

# TEACHING-STREAM POSITIONS: SOME IMPLICATIONS

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### TEACHING-STREAM POSITIONS: SOME IMPLICATIONS

The increasing demand for university education, and the declining resources with which to provide it, are fundamentally altering our institutions and reshaping the academic profession. Traditionally, university professors in what can be termed traditional tenure-stream faculty positions have a threefold responsibility: teaching, research and service to the institution. The first two responsibilities are consonant with what is seen as the function of a university: the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Research and teaching are viewed as inextricably bound together because, in the words of the Boyer Commission (1998), widely accepted as defining excellence in undergraduate education, universities are “communities of learners” and the education they provide is grounded in inquiry, and not merely the transmission of information. Excellent university teaching is animated by an enquiring mentality: the research engagements of the professor, as well as the classroom, ideally, raise issues that spark further research, and foster critical inquiry on the part of students.

In Canada, at least to date, the postsecondary sector comprises primarily publicly-funded universities and colleges. College faculty are, generally, not obligated to pursue academic research. Teaching, by and large understood as applied theory and job training, is their principal obligation, and their workloads reflect this. In contrast, the universities all incorporate research obligations into definitions of workload. Typically the breakdown, sometimes called “distribution of effort (or DOE),” is 40% research, 40% teaching and 20% service (termed “40/40/20”) to the institution. Teaching loads vary among universities and departments (and even within departments), with loads of three courses taught per semester over two semesters (termed 3-3) at the high end, and 3-2 or 2-2 more typically. Notably in the sciences, the load is often considerably less. The decrease in teaching load in the last few years is meant to allow more time for research, and to increase research productivity, increasingly the primary international measure of institutional excellence.

In addition to traditional tenure-stream faculty, universities typically also employ full-time faculty whose contract is of limited duration—contractually limited (CL) or limited term (LT) - and these faculty may or may not have the same load as their traditional tenure-stream colleagues. At York University, for example, in many faculties, the load for contractually-limited instructors is 3/3, whereas their immediate full-time traditional tenure-stream colleagues' load is 3/2. For a variety of reasons, in addition to full-time traditional tenure-stream and contractually-limited full-time faculty positions, universities have, for many years, also augmented their teaching resources with faculty who are contracted on a course-by-course basis, a practice that has increased in recent years.

The proportion of the teaching done by these “part-time” (often called adjunct or sessional) faculty varies by institution, and by faculty or department within the institutions. In some programs, the mix of full and part-time faculty is used to introduce particular perspectives into the curriculum. For example, programs such as nursing and medicine, business, law, education and social work often employ practitioners to teach courses and to supervise practicums. Research Fellows in the sciences may teach laboratories, and senior level graduate students may be assigned their own courses to teach instead of leading tutorials in courses taught by someone else. A distinguishing characteristic of part-time faculty employed in these ways is that they are not individuals who would prefer to have full-time professorial positions. Typically they have other employment in the sector, related to the subject they are teaching, or are graduate students who may or may not desire professorial positions upon completion of their studies.

However, other part-time faculty are PhDs who would prefer full-time positions, or graduate students who have completed all their doctoral work except the dissertation (ABD), and who chose to remain within the academy

rather than to seek other kinds of employment. Although at a great disadvantage, many also pursue research activities and publish. They teach courses at one or more institutions at salaries far lower than those paid to full-time faculty, have little or no job security, and few to no benefits. Universities depend on them because they comprise a cheap and flexible labour pool, enabling the institutions to lower their teaching costs, and to redirect resources as student demands shift.

In the last several decades, the staffing of universities has altered considerably, and the change is a relatively widespread phenomenon. In the United States, for example, in 2007, traditional tenure-stream appointments accounted for only approximately 30 per cent of the postsecondary sector teaching complement. Approximately 51 per cent were adjunct faculty, hired on a course-by-course basis, and the remainder were full-time limited-term appointments.<sup>1</sup> There are no statistics available for Canada, but some Canadian institutions do half or more of their teaching with adjuncts and contractually-limited full-time faculty. It must be stressed that these changes have only one driver: the level of funding for universities. The result is the reluctance and/or inability of institutions to commit to traditional tenure-stream faculty to meet their instructional needs. In *Academic Transformation*, Clark et al. say flatly that “the teacher-researcher model is in retreat and the vision of a university system where almost all students are taught by a teacher-researcher is no longer with us (108).”

