

Why We Must Oppose New Teaching-Only Streams

by Craig Heron, Department of History, York University

Across Canada, university faculty and their unions are being asked to accept new colleagues who will be full-time teachers, but not scholars. Teaching-only streams are high on the agenda of academic managers looking for ways to cheapen labour costs. The model varies a good deal, but typically, it seems, these instructors are asked to teach four full-year courses. They are not expected to engage in any scholarship (except perhaps that related to pedagogy), and are not assessed on such professional contributions. They might have some job security, perhaps even something approximating tenure, but not necessarily.

Historians, like other academics, might see this new stream of appointments as a solution to fewer hirings and rising enrolments. I hope they will think twice, and recognize that this proposal is yet another way to increase the number of worse paid, precarious positions within the academic labour market. What follows is a slightly revised version of a critique that I circulated at York University in the spring of 2011 after our administration brought in such a proposal, in response to our request for reduction in the full-time faculty's teaching load to two full courses.

Teaching-stream appointments are fundamentally antithetical to all that our universities stand for, and, in the name of cost-cutting, can do grave damage. I am opposed to their introduction because I strongly believe they will have a negative effect on us, our students, the young scholars we have recently trained, and those filling the new positions.

A teaching stream fundamentally disrupts the important intellectual dynamic between research and teaching.

Few of us (at least in the Social Sciences and Humanities) would deny that we bring a great deal of intellectual energy and insight from our research into our work with students in the classroom. They benefit from engagement with faculty who can explain, first hand, how research questions are formulated, and who can share the approaches to research and research tools that they employ in their own research. This is true at all levels of the curriculum. This has always been one of the strengths of a research-intensive university and one of the ways that our scholarship enriches undergraduate education. Few of us would also deny how much our research benefits from the insights that arise from synthesizing broad bodies of knowledge and highlighting key themes and issues in our disciplines for our undergraduate audiences. The symbiosis between teaching and research is essential and would be seriously threatened by a teaching stream.

Moreover, a teaching stream would bifurcate the undergraduate curriculum, as the new appointees would inevitably be assigned to introductory courses. Since they would not be expected to be

active scholars, they could not be assigned to upper-level undergraduate or graduate courses. The integrity of the undergraduate curriculum would suffer as students encountered this great divide between teachers and teaching scholars.

The introduction of a teaching stream at this point would seriously undermine the academic careers of a recent generation of young scholars.

The reason that this measure looks so attractive to management is that there is a large pool of underemployed young scholars on the academic labour market who, after years of graduate training, have been unable to find tenure-stream jobs. Under our supervision, they have been taught to be scholars (and teaching scholars), and would almost invariably prefer a normal academic appointment. They will be forced by their economic circumstances to apply for the new teaching-only positions, and in the process will effectively end their development as scholars. Teaching four courses a year will give no time to devote to research or the presentation of research findings to scholarly conferences or in journals, and their contracts with the university will have no incentives to do so. This is exploitation of highly skilled academic labour of the worst sort, and amounts to the academic kneecapping of a generation of once eager, hopeful young scholars.

There is no room in the collegium for such an employment hierarchy.

Our various academic professions are communities that welcome new hires as equals. We share a mutual respect based on the commonality of our experience as scholars and teachers. It is fundamentally disruptive of that sense of collegiality to introduce people who are hired with the expectation that they will only do part of what we do and who would not be expected to share our research orientation. It would be impossible for the pure-and-simple teachers to avoid feeling inferior to the researchers. They would in fact have been turned into a new *caste* of full-time workers within academia. Disciplinary cultures within a university would be eroded and impoverished. We should not be willing to accept such a fundamental change in our working environment.

A burdensome four-course load will make high-quality teaching nearly impossible.

Teaching-stream appointees with four courses a week could easily be putting something like forty-eight hours a week in class preparation, classroom teaching, grading, and advising. Service work, we were told, would be 20 per cent more of such appointee's time. How could undergraduate instructors pull together the knowledge on a subject, assemble appropriate reading material, and develop creative pedagogical techniques in such a packed scenario? They would not have time to keep

abreast of new literature to be incorporated into course content, and would have no incentive to use more labour-intensive teaching techniques (more writing assignments, for example). Students would be short-changed, and the quality of the learning experience would certainly decline still further.

The proposed new teaching-stream appointments will inevitably be applied to the full-time faculty complement.

There is absolutely no assurance that the proposed teaching stream will simply replace part-time, per-course appointments, as administrators like to argue. In maintaining the faculty complement, deans will almost certainly start to make some proportion of new-hires teaching-only. Indeed, at York, the proposal for this new stream came forward from the administration when our union representatives insisted that the extra faculty needed to implement a workload reduction would have to be full-time, tenure-stream colleagues. In ten years' time, it is easy to imagine that as many as 10 per cent of our full-time faculty will be in the teaching stream – perhaps more. Even with a cap on their numbers, we have no guarantees that they will not eat into the complement of regular tenure-stream appointments.

Regular tenure-stream faculty will end up with more work, not less, and will therefore not have a great deal more time to do research.

Management has argued that a teaching stream will support more “research intensity” by allowing scholars to devote more time to their research. Yet, if we combine the effects projected above, the new teaching-stream appointees will have little time for service (if their work week is already chock full of teaching responsibilities, how could they be chairs, undergraduate or graduate directors, program coordinators, committee chairs, etc.?) and will, of course, do no graduate teaching or supervision. If, as I fear, the full-time faculty complement will actually shrink over the next ten years (as teaching-stream appointments take over some former tenure-stream positions), then there will be fewer of us to do service and graduate supervision. In fact, arguably there will be a reduction in the proportion of active scholars, and thus the “research productivity” will not expand at all.

We should not be engaged in trying to solve our universities' budgetary problems with such a fundamentally flawed and deleterious proposal.

A LONGTIME CHA MEMBER IS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE BERKSHIRE CONFERENCE OF WOMEN HISTORIANS

UN MEMBRE DE LONGUE DATE DE LA SHC EST ÉLUE PRÉSIDENTE DE LA BERKSHIRE CONFERENCE OF WOMEN HISTORIANS

At the last “Little Berks” that was held at the University of Massachusetts, June 9-12, 2011, Franca Iacovetta, longtime member of the CHA, winner of the 2008 Sir John A Macdonald for her book, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006, and professor in the history department at the University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus, was elected president of the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians. She is the first ever non-U.S. citizen to achieve that prestigious position.



Moreover, Franca, as president of the parent organisation that sponsors the tri-annual international conference on Women history, known as the “Big Berks”, will host the event that will be the first-ever Big Berks ever held outside the United States, at the University of Toronto in 2014.

Congratulations Franca!

Franca Iacovetta, membre de longue date de la SHC, lauréate du prix Sir-John-A.-Macdonald 2008 pour son livre *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006 et professeure d'histoire à l'Université de Toronto, campus Scarborough, a été élue présidente de la Berks Conference of Women Historians lors de la tenue de la « Little Berks » à l'Université de Massachusetts du 9 au 12 juin 2011. Elle devient ainsi la première citoyenne non américaine à devenir présidente de la Berkshire Conference of Women Historians.

Par ailleurs, Franca sera, à titre de présidente de l'organisation mère qui commandite la conférence tri-annuelle internationale sur l'histoire des femmes, connue sous le nom de “Big Berks», l'hôte de l'événement qui sera la première Berks jamais tenue à l'extérieur des États-Unis, à l'Université de Toronto en 2014.

Félicitations Franca !