



# The OWL HOOTS

## Continuing Education Special Issue

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## Understanding Continuing Education at Dawson

The DTU Executive is working closely with a group of hard-working, dedicated Cont. Ed. teachers to make sure that their concerns are heard in upcoming negotiations.

To this effect, we have put together this special edition of the Owl Hoots, highlighting some of the challenges facing our Cont. Ed. and non-perm. teachers.

The DTU has compiled facts about the evolution of Cont. Ed. at Dawson and some of our teachers have been kind enough to provide us with testimonials about their experiences in this ever-growing sector of the college.

### TWO TYPICAL<sup>†</sup> COLLEGE TEACHERS IN 2014 (SCIENCE)

COMPARISON BY SECTOR	REGULAR DAY	CONTINUING EDUCATION
DEGREE	MASTER'S	MASTER'S
EXPERIENCE	5 YEARS	5 YEARS
WORKLOAD	5 COURSES / YR	5 COURSES / YR
SALARY	\$52,064 / YR	\$29,090 / YR <sup>‡</sup>
INCREASE*	4.25% / YR	0% / YR
BENEFITS		
HEALTH	●	
DENTAL	●	
ACCIDENT	●	
DISABILITY	●	
SICK DAYS	●	
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT		●**

<sup>†</sup> For a fair comparison, two hypothetical teachers with identical credentials and course loads have been selected. These selections are typical because they reflect the circumstances of real individuals in both sectors.

<sup>‡</sup> Based on four regular session courses (78 hours each) and one summer course (75 hours) at a rate of \$75.17 per hour.

\* Inflation indexing is omitted from these figures on the basis that it does not represent a true increase in salary value.

\*\* At the discretion of the college, some funds may be allocated to continuing education professors for professional development.

## Did you know?

Facts and figures about job security and Cont. Ed. at Dawson

There are **2716** students enrolled in Cont Ed. this semester.

There are over **700** full-time Cont. Ed. students enrolled at Dawson.

Dawson College offers two D.E.C. programs in Continuing Education. Since 2011, the number of students enrolled in these two programs has more than **doubled**.

The number of Continuing Education students at Dawson increased by **21%** this semester alone.

Enrolment in Cont. Ed. credit courses has increased by **200%** in the last ten years.

As of August 2014, there were **448 non-permanent** employees with job priority at Dawson. Of those teachers

- approximately 277 held contracts this fall,
- 51 currently have 5 or more years of seniority,
- 119 have 19 or more years of schooling,
- approximately 100 teach at least one ContEd course

## Interested in getting involved? Job security not required

Your non-permanent members of the DTU Executive Council

One third of our Executive Council is made up of non-permanent teachers, some teaching uniquely in Continuing Education. Our non-perm members are listed below, along with the sectors they represent

**Nikolaos** Gryspolakis, Continuing Education  
**Manuel** Toharia Zapata, Non-perm teachers  
**Sarah** Beer, Sociology, Women's Committee  
**Geoffrey** Pearce, Geography, Social Activities  
**Patricia** Murphy, Social Services, Careers Sector  
**Maria** Dikeakos, Physics, Science  
**Luc** Lapierre, Chemistry, Careers Sector  
**Matthew** Potter, Physical Education

Contact the DTU if you're interested in finding out how you can get involved in union activities: [dtu@dtu.qc.ca](mailto:dtu@dtu.qc.ca)

## DTU G.A. passes motion in support of non-permanent and Cont. Ed. teachers

On September 24, a group of teachers proposed a motion encouraging the prioritization of bargaining demands related to the improvement of working conditions of Continuing Education and non-permanent teachers. The motion, passed unanimously at the very well attended General Assembly.

A subsequent motion gave the DTU Executive the mandate to inform other FNEEQ unions of the motion and encourage them to pass a similar one in the hope of mobilizing Continuing Education teachers across the cégep network.

## Dawson Board of Governors to study "the Continuing Education Situation"

On the September 29 meeting of the Board of Governors, the Director General announced that the study of Continuing Education would be one of the College's key actions for 2014-15. The College plan to "*conduct a thorough analysis of the Continuing Education situation with a view to proposing a specific strategy for the development of this sector*".

The College claims that the study is designed to meet the goals of "*fostering academic excellence and responding to emerging social needs*". But will this study, conducted by our new Academic Dean, involve an actual analysis of the growing number of challenges facing Cont. Ed. students and teachers?

It remains to be seen if this exercise will be more than an attempt at furthering the profitability of Cont Ed.

