

The Steward

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CUPE 2278
Teaching Assistants at UBC

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Welcome 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 TA at UBC, you are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 2278. You are the union!

Our collective agreement will expire in August 2010 signalling a new and exciting opportunity for the local to bargain with the university on issues important to us. We welcome your input and support, and want to hear from you on issues important to you. Attending membership meetings as well as keeping informed through reading the electronic newsletters sent out by the local are excellent ways to stay knowledgeable on what is going on as well as to voice the issues that most concern you.

Given the impending expiration of our collective agreement, now is a particularly exciting time to get involved with the union. There are many different ways in which you can be involved. This includes serving as a department representative, emailing us with your concerns, sitting on various committees, and/or becoming a member of the executive committee. In order to serve you better we need to know what concerns you the most! Be active and vocal in order to help the union assist you!

Geraldina Polanco

President of CUPE 2278

A shout out to the undergrads

Welcome all undergraduate TAs! As your undergrad Exec Committee member I want to first of all show my appreciation for your hard work and dedication to the educational advancement of undergraduate students in UBC. Second, I want to remind you that your membership affords you many benefits and that you can always count on us as your resource for information and support. Third, I want to encourage you to participate as Exec members so you can voice your thoughts and concerns to better represent undergraduate TA's issues in our upcoming bargaining process. Through this message to you, I would like to make sure that each of you understands that you are a very important part of the educational process and we care deeply for your betterment and your concerns.

This is my third year as a UTA at UBC and I have learned much and gained invaluable experience that has helped me to achieve many goals. This year I decided to become involved in the Executive Committee in order to show my appreciation for the outstanding representation from Local 2278. It is my sincere hope that you can gain as much satisfaction as I have and that you can also be an important part of the CUPE Local 2278, especially during this crucial time of collective bargaining preparation. Once again, welcome and may you find as much satisfaction in your TA experience as I have.

Lily Liang

Undergraduate Representative

[All you ever wanted to know about collective bargaining!](#)

[What is collective bargaining?](#)

Collective bargaining is a method for employees (ie. Teaching Assistants) to negotiate through a representative (ie. a union) the labour contract with the employer (ie. UBC). The labour contract details wages, hours, working conditions, and other agreements between the employees and the employer. Without the Collective Agreement gained through the union's bargaining, each employee would have to form an individual agreement with the employer. By bargaining together, the employees gain more influence during negotiations.

[Who represents me?](#)

As a Teaching Assistant at UBC, you are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 2278. You can browse us on the web to find wages, the current Collective Agreement, and our contact info.

[How do I know what my rights and duties are?](#)

The current Collective Agreement details your rights and duties including information on vacation, leave, reappointment, and grievances. Be sure to read it!

[What is a bargaining year?](#)

A Collective Agreement is a fixed term agreement. A year in which a Collective Agreement is expiring and a new Collective Agreement is being negotiated is a bargaining year. Our current agreement expires on August 31st, 2010. If a new Collective Agreement is not agreed upon by the expiry date, the current agreement continues in force until a new agreement is reached.

[What does collective bargaining look like for us?](#)

As we usually begin bargaining four months prior to the expiration of the Collective Agreement, that makes this an interesting time for teaching assistants at UBC.

For one thing, we will be bargaining a new contract in the shadow of the Olympics. Since the provincial government holds the purse strings at the bargaining table, TAs should be watching closely what happens to the province's finances in the wake of the Olympics. If the government starts crying poverty in February or March ("Who would have thought hosting the Olympics would be expensive?"),

we can expect the university to take a hard line when it comes time to bargain our new contract in the fall.

In this potentially difficult bargaining climate, it's especially important that our bargaining team have clear direction from the membership about what our priorities should be at the table. To this end, we've held a series of membership meetings over the last year to identify important issues; furthermore, we've just closed a survey aimed at determining just how important which issues are to TAs at UBC. Aside from the usual issue of increased wages, there are several places we have identified in the Collective Agreement that could be improved to make TAs' lives better. For example, we would like guarantees on adequate office space and paid time off for TAs during comprehensive exam periods. We also want to add more ways to initiate having a TA's workload checked in case the workload is too heavy.

Now, you might be wondering why, in the last round of bargaining, we signed a contract that would expire in the year following the Olympics, when money was likely to be tight. This is the result of a particularly ingenious--albeit cynical--move by the provincial government. When we were bargaining our current Collective Agreement, back in 2006, the government of British Columbia came out with the following offer, to all the public sector unions then in bargaining: sign a new contract that lasts until after the Olympics, and all your members will receive a \$3000 "signing bonus". Now, \$3000 is nothing to sneeze at for anyone, but it's especially significant to a TA--\$3000 is close to a third of what a full TAship earns in a year. So, of course, we made sure our members got the signing bonus.

But here's an interesting consequence of the signing bonus: Every public sector union in BC has their Collective Agreement expire in 2010, within a few months of each other. This is a unique opportunity to co-ordinate our bargaining efforts with other public sector unions across the province. Our local has already been participating in meetings between university sector CUPE locals from all across BC--including other locals at UBC--to strategize for bargaining in 2010, building solidarity with other university workers. Whatever happens, 2010 should be an interesting year!

