✓					
Contract Faculty	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