Working for a Living Around the Ivory Tower

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About RPIRG

The Regina Public Interest Research Group (RPIRG) is a student-run, student-funded non-profit organization dedicated to community-based research, education, action and awareness in the public interest. RPIRG exists to provide its members with the resources to be active citizens on the University of Regina campus and in the greater community.

About CRU

The Community Research Unit (CRU), based in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Regina, connects community groups and University of Regina faculty and students through research, service-learning, and other collaborative activities. These partnerships seek answers to community questions to foster positive action and change.
Executive summary

Survey overview

- A total of 687 members of the university community – students and employees at the University of Regina and federated colleges – completed the electronic survey.
- Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with a representative cross section of the University of Regina campus.

Living Wages

- Over 140 living wage ordinances have been established across Canada, the United States, and the UK.
- Regina’s “living wage” is $16.46 an hour, or an annual income of approximately $58,000 for a family of four.
- Around 23% of workers in Regina earn less than the living wage, compared to 25% at the provincial level (based on City of Regina figures).
- Most of the living wage literature suggests that living wage policies are a net benefit to workers and the organizations in which they are employed. To date, there is no empirical evidence to substantiate the argument that living wages lead to catastrophic economic consequences.
- Across Canada, the number of temporary academic workers has been on the rise for at least two decades. At the University of Regina, the number of sessional lecturers has grown by 12% since 2011.
- Dozens of universities in the United States and the UK have become “living wage” universities, including Ivy League institutions.

Work in the “new” Saskatchewan

- Real wage growth in recent years has slowed after a period of meaningful wage increases.
- Part-time and temporary forms of employment in Saskatchewan are on the rise while the number of full-time jobs has declined.
- Despite a decade of economic growth, over 26,000 people depend on food banks in Saskatchewan, an increase of over 50% since 2008. Meanwhile, Regina is home to the second highest Indigenous child poverty rate in Canada.
Working around the ivory tower

79% of University employee participants identify as white, 4.9% as First Nations or Metis. Around 7% identified as “visible minorities”.

The average salary for academic staff across the U of R and federated colleges (not including sessional lecturers) is $114,000. Academic staff employed at the First Nations University of Canada earn 9% less than the campus average.

The average salary for “out-of-scope” employees at the University of Regina is approximately $122,000. Senior managers earn on average $163,000 per year.

APT (Administrative, Professional, and Technical) staff earn, on average, an annual salary of $74,000. APT staff employed at the First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv) earn 12% less than the campus average.

Teaching assistants and research assistants earn between $13.57 and $20.58 an hour.

Roughly 60% of academic workers at the University of Regina are employed on non-permanent contracts.

CUPE 5791 Applied Scientific, Facilities, Operational, Security, and Trade Services workers at the University of Regina earn between $12.68 and $42.76 an hour (not including benefits or special allowances). Rates of pay at FNUniv range between $13.17 and $30.19 an hour for comparable occupations.

The median annual income range for University employee participants is $56,000 and $65,999.

The median hourly rate of pay for off-campus employment is $15 per hour.

The median gratuity for workers who earn tips is $50 per shift.

Even though an overwhelming majority of university employees are satisfied with their immediate working environment and level of compensation, over half worry about losing their jobs due to budget cuts and subcontracting.

Many of the interview participants across academic and non-academic positions at the University spoke about unpaid overtime and overwork due to attrition and budget cuts.

48% of sessional lecturers depend on their academic contracts for at least half of their annual income.

While most sessionals taught, on average, only one course at a time, a few teach five or more classes at once. Over half said they would accept a full-time faculty position at the U of R if given the opportunity.

A third of respondents are unable to save any money at the end of the month; over half save $100 or less each month.
Students at the University

- University of Regina students are more likely to report being of Aboriginal ancestry (7%) compared to the national average (3%).

- Over forty percent (45%) finance their education through some form of repayable debt.

- The average debt load amongst these students at the time of graduation was $14,085, slightly higher than the national average of $13,331.

- A majority of students at the University of Regina (59%) report working for wages and to being employed about 20 hours per week. Over half of students recognize that employment has a negative impact on their education.

- Professional childcare services is the single largest monthly costs for students and staff.

Recommendations at a glance

- The formation of a campus-wide Contingent Workers Caucus aimed at addressing the working conditions facing casual and term-based academic and non-academic workforce.

- Hourly base rates of pay for employees employed by the University of Regina (and federated colleges) must be increased to match local living wage calculations. A similar commitment to pay a living wage must be made by employers who conduct business on campus (e.g., food services, student organizations) as a matter of University of Regina policy.

- Labour organizations and the University must conduct a study of contingent work and commit to a definition that defines the purpose of these categories of employees where one currently does not exist.
Methods

Research for the study commenced in the fall of 2014. At that time, research assistant support funded by the Regina Public Interest Research Group (RPIRG) focused on developing a literature review and annotated bibliography. Reports and peer reviewed literature related to living wage ordinances, movements, and economic theories were assembled in advance of crafting a survey and semi-structured interview schedule. Several comparable living wage methodologies and survey templates from Canadian and American post-secondary institutions were used as guides. An application to the University of Regina Research Ethics Board (REB #2015-025) was submitted and ultimately approved over the Spring/Summer semester of 2015. The University’s Survey Committee granted approval for the electronic survey to be distributed over campus email listservs.

The on-line survey ran from September 2015 to February 2016 and was promoted through social media, University listservs, post cards, posters, and word of mouth. An identical survey was administered through the Faculty of Business Administration research participant pool for technical and recruitment purposes. Data from both surveys were merged prior to statistical analysis. Containing a total of 60 branching questions, the survey addressed a range of issues including demographics (sex, age, relationship status, country of origin, parental status), income, educational enrollment, employment, job security, job satisfaction, cost of living, and other related queries. Unless stated otherwise, the use of "University of Regina" is meant to include the federated colleges (Luther College, Campion College, and First Nations University of Canada).

Survey participants were provided the option to enter their name into one of ten, $50 draw prizes, as a means of encouraging participation. Business students who completed the survey through the participant pool were also awarded course credit. A total of 687 (n=687) members of the University community (students and employees) completed the survey. Of that population, approximately 264 participants agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. These individuals were then contacted and asked to complete a short survey with the purpose of constructing a representative interview sample.

Twenty-eight (n=28) participants were selected for interviews based on their employment status (university employees/non-university employees; academic staff/non-academic staff), demographics (sex; country of origin; racial identity), and student status (student/non-student; domestic/international student). This population offers a meaningful cross section of the University of Regina community, including the federated colleges of Campion College, Luther College, and First Nations University. Semi-structured interview questions focused primarily on the respondent’s economic history, employment information, childcare needs, parental status, opinions on living wages and employment, student experiences, and living wage policies. Interview participants were awarded a $25 honorarium.

Many of the participants have been quoted at length in the report in an effort to ensure that their voices are heard and to avoid misinterpretation. In some instances employment titles, place of employment within the University of Regina (and federated colleges), and other identifiers have been masked to protect the confidentiality of participants.
The “living wage”: A background

In the 19th century, English professor, J.E.C. Monro defined a living wage as a “yearly wage sufficient to maintain the worker in the highest state of industrial efficiency and to afford him adequate leisure to discharge the duties of citizenship” (cited in The Economic Journal 1894, 365). This wage, the author continued, might be obtained through increased efficiency, raising the price of a product, or by reducing the rate of profit. These reflections would certainly resonate with opponents and advocates of the living wage today.

Legal scholar Harry Arthurs wrote in his review of Canada’s labour standards regime, “no worker and by implication their family should receive a wage that is insufficient to live on... or be required to work so many hours that he or she is effectively denied a personal or civil life” (Arthurs 2006, 47). Indeed, the social dimension of wages and wealth distribution has long been a concern for radicals and social reformers since the earliest periods of industrialization. Minimum wage rates were, in fact, instituted as a culmination of “living wage” movements throughout much of the industrialized world. American President Franklin D. Roosevelt went further, insisting that “no business which depends for existence on paying less than living wages to its workers has any right to exist in this country” (cited in Pollin 2003, 1). It was not until the 1990s that the contemporary iteration of a living wage began to take shape.

Workers left out

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s real wage growth for Canadian and American workers was slowing despite productivity gains. Adjusting for inflation, annual earnings rose just $53 between 1980 and 2005, yet labour productivity grew by over 37% (Sharpe, Arsenault, and Harrison 2008). Similarly, the disposable income of the top 1% income earners increased by 77% between 1986 and 2012, compared to just 19% for the bottom 90% (Government of Canada 2013). Over this period labour’s share of GDP also declined. This development was particularly acute in the mid-1990s as wages fell while the economy recovered. Subcontracting, outsourcing, and the privatization of government enterprises and services amplified the problem for labour. In many cases economic recovery was fueled by the use of less expensive, offshore labour. This period was also defined by the growth of contingent, precarious, and temporary work. Young workers, women, and minorities continue to be disproportionately impacted by these developments (Government of Canada 2013).

The low wage jobs being created in Canada’s “new economy” also means that incomes for thousands of workers are being outstripped by the cost of living (Saunders 2005). In fact, the modern living wage movement surfaced precisely because a growing number of workers were being excluded from economic booms (Ciscel 2000). In recent years businesses have started to voice concern about the impacts of these economic disparities, shedding light on the perils facing policy makers if they turn their back to living wage movements. Protests and labour disputes have even been recognized as a symptom of social discord caused by underemployment and economic marginalization (Deloitte and Human Resources Professionals Association 2012). For similar reasons the Canadian Medical Association has endorsed a guaranteed annual income as a feasible anti-poverty strategy aimed at combating the health related consequences of a dysfunctional income distribution system (Canadian Medical Association 2013).

