

PERSPECTIVE ON UPEI STRIKE

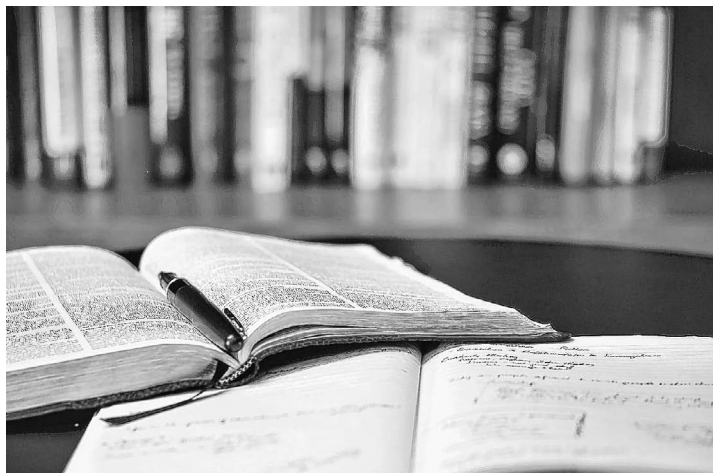
I was asked by my mechanic what the issues might be in the UPEI faculty strike. He knows that my spouse is a professor at UPEI. For a busy man, I wanted to give my friend an easy understanding of just one simple issue, that might give him perspective on some even broader issues here. Perhaps your readers might benefit likewise.

SHORT CONTRACTS

My spouse has been a professor at UPEI for some 22 years. She is one of the more than 50 per cent of professors who are contract workers. While some of these contracts are for up to one year, it would be safe to say that the majority of these contracts are for a single three- or four-month term.

These single-term contract instructors (professors) are called sessional instructors by the university, and it is their situation in particular that I wish to address.

For sessional instructors



Every professor at a university needs a minimum of two post-secondary degrees to teach there, whether they are tenured employees or contract workers.

AARON BURDEN ■ UNSPLASH

you may read: part-time; no health-care benefit, no pension and limited job security. She is paid by the course that she teaches in any term and must apply for each one of them.

You may appreciate that every professor at a university needs a minimum of two post-secondary degrees to teach there. For my spouse, after she had achieved an honours BA at UPEI, this had to include going off-Island for

her master's degree for an additional two years, as there is no MA program here in her discipline. Thus, the qualifications are indeed high.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Consider this: as a long-haul trucker, my employer provided health benefits to my family and covered half the cost. Public school teachers have such a benefit; even school bus drivers

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have it. I do not diminish the importance of any of these professions, or the need for a health-care benefit in any of them. My point is simply that teachers at our higher learning institution, who have worked so hard to gain accreditation, and continue to work diligently to educate their students deserve at least the same consideration as these job descriptions.

I recently retired from my profession, and with it, so went my family health benefit.

I can tell your readers, in case they haven't had the pleasure, that procuring a health benefit on one's own

is a costly business, with lesser available benefits than a group plan. Of course, providers of extended health benefits — the insurers — can give a reduced price and better benefits to institutions like employers or universities, where they bundle a number of applicants. Would it not make sense, then, for the university to provide such coverage to all its professors?

While the university does offer its sessional instructors a small stipend to help offset health costs, it does not come close to covering the cost of the coverage. It seems reasonable to me that the university should be providing such coverage, where they already do provide it for the other half of their teachers and can get it at a cost far less than what an individual can pay.

Would this not be the least the university could do for its dedicated professors? And that is my perspective, and I hope, a useful one in this conversation.

**Ian Dennison,
Victoria, P.E.I.**