H1N1 and how it affects you

Swine flu, or H1N1, emerged in April 2009 and is a stronger variant of the seasonal flu. The WHO maintains its status as a pandemic and Health Canada estimates 309 deaths associated with the virus nationwide. In an effort to reduce exposure, it is recommended that students and staff who develop flu-like symptoms isolate themselves and avoid attending classes. Students who develop symptoms such as cough and fever, fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat, headache and/or runny nose should register with the [Student Service Centre](#) and do not require a medical certificate to be excused from classes. UBC recommends leniency from teaching staff for students who suspect they have contracted the virus.

In October the UBC Department of Health, Safety and Environment released their Pandemic Influenza Response Plan ([pdf here](#)). The Plan reaffirms that teaching staff have the right to stay home if they contract H1N1 and that such information is considered personal information under provincial privacy legislation (FOIPPA) and should not be shared with co-workers unless the staff member chooses to do so themselves. Teaching staff likewise have the right to refuse unsafe work should another staff member display symptoms and refuse to stay at home. Any CUPE 2278 member who is obligated to engage in unsafe work should contact their union representative.

Anyone who develops H1N1 symptoms are advised to remain indoors 24 hours after their fever is gone. It is

advised that an ill person wash their hands frequently, cough only into a tissue or their arm, drink lots of fluids, and take acetaminophen or ibuprofen every 4-6 hours to bring down their fever and to take away any aches and pains. Fevers that exceed 100° F (37.8°C), wheezing or shortness of breath, and/or chest pain should receive a health assessment.

Keep counting those hours!

When you are appointed as a TA, you should be told what your duties are and how many hours you are working. You should also receive a breakdown of approximately how many hours are allocated to each of your duties. You are entitled to be given this information in writing.

Any work you do as a TA counts towards these paid hours, including: class preparation, answering emails related to the course, training, marking, conducting labs or tutorials, attending lectures, and meeting with your students or with the instructor. Keep track of your hours and let the instructor know if you've used up your hours. Do not work unpaid hours!!!

It is good to keep track of the hours that you actually work. Many grievances can be avoided by simply keeping track of your hours from the beginning of the semester. This can be done by using log forms available for download from the 2278 website at cupe2278.ca [link here]. If you are not good at keeping track of paperwork, another approach would be to use a google calendar associated with your google email account.

Your new executive team

President

Geraldina Polanco (Sociology)

Vice President

Roger Clarke (Philosophy)

Secretary-Treasurer

Sarah Roberts (Geography)

Recording Secretary

Shahed Alam (Computer Science)

Privacy Officer

Tabea Weihmann (Botany)

Correspondence Secretary

Valerie Ishida (Computer Science)

Technology Officer

Gary Yang (Cell. and Phyl. Sciences)

Sergeant-at-arms

Eric Johnson (History)

Undergraduate Representative

Lily Liang (Math)

Beyond the Thunderbird Stadium



Ambulance Paramedics of British Columbia

On November 7th, the BC Paramedics (CUPE local 873) were legislated back to work by the BC liberals via Bill 21 (Back to work Legislation). The bill was introduced by the BC liberals based on an edict from VANOC (Vancouver Olympic Committee) asking the government to end the strike before the Winter Olympics.

The BC Paramedics had been on strike for almost 7 months (since April 1st, 2009). Their main goal is to increase wages of their 3500 members from their current \$2.00 an hour pager pay rate. The paramedics get paid just two dollars per hour beyond their regular pay while on call-out, and yet the government is unwilling to negotiate their wages. As a result, they are now paid less than Paramedics in Calgary, Edmonton and Windsor-Ontario. Their working conditions, including ambulance stations are not fairing any better. Some of the stations have been housed in temporary trailers for over 2 years.

How can bill 21 affect our bargaining?

Not too long ago (back in 2003), bill 21 was applied by the provincial government to legislate striking workers of CUPE 2278 (the teaching assistants at UBC) back to work. There is a pattern to legislating workers back to work in this province and the situation with the paramedics could have an impact on bargaining throughout the Post-Secondary Education sector

For further details about BC Paramedics, click [here](#).

Back to the school – McMasters University

8:00am Monday, November 2nd, 2009, after months of negotiation with University, the teaching assistants of McMaster University (CUPE 3906 Unit #1) withdrew their

labour until a fair settlement is reached. Over the past months, McMaster University has continuously brought to the table wage increases of 2% for year 1 and 1.3% for year 2 while a projected tuition hike mounts up to an alarming 8% increase. It does not take a rocket scientist to realize that this would result in a wage decrease. Furthermore McMaster refused to appropriately address any non-monetary issues regarding benefits, class sizes, work load control and job security.

On Tuesday, November 10th, the bargaining unit for CUPE 3906 had to sign the “Back to Work Protocol” to protect the member’s rights as they returned to work. While the protocol protects the teaching assistants from any reprisals, the University has taken away 7.7% of their paid hours which is approximately 10 hours or \$350. Even now, teaching assistants at McMasters University are struggling to catch up on the workload while dealing with the financial hardship. In light of the reduced paid hours, meticulous logging of hours worked is more important than ever. Read more about this [here](#).

Victory down south – University of Illinois

On Tuesday, November 17 teaching and graduate student assistants at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign unanimously voted to suspend their two-day strike. In a [press release](#) authored by the Graduate Employees’ Organization (IFT/AFT 6300) the labor action was declared a “major victory” that achieved multiple gains over the University’s original contract position. Members won protection for tuition waivers, an additional two weeks of unpaid parental leave, increases to the University’s contribution to health care premiums, and a ten percent increase to the minimum salary over the next three years. The Graduate Employees’ Union represents more than 2,600 teaching and graduate students in the bargaining unit and is one of the largest higher education union locals in the United States.

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