A living wage movement takes off

Beginning with a successful living wage campaign in Baltimore in 1994, the movement spread across the United States, the UK, and more recently, Canada. The number of cities with living wage laws took off again in the recession and job-loss years of 2000 to 2003 (Fairris and Reich 2005). Estimates indicate there are around 140 living wage ordinances across the United States.
Drawing from the Baltimore experience, London’s living wage campaign was launched in 2001 by London Citizens, a broad-based coalition responding to the conditions of the working poor in this major metropolitan centre. By 2011, over 100 employers and 10,000 workers had been involved in the distribution of nearly £100 million as a result of London’s living wage law (Wills and Linneker 2012). That same year New Westminster, British Columbia, became the first Canadian city to adopt such a living wage ordinance (Lamman 2014). In that city, the campaign was spearheaded by anti-poverty advocates who targeted employers in an effort to pressure these organizations into paying employees a living wage (Cohen 2008).

The impact of a living wage

What makes the living wage movement important is its capacity to identify subcontracting as a means of proliferating low wage work. In Saskatchewan one only needs to look at the privatization of largely unionized and relatively well-paid hospital cleaning and prison food preparation services as an example of why subcontracting is a threat to fair pay and other achievements arrived at through decades of collective bargaining (Graney 2016). For these reasons living wage campaigns have even been identified as a means of responding to a new landscape of work and capitalism, either through municipal ordinances or voluntary recognition schemes. Whatever the method, living wage projects need to confront subcontracting for what it is: a means of shedding responsibility and disempowering the workforce (Wills 2009). Without these considerations, simply raising the floor of wages will not address the precarious nature of employment facing a growing number of workers (Luce 2015). By some accounts, the work of living wage coalitions exceeds the value of wage increases by creating a community of allies interested in long-term social and economic justice (Nissen 2000; Wells 2016).

Academic and policy advocates have grappled with the implications of living wage ordinances since at least the late 1990s. Opponents on the right, for example, insist that living wage ordinances create distortions in the labour market, negatively impacting employment and hurting the very constituency that these laws are meant to protect (Lamman 2014). Critics also suggest that as living wages create upward pressure on an organization’s labour costs, wage premiums will result in inflated costs or, alternatively, reduced levels of investment into employment-generating business activities. Municipal living wage ordinances have similarly been accused of inflating the costs of procuring services through subcontractors, creating additional burdens on the taxpayer. But how do these theories stack up against the evidence?

For starters, consider that even the Fraser Institute acknowledges that businesses abiding by living wage ordinances have experienced less turnover and absenteeism compared to similar enterprises in the same industry. Workers who are paid what they perceive to be a fair wage are less likely to seek employment elsewhere. Fast food giant McDonald’s discovered this when it experimented with wage increases beyond the legislated minimum (Wahba 2016). Recent studies of the U.S. food service industry found strong evidence that increasing the minimum wage reduces turnover and enhances employee productivity. Nor have the minimum wage increases in the U.S. impacted employment in full and limited-service restaurants (Lynn and Boone 2015). Similar conclusions can be drawn in Canada. The suggestion that wage hikes will cause businesses to close, research indicates, is unfounded.

Seattle’s recent experience with a graduated $15 an hour minimum wage is one of the best examples showing that businesses can still succeed in a living wage environment (Torres 2016). In a study of the San Francisco Airport’s living wage policy, employer instituted surveys uncovered that higher wages and improved benefits translated into enhanced worker performance and morale (Reich, Hall, Jacobs 2005). Turnover rates dropped between 44% and 80%. Employment levels similarly increased. Airport activity also grew. Of course, the wage bill for employers spread across the SFA did rise, and these costs were passed on to airlines and others, averaging just $1.42 per passenger.
Other studies have found that living wage ordinances have modest effects on reducing urban poverty in some jurisdictions, conflicting with economic theories suggesting that these laws would have a negative effect on the working poor (Neumark and Adams 2003). Still, significant boosts in wages had moderate negative employment effects on low-skilled workers. British studies have also repudiated claims that living wage laws would adversely affect net business activity. In London, average wage increases ranged between just 0.2% in banking and 6.2% in food services and hospitality (Wills and Linneker 2012). For small cleaning companies impacted by living wage ordinances, wage rate increases of some 26% were accompanied by wage costs that barely exceeded 7%. Overall contract costs actually went down by 4%. What these and other findings suggest is that the economic catastrophe anticipated by mainstream economic theory and conservative think tanks has not materialized.

### Calculating the living wage

Using data drawn from Statistics Canada, over a quarter of workers in Regina, or about 30,000 employees, were said to be making less than a living wage in 2012. The $16.46 living wage rate is important when compared to the current minimum wage of $10.50 an hour. About 5% of workers in Saskatchewan are earning minimum wage (MacEwen 2016). Based on 2013 figures, at minimum wage a family with two income earners working full time would be just above the poverty line (Gingrich, Enoch and Banks 2014). Around 23% of workers in Regina earned less than a living wage in 2015. An annual income commensurate with a living wage, meanwhile, would put this family at $58,232, midway between the median family after tax income ($89,400) and low income cut off line ($34,600).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of workers earning less than $16.46 in Regina (thousands)</th>
<th>Percentage of workers earning less than $16.46 in Regina</th>
<th>Percentage of workers earning less than $16.46 in Saskatchewan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey Microdata

The British Columbia office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) initially developed the method of calculating a living wage in 2008. This measure has since become the standard for living wage networks across Canada. "Families who work for low wages face impossible choices", the authors of the CCPA report write.

In many cases it means that the adults in the family are working long hours, often at two or three jobs, just to pay for basic necessities. They have little time to spend with their family, much less to help their children with school work or to participate in community activities (Ivanova and Klein 2015, 1).

In this model the living wage reflects what people need to support themselves based on actual costs of living. In real terms it means that a living wage includes an income sufficient to participate in recreational and community activities, in addition to food and housing. Retirement savings, homeownership, and debt servicing costs are not included in the calculation. Expressed as a simple equation:

\[
\text{Total expenses} = \text{Employment income + government transfers - income and payroll taxes}
\]
The calculation is premised on a model four-person family with two income-earning parents and two children. One of the children attends a licensed day care full-time; the other requires professional childcare before and after school. Each parent is enrolled in one post-secondary course each year to upgrade his or her skills and credentials. The family rents a small three-bedroom apartment and owns a used car along with one Regina Transit pass. An equivalent of two weeks’ pay is factored into the calculation as a buffer against unemployment and family emergencies.

Expenses are calculated for the family using a modified Market Basket Measure (MBM) constructed by Statistics Canada. The MBM estimates the cost of goods and services “representing a modest, basic standard of living” (Gingrich, Enoch, and Banks 2014, 13), broken down by food, clothing, shelter, transportation, household and other expenses, child care, health care, parents’ education, and contingency (see Gingrich 2014 for details).

Another element of the living wage calculation includes transfers like the Universal Child Tax Benefit (UCCB), GST Credit, and Saskatchewan Low Income Tax Credit, among others. Finally, the method considers federal and provincial income and payroll taxes, including Employment Insurance and CPP deductions, in the equation. Based on these factors the CCPA Saskatchewan concluded that by working full-time at 35 hours per week, a double income family would need to earn $58,232 (adjusted for transfers and taxes) to match expenses in Regina (Gingrich, Enoch, and Banks 2014, 15).

**Source:** Gingrich, Enoch, and Banks (2014)

**What does the University of Regina community think about a “living wage”?**

Even without socio-economic prompts, students and U of R employees were able to provide a coherent understand of what constitutes a living wage.

**What is a living wage?**

- Employment security
- Income for healthy food, housing, utilities, as well as some savings
- An ability to live comfortably and afford a “reasonable,” frugal standard of living
- Work-life balance
- Being able to achieve peace of mind through economic security
- Capacity to afford prescriptions and medical treatment
- Typically involves two income earners
- Dignity as an economic human right
- Ability to maintain a social life and to participate in society
- Able to afford an education

Although interview participants never pegged down a definitive rate of pay or annual income, there was a consensus of what a living wage is not – Saskatchewan’s current minimum wage of $10.50 an hour. When asked about the benefits of living wages, or what it might mean to increase
the provincial minimum wage to match local living wage calculations, participants established the following implications:

### Positive Living Wage Outcomes

- An overall better life for workers who are not currently making a living wage
- Improved health outcomes for individuals and their communities
- Fewer financial strains on social services
- More disposable income and money to spend in the local economy
- Higher productivity, lower attrition, fewer absences due to illness
- Improved workplace morale
- Students would be able to commit more time to their studies, increasing their ability to succeed
- Significant social and economic improvements in communities
- Students and workers would be able to afford to live in Regina and have some disposable income

Some respondents also believed that living wage policies might have negative outcomes, as illustrated below. There were those who also responded negatively to the suggestion that people deserve to be making a living wage, indicating instead that this level of economic comfort needs to be earned through experience and education. Some believed living wage policies would generate negative economic outcomes:

- Higher unemployment for younger, less experienced and educated workers
- Increased competition for low-skill jobs
- Employers in the low-wage, low-skill intense industries like food services might replace labour with machines
- Cities and municipalities that commit to pay living wages to subcontractors and all other employees would have less money for basic infrastructure
- Less business activity and store closures
- If public institutions in Saskatchewan, like the University of Regina, committed to paying living wages, the provincial government would respond negatively
- Cost of living would increase

Important for our research of work around the ivory tower, a living wage is characterized here as more than a simple rate of compensation. In fact, these responses help to define the social and economic nature of what constitutes good work and how we measure an organization as a living wage employer.
Wages and earnings in the “new” Saskatchewan

For nearly a decade economic growth in Saskatchewan has been built on the premise of a prolonged resource-led boom. In Regina, the purchasing power of adults increased by 13% between 2005 and 2010 as median incomes exceeded the rate of inflation (Elliot n.d.). In 2010, the individual median income reached $36,830 before taxes, second only to Estevan ($40,500) in Saskatchewan. About 41% of households held pre-tax incomes of under $59,999, which approximates the 2013 living wage calculation (Statistics Canada 2011). That year median household income in Regina was $84,890, reaching $93,670 by 2013 (CANSIM Table 281-0063). This sat well above the national average of $76,550.