## Resources that both teachers and students deserve

A teacher testimonial by Elliott Kerr, Sociology

I teach in the sociology department at Dawson College. To have some of my first teaching experiences in continuing education was both humbling and challenging. I met some extremely bright students with amazing amounts of potential and enthusiasm, but who perhaps needed more attention, care and support than other students.

This is why teaching cont ed can be especially frustrating at times; while there are some students who have great potential, both they and the teacher lack the necessary resources and time to be able to give special focus to that potential. As a result, some students sometimes slip between the cracks and stop showing up at some point during the semester. With increased support for the teacher, the teacher would have more time and energy to focus on the students who need and deserve their attention.

This support could include holding more office hours, acting as a liaison between the student and the learning center (or other services), or simply taking the time to zone in on the individual's students learning needs and trying to address them more comprehensively.

Therefore, I believe improving the conditions for cont. ed teachers would result in the improved performance of both the student and the teacher.

My experience teaching cont. ed for the most part was great! I had many engaging courses with students who were excited to participate. I think by changing our perspective on what continuing education is, and what its function is for Dawson as a whole. If we improve the working conditions for teachers this would lead to nothing but benefits for the entire Dawson Community.



## In defense of sick days

A teacher testimonial by Christian Charette, English

One of the biggest issues facing ContEd teachers is the lack of a sick day bank.

This often forces us to choose between doing what is right for our health, or getting paid. Given that by and large ContEd teachers must make due with a much lower salary than their regular day counterparts, we often elect to go teach our classes even when doing so is counter-indicated for our health.

As an example, last Summer, I suffered an infection in my leg that necessitated that I receive intravenous antibiotics, and stay off my feet for a few days. At the hospital, the Doctor said he would be writing me a note to indicate that I could not work, as I needed to A) remain in a position with my leg elevated, B) should not be standing or walking, and C) needed to be at the hospital every 12 hours for the IV.

The Doctor was rather non-nonplussed when I told him not to bother, as I could not afford to miss the day of work (I was teaching a 4 hour evening class that very night). His manner paternal, he explained once more that I needn't worry, as he would be writing me a note - which employers generally respect. As it was my turn in this little pas-de-deux to act paternal, I proceeded to explain that, yes, I understood that, but a note would not do me any good. If I didn't teach, I didn't get paid. And I could not afford not to get paid. He said that this made no sense, that he was giving the note, and that I had to stay off my leg

His note, of course, was of little use. As I'd only been assigned one course, a ContEd course in the Winter, I simply could not afford to lose half my week's pay; I was in class that night .

I hope my personal experience acts as a good illustration of the need for ContEd teachers to receive fairer working conditions

## I Feel Like a Terrible Mother

A teacher testimonial by Carmen Leung, Chemistry

I am a Continuing Education teacher at Dawson in the Department of Chemistry. I am also a mother of two young children, 4 and 7 years old. Since I started teaching in January 2013, my family and I have had a difficult time adjusting. Due to the evening teaching schedule, which is Mondays to Thursdays from 5:00 to 9:30 pm, I see my children only in the mornings on those days. This leaves my husband to care for the kids completely on his own from the time he gets off work to the time the kids go to bed. I have also had to take on extra courses in the daytime on top of my evening courses during some semesters. This has resulted in extremely heavy teaching loads and very long days, as I would be at the college from 9:00am until 9:30 pm multiple times each week.

As a new teacher, I am working hard and striving to become the best teacher that I can be. When I'm not at the college, I am constantly preparing, replying to messages sent by my students, and grading at home. But dedicating so much of my energy and efforts to my teaching responsibilities has taken a toll on my responsibilities as a parent. This became evident when my 7 year old came home from school one day and handed me my first ever 'report card of my Maman'. It had 8 'parental competencies' that either had a happy face or an unhappy face drawn next to it: (i) helping me with my homework, (ii) making my lunch, (iii) making cakes, (iv) giving hugs, (v) kissing my 'boobos', (vi) driving me to my activities, (vii) reading me bedtime stories and (viii) playing with me. It turns out he gave me happy faces only for the first 4 competencies, giving me a failing grade! I—was—stunned! Although the activity was meant to be fun, it made me feel terrible.

While I've been working so hard to be a good teacher, I was failing as a mother. I have since tried to rebalance my life between being a mother and being a teacher. However, it's been very difficult with the heavy and unpredictable teaching loads. When daytime teachers go on leave, I must accept the extra courses in order to maintain my priority—all in the hope of eventually attaining full-time day status (with no idea how long that might take).

It's disheartening to see that, despite having similar responsibilities as daytime teachers (teaching the exact same courses), we Cont Ed teachers are paid less, receiving about 50% of what a daytime teacher makes, with no sick days or benefits. There is also no pay scale to recognize the experience we gain with each year we teach.



