

## Your learning experience is our teaching experience.

Over 50% of your undergraduate education at YorkU is taught by contract faculty and graduate students. These are the people that make up the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Local 3903. Because the Union is made up of people who are on both sides of the educational experience at YorkU – as both teachers and students – education is at the core of our concerns.

One of these concerns revolves around the size of your classes. You may have recently heard about class sizes at the University of Toronto, where over 50% of tutorials have more than 50 students. That's because at U of T there are no limits set on class sizes. At YorkU there *are* such limits in place – **because of the pressure placed on YorkU's administration by CUPE 3903 to keep class sizes at a manageable level.** These limits are protected in the contracts signed by the University and your teachers.

This doesn't mean the problem has been solved, however. 3903 is currently asking for more protections on class sizes. For instance, we're asking for a fund that would allow undergraduate students to identify classes that are too big and petition to have these split into more sections.

More broadly speaking, any change at the University that affects your teachers' ability to work affects the quality of your education. If contract faculty have to teach 5 classes a semester to even approach the standard of living of a full-time faculty member teaching 2.5 courses a semester, they simply can't teach to their full potential; if a grad student has to take on a second job to pay their bills, giving effective feedback on your assignments becomes harder to do. **Making improvements to our Collective Agreements in these areas means improving the quality of your education.**

## What does CUPE want?

★ **Continuing Appointments:** at present around **half of course directors** work semester-to-semester not knowing whether they will have courses to teach in the next term. Many faculty are not assigned courses until **days before the start of the term.** This makes it hard to improve the courses we teach. CUPE has three proposals to deal with this issue. First, contract faculty who have a decade or more of experience teaching will be guaranteed a consistent and reliable amount of work. Second, CUPE wants to increase promotions for qualified contract faculty to the rank of tenure-track professor. And third, we want to guarantee **one course worth of work** to all contract faculty members who have taught at least this much over the last two years.

★ **Post-Residency Fees:** CUPE wants students who have completed their course requirements to receive a tuition rebate to reflect their reduced usage of university resources. York used to have a program like this in the 1990's and many schools across the country continue to honour this practice. Winning this back could mean a **reduction in tuition** of between **\$100-\$300** for all second year Masters students and those in years three through six of their PhDs.

★ **Anti-Claw-back language:** When teaching assistants' wages go up, York cuts back their scholarship money. Because wages are taxable while scholarship money is not, this means these

teaching assistants potentially pay higher taxes and never see any real increase in their income. CUPE wants to fix this by making sure every wage gain results in an actual increase to their funding.

★ **Income Parity:** Not all full-time graduate students receive the same funding. PhD students get much more funding than Masters (MA) students. CUPE wants to help close this gap by getting a **minimum funding package of \$11,000** for all MAs who are paid to do research. Currently, the average MA researcher makes between **\$6,000-9,000** a year, depending on their program. They also have to pay roughly **\$5,500 in tuition (as do PhD students - any student who is a member of 3903 is paying tuition all year round)**. Teaching Assistants, on the other hand, make about **\$15,000**. Both these amounts are not nearly enough to be able to live in Toronto, but CUPE is trying to make it a bit easier for MAs to afford their degrees.

### **What does this have to do with me?**

The biggest reason to care is that YorkU can't deliver a good education without Teaching Assistants (TAs), Course Directors (CDs), and Graduate/Research Assistants. We prep your course materials, teach your classes, supervise your labs, run your tutorials, invigilate your exams, and grade your assignments. The problems that your TAs and CDs face (big classes, growing tutorials and labs, mounting debt, overwork, etc.) make it hard for us to teach to our potential. This, in turn, makes it difficult for you to learn. The quality of your education is at stake.

The administration is more likely to take steps to improve working conditions and education at YorkU if they perceive that undergrads and graduate students have are united and are advocating on each other's behalf. Indeed, we must stand together to fend off increases in tuition, class sizes, online courses, and budget cuts.

### **What's all this talk of a strike, and how will it affect me if it happens?**

On March 13, *CUPE 3903 presented a settlement* to York's Bargaining Team that asked for a total compensation package of 12% over three years (4% per year), just less than that recently agreed to by 3902's (U of T) Teaching Assistants. Included within this proposed settlement was a wage increase of 2% per year for three years, 1% less than inflation, and 1% less than we received in our last contract. *York rejected this offer.*

That same week, we held a **strike mandate vote**. This came back as a "yes" from our members. A "yes" vote empowers CUPE 3903's Executive to take the local out on strike if necessary once they are in a Legal Strike position. CUPE 3903 will be in a legal strike position as of April 12th. No need to panic! (Not yet at least)

CUPE 3903 has held a strike mandate vote in **every round of bargaining since 1996** in order to improve its position at the bargaining table. In the vast majority of rounds the added leverage of a successful mandate vote resulted in the union **not** having to go on strike. In fact, about 75% of contracts get signed within 48 to 72 hours before a potential strike. Put simply, the threat of a strike is the only reason Employers take Union demands seriously and for this reason most contracts aren't signed until after this threat becomes real.