In 2015, average weekly earnings in Saskatchewan were $981.61, exceeding the national average of $952.11 and second only to Alberta ($1,145.97) (CANSIM Table 281-0027). By February of 2016 this number came to $993.09, an increase of just 0.2% from a year earlier (CANSIM Table 281-0063). Earnings in Education Services, meanwhile, fell 0.9% over the same period even though weekly earnings ($1,026.91) were above the provincial average. This sector includes establishments such as “schools, colleges, universities and training centres”, in accordance with North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) (Government of Canada n.d.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Average weekly earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale &amp; retail</td>
<td>$601.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food services</td>
<td>$374.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$1,020.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td>$1,248.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 281-0063

Wage growth in the province needs, however, to be compared with the average cost of living. Consumer price inflation was 2.4% in 2014, decreasing to 1.6% in 2015. Some estimates suggest that CPI will near 2.5% in 2016, pushed upwards by a low exchange rate and subsequently more expensive imported goods (SaskTrends Monitor 2016a). Since at least 2012 real wage increases in the province have been shrinking. Adjusted for inflation, average hourly wage increases declined from 2.6% in 2012 to just 0.9% in 2015 (SaskTrends Monitor 2016a).

“Some of those questions are tough. The food one, for example, sucks because some months I can only spend what I have, which likely isn’t that much at all. Ideally though, it would be nice if I could spend that much, and will (easily) if I can. Eating healthy is expensive as hell. I also had a bit of an issue with the income and hours section. When the oilfield was in good times, I could easily work a 40 hour week around school. I’m also doing this coop position, so I’m 40 hours a week presently, but only for four months.” (U of R student, co-op placement, employed full-time)

Employment forecasts for the province have been equally negative. Unemployment in Saskatchewan hit 6.3% in April of 2016, the highest rate in over a decade (CANSIM Table 282-0087). Approximately 14,300 full time jobs were shed between March of 2015 and 2016 just as part time employment grew by 3,200 positions. A similar trend was witnessed with the decline of 12,200 permanent jobs and the increase of 1,100 temporary jobs over this period (CANSIM Tables 282-0151 and 282-0073). Employment in Regina, meanwhile, has grown 1.5% since 2015 (SaskTrends Monitor 2016a). Real GDP growth for the province is expected to stagnate at just 0.7% throughout 2016 due to weak commodity prices, especially oil (Conference Board of Canada 2016).

It is also important to consider that the wealth generated during Saskatchewan’s growth period has not been equally distributed. Over 26,000
people depended on the food bank in 2015. Since 2008, food bank usage in Saskatchewan increased 50.6%, compared to the national average of 26.1%, according to Food Banks Canada (2015). Around 17% of people who accessed the food bank are members of the working poor. Almost half (45%) of those individuals who accessed this service are children. Indeed, child poverty in the province needs to be addressed when discussing the economic state of Saskatchewan. According to a study on child and family poverty, a third of poor children live in families with full time employment. Regina is also home to the second highest Indigenous child poverty rate across the country at 41% (Macdonald and Wilson 2016). Evidence suggests that the problem has deepened over the last decade, even during periods of economic growth. This reality emphasizes the importance of living wages and living wage policies. These startling statistics build on evidence that inequality in Saskatchewan has been on the rise for decades (Gingrich 2009). It is in this context that the report examines the conditions of work and employment amongst employees and students at the University of Regina.
Living wages and the ivory tower

Since the 1980s most of the research on employment conditions in post-secondary institutions has focused on the growth of contingent academic workers, or what the Higher Quality Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) has labeled “non-full-time instructors”. Very little attention has been paid to administrative support and operations workers employed within universities and colleges.

Non-full-time instructors are typically categorized into three broad groups: sessionals, who are employed on a per-course basis; graduate student instructors; and other instructors, a category that includes a range of appointments that are often difficult to compare across institutions (Field, Jones, Stephenson, Khojetsyan 2014). But by nature all of these classifications are characterized by their lack of employment security (Baldwin, Chronister, Rivera, Bailey 1993). Sessionals are indeed the quintessential “just-in-time” worker. This has led some to characterize the sessional lecturer as a form of migrant labour: inexpensive, temporary, and mobile (Mysyk 2001).

For these reasons much of the research on precarious labour within the ivory tower has focused on sessional instructors, and with good cause. These employees make considerable contributions to the academic and research mission of the university, yet receive none of the job security enjoyed by their full-time counterparts. And while the use of temporary and non-tenured part-time faculty is a long established tradition, what has changed is the extent to which this constituency has become a staple of university-level instruction (Warme and Lundy 1988). In this historical context it is useful to differentiate between the “classic” and “contemporary” model of contingent faculty in today’s university (Rajagopal 2002).

“Classic” part-time faculty are individuals with careers outside of the university who teach in order to share their expertise. This might include business leaders, executives, lawyers, even university managers and other professionals. “Contemporary” part-time faculty, on the other hand, aspire to hold full-time tenure-stream appointments but are unable to secure such positions and therefore take on contingent positions on a per-course basis. Both typologies of non-tenure track faculty offer benefits to universities by enabling institutions to preserve flexibility in a period of financial constraint and make it easy for administrators to respond quickly to enrollment patterns (Baldwin, Chronister, Rivera, Bailey 1993).

Although there is no central depository of statistics regarding part-time faculty, the consensus is that universities across Canada, the United States, the UK, and Australia are expanding the number of casual, non-permanent academic workers they employ (Field, Jones, Stephenson, and Khojetsyan 2014). The lack of national or institution-level data on this category of university employee is, according to some, a reflection of the tenuous and ephemeral nature of their existence in academia (Muzzin 2009). What evidence does exist suggests that the casualization of academic labour has gone further in Canada than in the United States (Dobbie and Robinson 2008). Even as academic unions attempt to combat the growth of contingent labour through collective bargaining it appears that unionization has done little to curb this trend. At some Ontario universities the number of sessional assignments increased 135% between 2002 and 2012 while the number of full-time faculty increased by just 20%. Salary surveys suggest that sessional earn between $5,000 and $9,000 per course. In the United States the condition of sessional remuneration is even worse. There, these contingent academic labourers receive on average half of what their Canadian counterparts earn on a per course basis (Coalition on the Academic Workforce 2012; Chronicle of Higher Education n.d.).

These trends are part of what scholars have long claimed to be symptoms of commodification; first of the university’s research function and,
increasingly, its education function (Mysyk 2001; Noble 2002). Contingent faculty appointments in this sense operate as a response to soaring enrolments, increases in class sizes, tuition inflation, and the loss of tenured faculty to attrition, where sessionals are hired in their place. Conversations like this unfold as the universities move from bastions of liberal arts education (Axelrod, Anisef, Lin 2001) to measurement and audit-driven institutions (Spooner in press), as well as spaces of and for commercialization (Tupper and Titley 2003).

The losers in this process tend to be students who experience larger class sizes and amplified costs, along with the academic workers who face job cuts, stagnant wages, and benefit cutbacks (Dobbie and Robinson 2008). In some respects these tendencies represent a game of “catch-up”, where post-secondary employment converges with other corners of the market long defined by precarious work relations (Standing 2015; 2011). Research points out that contingent workers are no longer secluded to the lower rungs of the labour market, but exist as highly educated and skilled professionals (Muzzin 2009). Accompanying this status is the stress, exhaustion, overwork, anxiety, ill health, and insecurity that typically defines precarious employment (Gill 2014).

Here we witness a convergence between academic labour and the non-academic workers who constitute the university community and facilitate the delivery of education. Complex divisions of labour – some administrative, others on the front line of research and teaching – are more often than not overshadowed in research on conditions of employment on campus. Living wage campaigns in the United States have targeted the pay and working conditions of janitors and clerical staff, many of whom are non-unionized, at some of that country’s most prestigious academic institutions. As one writer put it, living wage campaigns “stormed the ivory tower” (Walsh 2000). And much like municipal campaigns, campus mobilizations tend to be broad coalitions involving students, academic staff, workers, community members, and faith groups. In Canada, cleaners at McMaster University fought for, and finally achieved a living wage through bargaining (Nolan 2014; Wells 2016). Dozens of post-secondary institutions across the UK and the United States have since committed to paying a living wage, including the Ivy League universities (Flynn 2012).

### Living Wage Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United States</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State University</td>
<td>Birkbeck College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DePaul University</td>
<td>Goldsmith College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgetown University</td>
<td>Institute of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>Kings College London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johns Hopkins University</td>
<td>London Metropolitan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas University</td>
<td>London School of Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>Queen Mary University of London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swarthmore College</td>
<td>School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington University (St. Louis)</td>
<td>School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan University</td>
<td>University of London College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of East London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of London Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University employment at a glance

Although workforce demographic data is not consistently reported across the University of Regina and the federated colleges, a snapshot of employment conditions can still be generating using available information. Some of the statistics below have been compiled using publicly accessible sources as well as figures acquired through the various unions and campus employers. Five labour organizations represent approximately 2,400 academic and non-academic workers at the various colleges, each with their own respective compensation and benefit structures.