In an attempt to regularize this diminished vision of university education, and to meet the demands of increased enrolment, many institutions have created what has come to be known as a “teaching stream” or (misnamed) “teaching only” positions. The nature of these positions varies from institution to institution, but all share three characteristics: teaching is the priority of these faculty, the teaching load of the position is higher than that of traditional tenure-stream faculty and little or no research is required.<sup>2</sup> Typically, also, they are paid less than traditional tenure-stream faculty. The positions are meant to have several advantages: they make the teaching of more students at a lower cost possible; they augment the number of faculty available for service to the institution; they can free up “researcher-teachers” for greater involvement in graduate programs; they provide stable employment for people who otherwise would be “part-timers” and provide them with opportunities for educational and institutional leadership; and they provide an alternative for professors who prefer teaching to research.<sup>3</sup> Since the principal criterion for their hire is excellence in teaching, improved undergraduate teaching is, arguably, more likely to occur. Often arguments for these teaching-stream positions are bolstered by the assertion that excellent researchers may not be good teachers, and vice versa, and that room should be made in the institution for both strengths.

Mindful of the **HECQO Project on Teaching-Stream Faculty in Ontario Universities**, the purpose of this discussion paper is to suggest various implications of this shift in university staffing that appear not to be contemplated by the HECQO proposed study (see Appendix B).

Some version of teaching-stream positions exist in at least 14 of the 20 publicly funded universities in Ontario, and are increasingly common elsewhere. At the University of Toronto, they are relatively widespread. In some institutions they are confined to certain departments; for example, at York University they are called “Alternate Stream” and are limited to languages, sciences and nursing, but expansion, or the development of a “teaching-only” stream, is contemplated. York’s Alternate Stream faculty are evaluated for tenure and promotion on

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<sup>1</sup> “Trends in Faculty Status” <http://www.aaup2.org/research/TrendsInFacultyStatus2007.pdf> [Appendix A] Accessed 11 March 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Clark et al. understand their “teaching-stream” faculty distribution of effort as 80 per cent teaching and 20 per cent other, and model it on the state university system in the California (presentation to COU Colleagues, August 26, 2010). The text does not indicate, however, that it is the case that faculty in these institutions are required to maintain research activity.

<sup>3</sup> At one university, teaching-stream faculty typically are engaged in pedagogical and/or discipline-related research. Moreover, in some departments they are involved in graduate programs (Personal communication. Geraldine MacDonald. March 27, 2011.).

teaching and service only. Some Collective Agreements limit the proportion of the full-time complement that can be “teaching-stream.” Salary varies, but typically it is less than that of traditional faculty. In many institutions some form of tenure-like process leads to continuing positions. The awarding of a continuing appointment after rigorous review is what distinguishes these appointments from the widespread practice in the United States of terminal contracts only and the practice of awarding tenure to only a very small proportion of those hired, and so achieving the same result.

### THE STRENGTHS

Teaching-stream positions seem to solve many problems. Even if the salaries for these positions are commensurate with those of traditional faculty, their higher teaching load lowers the cost per student and has the potential of sizably augmenting the undergraduate teaching capacity of an institution.<sup>4</sup> Given the purpose of their position, teaching-stream faculty can focus on curriculum development and teaching expertise, provide service to the department and institution, and stabilize units that now may rely on marginalized “part-time” faculty, whose continued employment in a unit is always uncertain, and who have little to do with the institution outside their own classrooms. If fully integrated into departments, teaching-stream faculty can free traditional faculty for the various facets of graduate education.

For existing part-time or adjunct faculty, the teaching stream is a solution to their extremely marginal relationship with the university or universities in which they teach, and their employment insecurity. It provides them with status, stability, improved salary and benefits, and more control over their teaching. It may not be the academic position they envisioned and sought for themselves, but it is a vast improvement over unstable part-time work for those who desire a career in the academy.

### THE LIMITATIONS

Taking a teaching-stream position may be, as OCUFA entitled their provocative 2008 discussion paper on the issue, a “career limiting move.” It is so because it is quite unlikely that anyone could research and publish in their field while in a teaching-stream position, and so such faculty would be unable to compete with traditional tenure-track academics or new scholars who have a research portfolio to present when applying for traditional tenure-track positions. As well, even if their institution supports their grant applications, in an environment that requires a research record to compete, they would soon be disadvantaged. Moreover, if they are confined to introductory courses, their relation to their field could soon atrophy.

At present, and perhaps for the foreseeable future, there is a glut of unemployed, or marginally employed, PhDs who would appreciate the prospect of steady employment. However, “teaching-only” is not the job for which they were trained, or that they imagined for themselves. Traditional doctorates are primarily research degrees; the dissertation in every discipline is the heart of the degree and its *raison d'être*. So an important question to ask is: for whom are these jobs meant? Who, ideally, would be hired, and with what qualifications?<sup>5</sup> Or, put differently, for which junior academic is this job a first choice (even if the salary were to equal that of traditional faculty – an unlikely situation)?

