

# The Steward

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**CUPE 2278**  
Teaching Assistants at UBC

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## Collective Bargaining

Over the past year, you may have heard that our Union is “going into bargaining”. But what does this all mean? Here we outline what it means to collectively bargain in broad terms and, more specifically, what our collective bargaining process may entail. It is never possible to predict what the specifics of bargaining a new collective agreement may be. Nevertheless, understanding the consistent features involved in bargaining a new labour contract will prove to be insightful for understanding the process and the potential obstacles to overcome.

## Your contract = our contract

We are the executive members of the **Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 2278**. This Union represents all the teaching assistants at UBC. As a TA here, you do not sign a new contract with the University every time you get hired. Instead, all the TA’s join together to form the Union, which then signs a **collective bargaining agreement** with the University. Since our agreement is expiring in August 2010, we are now working hard in preparation for bargaining.

## Collective Bargaining Agreements?

These are labour contracts negotiated with employers, by unions, on behalf of workers. These agreements outline the rights, obligations and duties of the employment relationship both on the employee and employer side. In the case of TAs at UBC, this includes rates of pay, expected work hours, sick/bereavement leave, re-appointment, as well as the responsibility of the Employer as related to your physical working conditions. Part of the role of the Union is to ensure that the specifics of these labour agreements are upheld on the part of the **Employer**.

## Employer = UBC Human Resources

It is important to note that bargaining a new agreement has nothing to do with your department, course coordinator or supervisor, who you may have an excellent relationship with. Instead, the agreement is negotiated with the Department of Human Resources at UBC, whom you have probably never heard of. Therefore, it is the job of CUPE Local 2278 to negotiate the labour contract with the UBC Department of Human Resources on your behalf. This will be done by our Bargaining Committee led by our Business Manager.

## What’s happening now?

A month ago, our Union filed notice to Human Resources that we are ready to begin bargaining a new collective agreement. They have acknowledged the receipt of our notice and the Union’s intent to bargain. The process of bargaining a new agreement can be a long and difficult one, and it is probable that this round of bargaining will be no different. We, as the executive members of your Union, will do everything to keep you posted on bargaining activities as well as solicit you for further input when situations arise. Please visit our website at [www.cupe2278.ca](http://www.cupe2278.ca) for updates.

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## University Coordinated Bargaining Committee

The UCBC is an organization bringing together university sector unions across British Columbia to keep unions like ours informed of what’s happening around the province. We all work at universities, so we are likely to face similar problems, and can therefore learn from each other's experience.

## Coordinated Bargaining (not collective bargaining)

The heart of UCBC, as you would expect from its name, is coordinated bargaining. When all the university sector union locals across the province are asking for the same things in bargaining, we're more likely to win what we want. For this reason, we work together on some of our bargaining proposals. Of course, there are also important differences among the union locals

making up UCBC--Plant Ops workers are less likely to care about class sizes than Teaching Assistants, and TAs are less likely to care about pensions--so a great deal of the work coming up with specific proposals for bargaining is done autonomously at the local level. But the common ground between university sector unions is significant, and it benefits us to coordinate with others with whom we have common interest.

### Strong we stand, stronger when we stand together

Furthermore, coordinating on our proposals sends a message to university administrations that we are working together, and this leads to the other side of coordinated bargaining: once we're at the table bargaining with the Employer, by coordinating bargaining across locals, we put ourselves in a stronger position--just as individual workers put themselves in a stronger position by bargaining collectively, as a union.

For example, we Teaching Assistants at UBC have benefited from this in the past. In the last round of bargaining, in 2006, one of the major issues was a signing bonus, coming out of the province's budget surplus at the time. Initially, the amount offered was \$1575 per TA per term worked in 2005-06. But when we were close to finishing bargaining, and going through the Employer's final package, we noticed that the signing bonus offered to 2278 members was now reduced to \$1250, without any explanation; at the same time, the amount of the signing bonus being offered to members of **CUPE Local 116** (outside workers at UBC) had increased, also without explanation. In a joint meeting of UBC CUPE Locals and the Employer, 116 refused to take an increase in their signing bonus at the expense of 2278. In the end, we won the full amount of \$1575, thanks to support from 116 and **2950** (inside workers at UBC).

Nor was this the first time we've benefitted from Local 116's support at the table. During bargaining in 1999, we won a letter of agreement with the Employer granting our members some protection from tuition

increases. But we would not have won that letter if not for 116's support: they refused to settle on their final outstanding issue--which had to do with parking--until the President of UBC agreed to our letter.

When we coordinate, we are stronger. Through our Union, we can coordinate all the UBC Teaching Assistants to bargain collectively across the campus; through UCBC, we can coordinate not just across the UBC campus, but across the province.

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### The Stephen Lewis Foundation

In 2005, the members of our Union at the time decided that every member of the Union will contribute \$1 to a non-profitable organization. To carry on that tradition, this year we donated \$1838 to the Stephen Lewis Foundation. This foundation supports community-based organizations providing counselling and education about HIV prevention, care and treatment in Africa. They also distribute food, medication and other necessities throughout the community. Furthermore they help orphans and vulnerable children access education and work. To find out more about the Stephen Lewis Foundation, please visit [www.stephenlewisfoundation.org](http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org).



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### Union Executive Elections

With our collective agreement expiring this August, we are now deep in preparation for the upcoming bargaining for a new contract. This is also the time when we are looking for enthusiastic members who would like to be more involved during this exciting time and help us lead our Union towards a better future. If you are interested in running to become a CUPE 2278 Union executive, then please stay tuned this fall when we have our next election.

#### Contact us

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