



Welcome from the President

Karen Harper

As we begin yet another new year in a global pandemic, we are still deep into bargaining with financial proposals soon to be tabled and an end to bargaining on the horizon. This far into the pandemic, it is clear that the universities have the funds to increase our stipends substantially. It is incredible how low our stipends are compared to the national average, just released by CAUT (Canadian Association of University Teachers): \$7225 / \$8387 for base / top levels. No comparison with cost of living can justify the discrepancy between our salaries compared to others. Dalhousie teaching assistants and especially markers do not fare much better with hourly wages only a bit more than half as much compared to other U15 institutions.

After a well-earned rest over the holidays, our bargaining teams will be back at the table early in the new year. We will also launch a new campaign as we table financial proposals in bargaining that will focus on the numbers by highlighting comparisons among other universities and trends before and during the pandemic. Our working title is **Wage Parity Now!** With Omicron it will again be more difficult to do things in person, so please keep an eye out for emails and tweets, and keep checking our website and Facebook page for our launch.

I know that a lot of you read my weekly updates, particularly during these challenging times. **Thank you** to all who have responded with emails simply thanking me and to many more of you who read my updates. I really wish it was easier to see you in person, but this just makes your emails so much more meaningful. You all deserve so much more in terms of fair working conditions and the executive, bargaining teams and I will continue to work to achieve more for you into 2022 and beyond.

Thanks for your continued support in our mission to improve your working conditions.

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Inflation During Pandemic and Bargaining Times

Carlos Pessoa, Former CUPE 3912 VP, SMU (2019-2020)

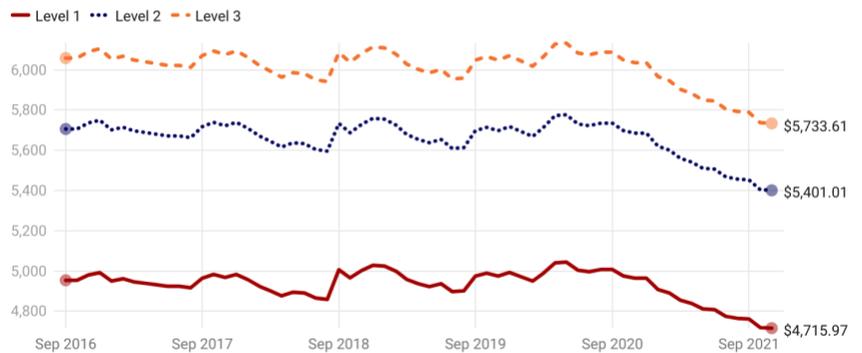
While the rise of inflation is having worldwide effects, CUPE 3912 faces a particularly timely challenge: inflation is rising during the bargaining process. Inflation is the increase of the price of basic goods such as food, gas, and housing, among other things. The government keeps track of inflation as it can have real deteriorating effects on the economy. As inflation rises, the purchasing power of wages decreases and can force people to buy less or work more. This can have an effect of increasing wage demands. It is at this point where we all find ourselves today.

While preparing for bargaining, The Bargaining Survey taken among CUPE 3912 members showed that almost 60% gave wage increase priority number one (followed by continuing appointments, and medical & dental benefits). If this was the case before inflation started increasing, then it seems safe to assume, now more than ever, wage increase is our top priority.

We were told during our last General Meeting (December 10, 2021) that bargaining for non-financial items is pretty much done and now we are moving towards financial items. We need a bit more transparency on the items that are being negotiated, so we can be aware of the final package being offered before it gets to that level. Even though members have the power to not ratify the final proposal, it seems important to keep everyone in the loop, as a lot of time and energy are being invested in this process. Furthermore, the element of transparency can foster membership engagement and support to the bargaining teams.