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, Clark et al. seem to recommend equivalence in salary.

<sup>5</sup> There are professional doctorates that can be pursued, particularly in non-Canadian jurisdictions, and these do not typically involve dissertations but rather “practitioner-based” exit requirements – however, these are rarely pursued by Canadians in traditional disciplinary areas and rarely hired, in any case, into university-level teaching-only teaching positions. See for example, Boud, D. and Lee, A. eds., *Changing Practices of Doctoral Education* (London: Routledge, 2008); Scott, D., Brown, A., Lunt, I., and Thorne, L., *Professional Doctorates: Integrating Professional and Academic Knowledge* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2004).

The paucity of traditional tenure-stream positions is well known. New PhDs in disciplines where the primary utility of the degree is academic usually expect to spend a couple of years of contingent teaching, with or without a postdoctoral fellowship of some kind. However, after several years, hiring committees begin to view them less favourably, even if they have managed to maintain a record of scholarship. Time between highest degree and date of hire of teaching-stream faculty at one university suggests that teaching-stream jobs are, indeed, not “first choice” but rather an amelioration of contingent part-time status.

Moreover, the PhD as it now stands is not the optimal training for a “teaching-stream” position. Not only do most graduate schools offer no training in university teaching, but even those which now offer some training do not reliably credential it. Thus, virtually all PhDs emerge from their programs having proven themselves at a pursuit they may not pursue again -- but without education in what they will be doing. It certainly is true that many love the classroom, and research less so, and that other faculty find the classroom a trial (whether or not they are good teachers) and their research is their chosen activity, but in the current situation it is unlikely that aspiring academics will have the luxury of simply following their inclinations. How to prevent these teaching-stream positions from being the refuge of those who somehow “didn’t make it” on the primary job market?<sup>6</sup>

Institutionalizing of teaching-stream positions in a positive way poses critical questions for graduate education. What might be the best preparation for the teaching-stream? If other than a PhD, how, and at what point, will graduate students choose one path or the other? And having done so, how will they be regarded in the academy?

How will the increasing prevalence of teaching stream positions affect the university’s traditional role as a forum for the development of critical inquiry? Clark et al. assert that research shows there is little relation between being an excellent researcher and an excellent teacher. That finding is contentious, but nonetheless, that is not the same as saying a good university teacher need not be a researcher, and the converse. Splitting the two activities implies a fundamental rethinking of what comprises excellent undergraduate education.

Depending on discipline and over a career, it is fairly well recognized that an individual faculty member’s research productivity will vary. Some arrangements recognize this variation by allowing flexibility in “distribution of effort,” assuming 40 per cent research/40 per cent teaching/20 per cent service as the “normal” distribution, but assigning more teaching in periods of less research activity, or, conversely, a lighter teaching load when research (e.g. the need for archival work elsewhere, or the completion of a manuscript) may require some teaching release. An example within a Collective Agreement is the University of Guelph, which offers the option of a discussion with the dean to determine individual variations in the mix of research, teaching and service allowed for a specified amount of time. The Collective Agreement at the University of Western Ontario insists that teaching and research be equally important in tenure and promotion. It also allows faculty members to choose and request an alternative workload. An issue that arises from this type of arrangement is whether it simply would be used to reward research or, conversely, punish lack of research productivity with more teaching, or whether it is used constructively to recognize career variation. Ideally, the fluctuation would be construed as neither, but rather the flexible distribution of teaching/research loads over time would be conceived as advantageous to faculty renewal, and overall institutional productivity. Unfortunately, more typical are practices that assign faculty higher teaching loads when, and because, their research productivity is considered inadequate (thus ensuring there will be little opportunity for a vigorous return to research) and promoting a culture of teaching as punishment.

The literature on attitudes to teaching within university cultures, particularly in “research universities”, suggests that research productivity is always the most valued aspect of an individual’s activity. For example, a recent study

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<sup>6</sup> This problem is most acute in fields whose primary purpose is academic (most of the humanities and social sciences might be so described). In professional programs, for example Nursing, Business, Performance and Studio Arts, people may come to teaching after years in the field, and teaching stream may be completely appropriate for their new career goal.

of 34 universities<sup>7</sup> found that regardless of the policies on valuing teaching, faculty continued to see research as the institutional priority. Thus, without a cultural shift, choosing a higher teaching load, even temporarily, suggests failure to do research rather than preference for an equally valuable activity. This cultural attitude toward teaching is also a problem for teaching-stream positions: the attitude creates a two-tiered rather than simply a bifurcated faculty.

