



PRECARIOUS INSTRUCTORS

A CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS

How can full-time faculty promote fairness and equity for precarious instructors, in History and beyond? What are full-time faculty responsibilities to precariously-employed colleagues? What are some promising practices that our department can consider implementing?

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There is a crisis in working conditions for precariously employed history professors in Canadian universities. It is a crisis decades in the making; it has taken a profound personal and collective toll on generations of historians. As real as this situation is to the workers themselves, it is largely invisible at both department and association levels where precarious workers are often held responsible for their own working conditions. At the same time, departments, perhaps unconsciously, benefit from a historically unprecedented multi-decade internship system. This needs to stop.”

– Precarious Historical Instructors’ Manifesto, February 2020¹

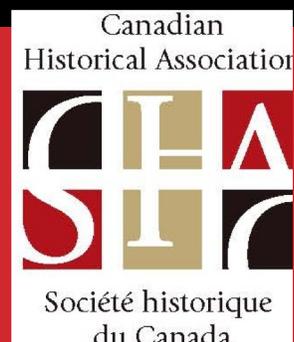
CONTEXT

The majority of faculty in Canadian universities work contract to contract, with precarious employment conditions. “Once among the most secure professions in the country, by 2016-17 contract jobs in the sector accounted for the majority (53.6 per cent) of all university faculty appointments,” according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.² Since the CCPA shared data from Canada’s 78 publicly-funded universities in 2018, the situation has only deteriorated. Most History students are taught by precarious rather than full-time instructors. What does this mean for our departments?

In February 2020, a group of precarious instructors issued the Precarious Historical Instructors’ Manifesto. The fact that they did so anonymously, for fear of possible reprisals, is itself an indication of the problem. The Canadian Historical Association responded with a series of webinar discussions and at its 2020 annual general meeting, endorsed the Manifesto.

A GUIDE FROM THE CHA

This conversation guide is produced through the [Canadian Historical Association](#) as an aid for History departments (and others) within the Precarious Instructors’ Manifesto and C.H.A. responses on how to promote equity for precarious instructors at the department level.



RATIONALE

The Canadian Historical Association recognizes that more must be done to ensure equity and fairness for colleagues who teach on a precarious basis. As the CHA vice-president wrote in a report delivered to the CHA in May 2021: “The Canadian Historical Association must recognize precarity within our discipline for what it is: a form of structural violence. The “collegial” structures within the academy implicate full-time faculty in a system, while not of our making, that is fundamentally unfair and exploitative.”³

The CHA began to address this issue as a result of the advocacy by precarious instructors themselves. It has made a start in responding to the recommendations of the Precarious Historical Instructors’ Manifesto. Action is now needed at the departmental level. Both the Manifesto and the CHA report lay out a series of recommendations to departments. Yet these can only remain recommendations until departments and permanent faculty discuss and begin to take action for equity internally and within their own universities. Some have started. Others have not. In 2021, the CHA Council mandated a committee to make recommendations to departments on promising practices.

One result is this conversation guide, which aims to allow departments to discuss these important issues in a structured conversation. It is inspired by the “Kitchen Table Guide for Reconciliation Dialogue” from Reconciliation Canada.⁴

Please follow the ground rules and schedule of this conversation guide as closely as you can, but also remember it’s intended as a tool to help departments consider current practices and promising practices for the future, so use it as best suits your needs.

Background Documents appear as appendices to this document:

- Precarious Historical Instructors’ Manifesto <http://activehistory.ca/2020/02/precarious-historical-instructors-manifesto/>.
- First response by the CHA <https://cha-shc.ca/news/the-chas-response-to-the-precarious-historical-instructors-manifesto-2020-03-05.htm>.
- Letter in support of the manifesto from tenured faculty <http://activehistory.ca/2020/03/an-open-letter-to-the-canadian-historical-association/>.
- CHA annual meeting resolution <https://cha-shc.ca/uploads/60c0d1d2c6a9d.pdf>.
- Link to CHA precarity webinars <https://cha-shc.ca/precarity/engaged-engages-a-cha-webinar-series-on-precarity>.
- “There Is No Solidarity In A Meritocracy” <https://cha-shc.ca/precarity/cha-report-on-precarity>.
- Promising departmental practices <https://cha-shc.ca/precarity/departmental-best-practices-for-precarious-teachers>.

GROUND RULES

No interruptions. In order to ensure that no voice dominates and that everyone is able to take part, please do not speak while someone else is speaking. Don’t argue – instead, listen actively and then share your own thoughts. In general, the conversation is designed to use a “talking circle” model, in

which each person awaits their turn before speaking and participants do not directly oppose each other, at least not in opening rounds. Please try to ensure mutual respect for each other and please bear in mind the goals of the exercise. The facilitator's role is to keep the conversation moving and on track, not to intervene on content.