Dalhousie Part-Time Instructor Stipend Buying Power

Inflation Adjusted Stipend Per 3-Credit Course

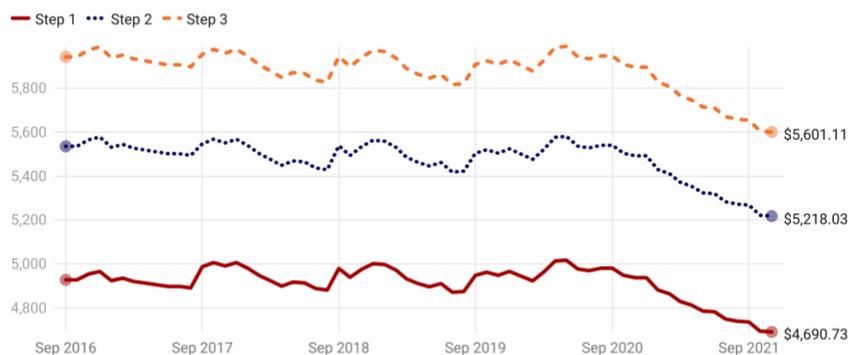


Calculated using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), relative to dollar value in September 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada • Created with Datawrapper

MSVU Part-Time Instructor Stipend Buying Power

Inflation Adjusted Stipend Per 3-Credit Course

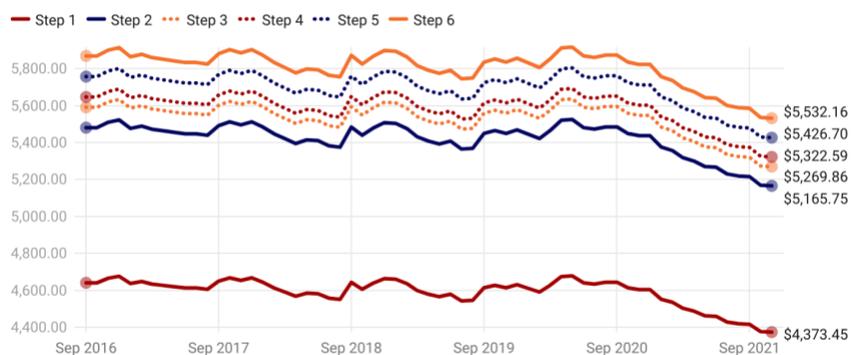


Calculated using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), relative to dollar value in September 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada • Created with Datawrapper

SMU Part-Time Instructor Stipend Buying Power

Inflation Adjusted Stipend Per 3-Credit Course



Calculated using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), relative to dollar value in September 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada • Created with Datawrapper

More than anything, it is important for our bargaining teams **not to** give up the important priority of a wage increase in exchange for other items that were ranked as lower priority by the membership (such as office space, parking or discounts for family members). For the coming years, workshops on striking and strike

mandates should be part of the strategic bargaining process.

In 2022, we will be faced with a tough battle, but a more difficult battle is to stand in line at the food bank while having to catch up on your grading.

Survey Says . . . On Contributing to Improvements in TA/Marker Working Conditions

Cameron Ells, VP Dalhousie, Teaching Assistants, Sexton Campus

TAs and Markers responding to the December 2021 TA Marker Survey, are contributing to efforts to improve our working conditions.

Since November 2020, there have been about 12 formal bargaining sessions on the successor to the [2016 – 2020 Collective Agreement](#) between CUPE 3912 and the Employer (Dalhousie University).

The CUPE 3912 website includes [updates](#) from the Dalhousie University bargaining sessions.

