

The Steward

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CUPE 2278
Teaching Assistants at UBC

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Message from the President

My name is Geraldina Polanco and I am honoured to serve as President of CUPE Local 2278, representing UBC's Teaching Assistants, Markers, and Instructors at the English Language Institute. As a teaching assistant at UBC, you are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 2278. You are the union!

In August 2010, our collective agreement expired and we are now "in bargaining" with the university. The collective agreement is the contract that was negotiated by the local and the university's Human Resources Department, and which governs your working conditions as a teaching assistant at UBC. This includes but is not limited to the hours you are expected to work, rates of pay, sick leave and bereavement leave. The expiry of our collective agreement (which was in place from September 1, 2005 to August 31st, 2010) signals a new and exciting opportunity for the local to bargain with the university on issues important to employees. Each collective bargaining process takes more time to process depending on the number of issues on the table. You have brought a lot of necessary changes that are long overdue to the table and the steps for both the employer and the union means that this round of bargaining has taken several months to prepare. Want to know what we mean? Check out **Bargaining – Informed and Fighting** (just look over here →) to find out more.

We welcome your input and support, and look forward to hearing about issues important to you. Attending general membership meetings, as well as remaining informed through reading the electronic newsletters sent out by the local are excellent ways to stay

knowledgeable on what is going on. Please speak up at membership meetings and keep in touch with us!

Geraldina Polanco, President

Bargaining – Informed and Fighting

Being in bargaining negotiations is a lot like being in a conversation. In order to make your point clear, you need to come prepared, and the more you have to say the longer the conversation will take. This round of bargaining negotiations has involved a large number of concerns brought to the table by your executive committee to the employer.

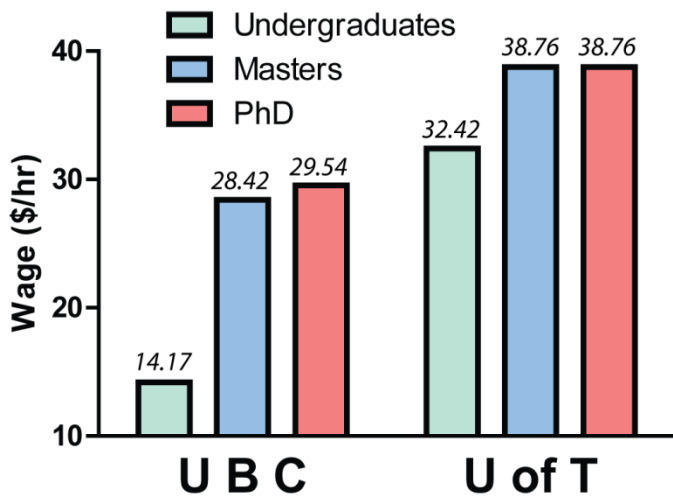
Why take longer and bring more to the table? Our research has shown us that there is tremendous disparity between our world class university and other top universities. Here is a snap shot of a sister institution, the University of Toronto:

At the University of Toronto **the absolute minimum that nearly all grad students get in almost all departments (except for a few professional degrees) is \$15,000 a year in addition to money to cover tuitions and fees.** Normally \$7000 of this \$15,000 comes from TA wages, but the funding packages and scholarships that top off the rest is part of their Teaching Assistant contract.

Being given funding as part of a condition of employment instead of being charged to work here? Great idea, right? For international students this

funding package also includes their international healthcare.

Compare the numbers: A UBC teaching assistant works more hours than the average worker at U of T. For example, across all departments and levels (undergrad, MA, and PhD teaching assistants) the average ranges from 140-210 hours/year. At UBC, a full TAship is 384 hours. While we earn more in wages at UBC by putting in more hours, the U of T funding package ensures that **they work less, have a better hourly wage (see below), and earn much more through guaranteed scholarships in their collective agreement** for their workers.



Remember, these are minimums for most grads at U of T and this minimum of \$15,000 and tuition/fee coverage hops up to a \$19,000 minimum for science departments. If a teaching assistant gets external funding, they take home even more. Finally, if tuition goes up or fees go up, their packages are required to cover the difference.

Hey, why don't we have that?

We are asking the same question. Join us at Koerner's Pub to find some answers!