As Cont Ed teachers, we often have to disappoint our children by missing many important activities with them: their music concerts at school, parent-teacher nights, sports games, bedtime stories and play time with them. But the sacrifices we make would be more worthwhile if the college provided better working conditions and recognized those who are in Cont Ed as equals amongst all the teachers at Dawson. Why is there a two-tier system when many Dawson Cont Ed students are taking courses that are identical to the daytime courses and graduating with the same DEC degrees? This fact implies that Cont Ed teachers are providing the same services and education as day teachers. The Cont Ed students should also be given the same support as the daytime students; there will always be students who need extra help regardless of the time of day their course is given. Cont Ed teachers are not paid to hold office hours, but most of us do it anyhow because we want our students to succeed and we are compelled by conscience to help them.

I have enjoyed my teaching experiences; it is incredibly rewarding to see students succeed and to know that I had a part in their accomplishments. But the reality is that Cont Ed teachers who have children at home are sacrificing family time and should be better compensated. The working conditions for Cont Ed teachers need to be re-evaluated, and so does the role of Cont Ed at the college. I hope my testimonial will shed some light on an area of concern that is often overlooked.



## What lasts in teaching?

A reflection from a young contract teacher, by Phil Lagogiannis, Physics

As teachers we engage the question of what it means to teach constantly. This question inflects our work even if we have never asked it out loud. Our teaching is itself the articulation of the

question, even if it only flirts with giving an answer through its method. What lasts in teaching? I don't mean to ask, "What do our students take away from us?" but rather, "What about teaching remains present over the semesters, over the years?" As a young teacher I can only outline a possible answer, but maybe you will be willing to share your insight upon hearing mine.

A related question we could first ponder is, "To what extent does our employer encourage us to teach?" This question sounds superfluous because we are all hired to be teachers, but we may still discuss the appropriateness of the conditions under which our obligations are to be carried out. As a teacher of the precarious sort I might be able to say something relevant, but I can only speculate about what it might be like to be a permanent teacher working for the same employer.

For example, I have recently come off a fall and winter session comprised of two night courses each. I felt that I was capable of teaching these courses at a level consistent with my own evolving standards. I have just now begun to teach a summer course at night. This course is contracted by a factor of two in scheduling length but remains identical in duration to its regular session counterpart. The enrolment currently sits at thirty-four students. To an administrator, it would be reasonable to assume that my situation looks a lot like teaching two regular session classes at once – a nearly full workload. This official determination would depend on various factors outlined in the CI protocol which unfortunately does not apply to contract teachers.

Nevertheless, I feel capable of teaching this course at a level consistent with my current standards. Its 10.75 hours per week translate to 38.7 work hours under the Employment Insurance Act. This is a special provision for contract teachers which intends to recognize the value of a single teaching hour as 3.6 hours once preparation, grading, and support are factored in. This seems to be altogether fair to me based on my own experience, but there is no parallel College policy. Since money talks, our high hourly rate reflects this *de facto* if not *de jure*.

For contract teachers, classes seem to be indiscriminately identical regardless of student enrolment. Maximum workloads are also not ideas we should be entertaining lest we compromise our job security. These are the only conclusions I can reach based on the fact that I was offered a second course, running in parallel but during the day, which is contracted in scheduling length by a factor of three. If I were to accept this assignment, then my night course coupled with my 16.75 hour per week day course – aside from putting me on a schedule which most days begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 9:35 p.m. with a break of less than five hours in between – would give me an EI-equivalent workload of **99 hours per week**. To an administrator, this should look like a breach of at least one common sense principle: there are only 168 hours in a week, and roughly 70 of them are spent sleeping and eating. However, I was encouraged to take on this class in order to secure my position in the seniority pool. If I were to oblige, the time constraints imposed by my decision would require me to lower my standards. Permanent teachers are fortunately exempt from having to make this call.

Would it be worthwhile to accept the work? Some might argue that contract teaching is a stepping stone to permanent teaching. This is no longer the case in many departments given the size of the continuing education program and the relative dearth of permanent posts compared to the growing number of contract teachers. Others might suggest that the work is challenging but that the financial reward is due compensation. This is not the case: a permanent teacher would in some cases make over twice as much for teaching the exact same summer course. (continued on page 6)



(continued from page 5). Their salary also grows each year while ours remains unjustly frozen. We have no sick days, no disability insurance, no guarantees of future work, and no available leaves other than parental leaves.

But none of this answers the question, “To what extent does our employer encourage us to teach?” directly. Any honest answer must be couched in a certain signification of the word *teacher*. It might help us to run through two possible meanings of the word: a common one and an older one. This detour will take us back to the question we opened with.