Proposals are based on the goals supported in the June 2020 vote by members. There are many proposals that are specific to Part-Time Instructors; however, the general TA and Marker specific bargaining proposals are based on the following goals:

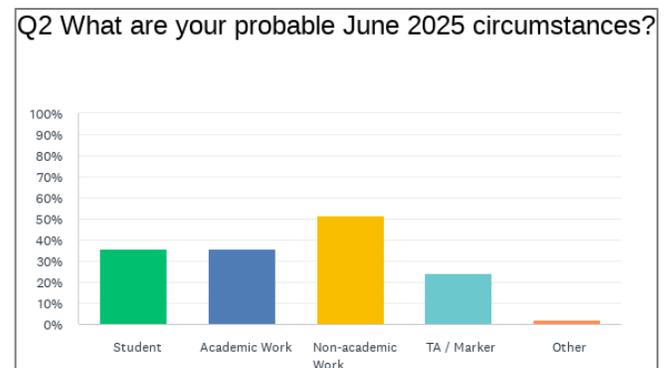
- Increased hourly rates for TA and Marker contracts
- Worked hours = contracted hours = paid hours
- New duty form for contracted marker hourly rate activities
- Timely processes that award contracts before classes begin
- Transparent processes for how contracts are awarded
- Showing process performance improvement rates in contract timeliness and transparency

The results from a February 2020 TA Marker Survey contributed to describing these six general TA Marker goals, and the multiple proposals that followed that were intended to help achieve those goals.

By the end of 2021, the employer has not accepted or specifically rejected our reasonable CUPE 3912 proposals regarding many of these goals. There appears to be an impasse at this time on many of these topics. Financial proposals are being made in January 2022.

The December 2021 TA Marker survey results are helpful in generally describing this portion of our membership, and in gauging member sentiments about TA Marker specific bargaining goals.

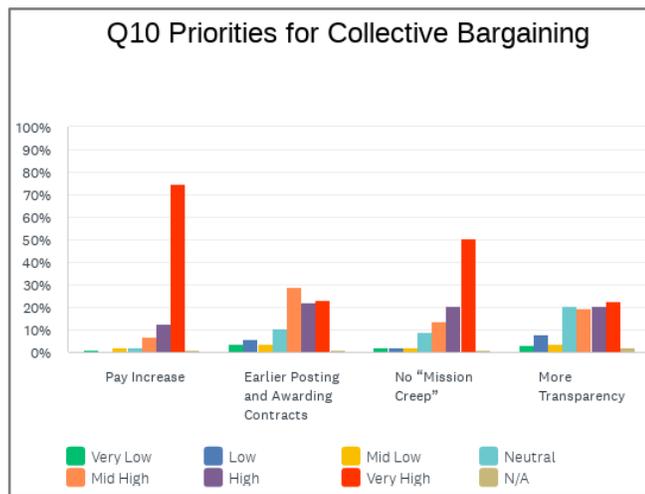
Preliminary results were available for presentation at the December 10, 2021 General Meeting. Instead of a general presentation to all present, we followed up directly with the interested TA and Markers who were still at the meeting when this topic came up on the agenda.



TA Marker Survey respondents that self-identified as students are a mix of graduate students (approx. 2/3) and undergraduate students (approx.1/3). Some may

be surprised at how many are not Dalhousie students (approx. 1/5), although perhaps some of these are recently graduated students, who are familiar with the recent course content.

While a strong majority (>85%) of respondents indicate that the best TA or Marker candidate should receive the job, only 2/3 of respondents perceive that this happens. Similarly around 2/3 of respondents indicate support for using preferences in awarding contracts (e.g., must be a current Dalhousie University student over others; or a graduate student over an undergraduate student).



TA Marker Survey respondents self-identified the relative priorities they had of the six general goals, as being in the same order as presented. The highest priority was increasing hourly rates. Reducing “mission creep” (i.e., same money but for more hours) was the next highest priority. This was followed by the earlier posting and awarding of TA Marker contracts, and there being greater transparency in candidate evaluations and the awarding of contracts.

Survey respondents’ relative motivations for providing TA Marker services were financial (>90%), the experience (>85%), and the academic relationships with Instructors (>80%).

In December 2020, CUPE 3912 shared a [Digital Duty Form](#) with TAs, Markers, and Instructors. Consider using it for the upcoming courses starting in January 2022.

