

EM9527: The Globe and Mail, June 16, 1995, page A9

# Professor of year can't get job

York University blames underfunding for not giving award-winner full-time position

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Education Reporter

TORONTO – Canada's professor of the year can't get hired by her own university.

Diana Cooper-Clark, named this week as Canadian professor of the year by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, is lionized by students and professors alike for her spirited teaching and passionate curiosity about life.

But she is a part-time teacher at York University – a 25-year veteran who earned her first degrees there – who has been passed over for full-time positions leading to tenure.

In fact, Ms. Cooper-Clark and the union representing part-time faculty have a grievance against York because she was not appointed to the English department two years ago.

Her champions see York's failure to add a top-flight teacher to the professorial ranks as an outrage.

"Diana should have been given a full-time position years and years ago," said Peter Such, associate dean of York's Atkinson College. "Despite the fact she's had to work twice as hard as a normal faculty member, she's still kept up with her research and has a life outside the university that's interesting and involved."

Prof. Such, whose own college has had no openings, added emphatically: "If the university doesn't give her a full-time appointment, they deserve to be embarrassed!"

But York – which nominated Ms. Cooper-Clark for the \$5,000 prize to be awarded in Calgary this weekend and presented her with its own university-wide teaching award two years ago – blames the budget squeeze faced by postsecondary institutions in the 1990s for its inability to hire her.

"I don't mind a recognition of the apparent anomaly that we're unable to appoint one of Canada's best to a full-time teaching position," said Michael Stephenson, vice-president of academic affairs for York. "This should dramatize the gross under-funding of Ontario universities and York in particular."

He noted that York's budget has shrunk by \$21-million over the past three years and the university has been forced to reduce teaching positions and increase class size. York has trimmed its part-time faculty, now about 1,000, by about 300 people in the past

three years.

In university terminology, Ms. Cooper-Clark is a "full-time part-time" faculty member. A single mother of one, she juggles her teaching activities with scholarship. She has published two books – with another one just written – in addition to 10 articles in refereed academic journals as well as more popular writing, including an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Unlike a full-time professor who teaches an average of 2.5 courses a year, Ms. Cooper-Clark teaches about six or seven courses a year, including at night. Like other part-timers, she is hired by the course (at \$10,600 each), receives a more modest package of benefits and, significantly, is not eligible for tenure.

Prof. Such, who sponsored Ms. Cooper-Clark for the council award, said he decided not to play down her part-time status since it reveals much about her commitment to teaching and students. She volunteers for university committees and works with full-time faculty on new methods of teaching. "This is not stuff part-time people do."

In the 10-year history of the Canadian award, sponsored by Merck Frosst Canada Inc., a part-time teacher has never won. Two years ago, the honour went to York philosophy professor Claudio Duran.

When contacted, Ms. Cooper-Clark was reluctant to talk about the battle over her teaching status, preferring to enjoy the prize. But she is obviously pained that her own university has not hired her.

"They think I'm the best professor, but they won't hire me," she said.

Two years ago, shortly after losing in her bid to join York's English department, she won the university-wide teaching award.

Last month, the university had another opportunity to hire her full time when, as part of a contract agreement with the union representing part-time faculty, York converted two part-time instructors to full-time status.

However, Ms. Cooper-Clark lost out to two other senior part-time instructors in other fields.

Those appointments were made "in areas where student growth and the existing tenure-stream complement are out of whack, compared to Diana's area," Mr. Stephenson said.

## Curriculum vitae

### ORIGINS

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1945. Now a Canadian citizen. Bachelor of arts in English, 1969; master's degree in English, 1971; bachelor's in fine arts, 1979, all at York University. Bachelor of education, 1973, University of Toronto.

### TEACHING CAREER

Since 1970, teaching for English Department, Humanities and Arts Department, and the Centre for Academic Writing, York University.

### BOOKS

Author of *Designs of Darkness: Interviews with Detective Novelists* (1983), *Interviews with Contemporary Novelists* (1986) and *Writers on Writing: Perspectives on the Contemporary Novelist* (coming).

### AWARDS

Teaching award for excellence from the Humanities and Arts Department, York University, 1992; award for excellence in teaching given by the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning, York University, 1994; Canadian Professor of the Year, awarded by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, 1995.

What makes Ms. Cooper-Clark so special as a teacher? Brad Reed, a 45-year-old fourth-year English major at Atkinson College, said she embodies what he hoped to find at university: an open-minded pursuit of ideas.

Her classes "are all the things a university should be and often aren't," he said. "I always had the sense that whatever was going on, it would enrich my life and give me a different way of looking at things."

For her part, Ms. Cooper-Clark said she loves being passionate about her work. "For me, ideas aren't bloodless. They are life itself."

Paraphrasing the celebrated University of Toronto English professor Northrop Frye, she said: "Teaching is a performance. Something magical happens to me when I hit the door [of the classroom]."

The article EM9527 reprinted above is used in Figure 11.10c of the STAT 221 Course Materials and in Chapter 6 of the STAT 231 Course Materials.