



We have been negotiating Unit 1 collective agreement since September 2019. After 18 meetings with the employer, there are issues important to our members that still need to be meaningfully addressed by the administration:

Pay equity for Instructors

Matching job with qualifications for grad student members

Job security for long term members

Tuition fee indexation for graduate student members

Experience for doctorate student members and security for Instructors

Grad Student Issues

Every round of bargaining, grad student issues are at the forefront of our priorities. As the bulk of the 4207 membership, grad students are amongst the worst off financially. In comparison to other universities of comparable size and composition, we have fewer hours and a lesser wage. For grad students who are capped at 10 hours per week, this has a noticeable impact. This is even harder for international grad students, who pay the full costs of tuition. In the end, the only options are to seek work outside of the university to the detriment of their studies.

There are several avenues that the bargaining committee is working on to help alleviate these stresses. While more hours and more pay would be useful, Bill 124 might prevent us from making gains there. At least for the time being. One more effective means would be in enhancing tuition protection.

The Graduate Student Supplement is additional funding that is added to members hourly wage. Increasing this amount would serve to offer increased support for grad students. Tuition indexation, on the other hand, will help negate the impact of rising tuition on all grad members. For every dollar that tuition rises, grad students would receive an additional dollar in funding to prevent tuition increases from eroding wage gains.

These are worth a fight – not just for present grad students but for future grad students. All members – grad student or not – should support these measures.

Workload

Wages keeping up with inflation

Paid training

Class size caps

Extra hours for 60 hour contracts

Health plan retention

Access to tools and office space

Fair hours allocation for Lab Demonstrators

Class Sizes Caps

Class sizes have continuously been increasing over the years, and there are few protections for our members. For seminars, the Collective Agreement puts a soft cap of 20 students. For every additional student beyond 20, members should be receiving an additional 2 hours on their contract. However, there are problems and we can do better.

- This does not protect members if departments are not abiding by this article.
- This does not protect Instructors. They do not have any guarantees to have supports, either in additional hours or from the hiring of Course Coordinators or Marker/Graders.
- This does not protect Lab Demonstrators. Some Lab Demonstrators have noted that growing lab enrollment has led to an unsustainable increase in workload.

Rising seminar and lab sizes leads to an increase in the workload for our members. It also leads to the decline in the quality of education for students, because there will be less one-on-one attention. The increasing workload also reduces the quality of teaching and grading, as the pressure to produce overtakes quality. Due to this, we have been pursuing several gains in bargaining.

- A harder cap on seminar and lab enrollment, to ensure that the quality of education is not sacrificed for quantity.
- Providing additional support for Instructors with larger classes in either increased hours or hiring teaching supports.

The University will continue to pack students into seminars and labs and risk quality. Only a fair collective agreement will serve to privilege quality in education.

Wages and Bill 124

Wage increases regularly show up as a priority in bargaining. While this is a normal part of bargaining – that we would negotiate for, and receive, wage increases – it also demonstrates another important fact. Our members are paid less for doing the same work than those who work at universities throughout the country. For instance, as of September 2018, McMaster TAs who hold a graduate degree made over \$10 more per hour than our members.

However, it isn't just the wage. Our members are also given fewer hours in our contracts than comparable positions elsewhere. At McMaster, TAs are given 260-hour contracts for two semesters. Instructors are also given fewer hours at Brock and this shows in the lesser stipends. Across all faculties and departments, our members receive less. What does this mean?

For Grad Students, this means less pay and more financial stress when they are working to complete their degrees. For Instructors, this means piecing TA and Instructor work, and sometimes work at multiple institutions around Ontario to make ends meet. For most, this means working for free to ensure that work is done properly.

And then there is Bill 124

Bill 124 is a piece of provincial legislation aimed at cutting public sector workers' salaries. It limits compensation gains to 1% per year and empowers the Government to open Collective Agreements and change any wage increase that is over 1%. While CUPE and many other unions in Ontario are challenging this legislation in the courts, this might take years to achieve victory. In the meantime, our bargaining committee has been told 1% - even before this was passed into law. It is clear that the University's bargaining committee is more than willing to accept the Ford Government's regressive law. We should still hold out for better wages and more hours!

Benefits

For too long, we did not have access to basic health benefits. We have finally won a benefits plan in the last round of bargaining. This replaced the inadequate dental fund. While there are issues with the current health plan, this is a great start to providing an important benefit to members. However, these benefits are at risk of being cut back or being eliminated.

Typically, employers will contribute 10% of all compensation to benefits. We receive only 0.9%. The University has made it clear that they will not increase funding for benefits to keep pace with rising costs. Instead, they believe that the same figure established in four years ago is sufficient. While we would like to expand benefits, the University has made it clear that they are not interested.

We have put forward a number of proposals aimed at strengthening our already underfunded benefits package. These include expanding coverage for all members, and not just an opt in; increasing funding for the plan; and expanding the coverage and services available to members.

Our members do the majority of teaching at this university, and all we are asking is to have what others like else already receive at universities across the country. This is about respect.

Permanent Positions for Senior Members

As precariously employed academics, we rely on piecing together contracts to make a living. Having to apply every four to eight months for contract work, we don't know from year to year what our contracts will look like, and whether we will have enough work to pay the bills. Sometimes, we won't know what we are doing until after the start of classes in any given term. This often leads to unbearable stress on members, especially when their qualifications and seniority are overlooked in hiring.

For members who have been at this university for years, having to reapply for your job every few months is disrespectful of the experience and knowledge that senior members bring to the table in their work, in mentoring new members, and in improving the quality of education for students.

As of now, there are over 150 members who have seniority dates of over 10 years. The bargaining committee has sought to provide some security for Instructors, but that has a long way to go. For other members, the bargaining committee has sought a number of permanent positions created for senior members, so they do not have to apply for their jobs over and over. It is a modest proposal to start, but the university would seem ready to enhance rather than reduce the precarity of our work.

In the end, this is about recognition of long-serving members and an acknowledgement that their expertise and experience is what students note as a strength of Brock University. It is time that the university's bargaining committee listen and recognize the value of senior members.