The text is essentially that of a paper form in the Collective Agreement, with duties and numbers of

paid hours, that is to be signed by TAs and Instructors. Having a writable PDF version, in a COVID world with fewer in-person interactions, that could also be used for Marker contract applications, can reduce the opportunity for Mission Creep.

A majority of respondents indicated using – and preferring to use – the Digital Duty Form with their 2021 TA contracts.

Over 40% of respondents indicated using – and preferring to use – the Digital Duty Form with their 2021 Marker contracts.

For strong majorities (>70 - 90 %) of 2021 TA Marker Survey respondents, TA / Marker opportunities should be posted for more than 5 days, should be posted at least one month before the course begins, that preferred candidates for the contracts should be notified at least 1 week before the course begins, and that the Duty Form or equivalent should be signed before the course begins.

Conceptually, jointly agreed adjustments in course specific contracted hours might be possible where pre-course estimates of the hours in the job posting differ from the actual class sizes.

Respondents were evenly divided on whether contracted hours were sufficient to achieve the course objectives.

While there is a common collective agreement across faculties and departments, there are some dynamics in the TA and Marker working experiences that are not consistent in a workplace where the contract implementation is typically decentralized (e.g., by faculty or department); where each year there is a percentage of new supervisors (e.g., course instructors); and these supervisors have a varying capacity to authorize changes in the number of paid hours.

Since September 2019, the hourly rates, for a TA (\$24.41/hr) and Marker (\$16.61/hr) have been similar to 2019 hourly rates for a unionized Cook (~ \$24.43/hr) and Dietary Assistant (~ \$17.72/hr) in Halifax. There are higher TA hourly rates at some other universities (e.g., University of New Brunswick).

The Halifax Regional Municipality is implementing a policy where in future contracts, service providers such as curbside solid waste removers, receive a “living wage” rate (e.g., \$21.80/hr in 2020). The calculation of that “living wage” rate assumes housing and family circumstances that are different for many but not all university students. That “living wage” hourly rate is between the TA and the Marker hourly rates.

There is currently a 3:2 ratio between TA and Marker hourly rates (\$24.41 vs. \$16.61), There are some similarities and differences in the services being provided at the TA hourly rate, and at the Marker hourly rate. Does that 3:2 ratio reasonably reflect these similarities and differences for most courses, most of the time? Should that 3:2 ratio be maintained (e.g., same % change in TA and Marker hourly rates),

or should those hourly rates be more similar (i.e., a smaller difference in the hourly rates, accomplished by a relatively greater increase in the Marker hourly rate)?

There is currently an impasse with the employer regarding many of the TA and Marker goals for improvements in our working conditions

Thanks again to all who responded to the 2021 TA and Marker Survey. In 2022, fellow TAs and Markers will be calling on you to contribute to our communications with the employer.

Please join in these organized efforts, based on your time and ability. In doing so, you are also contributing to our efforts to improve our working conditions.

In Memoriam, Pat O’Neill, 1942-2021

Karen Harper

Pat O’Neill joined CUPE 3912 several years ago to teach a course at the Mount and was our VP from 2018 to 2020. He was a professor in psychology at Acadia University for most of his career and retired early as professor emeritus. He brought to CUPE 3912 many years of experience in union activities including serving on negotiating teams and being chief negotiator for the Acadia University Faculty Association, and serving as chair of CAUT’s Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee.



As our VP, Pat dealt with grievances, including a particularly difficult one that led to arbitration, and served on our bargaining team in our last round of

negotiations. He participated in CAUT’s Senior Grievance Officers Forum a few times and shared what he learned with the executive.



I remember Pat fondly. He was one of the most supportive members of the executive when I became president a few years ago. He wrote me a great reference letter for my nomination as a member at large on the CAUT executive; I think I would have been elected if more delegates had actually read the letter.

Other executive members have also shared their memories of Pat as a fabulous person with invaluable advice. Read more about Pat’s amazing life [here](#).