CUPE 2419

CUPE Local 2419 represents around 500 student teaching assistants, research assistants, and teaching fellows at the University of Regina. Hourly rates of pay for TAs and RAs range from $13.93 to $21.86 based on student enrollment status (undergraduate, Masters, Ph.D). Semester-based stipends vary between $1,253 and $2,469.83. Teaching fellows are remunerated $6,623.69 per course.¹ The Local 2419 collective agreement offers no supplemental health benefits. All Local 2419 members are term employees.

CUPE 5791

CUPE 5791 represents approximately 700 Applied Scientific, Facilities, Operational, Security, and Trade Services workers at the University of Regina and First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv). Of this complement 285 are term/casual employees, or 40% of the total Local 5791 membership. This population includes students, retirees that return as casual workers, campus residence assistants, lifeguards, and term appointments intended to fill-in for permanent employees on leave, and so on. Hourly rates of compensation range from $14.57 to $42.76 based on seniority and occupation. It can take certain classification of employee represented by CUPE 5791 over 15 years to reach their maximum hourly rate of pay. Base monthly salaries vary from $2,209 (35 hrs/week) to $7,041 (38 hrs/week).² Under a separate collective agreement representing comparable occupations at FNUniv, base annual salaries commence at $23,970, reaching $54,961 for certain categories of employees, or between $13.17 and $30.19 an hour.

Local 5791 also represents food service workers employed by Chartwells, a division of Compass Group Canada, the company subcontracted by the University of Regina to deliver food services. Casual general helpers have a base hourly rate of pay of $12.58 and max out at $13.38 after one year. Permanent helpers earn a base rate of $13.38 with a cap of $15.61. Cooks can earn the highest hourly rate of $20.07. These rates are comparable with industry averages. Depending on the time of year, the company employees between 20 and 56 employees, most of whom are full-time.³

University of Regina Faculty Association (URFA)

Spanning seven bargaining units, URFA represents a diverse membership from the 355 Administrative, Professional, and Technical (APT) staff at the University of Regina and First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv) to 881 academic staff at the U of R, Campion College, Luther College, and FNUniv. About 1,000 of URFA’s 1,200 members are employed at the University of Regina. Annual salaries average $114,153 for the professorial ranks and about $74,000 for APT employees across the U of Regina and federated
colleges. Academic and APT employees at FNUniv are the lowest paid, falling below average salaries for their respective occupation classifications by 9% and 12%.

**Out-of-scope**

At the University of Regina proper, the distribution of these occupations is highlighted in the table below. There are an estimated 143 “out-of-scope” positions – or 5.4% of the U of R workforce – that include a range of managerial and supervisory occupations. Human resource professionals and executive assistants are also included in this list. Salaries range from around $48,000 for administrative support staff to $360,000 for senior managers. Annual salaries for these out-of-scope employees are, on average, $122,478. Of this out-of-scope group, the President, Vice Presidents, Provost, Directors, Associate Vice-Presidents, and Deans make an average of $163,330 per year.

![Bar chart showing distribution of academic, APT, CLUE, and out-of-scope positions]

Source: University of Regina (2015a)

“Others”

There also exists a category of about 334 “other” employees that includes accompanists, conservatory, consultants, coop students, Dr. Paul Schwann Applied Health and Research Centre, Elders, facilitators, post-doctoral fellows, models, as well as project, writer, contract, research, and resident attendants.

**Other food service providers**

The University Club at the U of R is an independent, non-unionized food service provider on campus. Casual workers earn between $12 and $13 per hour, comparable to industry averages. Full-time hourly staff earn between $15 and $21 per hour. Salaried managerial staff, meanwhile, earn between $5,580 and $7,998 per month.

**Sessional lecturers**

Including the federated colleges, there are 509 academic positions at the University of Regina, up 5% from 2012. This figure includes Instructors, Lab Instructors, and Librarians, as well as the professorial ranks (lecturer, assistant, associate, professor). The University does not maintain comprehensive data on sessional categories, a telling reflection on the status of these academic employees within the university community. Sessional category includes (University of Regina 2015, 16):

- Sessional lecturers – teaching courses
- Sessional Laboratory Instructors – teaching lab sections of courses
- Sessional Practicum Co-Coordinators – to facilitate with practicum placements for Social Work and Human Justice students
- Sessional supervisors – to supervise interns and pre-interns in the Faculty of Education
- Practica Coaches – preparing Education students to enter the school systems/to preparing Nursing students to enter the health care system

Between 2011 and 2014 the number of sessional appointments at the U of R—excluded the federated colleges—went from 716 to 819, representing a 12% increase, after witnessing slight drops in numbers in 2012 and 2013. This growth occurred even though the University is obliged to “reduce the proportion of sessional
appointments” in accordance with the URFA-U of R Academic Staff agreement. These figures fluctuate throughout the academic year, typically peaking during the Winter semester.

In 2014 there were nearly twice as many sessional appointments as permanent academic positions. However it is important to disclose that sessionals may hold more than one type of appointment and teach courses in one or more Faculty or Department in a given semester. By number of employees there were 348 term/casual academic employees at the University of Regina and 425 permanent academic staff. Compensation structures also vary across sessional appointment types. A Sessional I at the University of Regina, for instance, receives a stipend of $7,063 for each course compared to a Sessional Laboratory Instructor who receives $93.60 per hour.5

It is worth noting that academic staff constitute the most term-based workforce at the University of Regina. If we include the student TAs, RAs, and teaching fellows who, in some capacity, contribute to the university’s academic mission, we see that only a third of these research and teaching-focused positions are permanent. Over sixty percent of academic workers hold term appointments.
Students at the University of Regina

Approximately 14,360 full-time students are enrolled at the University of Regina and the federated colleges, up from 12,877 in 2011 (Office of Resource Planning 2015). A majority of first year undergraduate students identify as female (73%) (University of Regina 2013). Fewer University of Regina students self-report as being a member of a visible minority (18%) compared to the national average (37%). Still, this number has increased from just 7% in 2004. University of Regina students are also more likely to report being of Aboriginal ancestry (7%) compared to the national average (3%). These figures increase amongst upper-year students at the U of R (University of Regina 2014a).

Struggling to find a school-work-life balance

A majority of students at the University of Regina (59%) report working for wages and to being employed about 20 hours per week. Over half of students recognize that employment has a negative impact on their education.

Struggling to find time and money

“I still haven’t found that part time job again and definitely money is a stress. So I’m not sleeping at night or I’m not eating so that I don’t do as good on my projects or my assignments. So not knowing whether you have a job or not liking your job definitely affects how you do in university for sure.” (Undergraduate student, self-employed)

“It’s always trying to find the time to get the work done. I find that the studying, 3 hours for every hour of class work that you do is so hard to get done when you’re trying to maintain jobs. I’m basically running my own business and considering learning business it’s really frustrating that I can’t exactly apply what I’m learning to my job” (Undergraduate student, parent, holds five casual jobs, volunteers)

“You don’t always have time when you’re working to study and stuff so most of your studying is just what you sat in class and trying to retain that. So that’s my biggest concern, it’s time constraint because I don’t have the time to study the way I want. [...] I don’t think my grades fully reflect how much I’ve learned.” (Full-time student, employed part-time, two children)

“Because I think that’s like students who receive a minimum wage, sometimes they will not be able to follow their classes as they should, because they would not get healthy and sufficient food. Maybe they will be concerned about their rent. I think that would be the main reason.” (Full-time international student, works part-time)
A university employee who works with students discussed the additional barriers facing international students.

“There’s also cultural barriers. But the huge one is financial barrier. The cost of schooling and textbooks and for people who live out of town to come and live on residence is huge and especially for international students that pay double the tuition as domestic students, I think that’s totally outrageous. It’s really exploiting international students.” (Federated college employee, graduate student)

Over forty percent (45%) of students finance their education through some form of repayable debt (University of Regina 2014a). In 2015, graduating students indicated that they require, on average, $16,673 a year to finance their education (University of Regina 2015b). This figure is higher than the national average and universities of comparable size.

**A business school divide?**

Of the 72.5% of respondents who are enrolled as students – either at the U of R (70.3%) or elsewhere (2.2%) – three quarters (75.1%) are undergraduates. Within the U of R, students in an Arts-based program were the most represented (28.0%), followed by Business Administration (20.3%) and Science (16.5%). By comparison, students enrolled in Arts across the U of R and federated colleges constitute 17.6% of the student complement, compared with 10% in Business (Office of Resource Planning 2015).
With the assumption that there might exist socio-economic differences between Business and non-Business students, the data was broken down to compare these two populations. Similarities were apparent along the lines of parental status and employment. Most students do not have children (Business = 82.5%; Others = 85%) and most are employed (Business = 69.1%; Others = 63.5%) in “front line positions” (Business = 77.6%; Others = 77.7%). A comparable percentage is employed full-time (Business = 25.8%; Others = 18.9%) and part-time (Business 41.2%; Others = 43.6%).

Interesting divergences exist in terms of where Business and non-Business students are employed. For non-Business students, wholesale and retail (20%), food service and accommodations (17.9%), and Education (9.7%) constituted the leading industries of employment. For Business students, however, food services and accommodations is the leading source of employment (19.3%), followed by public administration (17.5%), and wholesale and retail (14%). Only 9% of non-Business students are employed in Public Administration. Interestingly, non-Business students are more likely to work in Management specific occupations (2.1%) than their Business counterparts (1.8%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Average weekly earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale &amp; retail</td>
<td>$601.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food services</td>
<td>$374.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$1,020.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td>$1,248.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 281-0063

Data also reveals that large disparities in pre-tax household incomes exist between these types of students. Over a third (35.7%) of Business students identified as being in households where the average annual income exceeds $150,000 compared to just 18.1% of non-Business students. Using Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives calculations (Gingrich, Enoch, and Banks 2014), almost a quarter (24.6%) of non-Business students are in households that fall below the annual household living wage, compared to only 10.8% of Business students.
When students were asked how they paid for their education, nearly half of the responses indicate employment income as a means of paying for university. This is comparable to findings from a 2015 CUSC survey of University of Regina graduates (University of Regina 2015b). Across the sample, roughly half (50.5%) of current and former students financed their education in part through a form of student loans. This is comparable to a recent CUSC study finding that 51% of U of Regina’s graduating students reported having education-related debt from their undergraduate studies (University of Regina 2015b).
Nearly 20% of current students reported to paying for their education through loans. The average debt load amongst these students at the time of graduation was $14,085, slightly higher than the national average of $13,331. Domestic tuition at the University of Regina, including fees, averages $6,357 per year (University of Regina n.d.a). International students, meanwhile, pay on average $10,312 in tuition and fees (University of Regina n.d.b).

