

Materials from the SGMM on Summer Funding and Mobilization March 28, 2017

FAQ on Summer Funding

What is the fellowship funding model?

The fellowship is a funding model that York rolled out in Fall 2016. Each semester, every graduate student is supposed to receive an amount that covers tuition fees (minus ancillary fees). While this might sound like a good thing, this model is problematic in several ways. More of our funding goes straight to our student account, taking away our discretion over our own finances. Furthermore, this model was implemented so that York could cut almost 700 jobs from Unit 3 (graduate assistants) by denying them work while still meeting their guaranteed funding packages.

Why does that affect my Unit 1 summer funding?

In order to give PhD students this funding without actually increasing how much they pay, York has taken the minimum guarantee normally paid in the summer and rolled it into the fellowship funding, i.e. equally in the Fall, Winter, and Summer terms. This means that, besides the fellowship amount that will be automatically applied to tuition, Unit 1 members who don't have scholarships or summer TAs will not receive any income over the summer.

Doesn't that violate our collective agreement?

Yes. CUPE 3903 has argued that the language permitting exceptions to the minimum guarantee being paid in the summer is just that, an exception. It's been used in the past by members wishing to take on an extra 0.5 TA in order to compensate for fieldwork in another semester. York is trying to argue that "normally" means "never", a truly impressive resignification of the English language.

What's being done about this?

York has made it clear that they are sticking to their creative interpretation.

Legal Strategy:

1. Grievance on summer funding, filed at Step 4 (the most serious step in the grievance process) on December 2, 2016. The employer has yet to schedule a meeting, even though the collective agreement states that a Step 4 meeting must be held within 14 days of the grievance being filed at or reaching Step 4. While the fact that we have had three Grievance Officers this year may have caused a breakdown in communication, it is still the employer's responsibility to respond in a timely fashion. We are pushing to have this Step 4 meeting as soon as possible.

2. Unfair Labour Practice (ULP) claim, filed by CUPE National on behalf of CUPE 3903 on February 15, 2017. The first mediation date is April 11, 10:30, 505 University Avenue, second floor.
3. Bargaining: With our CA expiring in August 2017, bargaining offers an opportunity to reinforce the language around the minimum guarantee and to remind York of the meaning of the word

Political Strategy:

1. Communications: letters, website materials, social media, members' manuals, orientations, tabling, membership-wide events, and events in departments.
2. "665" button and poster campaign on loss of GA jobs
3. Bargaining: Using bargaining surveys and contract workshops to organize and mobilize the membership.

What more can be done about this?

You tell us. Legal approaches are tools that the union can use to advance our membership's best interest, but our most fearsome weapon has always been and remains a mobilized membership.

Was it ever possible to save summer funding in time for summer 2017?

Unfortunately, that was always incredibly unlikely. York dragging its feet on a Step 4 meeting is par for the course. They stretch timelines as far as they can. This is a grievance that was always sure to require arbitration, which is also a process that can take months, if not years. It is completely possible that our quickest resolution will come through bargaining, as was the case with tuition indexation (which had been in arbitration for months before new language was reached in the March 2015 strike).

Timeline

January 27, 2016: York meets with CUPE 3903 to discuss the fellowship model for the first time. Executive and rank-and-file members in attendance make it clear that we would never support such a plan.

January 28, 2016: A summary of the January 27 meeting entitled "Proposed Funding Model Raises Serious Concerns" is posted to the CUPE 3903 website.

April 13, 2016: York calls a second meeting to "discuss" the fellowship plan some more. They arrive 15 minutes late, lie when caught in factual errors, disrespect the members present, and leave the meeting after 20 minutes, led by soon-to-be-President Rhonda Lenton. **The employer confirms in writing that they plan to go forward with the fellowship model later that day.**

April 16, 2016: A full report of the April 13 meeting, entitled "York Walks Out of Funding Model Meeting" is posted on the website.

April-May 2016: CUPE 3903 makes a GA/RA survey collecting information about the potential job loss on campus. The survey gets over 100 responses.

April-May 2016: CUPE 3903 and Faculty Relations exchange several emails, trying to draw out the details of the new plan and outlining concerns in regard to the collective agreements and effects this model will have on graduate students at York.

