

"They've got PhDs too, you know"

By Jonathan Woodward,
Ubyyssey

VANCOUVER (CUP) - Sessional lecturers who say they feel "invisible" at UBC are celebrating Fair Employment Week to make their presence known to students and the administration.

The event, mirrored at campuses across North America, hopes to acknowledge the contribution of the more than 500 sessional lecturers to campus life and research, and aims to make an impression before the faculty association and UBC meet next year for labour talks.

"We're trying to make people on campus aware of the fact that there are people around them who look the same as regular faculty but they aren't," said Elizabeth Hodgson, who has been a sessional lecturer for eight years at UBC. "Students don't know it, but we're here in far greater numbers than people think."

Sessional lecturers are faculty members hired to teach courses on a per-credit basis with appointments lasting up to a year. Sessionals at UBC are concentrated mostly in the Arts and Education faculties.

A sessional is hired when UBC has student demand for a course but cannot secure permanent faculty to teach it, said Neil Guppy, VP academic programs for UBC.

"Sometimes there is a temporary need for quality instruction, so we try to find people who can do that on a temporary basis," he said.

But sessionals have grown in number at UBC to the point where nearly half of the English department's courses are taught by sessionals, Hodgson said.

"I was a sessional for 12 years, doing the same job, year after year," said Karen Needham, who is now a full-year instructor in the zoology department at UBC. "I wasn't filling some sort of temporary hole. I was permanently needed in that department."

Sessionals often return year after year, do research, publish schol-

arly work and help plan academic courses, she added.

Academic and research work done outside of class is not included in a sessional's job description, and it goes unpaid, said Needham. This hampers their ability to give students access to research in the classroom, she added.

"Most of the sessionals have PhDs too, you know," she said. "The problem is that you've got someone who you're expecting to stay current in the field, but doesn't have access to research facilities that help bring research into the classroom."

Sessionals also face bureaucratic red tape with each reappointment, said Needham, adding that even a continuing sessional must reapply for a library card, a parking space and an e-mail address.

Hodgson said sometimes sessionals feel their contribution to the university is largely unrecognized.

"We can't often vote in department meetings, our name is not listed next to courses, we're not on Web sites. We're just invisible."

This week, sessional lecturers will be placing 500 stickers of "shadowy academics" on buildings around campus, one for each sessional lecturer.

About 20 full-size shadowy cardboard cutouts of sessionals will loom over the grassy knoll, and biographies of sessionals will be displayed in the SUB.

UBC spokesman Scott Macrae hopes the upcoming displays will be empowering for sessional lecturers.

"This is a good place to do it," he said. "'This is what a university is for.'"

But he also said bargaining between the university and the faculty association last spring resulted in increases in benefits for sessionals. Examples include access to vacation pay and the option of unpaid leave.

He said any further changes to sessional contracts will be discussed in bargaining next year.

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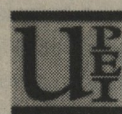
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