

*Could University Sessional Instructors Be Directly
Compensated by Their Students in an Age of
Academic Capitalism?*

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One of the striking phenomena of our time in universities across Canada is the large presence of sessional instructors in both undergraduate and graduate programs. This is partly due to the increasing production of people with doctorates who would like to be part of the university professorate but for whom there are little full-time job opportunities. Universities in Canada are not in a steady expansion phase of the sort that was common immediately after the Second World War and in the early 1960s and 1970s. Many universities may be expected to increase their student numbers, often students from outside Canada who pay higher fees, but are not expected to increase their permanent faculty numbers. In many cases the reward for engaging in this expansion of student numbers is more money directly to departmental or Faculty coffers. But there is no guarantee that these numbers or this money will hold. So the solution is to hire recent doctoral graduates who can teach the courses but to whom no immediate prospect of a permanent, tenure track job can be offered.

In many cases a sessional instructor works out of home, has no office space in the university or college, has no connection with an academic union or faculty association, has few benefits if any, and can lose their teaching post at a moment's notice. Some faculty associations have realized their plight and offered to

bargain for them, but their bargaining power is limited given the fluctuating nature of the sessional instructors numbers. Some universities have been engaging large numbers of sessional a for a long time---York University in Toronto comes to mind. And given the numbers and the needs such jobs are almost permanent. I recall a remarkable story some years ago in the *Globe and Mail* to the effect that the highest paid faculty member at York was a sessional who taught a very large number of courses. The money paid to a sessional there per course was, as I recall, higher than at the rest of the country. Perhaps for some such an arrangement (being able to choose the number of courses you taught, minimal requirements or opportunities for publication or other university activities of a service nature and the like) might be just what one needed or wanted. But for most the pay would be hard to live on. A sessional instructor making, say, \$6000.00 per course and able to teach two courses per term would only make \$36,000 per year (assuming three terms) which would be rather difficult to live on and certainly very difficult to raise a small family on. At say \$12,000 per course this would be a much better \$72,000. But such opportunities must be very rare.

There was for a time in German universities the title *Privat Docent* for men (or *Privat Docentin* for women) was conferred to those qualified to teach at a university. These received payment directly from their students and not from the university. Indeed, the origin of universities in Italy began with such a principle of payment to the instructor directly by the students. In Germany this title is still conferred but payment is often through research projects and rarely through the university directly. The practice of direct payment from students to the instructor in this context was abandoned in the last century.

This has never been a practice at English language universities, but the present circumstances, with many teaching who hold doctorates but who have no immediate prospect of a tenure track appointment, suggests it might be a real possibility. Perhaps we ought to refer to such sessional instructors as "Private Instructors" or even "Private Assistant Professors" with permission to teach a specific range of university courses and to whom the students directly paid a fee with a token sum to the university for hosting the course. There need not be a fixed fee though a minimum would likely be a wise idea. This is a form of academic capitalism that recognizes that the instructor created the course and should receive credit for both creating it and for teaching it. The university for its part would receive the benefit of the course being taught by a competent instructor who is functioning as a professional selling a service to a student and compensating the university to some degree for the opportunity of teaching it for their students' benefit.

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