Here, differences were found to exist between Business and non-Business students in our sample. About two thirds (64.6%) of Business students have never held student loan debt compared to 44.8% of non-Business students. Just 2.1% of Business students hold over $25,000 of student loan debt compared to 15.7% of non-Business students.
Work in the ivory tower

General demographics

A majority of survey participants (71%) were under the age of 36. Most identified as “single” (50.2%) or “married/common law” (39.9%). Women constituted the bulk of respondents (71%) and nearly three quarters identified as “white” (72.5%). “Visible minorities” counted for 11.5% of respondents, followed by Metis and First Nations (5%). Around 6% chose not to self-identify. A strong majority are Canadian citizens (87.6%), with international students (6.6%) and permanent residents (5.7%) constituting the balance of the survey population. Only 1% of respondents admitted to being employed under a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), otherwise known as a Temporary Foreign Worker. Over half (56.6%) of the survey respondents are employed in some capacity by the University of Regina.

Income and precarious work

Over half of the survey participants have a pre-tax annual income of under $45,999, with 21% making less than $11,000. Of the participants who are employed, 48.5% are salaried and another 43% paid hourly. The average hourly rate of pay is $16.55, just above the living wage figure for Regina. Hourly rates of pay ranged from a low of $10.20 to a maximum of $55.00 per hour, with a median of $15.00. In 2015, almost a quarter of Saskatchewan workers (22.7%) earned $15 an hour or less (MacEwen 2016). Between 2010 and 2015, the number of workers earning $15 per hour or less has been in decline, even though the value of that rate of pay has been diminished by nearly 10% due to inflation. Seventy percent of those employed possess some form of supplementary employment benefit. About five percent (4.7%) receive tips, with gratuities averaging $61.58 per shift but ranging between $8 and $150. The median gratuity is $50 per shift.
For the 43.4% of student respondents not employed by the University of Regina, wholesale and retail (23.5%), food services and accommodations (22%), education (14.8%), and public administration (13.9%) were the principal employers by industry. Most considered themselves to be “front line” employees (70.6%) followed by a minority who identified as “supervisors” (10.7%). Not surprisingly, the leading industries of employment are also the lowest paid. And while students appreciate the flexibility these permanent yet part-time positions offer, some lamented that they are often scheduled full-time hours but receive none of the accompanying benefits typically associated with full-time employment.

Some students struggled with the precarious nature of work. A fitness and first aid instructor commented that securing work is itself labour intensive, with courses (and employment) contingent on enrolment levels; last minute cancellations are not uncommon. This, they added, was a defining feature of health and fitness related work. When asked about fitness instruction, a student said, “It’s all precarious work.”

“I love my work but yeah it’s very, very stressful, not knowing how you’re going to make ends meet, even a few months down the road. Like you have to have that emergency fund in place. Like several years ago I was told by [a local health region in Saskatchewan] they did want me to teach full time and they kept saying okay there’s going to be a place next month, next month, next month.” (Undergraduate student, parent, holds five casual jobs, volunteers)

“It’s funny because technically I’m only supposed to have a maximum of 24 hours but what we’re experiencing in Yorkton is what’s known as a labour shortage, and it’s actually hit retail first. So because I’m so flexible with my hours I actually am getting anywhere between 35 to 40 hours a week.” (Graduate student, works part-time in retail)
### Off-campus employment by industry

- Other
- Health care
- Agriculture
- Wholesale and retail trade
- Other natural resources
- Mining, oil and gas extraction
- Finance and insurance
- Management
- Public administration
- Arts, entertainment, recreation
- Education
- Professional, scientific, and technical services
- Utilities
- Transportation and warehousing
- Food services and accommodations
- Manufacturing
- Construction

### Weekly hours of employment

- **UR employees**
- **Off campus**

- **Percent of responses**
- **Number of responses**

- **Weekly hours of employment**
  - 1-10 hours
  - 11-20 hours
  - 21-30 hours
  - 31-40 hours
  - 41-50 hours
  - 51-60 hours
  - Over 60 hours
U of R employee trends

The data was broken down further to capture income and employment trends specific to University of Regina employees. We were also able to distill the data into academic and non-academic categories of worker.

A majority (50.2%) of U of R employees who participated in the survey are under the age of 36 and most are women (68%). Of this sample, 79.9% identify as white, 4.9% as First Nations and Métis. Just over 7% identified as "visible minorities". Based on 2015 figures published by the University of Regina, only 3.24% of employees identify as Aboriginal, compared to 7.74% as from a visible minority group (University of Regina 2015c). Based on the survey sample, most employees possess a bachelor’s degree (33.1%) or Master’s (30.5%). Interestingly, 42.1% of U of R employees are currently enrolled as a student at the university, with a near even split between undergraduate and graduate programs. Sixty-eight percent reported to be employed full-time. Nearly a third (31.2%) reported to be employed in limited term contracts and around half (49.8%) in permanent positions. Fifteen percent held a combination of permanent and limited term positions. Only 2.8% of these employees were paying for some or all of their educational expenses through an employment-related benefit.

UR employee demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nations</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible minority</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I choose not to self-identify</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not surprisingly, a strong majority (83.3%) of U of R employees held unionized positions, but only a quarter (25.2%) admitted to being active in their union. Most identified as “front line employees” (65.9%), followed by “supervisor” (11.8%), and “manager” (10.8%). Three percent reported to being employed as a “senior manager”.

Members of the Administrative, Professional, and Technical (APT) group constituted the largest unit of respondents at 27.8%, compared to academic staff (21%), teaching assistants (14.5%), and non-APT support staff (13.3%). Based on data provided by the University of Regina Faculty Association (URFA), there are 355 APT members employed throughout the U of R and its federated colleges, giving APTs the highest response rate by employee group at 25%. By comparison academic staff members, including sessionals, possess a response rate of just 8%. The significance of the following outcomes should be weighted accordingly.

Teaching assistants tended to take on more than one TA position per academic year (71.7%), with almost ten percent simultaneously working five or more contracts. Teaching fellows, meanwhile, typically (80%) held just one contract over the same period. Similar trends can be seen amongst the sessionals who constitute 31% of academic staff respondents. Of this group, half (51.6%) taught three or more classes in an academic year, on average. It was not uncommon (20.7%) for sessionals to teach a course load equivalent to Instructors (approximately six or more classes), but compensated on a per course basis. There is reason to believe that the ranks of “full-time” sessionals might have expanded due to the introduction of quasi-seniority preference language in the URFA collective agreement around 2006. Depending on rank and experience, this represents an annual wage gap of between $15,000 and $45,000 per year assuming comparable teaching loads. It should be noted that Instructors are responsible for service-related duties, whereas sessionals are not.

Survey responses also provide an illustration of the number of jobs held by U of R employees. Of the 46.1% of workers employed in more than one job throughout the year, 59.6% worked three or more jobs. A startling 16.1% were employed in five or more jobs over the course of a year, and a quarter (23.6%) said they were employed in three jobs at the same time. Just under half of the University employees in this survey held permanent positions. Most were employed in a combination of casual and limited term contracts. This is representative of the U of R workforce.

Data published by the University of Regina indicates that of the U of R’s employment complement of 2,667, about 54% of employees are considered “term/casual”, or 1,427. Over 1,200 are permanent (University of Regina 2015c). With these various employment configurations in mind, a third (31.6%) of these University of Regina employees worked 41 or more hours per week. Some (4.1%) worked in excess of 60 hours a week.
“In terms of an hourly salary, like an hourly wage I think they’re well compensated. What amazes me though is that you would need to teach a number of different courses in the semester as a sessional I think to accumulate enough pay to actually live, at least in my case to live the way I do now. So I am well compensated but it’s not enough.” (U of R sessional, employed full-time with secondary job)

“I think that a lot of them are and I think a lot of them aren’t [well paid]. Sessional lecturers for example are a good example of people that aren’t working with a really strong sense of job security. My dad has his main job with the city but he also works part time in the university as a sessional lecturer. So he does one class every other semester kind of thing, and there’s not a lot of security in that.” (U of R student, employed part-time)

“It would be nice if some of [our prep time was paid]. But the amount of prep you put in really does vary. Like if I’m teaching a class that I’ve never taught before, that’s when I can get up to those 80 hour weeks where it takes a lot of prep time. And then the next year ... it doesn’t take as much time.” (U of R sessional, works various other non-academic jobs)
Sessional lecturers

While most (62.1%) sessionals taught, on average, only one course at a time, a few managed to teach five or more classes at once. Over half said they would accept a full-time faculty position at the U of R if given the opportunity. Although there is little systematic understanding of sessionals and sessional employment at the U of R, the survey findings yield valuable insights.

Twenty-nine percent said that less than a quarter of their annual income is drawn from sessional lecturer contracts, whereas almost a third (32.3%) relies on these stipends for most to a substantial majority of their income. Around 16% said that all of their annual income comes from sessional employment.

