



Employment status and quality of teaching: Debunking the myth

“Course lecturers are essential members of the university teaching staff. Their expertise and diverse experience contribute to quality university education. Through their passion for teaching, they transmit knowledge to students and thereby ensure the next generation of torchbearers in all spheres of activity,” stated Quebec Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology Minister Pierre Duchesne in a news release issued for National Course Lecturers Day on November 22, 2013.



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Apart from tenure, is there any difference between a permanent teacher and a course lecturer in terms of the work they do? Is the tendency to under-value university contract teachers specific to Quebec universities, or is it the same in other parts of the world?

In this era of the globalized “knowledge economy”, are we not seeing here, as in the United States, the increased contractualization of teaching positions?

Is the prevailing myth that good education can only come from tenured faculty members still relevant today, when the only real difference lies in research? Can this function of research—most of it ultra-specialized—still be seen as an appropriate criterion for differentiating qualifications in undergraduate teaching when recent studies¹ clearly suggest otherwise? Further still, its very basis is predicated on the assumption that course lecturers do no research when, in fact, a good many of them do, even just to keep up with the constant evolution of knowledge.

It should be remembered that course lecturers have been around since the Middle Ages, teaching in Europe’s earliest universities at a period when the concept of permanent “professors” did not yet exist...While the nature of their role has surely changed over time, they do not deserve

today to see that role systematically discredited when they are doing more than half of the undergraduate teaching in Quebec.

To maintain that a real difference exists between the quality of education delivered by a lecturer and a regular professor would mean that we would also have to call into question the qualifications of thousands of Quebec university graduates.

As a society that has made the collective choice to offer universal access to higher education, can we really risk depreciating the teaching value of the 15,000 some course lecturers who are working in our universities in virtually every field of study? What message are we sending to the doctors, lawyers, directors, engineers, actors, accountants, musicians, dentists, journalists, educators, writers, poets, philosophers, and others who are sharing their professional and artistic experiences with students hungry for concrete and practical examples, who bring these students into direct contact with the field and community they will need to know once they graduate? The real-life expertise of these course lecturers and their widely diverse profiles and career paths are essential to the success of the educational mission of universities.



Professional valorization is a “socially responsible good” that must be preserved at all costs. It is the guarantee of Quebec’s ability to achieve the massification of higher education and thereby ensure the greater accessibility of education for adults and students throughout the province. The future of our society and the democratic ascension to education, safe from the clutches of sterile corporatism, hang in the balance of this struggle for due recognition.

“Course lecturers contribute individually and collectively to the academic success of the students they teach. They ensure better access to higher education for all who are willing and able to pursue their studies. It is important that we take the opportunity today to underscore this,” Minister Duchesne added in his release. ■



On the link between teaching and research

An increasing number of course lecturers are doing research and teaching at the graduate levels. In 2012, for example, 35% of the master-level classes and 29% of the doctoral courses at UQAC were given by course lecturers.

Source: *Syndicat des chargées et chargés de cours de l'Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (SCCCUQAC)*

“The role of tenure in American higher education has been reduced dramatically in recent decades. In 1975, 57% of all faculty (excluding graduate students) were in the tenure system; by 2009 that figure had been cut almost in half to 30%. Some observers predict that the share of tenured/tenure track faculty will bottom out at between 15-20%, with tenure being largely limited to the flagship public and private research universities and the wealthiest of the liberal arts colleges.”

Source: <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/the-teaching-only-stream.aspx>