May 2016: Stewards' Council drafts and circulates a letter to incoming students advising them of the changes York intends to make to the funding model, especially the loss of health benefits, union protections, and collective bargaining rights for many MA students, as well as the loss of summer funding for PhD students.

May 25, 2016: The first version of the Fellowship FAQ is posted on the website, shared over social media, and shared over the CUPE 3903 Newsletter for several weeks.

June 16, 2016: A press release regarding the fellowship model is sent to numerous media contacts, resulting in a well-received article in Rabble in July.

July 5, 2016: The CUPE 3903 executive committee meets with CUPE National and agrees to file an Unfair Labour Practices complaint.

July 11, 2016: The Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) send out emails to every graduate student announcing the new funding model.

July 12, 2016: What is known of the funding model following FGS' emails and the communications with Faculty Relations is shared in a comprehensive website post entitled "Confusion Reigns as York Unveils 'Simpler' Funding Model".

August 17, 2016: CUPE National forwards a list of documents needed to file an Unfair Labour Practice complaint.

September 5, 2016: The web version of the Members Manual, which included a new section on the fellowship model, is shared on the website and newsletter. Print versions have already been distributed during orientations during late August-early September, along with the letter from SC.

First week of September, 2016: York posts fellowship amounts to student accounts. There are numerous mistakes and confusions. Members are invited to ask their questions to the Executive Committee through the Communications Officer.

September 8, 2016: The information we managed to gather with the help of the membership is shared through a post entitled "Fellowship Flop Continues". Meanwhile, FGS is reluctant to answer any inquiries.

September 14, 2016: The CUPE 3903 BBQ is a success, with an educational component around the fellowship model, the loss of Unit 3 jobs, and summer funding.

September-October 2016: CUPE 3903 continues to seek out information and help members and non-members alike make sense of how the fellowship model affects them.

October 14, 2016: SGMM on the fellowship model. Information on what this model does and what it means for individual members and for the union as a whole is discussed at length. The question of summer funding is one of the major themes of the discussion.

October 25, 2016: Documents for the ULP are forwarded to CUPE National.

November 6, 2016: National requests clarification on some ULP documents plus some additional documents.

November 14, 2016: National forwards a draft of the ULP submission, which is circulated to executive members and staff for input.

November 25, 2016: After months of ignored emails and attempts to set up a meeting, CUPE 3903 finally manages to secure a meeting with Faculty Relations and FGS. The executive committee had solicited questions from the membership and prepared questions for the employer ahead of time.

November 29, 2016: Stewards' Council holds an info picket in Vari Hall to educate around the fellowship model changes, and what it means for both graduate and undergraduate students.

November 30, 2016: The results of the November 25 meeting, including the slides provided by the employer, are shared through a website post entitled "Employer Finally Answers on Fellowship Model".

December 4, 2016: The grievance regarding summer funding is filed at Step 4. A Step 4 meeting has yet to be held.

December 13, 2016: Nominations Open for the bargaining teams for Units 1, 2, and 3. the Units 1 and 3 BT are very important in fighting the fellowship and its effects.

December 18, 2016: The ULP draft is returned to National with a second set of documents.

December 19, 2016: The Fellowship FAQ on the website is updated, which is announced in the CUPE 3903 Newsletter.

January 23, 2017: National sends an email with questions about the ULP materials. These questions being difficult to decipher by email, executive members request a meeting with National in advance of the submission. National proceeds to ignore all requests.

February 15, 2017: The BT is elected, begins plans to produce bargaining surveys and mobilize departments.

February 15, 2017: National submits ULP claim. The CUPE 3903 executive committee and staff are not informed.

March 16, 2017: After 2 months of not hearing from National despite reaching out several times by email, we finally make contact by phone and are told that the ULP has been filed, that York has responded, and that mediation is set for April 11, 2017.

March 24, 2017: YUFA files for intervenor status on our ULP claim.

Important Dates

April 7, 2017, 10:00 a.m., Union Office: Meeting with Mona Staples (National's lawyer for the ULP claim).

April 10, 2017, 2:00 p.m., Union Office: SC Meeting

April 11, 2017, 10:30 a.m., 505 University Ave. (2nd floor): Mediation Meeting