Is a teacher that person who, through persistent remembrance of a set of skills, projects the essential features of her discipline for students to assimilate?

If this is the case, then our employer might even be partly justified in their approach to doling out work. A teacher is a pool of knowledge, a resource not unlike a textbook. Consultation of this resource is a process to which we could prescribe an almost definite temporal structure. That is the meaning of *course of study*, the duration and scope of which is mapped out in advance. Under this description, we could speak of a teacher’s efficiency and how it is conditioned in part by his experience. We might even conclude that a summer contract teacher with a remarkable capacity for time management who has taught all courses in question before – in my case, I submit to the latter but not to the former – would be able to bring down those 3.6 hours-per-lecture-hour to a more manageable 2.5. Then he is really only working about 69 hours per week, is sleeping and eating about the same amount, and even has some time for his loved ones and for himself during the remaining 30 hours. This is by no means easy, but it is at least conceivable.

There is nothing superficially defective about this signification of *teacher* and *course* insofar as it says something true about what we do. But we should also consider that a teacher might not essentially be the foregoing description. *Teach* comes from the Old English verb *taecan*, which is etymologically connected to the word *token* – a sign, a mark. To teach signifies to point out, to show. *Learn* comes from *leornian*, which aside from its usual signification of “to study” has the sense of “to find the path.”

Perhaps a teacher is a guide rather than a purveyor of knowledge. She brings her students into the disclosure of a phenomenon by pointing out the way to finding it. She is not a source of persistent remembrance of a skill, but someone for whom the path to disclosure has been trodden many times and with deliberate pre-meditation. Deliberate pre-meditation is therefore her skill. Her sharpened sense of the path and her commitment to treading it is her discipline. Her students follow this path not behind her but alongside her and ahead of her.

To teach is then not to set down the elements of the way as remembered facts, but to remember the way and to bring others into that remembrance. It involves a willful, thoughtfully meditative recollection. The recollection must be pre-meditated anew each time it is taken up. A teacher’s failure results from taking the way for granted, from assuming mastery – exhaustion – of something as inexhaustible as existence. All teachers, whether they teach French, physics, or physical education at bottom engage with existence.

Let me suggest that what lasts in teaching is the way. The students will be different; the metaphors may change; but the way is what we seek to show. Yet the way is demanding and often surprising. By forcing us to make of it something so crudely calculable, our employer does not fully encourage us to teach.

If this is true, then the definite structure upon which we rely for the organization of material into a course of study has to be understood as something provisional. A teacher can no longer be seen as an hourly laborer, but must instead be understood as having a task which is far less definite in its requirements from iteration to iteration. A teacher must be supported as a guide, as someone who guards her discipline and shepherds students on the way. A teacher should not need to spend every minute of her downtime eating and sleeping because of the absurd calculations of her friends in administration, and her security should not depend on this impossible proposition.

## Two-tiered system— for teachers and students

A testimonial by Nikolaos Gryspolakis, Physics

I have been a Continuing Education teacher in the Physics department at Dawson College since I completed my PhD in 2010. Still, at the beginning of every semester I have to wait until a few days before classes start in order to know whether I will be assigned a course or not. I find teaching one of the most rewarding activities a person can engage in. The reward and gratitude one feels when an old student of theirs thanks them for the change they have made in their lives cannot be compared to anything for me.

I see many of the Cont Ed students, often people with families and full-time jobs, being extremely dedicated and hardworking. These students receive a lot less support and resources than day students. They can obtain a DEC like every other student but under much more difficult and unfair terms. Instead of rewarding them or helping them even more because of the special conditions under which they study, our educational system punishes them.

I spend countless hours outside of my courses helping students, learning about novel teaching methods and preparing, even if I am only paid for the hours that I spend inside the classroom. This past summer I had a serious accident and I found myself unconscious in the hospital. My injuries were serious enough to lead the doctors to advise complete rest for 2 weeks.

As Cont Ed teachers have no insurance or even sick days, I was back at work the day after. My colleagues and students were shocked to see me teaching under these conditions and urged me to stay home. It should be apparent to everyone that I was not able to perform as an educator at the level that I would

have desired. Both the students and myself suffered from this absolutely anti-pedagogical situation.

Cont Ed teachers are treated by our educational system as a disposable labour force. If our society values education and then believes that better conditions for learners and educators translate to a better society, then this should be reflected in the way that all teachers and students are treated. I understand that most people are completely unaware of the conditions under which we work. I hope that my testimonial can help more people realise that this situation undermines the foundations of our educational system.



Nikolaos, teaching this summer after suffering serious injuries while cycling to Dawson