These findings suggest that while some professionals lend their expertise to the University of Regina by teaching courses as sessionals, a significant percentage rely on this type of work as a principal source of income. Indeed, as U of R data indicates, the University depends on contingent labour as an important source of course delivery. What is startling about this finding is that one of the core missions of the university—teaching—deploys a higher rate of term and casual workers compared to other support functions. But does this affect the quality of post-secondary instruction?

The trouble for contingent workers is there is no evidence to suggest that these precarious employment conditions jeopardize the quality of education, offering institutions few incentives to reduce the number of low paid yet highly skilled academic staff (Muzzin 2009). Participant responses to the query of whether or not these contingent workers threaten the caliber of education were mixed, illustrated by the comments below.

Sessional instruction and the quality of education

“I think that universities get around having to pay experienced people and get around having to hire tenured-track staff by hiring sessional lecturers. And that affects the quality of education.” (U of R graduate student and teaching fellow)

“I think that a lot of times the sessional instructors that I had were actually some of my favourite instructors and I felt really worked super hard and cared about the students and came up with innovative ways of teaching things. And perhaps part of that could even be because they were trying” (U of R non-academic worker)

“Most definitely [quality suffers]. Don’t get me wrong, these people who are sessionals they do a fantastic job. In fact I would even argue that some of my best professors were sessionals. But the thing is when you do that there’s really no incentive for them to stay. And I have seen so many good sessionals just be thrown under the bus. It’s terrible.” (U of R graduate student, employed in retail)

“I’m not sure. Because some of the best educators I’ve had at university have been sessionals.” (U of R student)
Overtime and overwork

There is value in couching the subsequent findings in the fact that the University of Regina was ranked as one of Saskatchewan Top Employers in 2016 (Yerema and Leung 2016). The institution received this status based on the institution's pension schemes, health plans, employee training initiatives, vacation allowances, Aboriginal apprenticeship programs, fitness facilities, and respect for work life balance, among other criteria. Interview participants generally agreed that this acclaim was well deserved even though many of these benefits are inaccessible to a significant number of its employees. Survey responses summoned interesting findings about other aspects of compensation and rates of pay.

In response to anecdotal evidence that students were being asked to work without pay or credit on research projects, a line of survey and interview questions related to unpaid work was developed. Three quarters (75.5%) of participants admitted to receiving no overtime rate of pay, which speaks to a symptom of several potential factors: the nature of salaried and term contract positions; a lack of knowledge of existing overtime rates; or, an expectation that employees work overtime without access to the legal or contractual minimum rates guaranteed under the Saskatchewan Employment Act or respective collective agreements. Without further investigation, the precise reason cannot be isolated in the data. The balance of responses identified "time and a half", "double time", or "in lieu" as their respective overtime rates. Employees offered some explanations during interviews.

Salaried non-academic workers at the University, for instance, talked about the seasonal nature of workloads and overtime expectations, which are often based on student recruitment and enrollment demands. APT agreements permit the banking of overtime at a rate of 1.5. In some cases, working unpaid is necessary in a context of budget cuts when certain tasks need to get done. Workers even take on these responsibilities when instructed not to by supervisors.
Overworked and not enough (over)time

“So what happens in [student service unit] is September to December I probably work 60 or more hours a week, even mid August to mid December. But then after that I go back to my normal 37.5 a week, like not too much overtime, just a bit here and three. So mid August to mid December would be 60 plus hours a week sometimes. It just depends.” (Federated college employee, non-unionized)

“Sometimes there’s more, sometimes there’s less... It’s not free because you get to use that time as time off.” (Federated college employee, unionized support staff)

“[The federated college I work at] is salary, so when I have to work extra – and this was a huge learning curve for me because coming from the Health Region everything was either overtime or banked time or time in lieu. You keep track of all of that. And coming here you can work 70 hours a week and only get paid 37 and really the faculty don’t even bat an eye when that happens. So that was huge for me to get used to that. Because I’d think okay I have to work 3 hours overtime for this meeting so I’ll just come in a little bit later the next day and my supervisor was like you cannot look at this as an hourly paid position, it’s salary. So I’ve been working a lot past 4:45 and don’t get paid for it.” (Federated college employee, non-unionized support staff)

“We’re not allowed to have overtime anymore, we haven’t for several months, but our position just requires it because sometimes we have very busy peak times and you just don’t get the work done in the work day, so I stay sometimes longer than I should just to get stuff done. Because it has to be done…” (Federated college employee, non-unionized support staff)

For certain types of sessionals, these employees are required to work unpaid hours in order to complete their duties, for which they are compensated a fixed rate. As one Practica Coach remarked:

“Fourteen hours per week paid time plus planning, phone calls, emails, assignment review/marking, necessary learning for the instructor = 16 hours unpaid time as well. Then there are meetings randomly called. It’s very difficult to have another job. [...] The Faculty is supposed to provide an office to work in but does not. [...] Personally I want a permanent position, active leadership, and benefits such as pension, vacation pay.”

A teaching assistant voiced similar concerns, adding that the power imbalance between student TAs and professors meant that non-permanent employees were often unwilling to refuse work.

“So they feel they have to keep working and yet they’re working for nothing, they are literally working for nothing. So the worst case, the student worked well over 100 hours... So really they were making less than minimum wage. And as terrible as that one was most of the students were working 80 hours for the 15 hours [a week contract]... But it’s a real problem for students. The students want to work, the professors want and need them to work and yet there is no money to actually pay them so they end up working for nothing.” (Graduate student and teaching assistant)

There reflections are not only about rates of pay and overtime, but also the conditions under which non-permanent academic staff work. Sessionals who teach courses yet maintain active research programmes are further disadvantaged by their precarious status within the university. For them, scholarly activity is unrecognized and unpaid, adding another dimension of exploitation in this employment relationship.
Since 2010, U of R employees have ranked the institution poorly on the work/life balance question, according to the institution’s own employee engagement survey. For five years this aspect of work at the U of R has been listed as “Opportunities for improvement” (University of Regina 2016c).

**Perceptions about work and pay**

Nearly a third (31.8%) of U of R employees possess annual household incomes in excess of $150,000. In most U of R employee households (85.9%) there is more than one income earner. About two thirds (68.1%) of these employees are in households earning above the Regina average of $93,670 (CANSIM Table 111-0009). However, around 20% of employees occupy households earning less than Regina’s living wage (Gingrich, Enoch, and Banks 2014). There is a fairly even distribution of individual employee annual income, from 14% earning below $10,999 to 11.3% making in excess of $100,000. About half of the sample (51.7%) earn less than $55,999, with salary scales ranging between $46,000 and $65,999 being the most common. Most students (64.8%), by comparison, earn less than $20,999.

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“Other faculty members, it’s a recognized part of their job so when a full-time faculty member publishes a paper, when they do this community work, when they participate on panels for the students’ benefit and so on that’s a part of the job. [...] If I eventually get a full-time job maybe some of this will matter but right now it’s unpaid unrecognized. [...] I’ve told people I don’t work at the university I’m an independent researcher over and over again because I don’t like the university getting credit for this work, but they still put the university’s name on. And I recognize why, maybe it’s to my benefit if the university’s name is put on it because maybe eventually down the road the university will recognize me as being somebody of value.” (U of R sessional)

Physical plant workers offered reflections on the structural problems associated with constrained infrastructure budgets and shrinking staff complements. This, one worker said, has created an atmosphere of overwork during a period of campus expansion (University of Regina 2014b).

“Well my boss comes in and says when is the last time you cleaned the hallways. I said you’ve got to make a choice. I have 13 staff but today I’ve got 3. Do you want to sit on the scrubber? Make a choice. Do you want the classrooms clean or the washroom clean or do you want the hallways done because I can’t do both? But that’s where we are right now. We’re cut down so tight with budgets. [...] When I started at the university like I said we had close to 90 people there and we had half the campus and we had 6,700 students. We’ve got 14,000 students now, twice the size of the campus, and some of the buildings we don’t clean in those buildings but guess where they go for lunch.” (University of Regina, Facilities Management worker)
University of Regina employees mostly hold positive views of working conditions and compensation. When asked how they would describe their immediate working environment, 58.2% of respondents answered “very good” to “excellent”. Only 16.1% responded with “fair” or “poor”. Pay and benefits were ranked as “good” to “very good” (63.4%), but only 9.7% said “excellent”. Over a quarter (26.9%) would describe their pay and benefits as “fair” or “poor”. Another story is told when examining perceptions of job security. A majority of employees (52.2%) are “fearful” or “very fearful” of losing their job at the U of R due to budget cuts or subcontracting. Only 20.9% said they never think about it. These findings were subsequently broken down into “academic”, “APT”, and “other” categories.
UR employee perception of work and compensation

Fear of job loss due to budget cuts or subcontracting
Compensation and living wages at the University of Regina

“Clearly, the UofR only pays enough to just get by every month. What ever happened to paying a living wage?” (Full-time U of R employee, permanent, non-APT support staff, two children, pre-tax income of $36,000-$45,999)

“Well definitely for things like vacation and time off and salary I think in comparison to other places that the UofR is competitive if not above that. And I personally don’t have any children but I know lots of people who have gone on Mat Leave, extended Mat Leave, had had the opportunity to go and I know lots of other places, like maybe not in Canada necessarily but even in the US or other countries we have it so much better than other places.” (Federated college, non-academic staff, non-unionized)

“When it comes to staff and faculty employment yes [the U of R pays a living wage]. For graduate students funding can be more difficult and some of the jobs like teaching assistantships, research assistantships don’t fall under the living wage amount in my opinion.” (Graduate student, U of R non-unionized administrative support)

Perception of pay and benefits

Workplace anxieties, low morale

Members of the APT group were the most fearful (58.3%) of losing their jobs due to subcontracting and/or budget cuts, followed closely by academic staff (57.2%), then “others” (45.8%). Yet, APT said they were most content with their pay and benefits (84.7%), with “others” being the least satisfied (67.8%). This latter category, however, was the most likely (87.5%) to describe their immediate working environment as positive. Academics were the least satisfied with their working environment even though responses were overwhelming positive (81%). Faced with a recent history of layoffs and a looming deficit, an APT employee at FNUniv said that they were not sure if their job was safe. The individual went on to provide a rationale for the institution’s financial predicament:
“That’s definitely provincial related, and cuts to education. It would be mainly provincial cuts and then they’ve turned it into a business model, and then that business model is not panning out because there’s less students attending, there’s less tuition so they’re making more cuts to more services. It’s just like a constant, I don’t know, this has been going on for years now.” (FNUniv, APT)

With some units on campus already short staffed due to attrition, according to employees, this prompted workers to believe that their employment at the university would be secure. This follows in the wake of a voluntary retirement package deal offered by the U of R in 2014-15. Others, meanwhile, felt confident that the university valued their services and performance to such an extent that job cuts in these areas would be unimaginable.