Put differently: how to retain and further develop a robust culture of inquiry in undergraduate education with a faculty complement, some of whom have a “teaching intensive” workload and others have a “research intensive” workload, but all of whom value equally both aspects of academic work? Should not all faculty engage in scholarly activity, perhaps with different levels of output, depending on the definition of their position, or where a flexible load is permitted at varying periods? Should not all graduate degrees also prepare students for teaching responsibilities?

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- That where teaching-stream positions are instituted they remain a small proportion of the faculty complement.
- That in any event, flexible workloads be introduced for traditional faculty in a positive rather than punitive fashion, and that it be clear teaching excellence is the responsibility of all faculty.
- That teaching-stream faculty be required to engage in research and scholarship, at least into the pedagogy of their discipline, but preferably in matters of their choosing, although at a lower threshold of activity than traditional faculty; that they be eligible for research and travel support, and so on; that they receive regular sabbaticals.
- That graduate faculties develop programs that will comprise teacher education in postsecondary teaching for all students, a certification program as credential for teaching-stream positions, and consider instituting doctoral programs more appropriate for teaching-stream positions.
- That institutions alter their culture so that teaching is valued equally with research.

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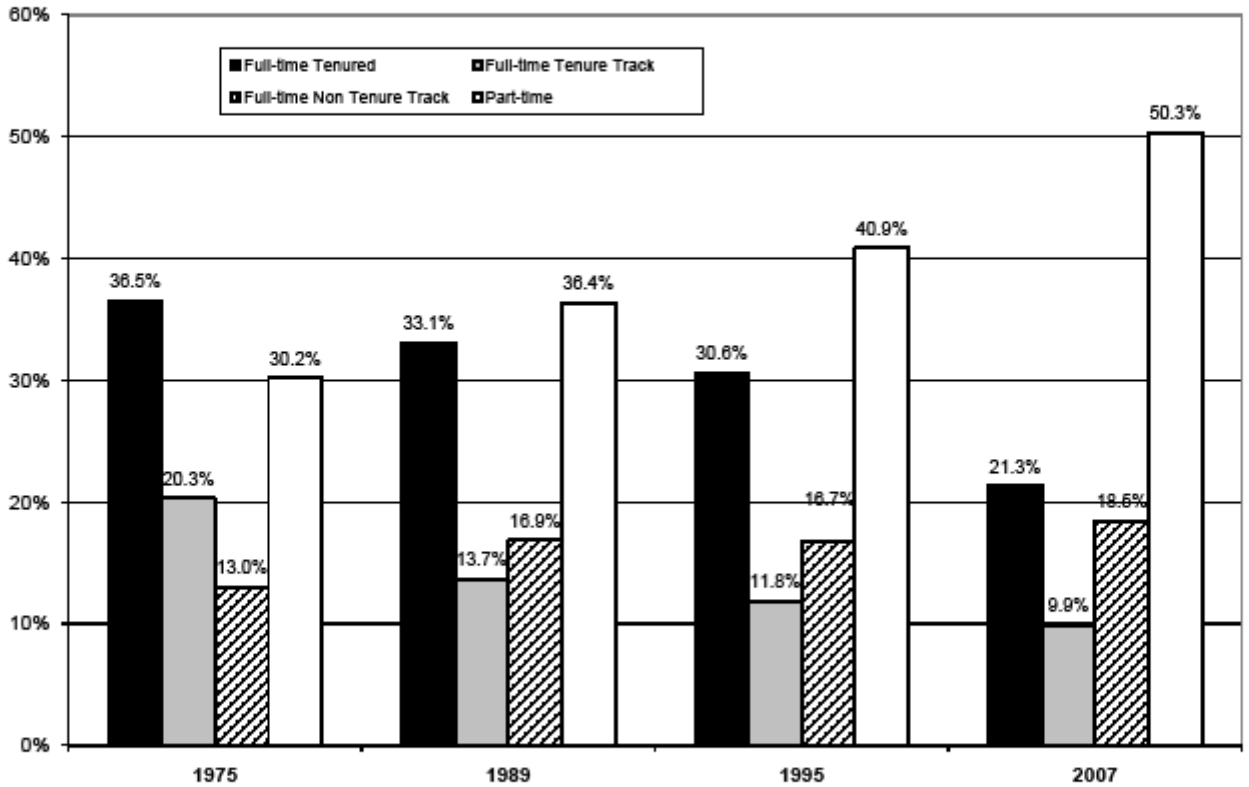
<sup>7</sup> “Ethos Matters” *InsideHigherEd*, Feb 1, 2011  
[http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/02/01/study\\_finds\\_that\\_professors\\_judge\\_colleges\\_on\\_commitment\\_to\\_teaching\\_by\\_overall\\_mission\\_not\\_policies](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/02/01/study_finds_that_professors_judge_colleges_on_commitment_to_teaching_by_overall_mission_not_policies), accessed Feb 1, 2011]