Reconciliation Canada offers the following ground rules for this type of conversation:

Norms for Sharing Circles:

- *Speak on behalf of yourself only*
- *If you are not speaking, your job is to listen wholeheartedly*
- *Every participant is invited to take care of their own needs (bathroom break, personal time away from the circle)*
- *Being in a circle allows us to co-create safety for ourselves and one another*
- *While recognizing personal traumas, the focus for the circle is to increase greater understanding of the need for reconciliation*

Ideas for Impactful Dialogue

- *Listen openly to ideas; be curious and listen to understand*
- *Assume best intentions; clumsy words can be a sign of learning*
- *Speak honestly and leave time for silence, emotion and vulnerability*
- *Remember that everyone has a responsibility to make space for all voices to be heard*

PREPARATION

Decide who will facilitate and invite participants. Try to find a comfortable space and ensure that participants feel safe physically and emotionally sharing controversial thoughts if necessary. Thus a public café or classroom is not the best space. The goal is to create at least some of the feeling of sitting in a salon, living room or at a kitchen table.

Share materials (appendices to this guide) with participants ahead of time, and invite them to read those that seem important to them, while making it clear that advance reading is not required.

The space should have video and internet access to allow screening near the beginning of short videos from the CHA precarity series. The facilitator should cue the videos up to the appropriate spot in advance to avoid using session time to do so.

Remind those who will attend that there will be several rounds of conversation, and the early rounds are aimed at listening to colleagues, not debating. Bear in mind that colleagues are coming from

different places and do not have equal power. Be prepared to repeat the ground rules in a friendly fashion.

You may wish to prepare a land acknowledgement or other form of recognition.

AGENDA (TIMES FOR AN 85-MINUTE MEETING)

1. Introductions – each person introduces themselves and their interest in the issue (5 minutes)
2. View 2 videos from CHA series (10 minutes)
 - a. Recommended in English: Catherine Murton Stoehr⁵, Jeremy Milloy⁶, Andrea Eiding and David Tough⁷.
 - b. Recommended in French: Godefroy Desrosiers-Lauzon and Christine Gauthier⁸
3. Questions and conversation
 - a. How do you respond to the calls to action in the video you just watched (initial responses, no debate!) – 15 minutes
 - b. In light of the video, what do you think the responsibilities of full-time faculty are to colleagues who happen to be precarious? – 15 minutes
 - c. Do you wish to respond to points raised by others? – 10 minutes
 - d. Look over the CHA recommendations to departments. How are we doing? – 15 minutes
 - e. Next steps – 10 minutes
4. Farewells/assessment of dialogue – 5 minutes

You are encouraged to take actions coming out of this conversation, within the department and the university. A useful venue could be your next departmental meeting, or another appropriate venue. The CHA is prepared to assist where it is useful to you. Please do not hesitate to get in touch.

¹ Anon, "Precarious Historical Instructors' Manifesto," 20 Feb. 2020, <https://activehistory.ca/2020/02/precarius-historical-instructors-manifesto/>

² Erika Shaker and Chandra Pasma, "Contract U: Contract faculty appointments at Canadian universities," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 1 Nov. 2018, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/contract-u>.

³ Steven High, "There Is No Solidarity In A Meritocracy: Precarity In The History Profession In Canada," report to the CHA, 1 May 2021, <https://cha-shc.ca/precarity/cha-report-on-precarity>.

⁴ Reconciliation Canada, "Kitchen Table Guide for Reconciliation Dialogue: For Individuals, Communities and Organizations," n.d., <https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/toolbox/kitchen-table-guide-reconciliation-dialogue-individuals>.

⁵ Time code 47:27 - 51:54. Access via <https://cha-shc.ca/english/publications/cha-publications.html/engaged-engages-a-cha-webinar-series/precarius-historians-diversity-inclusion-and-history-departments>; or <https://youtu.be/2dQvIxnwn8w>.

⁶ Time code 49:09 – 54:20 and 56:30 – 60:00. Access via <https://cha-shc.ca/english/publications/cha-publications.html/engaged-engages-a-cha-webinar-series/4-precarius-historians-trade-unions-the-neo-liberal-university>; or <https://youtu.be/tfy7JdWVR48>.

⁷ Time code 6:59 - 13:32 and 23:39 - 33:37. Access via <https://cha-shc.ca/english/publications/cha-publications.html/engaged-engages-a-cha-webinar-series/5-precarius-historians-disciplinary-caring-what-can-the-cha-do>; or https://youtu.be/ym_uqt1S1_s.

⁸ Time code 5:38 - 10:40 and 41:38 - 43:46. Access via <https://cha-shc.ca/english/publications/cha-publications.html/engaged-engages-a-cha-webinar-series/4-precarious-historians-trade-unions-the-neo-liberal-university>; or <https://youtu.be/tfy7JdWVR48>.