I think we’re so short staffed and I cover so many different parts of the job I don’t think they can afford to let any more people go, or have any more people leave. (CUPE 5791, library services)

Because the administration has demonstrated a commitment to my area. So they are really proud of the [program] and want it to continue and I have good relationships with the people I work with. I have good evaluations and I feel like I would know if I was in trouble. (Federated college employee, non-APT support worker)

During interviews university employees typically described a sense of pride in their jobs, especially those employees who work in a student support capacity. For the most part, the University of Regina was recognized amongst participants as a good employer. This status was earned due to what participants attributed to a fair compensation and benefits package as well as how they are treated individually at work in what some described as a generally supportive community. As one teaching fellow reflected, this extends to how graduate students are respected by their departments and the university as a whole.

“I think their compensation packages, their benefit packages are excellent compared to other universities at which I’ve worked. [...] And they do a really good job of having a bounty of everything from scholarships to remuneration for every type of research endeavour. They make a point of organizing a lot of social activities, even ones that fall flat on their faces because nobody really attends, in the attempt to help students away from isolation.” (Graduate student and teaching fellow)

Of course, not everyone shared these views. Some sessionals believed that the compromising of the university’s academic mission through the increased deployment of precarious academic labour was reason enough to question the U of R’s place as a top employer in Saskatchewan. Part of this is due to what one individual attributed to the bloat of senior administrative positions, not an uncommon sentiment amongst academic staff in post-secondary institutions (Usher 2013).

“I mean I think that everybody in the university has been frustrated. I think that whether or not you have a full-time faculty position or you’re a precarious worker as part of the academic workforce there’s been a disintegration of the academic mission as administrators are hiring more and more of their own that’s putting that ratio of administrators to people that are fulfilling the academic mission of the university out of whack. It’s led to people having to take on more and more service work as the departments are losing members that aren’t being replaced. So the amount of hours that you have to put in to doing a job and fulfilling that ratio of work that you’re supposed to do from research, teaching and administration, completely out of whack. [...] If you want to still fulfill all of those then you’re working more, you’re more and more frustrated by the culture of the university, there’s a lack of communication and understanding between administration and faculty. It’s toxic.” (Sessional lecturer, University of Regina)
A tenured faculty member echoed this position, recognizing that tensions between faculty and “administration” have led to a deterioration of the quality of work. This problem worsens when the faculty complement falls below what is required to run a successful program.

“I think that the work atmosphere has been in peril recently on account of tensions between faculty and administration. Physical workplace I think is fine. I think vacation time off is reasonable but you never get the time off because you don’t have the faculty complement to run your program so you end up doing way more than you should.” (Tenured faculty)

Speaking of a federated college, concerns were raised about the bureaucratic nature of management and decision making which compromised what could otherwise be a more collegial and effectively managed workplace. This, a student support worker said, has made the institution more “businesslike”.

From residence services to the library, staff commented on how job discretion and the nature of employee-management relations shift the perception of work from positive to negative.

“I think it’s challenging to work in an environment where you’re just told this is how it’s going to be and there was no oh we’re thinking about changing this maybe we should ask your opinion.” (Full-time student and U of R employee)

A CUPE 5791 employee, for instance, lamented on a poorly constructed “lean” initiative that would have sacrificed employee satisfaction and autonomy for efficiency. Their biggest complaint was that a study was conducted but nothing materialized in what was defined as an “absolute waste of money.” The individual embedded these remarks in a commentary about why the employer appears eager to staff management positions when other, front-line service positions are retired or sit vacant.

“They give good benefits, there’s a lot of good things that go on in the university itself, and benefits that they give you, but as far as environment ... it’s pretty laid back but it’s become more businesslike. I’ve seen it change over 10 years and it’s almost too businesslike. But that is what it is, it’s very bureaucratic...” (Federated college non-APT support worker)

“A lot of VP's, we have, once we get our full term, our [unit manager] in, in July then we’re going to go back to 3 [senior unit managers] and I still can’t really figure out what they all do. And we just, I’ve seen that and heard that from other departments that there seems to be a lot of management for not that much staff. So that, especially when we had that lean program come through here it could have been looked at a little closer.” (CUPE 5791 member)

Dignity and respect at work

During interviews a number of concerns related to dignity and respect in the workplace were raised. These voices were far ranging and diverse. Some felt that the University short-changes skilled trades during negotiations by not properly examining comparable private sector rates of compensation. Others, from library workers to custodians to student support, believed that there persists a culture of disrespect when it comes to CUPE workers generally. The slighting of these occupations takes place at the bargaining table, by immediate supervisors, and at the hands of other employees.
University of Regina employees also identified First Nations employment, and the Indigenization strategy generally, as a point of contention when addressing the question of fairness at dignity at work. A CUPE 5791 member said that the climate was such on campus that some First Nations individuals choose not to identify and that the university’s commitment to meeting equity targets has fallen short for political reasons.

“A respectful university?”

“I don’t think they really, being CUPE I don’t think they really value us. They don’t realize what an importance we have in the university, so almost kind of feel short-changed compared to the other unions and employees.” (CUPE 5791 member, library services)

“You snap your fingers and I jump or you’re in trouble. It’s never what it was meant to be. I’m nobody’s fucking servant. […] Right now they just shoot from above and get out of the way. It’s wrong. It is damn wrong. I’ve had professors come to me and wave their finger in front of my face. You know what, I’m sorry sir but I’m not your servant.” (U of R, Facilities Management worker)

“However with the different unions there is a different perceived level of, I don’t know if I should say worth or not, but it’s a lack of respect in some ways. I’m in the CUPE union and in our office we do, most of our stuff is student related and we do some scheduling and we do some [invigilation] and if there is an instructor that we require something from, there are some that are just like you want your exam, we will give your exam, you must need it for a reason. There’s some that are like no why do I have to respond to you?” (CUPE 5791, student support worker)

“[People] still have the stereotypical view that they’re First Nations so they’re going to get drunk and not come to work today. That’s a little bit exaggerated but they still have those very stereotypical views of hiring Aboriginal people here on campus, to the point where we have hidden Indians all over the place, they don’t even self declare because they don’t want to.” (CUPE 5791, administrative support worker)
The cost of living

According to the CCPA Saskatchewan’s calculations, a bare bones monthly budget for a family of four living in Regina amounts to approximately $4,800 (Gingrich, Enoch, and Banks 2014, 15). This includes shelter, household expenses, transportation, child care, food, clothing, health care, and education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average range of monthly expenses</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>U of R employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>$901-$1,100</td>
<td>$301-$500</td>
<td>$1,101-$1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>$101-$300</td>
<td>$101-$300</td>
<td>$301-$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>$101-$150</td>
<td>$101-$150</td>
<td>$101-$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>$51-$100</td>
<td>$51-$100</td>
<td>$51-$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>$101-$150</td>
<td>$101-$150</td>
<td>$101-$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>$500-$699</td>
<td>$500-$699</td>
<td>$900-$1,099</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child Care

Child care expenses constitute the greatest monthly expenses for students and university employees alike. For University of Regina employees this amounts to between 33% and 35% of average monthly expenses. The relative expense is greater for students at between 36% and 43% of average monthly expenses. Of the respondents who are parents (25.6%) a majority has two or more children (69.4%). About a third (33.7%) depend on professional childcare services, with monthly costs averaging between $500 and $699. Sixteen percent of the respondents who rely on professional childcare pay over $1,000 per month. By comparison, almost half (42.4%) of U of R employees have children and nearly a third (31.6%) pay for professional childcare services. Fifty seven percent of employees with children pay over $700 a month for childcare, with the average in the range of $900 to $1099.

Child care needs

- I pay for professional childcare services
- A spouse and/or family member provides childcare
- I do not require professional childcare services
- Adult children who no longer require care
- Mixed (Professional child care & family)
- Other
General living expenses

A majority (81.4%) of participants listed Regina as their primary residence, followed by Saskatoon (3.1%) and Moose Jaw (2.5%). Ten percent are distributed elsewhere in Saskatchewan, with 2.7% outside the province. In Regina, nearly a third (32.4%) of the participants reported they reside in a S4S postal code region (Regina South-Lakeview) followed by S4T (Regina West-Cathedral) at 14%.