If, however, a strike were to happen (and it is a big 'if'), *Senate policy 008 protects undergraduate students who refuse to cross picket lines*, stating that they 'are entitled to immunity from penalty,

to reasonable alternative access to materials covered in their absence, to reasonable extensions of deadlines and to such other remedy as Senate deems necessary and consistent with the principle of academic integrity.' *If York University decides to cancel classes*, they will be responsible for making sure that lectures will be made up when classes resume to ensure your semester isn't lost. If they do not cancel classes, and the university stays open, they have a responsibility to accommodate you.

*If you depend on OSAP*, there are also allowances for labour disruptions. After the 2000-2001 strike, York expanded its undergraduate bursary and pushed back the deadline to cover the costs of a school year that was ten months long rather than eight.

*An April 12th strike would, however, mean a disruption to the exam period.* In the two rounds when 3903 went on strike, we did so in late October/early November. This time around, we *decided to postpone any possible job action until the last possible moment to ensure the completion of all courses and a minimal disruption* of the learning process. That being said, any potential strike must begin prior to the end of the fall/winter term to ensure maximum leverage at the bargaining table. As such, any exams which fall on or after April 12th could be postponed and any assignments/ exams handed in between April 7th and 12th might not be graded until a new contract is signed.

This *may also mean a delay in the processing of your final transcripts.* However, we are confident that this will not jeopardize graduate program admissions for those graduating later this year. If you've applied to grad schools you will by now (or in the very near future) have received your acceptance letter(s). After this point you normally get two to three months to submit your final transcripts. This means that any potential job action would have to last well into the summer term before grade deadlines would be jeopardized. What is more, most schools make exceptions for labour disruptions and will likely grant extensions to those who might be affected. 3903 will be more than happy to provide written confirmation of any labour disruption to all those who might require written documentation.

## **Why does all this keep happening?**

In the mid 1990s, York University was restructured so that the Senate (the body which deals with academic matters) saw its importance diminished in relation to the Board of Governors (a group of business-minded elites that are primarily concerned with money matters). York's administration wants the cheapest deal possible from us to meet the demands of the Board of Governors.

Graduate students and contract faculty are an inexpensive way for our Employer to meet those demands while still making education at York possible – in fact, we do about 50% of the teaching and make up only 12% of York's payroll and benefits budget. The less they can give us the better for their bottom line and the worse for our working conditions and your education.

Also, **the province is rethinking what education will look like.** A recent report (the "Drummond Report", requested by the provincial government to find ways to cut costs in Ontario) suggests that **courses should run year round** (that might make your summer job a bit difficult to handle) and that **60% of courses should be online.** This in particular is worrisome because studies show it is very difficult to learn in this manner.

## **I'm not convinced.**

Not everyone will be.

But recall a few basic facts: Over the past twenty-five years full-time permanent work has dried up and part-time, "flexible", contract, and unpaid work has expanded exponentially; pension plans have suffered from bad investments, financial downturn and outright attack (though York's pension program has suffered substantially less than UofTs); fewer jobs are opening up for young people because older workers are choosing to delay retirement or return to the workforce; 70% of Toronto residents are now employed in the service sector known for its low wages, part-time hours and minimal benefits.

Most importantly, however, you will remember that these facts were taught to you by a person. A person who, more likely than not, works part-time, with no job security for \$26,000 or less. In other words, this person is living proof of the very transformations you learn about in *their* classes and read about in *their* books.

It is sometimes hard to accept this reality, the mythical image of the University being what it is. However, as students, teachers, and teacher-students, we must open our eyes to the reality that confronts us and begin to think critically about the state of education in this province.

Why, for instance, do we pay former University presidents millions of dollars after the end of their terms in office?

Why do so many York executives make the "sunshine list" (a list released by the province of all of the public sector workers making over \$100 000 per year) while those who actually teach make less than the low income cut off in Toronto?

Why do people taking full course loads pay the same as those taking no classes?

Why do international students pay more than double what "domestic" students pay?

These are the types of questions we are presently asking of the University. And you should too.

## **Help us avoid a strike!**

- ★ Let other students know how to find this information for undergrads and that you can read our [bargaining updates](#) (that we send to members)
- ★ Sign the [petitions supporting our proposals](#) ... They will be presented to the administration at the bargaining table
- ★ Send an email to President Shoukri ([presidnt@yorku.ca](mailto:presidnt@yorku.ca) or [mshoukri@yorku.ca](mailto:mshoukri@yorku.ca)) or call his office at 416-736-2100 extension 55200 ... tell him you support your professors, contract instructors, and Teaching Assistants and ask him why the university can't sign a fair contract with CUPE 3903 now
- ★ Contact the [York Federation of Students](#) and ask how you can help support CUPE 3903