Tuition Protection Panel/Party

Where: Thea Koerner's Pub, 6371 Crescent Road

When: Thursday, January 20, 2011 @ 5:00 pm-7:00 pm

The Graduate Student Society is hosting a Tuition Protection Panel/Party where teaching assistants will be provided with an open forum to speak with

administrators and create dialogue on tuition protection and other tuition concerns. On this panel you will hear from the following individuals on these issues:

- Brian Sullivan, UBC Vice President, Students
- Arvind Saraswat, President, Graduate Student Society
- Geraldina Polanco, President, CUPE 2278

Please come down to Koerner's Pub (6371 Crescent Road) on Thursday, January 20 @ 5 PM. Get informed about what is being done about tuition protection from the GSS, your local CUPE 2278, and our guest from the UBC President's office.

Get answers and get fed. There will be **FREE FOOD** and **DRINK SPECIALS** available in the lovely Koerner's Pub for this event. Please join us and tell your friends!

What's tuition protection again? The Union once had **tuition protection** but was lost in later bargaining with the University. This protection, different from a tuition waiver, stated that if tuition went up, employees under the collective agreement would not pay any increases that happened after a collective agreement had been reached. Although a waiver (TAs do not pay tuition) is preferable, tuition protection is the bare minimum of a fair contract.

News Sheet Format – Information to You! Faster!

Starting in February we will move to a new format for newsletters. **News sheets** are basically tighter and shorter, with less text and come out more often. They are a great way for keeping our membership informed and mobilizing them with new information.

New Members of the CUPE 2278 Executive

Get to know the newest members of your executive!

Eda Cakmakci

Eda, a new member of the CUPE 2278 Communications Committee, is in the second year of her MA in Anthropology.

Motivation for becoming involved with the local:

"I'm interested in the ways of unionizing in BC and particularly, in UBC."

Chandra Martini

Chandra began her MA in English literature this academic year and has also joined the CUPE 2278 Communications Committee.

Motivation for becoming involved with the local:

“I went to a general meeting and was struck by how much TA working conditions are determined by their union representation, and excited by the important issues that were coming up in bargaining. A stronger union = better rights so I wanted to help get the word out.”

Christa Korens

Motivation for becoming involved with the local: “I got involved with CUPE 2278 to gain experience and learn about how this union functions during a bargaining year. I'm motivated by my interest in labour law, but also by a family history of involvement in the labour movement.”

Conrad King

Conrad, a new member of the CUPE 2278 Communications Committee, is in the second year of his PhD in Political Science.

Motivation for becoming involved with the local: “I wanted to learn about the employment rights of TAs.”

Jennifer Glougie

Jennifer is working on the fourth year of her PhD in Linguistics and has joined the CUPE 2278 Grievance Committee.

Jonathan Easey

Jonathan is working on the second year of his MA in Music Theory and has joined the CUPE 2278 Bargaining Committee.

Motivation for becoming involved with the local: “I wanted to become more involved in this aspect of my graduate experience and to expand my perspective beyond merely my departmental involvement.”

Feel free to consult our website for information about the rest of the Executive.

Our website format will be changing a little in January, so please feel free to let us know what you think or if there is a way it could serve you better.

CUPE 2278 Donates to Local Charity

Every year our membership collectively decides on how to allocate the \$1 per member that is designated to go to a charity of our choosing. In past years donation money has supported the Stephen Lewis Foundation's AIDS relief in Africa and the Covenant House's work with homeless youth in downtown Vancouver. At our last membership meeting PACE (Providing Alternatives Counselling & Education), a local charity that offers programming, support, and safe respite to survival sex workers in Vancouver, was nominated as this year's recipient. The CUPE 2278 members present voted unanimously to allocate 100% of our designated charity funds to PACE this year. We are proud to support an organization doing such important work in our city! For more information about PACE, visit their website: <http://www.pace-society.org/>

Solidarity for AGSEM

The Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill is currently undergoing a labour drive to unionize its sessional lecturers and other contract faculty at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. In recognition of the various posters bans and other challenges facing this process, CUPE 2278 offers its full support to AGSEM and all other workers organizing on campuses.

Contact us

Website: www.cupe2278.ca
E-mail: cupe2278@interchange.ubc.ca
Facebook: Become a fan of CUPE 2278!



Phone: (604) 224-2118
Address: #218-2150 Western Parkway
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1V6

