



Dr. Greg Keefe, Interim President  
University of Prince Edward Island

January 7, 2022

Dear Interim President Keefe,

I am writing in response to a series of communications sent by you and other members of UPEI Administration to the university community over the last month, in regard to the ever-changing pandemic situation at UPEI. In all of your recent communications, each of you has acknowledged the very real mental health toll of the pandemic on faculty, staff, and students, and you have encouraged employees to take advantage of the Employee Assistance Program if they are in need of support.

Unfortunately, as many of my colleagues have reminded me over the last weeks, UPEI's many Sessional Instructors are not eligible for this program.

Sessional Instructors comprise a significant percentage of FA membership, typically around 35% annually. A quick look at the Sessional Seniority List reveals no less than 67 Instructors who have accumulated 75 contact hours or more - this represents 25 3-contact hour courses taught. Some have taught more than 50 or 100 such courses for UPEI. From this it is clear that Sessionals are not "backfill" or "temporary", but that they play an essential and ongoing role in the work of UPEI. A Sessional Instructor teaching 2 courses this semester faces the same pressures as a full-time faculty member doing the same, and Sessionals deserve to receive the same supports as their full-time colleagues.

Some supports we have suggested in the past, and that we suggest you should offer now, include:

- Making the Sessional Professional Development (PDTR) funds - used by most to pay for teaching-related expenses - available to all Sessional Instructors, regardless of how long they have been teaching at UPEI. Currently this is only available to Instructors at the Step 2 and Step 3 pay levels - Step 1 instructors must pay out-of-pocket for teaching expenses.
- Raising the amount of money available for reimbursement through Sessional PDTR. Currently, Sessional Instructors must request reimbursement after-the-fact, and may receive only a maximum of \$300 per semester regardless of how many courses they teach. Since the resources needed to teach online and in-person may be different, and we are expecting to pivot between these multiple times this semester, we urge you to commit to reimbursing all eligible teaching-related expenses for Sessional Instructors for the Winter 2022 semester, regardless of amount.
- Providing Sessional Instructors with paid sick leave, similar to what our full-time colleagues receive, in the event that they must miss teaching days due to covid-related isolation or illness. While Sessional Instructors can miss up to a week of classes before their contracts can be revoked, some may need more time if recovering from a COVID-19 infection, and that should be available to them.
- Making mental health supports such as EAP available to Sessional Instructors for the Winter 2022 semester. Sessionals are under the same pressures as their full-time colleagues, and many may also be juggling other employment at the same time. The toll on them is serious, and it is real, and they deserve help.

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- Making Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys formative-only for the Winter 2022 semester. While SOTS are an important tool for any instructor, in the case of Sessional Instructors they are used in hiring decisions. Given the current fast pivot to online instruction, in combination with the uncertainty regarding likely future pivots back to in-person teaching, it is unfair to evaluate Sessional Instructors on a course experience over which they have little control.

Throughout the pandemic we have been seeking to work with UPEI's Administration to determine ways in which you could - and should - provide help for Sessional Instructors. Unfortunately, many of our letters and requests to meet on this issue have been completely ignored. When there has been a response, it has invariably been "no". We urge you now to acknowledge the work of Sessionals and their effect on UPEI's ability to function, and to offer them the minimum supports referenced above so that we may all serve our students to the best of our ability.

Finally, I remind you that our working conditions are our students' learning conditions. Constraints on Sessional Instructors are constraints on their students. Students pay the same course fee whether their teacher is full-time or not, and they, quite rightly, expect that Administration will support their teachers in supporting them.

Sincerely,



Dr. Margot Rejskind, Vice-President  
UPEI Faculty Association

CC: Mr. Pat Sinnott, Chair UPEI Board of Governors  
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