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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

This letter, written on behalf of the UPEI English Department, continues the discussion begun in *The Cadre* before Christmas on sessional lecturers ("The Real Deal With Sessional Lecturers at UPEI," 11 Nov, 1997: 6). We wish to draw attention to two matters: the qualifications of sessional lecturers, and their pay.

In the English Department we have relied for many years on sessional lecturers: they have carried twenty percent or more of our program, chiefly the UPEI writing requirement (English 101 and one other 100- or 200-level English). Each instructor -- and we select them carefully -- comes to us always with at least one graduate degree in English, sometimes two, and always with related work experience (such as publications, teaching in writing programs elsewhere, or professional employment that involves a lot of writing).

In addition we employ sessionals with special expertise in special areas, such as theatre, creative writing, and children's literature. Several of our sessionals are published authors; another will be given an honorary degree by UPEI at the spring Convocation; yet another, from former times, is now President of the University.

Students can remain assured, then, that even if their teacher has no personal office or few faculty privileges or, as the budget fluctuates, assurance of continued employment here, he or she has the goods for teaching them the subject they are being taught.

For us, the second issue is the only critical one. By any accounting, UPEI sessionals are badly underpaid. Even highly conservative calculations (taking into account the research and committee work demanded of full-time, twelve-month faculty, and also paid holiday time) show that sessionals earn less than half as much per course -- which is how they are paid -- than the most junior professor among the full-time faculty.

With these facts in mind, the English Department has made several representations to the Faculty Association, through its President, to have sessional stipends made a standing item of the yearly salary negotiations; and to the Administration, through our Dean, to have such an approach taken seriously. Our department also pays, from our operating budget, a very small honourarium to the two representatives of our sessionals who sit on the English Council, as a recognition of this extra donation of their time. But this payment must be considered as only what we can do in a token way, locally, by taking money already allotted to other needs like photocopying and telephones. In our view, the university at large, even in these difficult financial times, simply *must* take another hard look at its allocations, and find a fairer level of pay for these hard-working, valued, and -- for the continuance of the freshman English program -- irreplaceable teachers.

Lisa Muzumdar, Student Representative, English Council
Professor T.K. Pratt, Vice-Chair, Department of English