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APPENDIX A

**Trends in Faculty Status, 1975-2007**  
**All degree-granting institutions; national totals**



Source: U.S. Department of Education, IPEDS Fall Staff Survey. Compiled by the American Association of University Professors.

### APPENDIX B

#### HEQCO PROJECT TEACHING-STREAM FACULTY IN ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

**Assignment Summary:** An evaluation of whether or how the employment of teaching-stream faculty could address the pressures of increased enrolment and expanded research expectations facing Ontario universities, with particular attention to the effects on teaching and learning quality.

A recent HEQCO-supported study (Clark, Moran, Skolnik & Trick, 2009) observes that Ontario universities have had to respond to two major societal forces over the past few decades:

- Demand for increased access to PSE, which is moving higher education from an elite model to one of near universal participation
- The belief that research activities of postsecondary institutions must play a more direct role in the economic development of the province and the well-being of its citizens

In their view, revenue has not kept pace with these increased responsibilities. Institutions have responded to these pressures by increasing average class sizes and by a greater reliance on contract and part-time faculty. The consequences of these and other adjustments for educational quality are unknown. These pressures will continue and intensify in coming years given projections of demand for PSE in Ontario, particularly for undergraduate degrees. The authors call for system redesign, and provide a number of options for reform.

HEQCO's *Third Annual Review and Research Plan* (2010) indicates that we agree with the basic diagnosis contained in *Academic Transformation*, and acknowledges that the authors have advanced some interesting ideas for system change. We note, however, that their analysis stops short of providing hard evidence on the relative costs and benefits of each, and that this work must be done before any of the proposals can receive serious policy attention.

The task of maintaining and enhancing learning quality in classes, where average sizes are such as to challenge traditional teaching methods, is the subject of another HEQCO call for expressions of interest. This project concerns the second development, namely the increased reliance on faculty with little or no disciplinary research responsibilities.

There are currently a range of such appointments in Ontario universities (OCUFA, 2008), and similar patterns are evident in many postsecondary institutions in the United Kingdom (HESA, 2010; HEFCE, 2010; Locke & Bennion, 2009), Australia (Government of Australia, 2010) and the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010; Plater, 2008; Shuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Finkelstein, 2003). Our interest here is in teaching-stream faculty, sometimes referred to as teaching-only appointments (OCUFA, 2008). These are generally full-time appointments. They may offer tenure or at least long-term or renewable contracts. Instructors typically have course loads that are 1.6 to 2 times that of regular full-time faculty (Clark et al., p. 102). Teaching-stream faculty are expected to remain current in their fields and to develop pedagogical skills, both of which may involve research (UFTA, 2007; McMaster, 2006, Nipissing, 2006). In some instances, they are expected or encouraged to be active in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

If such development is encouraged, positive effects on teaching and learning quality may be realized, to the extent that teaching-stream faculty become teaching specialists, equipped with the most recent pedagogical and technical developments and skilled in curriculum design, and to the extent that this knowledge is shared amongst all faculty.

This project will explore whether or how the employment of teaching stream faculty assists universities in addressing the pressures of increased enrolment and of expanded institutional research activities, while maintaining and enhancing teaching and learning quality.

The final report will include:

- A review of the literature on teaching-stream professors
- An overview of the current range of teaching-stream appointments at Ontario universities – this section will not be a complete inventory of such appointments, but it will include examples of the main types of appointments in place
- Comparisons with similar appointments at the national and international levels, including where applicable, reference to incentives available in other jurisdictions to create or maintain these positions
- A critical analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of expanding the use of teaching-stream professors in Ontario universities; the analysis will pay particular attention to:
  - The implications for teaching and learning quality
  - The contribution to the ability of universities to address projected enrolment challenges while maintaining or enhancing research objectives
  - The budgetary implications for institutions
  - Design and implementation issues, including those for current permanent and contract faculty

This analysis will be based on various sources, but will include consultations/interviews with key stakeholders in Ontario (faculty organizations/associations, union representatives, institutions, student organizations, faculty members, students).

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