Most U of R employees own or co-own their primary residence (56.6%) compared to just 18.9% of students. A comparable number of students (38.9%) and employees (34%) rent or lease accommodations as a primary residence. Not surprisingly, living with family and not paying rent constitutes the most common housing arrangement for students (41.6%). These results are consistent with living arrangement data collected through the CUSC Survey of Undergraduate Students (University of Regina 2011). Respondents paid on average between $901 and $1100 on housing expenses, with about half of U of R employees paying over $1501 a month. Of the students who contribute financially to cover housing expenses, most are paying between $300 and $1100. In October of 2015, the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Regina was approximately $1,100, comparable to the provincial average (SaskTrends Monitor 2016a). About 25% of the average paycheque in Saskatchewan is consumed by rent, up from 20% in 2005. The vacancy rate for Regina is one of the lowest in Saskatchewan, even though the availability of housing has improved slightly since 2014 (SaskTrends Monitor 2016a).

Campus residences provide an alternative to an otherwise tight Regina housing market, but as students reflect, this option does not alleviate the financial burden.

"I am very lucky to be in the position of having purchased my home before property values went up, having paid off my mortgage and having secured full-time employment with benefits.” (Employed full-time at the U of R, APT, household income over $125,000)

Average monthly household food expenses range between $301 and $500, with most students (57.2%) spending under $300. A third spend between $101 and $300 per month. About 41% of U of R employees, meanwhile, spend over $501 a month on food.

Transportation costs are also included in the basket of living wage expenses. Here, participants pay on average between $101 and $150 a month on transportation with an amount exceeding $201 being the single largest category for employees (38.8%) and students (28.9%).

Employees and students spend a comparable amount on clothing, with an average between $51 and $100 per month. Interestingly, a high percentage of students (36.7%) said that their health care plans covered all monthly expenses, compared to 20.9% of employees. In terms of out-of-pocket expenses, most paid between $1 and $50 each month.
It came as no surprise that students hold higher annual education expenses. Employees incurred these costs either through their own enrollment or that of dependents and spouses. Most students (39.4%) pay between $5,001 and $9,000 per year in education expenses compared to 21.3% of employees. A large percentage of employees (46.9%) and students (57.8%) said that they have never accumulated student loan debt. Nearly one quarter of employees (22.9%) have paid off their student loan debt, but 14.7% admitted to still holding over $25,000 of student loan debt compared to 9.4% of students.

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I am supporting an adult child who is a student living in my home (tuition, food, clothing, car, etc.) I also support two of my adult children and grandchildren who are not living in my home.” (Three children, enrolled as a student outside of Saskatchewan, employed full-time, casual, two jobs at a time, faculty member at the U of R)
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Debt and savings

A surprising percentage of the sample (44.4%) said that they pay off their entire credit card balance each month, which breaks down to 51.2% of employees and 41.7% of students. Although a third of the sample admitted that, on average, they are not able to save any money at the end of the month, evidently most are able to save some amount. What is surprising about the results is that a comparable number of students (28.9%) and employees (27.9%) say that no money is saved at month’s end. Around a quarter of each group put away between $101 and $500 monthly. Some of the variable circumstances facing students and employees alike are illustrated below.
**Monthly savings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
<th>No money at the end of the month</th>
<th>Between $1-$100 each month</th>
<th>Between $101-$500 each month</th>
<th>Between $501-$1,000 each month</th>
<th>Between $1,001-$3,000 each month</th>
<th>Between $3,001-$5,000 each month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

UR employees

Students

**Savings and income security**

“I save when I’m not a student. I spend more when not a student. I make more when not a student. I became a student again this September from working full time for a year.” (U of R student, employed part-time, works two jobs throughout the year, limited term contracts, Graduate TA)

“Things are changing. My partner will retire on disability. It will cut her income from about 80,000/year to as little as $15,249 to a max of $20,460. Obviously first cuts will come to savings. Likely we won’t have to draw on investments, but times are a changing.” (U of R student, employed full-time, permanent, U of R employee, non-APT support staff, household income of $46,000-$55,000)
Bringing about change

Discussion on living wages commonly turns to how workers can improve their conditions of employment. As the history of living wages illustrates, popular movements are responsible for driving social policy changes that bring about wage ordinances and improve basic standards of work. Indeed, the exclusion of certain occupations and sectors from economic growth in the 1990s provoked the formation of living wage movements, and today's Fight for $15 and Fairness campaign is premised on organizing for economic transformation.

Most interview participants believe they and others deserve to be making a living wage, citing benefits to themselves and communities. Most participants also concur that the University and local municipalities should be living wage employers, if these institutions are not already. During interviews participants were asked about how these changes should be brought about. Most of the responses gravitated towards human capital models emphasizing educational advancements, networking, labour market experience, and simply finding new sources of employment (Becker 1964). This aligns with the educational spending budget embedded within living wage calculations. “I think what you do is you search out for those employers and opportunities,” said one sessional lecturer who is also employed full-time off campus. Becoming a self-advocate and promoting your capabilities in the workplace with superiors was also identified as a means of improving conditions of employment.

Others believed that the capacity to voice concerns about workplace issues, without fear of reprisal, should be an avenue for affecting change. But, as some participants insisted, employees are often left without access to these voice mechanisms.

Working towards a living wage

“I feel like especially with my workplace, whenever concerns are voiced or any issues arise it’s never taken seriously because we’re student staff. But we know what’s going on because we’re students living in that situation right then and dealing with those conflicts and issues and those kinds of things right there. Whereas if we weren’t I still think validation and communication and consistency and inclusion are all important.” (Student, full-time University of Regina employee, non-unionized)

“The biggest barrier to improving standards and conditions of employment is people can’t afford to complain or go to court or to fight for their rights.” (Former food service employee)

“This one is hard for a lot of people but they need to find a way to have a voice. But then there’s that fear that you’ve got the job insecurity then. Because if you point out what’s wrong and the inequalities in a job there can be backlash.” (Undergraduate student, employed part-time)

A few participants identified unions and collective bargaining as an avenue to lift working conditions and advance towards a living wage. For precarious workers, however, accessing the benefits of these institutions can be challenging.

Even within a bargaining unit, by one sessional’s account, permanent employees wield greater influence, with precarious workers and their interests being sidelined in the process.
Using collective bargaining and union representation to advance the interests of contingent workers possesses limitations. Labour organizations have also been unable to stop the growth of contingent academic work, as evidence from the U of R and Canada’s post-secondary sector demonstrates. For students especially, these mechanisms are of little value when attempting to affect tuition rates and the cost of living. Living wage campaigns hold promise in building bridges between occupations, bargaining units, employee groups, and the various constituencies that define a university community. In this respect a living wage movement must concern itself with the quality of employment, dignity and respect in the workplace, cost of living, professional development and identities, as well as bread and butter issues like compensation and benefits. These are also struggles that must move beyond the walls of the ivory tower.

**Student-community-labour alliances**

When successful, living wage movements are defined by their capacity to generate alliances of workers and community members aimed at improving overall conditions of employment. This extends beyond basic rates of pay and benefits to include broader understandings of dignity and economic justice in the workplace and throughout an economy. Indeed, the success of living wage campaigns hinges on the capacity of these projects to generate solidarity across communities.

For starters, labour organizations representing the various occupations on campus should form a contingent workers caucus to identify the challenges facing this growing classification of academic and non-academic support worker. It is no longer enough to deal these issues in isolation at the bargaining table. Any contingent worker initiative must also recognize that different solutions for different types of occupations must be found.

Students, and their respective unions, and local labour organizations also have the potential to find common ground on campus. This is of particular importance if wage increases are perceived to be the cause of tuition inflation. Academic and non-academic workers need to raise awareness that their conditions of labour can impact the quality of education and the campus environment, generally. This means breaking down barriers between academic and non-academic workers and their unions. Since many students are also employees, and vice versa, the opportunities for bridge building are ample. Unions and student groups must also work to educate young workers and unions about the contemporary nature of employment and precarious work. Living wage movements have the capacity to take this on.

**Becoming a living wage university**

Universities are not exempt from the economic transformations that have long affected other industries and sectors. As the expansion of contingent academic labour illustrates, part-time, lowing paying, and temporary contracts increasingly encompass highly skilled and
educated workers. Enthusiasts of the “knowledge economy” need to be mindful of this, with sessional lecturers characterizing such a reality. These developments are due to a multitude of factors, not least of which is the decline of government funding as a proportion of university budgets. In this respect the challenges facing workers – and students – at the University of Regina are not unique.

A “living wage university” means advancing changes internally through existing decision-making bodies. A meaningful living wage policy would necessarily include the employees directly employed by the universities, as well as those who work for the various food services, teaching and research assistants, student employees, and subcontracted service providers. This means increasing hourly rates of pay to match local living wage calculations. As existing living wage implementation strategies show, such a commitment would impact a constellation of contractual obligations and procurement practices. But the challenge is manageable. Financial organizations like VanCity, Canada’s largest credit union, and municipalities such as New Westminster, British Columbia, have already advanced “best practices” in this regard. Indeed, living wage commitments are feasible and capable of lending to the reputation and financial interests of an enterprise.
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Endnotes

1 CUPE 2419 collective agreement can be found on-line: 

2 CUPE 5791 collective agreement can be found on-line: 

3 Estimates were provided by Charwells management.

4 These calculations are based on 2014 figures received through a freedom of information request.

5 Details can be found in the respective collective agreements between URFA and the University of Regina, Campion College, and Luther College. Sessionals at First Nations University of Canada certified in May of 2016 and have yet to secure a collective agreement at the date of publication.

6 Only the University of Regina and First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv) house Business Faculties. Arts exist throughout the U of R and federated colleges.


7 The data published by the University of Regina does not include the federated colleges. Comparable data for Campion, Luther, and FNUniv is not available.

8 543 non-sessionl academic staff plus 349 sessionals.

9 This figure excludes the federated colleges.

10 The survey took place during a period of collective bargaining between the University of Regina and URFA.