

Precarious Academic Labour in the Age of Neoliberalism

May 5th-7th, 2017

Okanagan College
Kelowna, British Columbia

Conference Call For Papers

The rise of contingent labour in all industries as a consequence of neoliberal policy priorities coincides with the fact that, for decades, the number of courses that are taught by contingent faculty at colleges and universities has increased dramatically. This ongoing shift constitutes an existential challenge to our sector and profession, and is in complicated ways related to other critical issues in our sector: dwindling government support, increasing tuition, the desire to subordinate education to market demands, the role of faculty unions in shaping the profession, and so forth.

Research on the state of higher education is largely in agreement that after decades of decline, higher education is now firmly embedded in a profound crisis. The source of this crisis is commonly identified as “corporatization,” “managerialism,” “instrumentalism,” or “neoliberal economics.” While discussing this crisis, educators and theorists identify the increasing reliance on precarious academic labour as only one symptom among many in this crisis of higher education. This conference is an attempt to re-focus this dissection of higher education. That is, rather than seeing the increase of sessional/adjunct professors as one symptom among many, we propose an investigation that sees the increasing reliance on precarious academic labour as fundamentally central to the current crisis in higher education, relating all other symptoms to this one of precarious labour.

Aside from obvious funding pressures, one of the major reasons for these changes is the fact that many people are unaware of the current situation in higher education and the dangers it poses. For this reason, this conference’s pursuit and dissemination of knowledge in this area is essential to resisting the increased reliance upon, and exploitation of, precarious academic labour. The implications of such a shift are vast, and require investigation. The goals of this conference, then, are to provide the most comprehensive picture of higher education’s increasing use of precarious labour in our area to date, and to formulate solutions to this crisis in our sector so that this analysis can provide an academically rigorous basis upon which to argue for systemic change.

Potential questions to be considered:

- In what way does corporatization, neoliberalism, instrumentalism, or managerialism support, if not openly endorse, increasing the number of PAL (precarious academic labour), and decrease the working conditions for PAL?
- What is the relationship between pedagogy and PAL? Are there pedagogies that lend themselves to increasing reliance on PAL? Are there pedagogies that are inherently resistant to the increasing reliance on PAL?
- What are some potential solutions to the increasing reliance on PAL, knowing that its increase is due to neoliberal ideology?
- What are the adverse health effects related to PAL?
- How has the greater apparatus for evaluating PAL affected the work conditions for, and the increase of, PAL?
- How are rising tuition costs tied to the increasing reliance on PAL?
- How much data on PAL is currently available, and how has this availability affected the increasing reliance on PAL?
- What myths do we have regarding PAL and academia in the 21st Century, and how have these myths affected the increasing reliance on PAL?
- How can we raise awareness about the increasing reliance on PAL? (This question relates to the fact that most students and their parents think that their professors are of the tenure-stream ilk.)
- In what ways are PAL expected to offer free labour in the form of uncompensated service, teaching, and research in order to make up for poor work conditions?
- How has corporatization, managerialism, or instrumentalism contributed to the rise in PAL?

Please send your brief bio and proposal to precariouslabour@gmail.com. Paper proposals should provide a 350-word abstract. Panel proposals should include biographies and abstracts from all panelists. Panelists should plan for 20-minute paper presentations. The deadline for paper and panel proposals is Feb. 20th, 2017. All applicants will be notified by Feb. 22nd. Conference registration is free.

Keynote Address by Dr. Jamie Brownlee (Carleton University), author of *Academia, Inc.:*
How Corporatization is Transforming Canadian Universities.

