



**TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND POSTDOCS
AT WESTERN UNIVERSITY**

PSAC 610



***UNION
HANDBOOK***



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A LETTER FROM YOUR PRESIDENT



Hi and welcome to PSAC Local 610, the graduate teaching assistant and postdoctoral associate union at Western University. As a member, you are uniting with nearly 2,500 academic workers across Western University, and millions of workers across Canada. It is with this unity that we are able to fight back against both our employer and the governments who look to harm our advances. This includes, but is not limited to, improving working conditions, increasing wages and benefits, as well as job security.

You are joining a movement of 4.8 million unionized workers in the broader Canadian labour movement to demand better working conditions for all of us. In fact, many of the benefits and rights that non-unionized workers enjoy today come from the efforts of unionized workers. Throughout history unions successfully gained shorter working days / weeks, abolished child labour, improved occupational health and safety, and fought for human rights and equity laws.



Recently, as the labour movement has received a flurry of attacks, members of PSAC 610 have marched alongside students unions and the broader labour movement to fight the government's cuts to education and healthcare.

To help learn more about your union as well as the broader labour movement, your local executive has put together this handbook. It will help you to understand the structure of PSAC, union history, your collective agreement and rights, the upcoming bargaining process, as well as the many benefits the union has to offer.

The union is only as strong as its membership, so please take some time to look through this handbook. We also encourage you to be active and involved in your union. As being informed and active makes for a stronger union.



In Solidarity,
Wesley Robinson,
President PSAC Local 610



FAQ

What is a union?

A union is an organized group of workers who come together with the employer to make decisions about the conditions of their work.

Unionizing means improving the quality of work on several levels. It protects the economic and social interests of workers

What do unions do?

Unions organize, represent, and negotiate better working conditions for employees within a workplace.

Unions also help fight for improved working conditions within the surrounding society.

What is a collective agreement?

A legal agreement between the members of a union and an employer that is negotiated every three years.

Outlines worker and employers rights, such as wages, hours of work, benefits, harassment and bullying procedures, and more.



What is a grievance? If I file one, what happens?

A grievance is any work-related dispute involving the interpretation, application, administration or violation of the Collective Agreement.

Grievances can also be filed if the employer violates any federal or provincial laws, such as the Ontario Labour Relations Act.

It is your right to file a grievance. By the Ontario Labour Relations Act, you cannot be disciplined for filing a grievance.

What are my union dues?

In return for a wide range of services and protections, PSAC members pay dues to the union. We have a fair dues system that is based on a percentage of your earnings.

Based on the 1945 Rand Formula all union members and non-members within a workplace must pay union dues. Non-members pay dues because they benefit from having a union in their workplace, such as earning higher wages.

How do I Become a Member?

You can fill out a membership card at your union's office, 1313 Somerville House.



WELCOME TO THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Canada's labour movement has a long history of improving the lives of workers. Unions have fought and won labour rights that are now enjoyed by all Canadians. This includes minimum wages, overtime pay, workplace health and safety, vacation pay, maternity and parental leave, as well as protection from discrimination and harassment.

These gains were only won by workers showing solidarity, which is why the history of the labour movement is important to understand. By understanding how we achieved these gains we can learn how to mobilize for the future! What follows is a brief history of those achievements.

1872 Toronto Printers' Strike:

In the 1870's many Toronto printers worked shifts longer than 10 hours a day.

The Toronto Typographical Union walked off the job - an illegal act - once they were refused a 9-hour work day.

Over 10,000 people joined the striking printers on the steps of Queen's Park, resulting in their employer giving them a shorter workday. This also contributed to new legislation, such as the Trade Union Act.

The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike:

The Winnipeg General Strike was the single biggest labour action in Canadian history to date.

30,000 workers walked off the job to strike for better wages and working conditions and were soon joined by public sector employees including police, firefighters, postal workers, utility workers and others.

On what became known as 'Bloody Saturday', police charged a crowd of striking workers resulting in dozens of casualties.



Windsor Ford Strike 1945:

After Ford announced 1,500 layoffs, the United Auto Workers demanded mandatory membership for all workers employed at the auto plant. After a massive strike, Canada's federal government eventually bent to pressure and appointed an arbitrator.

The arbitrator, Supreme Court Justice Ivan Rand, would issue a historic ruling, which declares that in a unionized workplace, employees are free to join or not join the union, but they must pay union dues. This is because even non-unionized employees receive the benefits gained through collective bargaining.

1981 PostalStrike:

In the 1980's paid maternity leave was rare. Only a single union in Quebec had secured that benefit at the time.

In 1981 following a successful 42-day strike, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers won postal workers across Canada 17 weeks of paid maternity leave - a concept which consequently became main-stream throughout the country.



Response to the 1992 Westray Disaster:

In 1992, twenty-six miners were killed by an explosion at the Westray Mine in Plymouth, Nova Scotia.

The government introduced Bill C-45 due to the protests initiated by supporters of the labour movement.

C-45 created a legal duty for managers to ensure the safety of all workers and members of the public. It also established new sections of the Criminal Code under which corporations and their managers can be charged criminally for negligence.

Power of Many (ongoing):

With the election of Doug Ford and the Conservative Government in Ontario came a direct attack on workers rights. One of the first acts of the Conservative Government was mandating teaching assistants at York University back to work. This was followed by freezing the minimum wage, and repealing large sections of Bill 148. In addition to this healthcare and education have seen major cuts in favour of corporate tax cuts.



In response, the Ontario Federation of Labour began the Power of Many Campaign, a campaign to engage the grassroots of the labour movement and our allies, to take the fight directly to the government. Members of PSAC 610 have been involved in the London area. We have protested and occupied the offices of MPPs and marched with thousands of workers at Queen's Park.

This year, PSAC 610 will continue to work with the Labour Movement and our allies to combat the cuts coming from the Ford Government. Whether it is attacks on students unions, OSAP, or affordable housing, we are in a precarious state. We must defend the right to organize, demand free education, and make life more affordable. All of these cuts are interrelated and as students we are directly impacted.

PUBLIC SERVICE ALLIANCE OF CANADA

PSAC represents over 180,000 employees in every province and territory in Canada and in locations around the world. Union members work for federal government departments and agencies, Crown Corporations, universities, casinos, community service agencies, Aboriginal communities, airports, and the security sector among others. PSAC is headquartered in Ottawa with 23 regional offices across Canada.

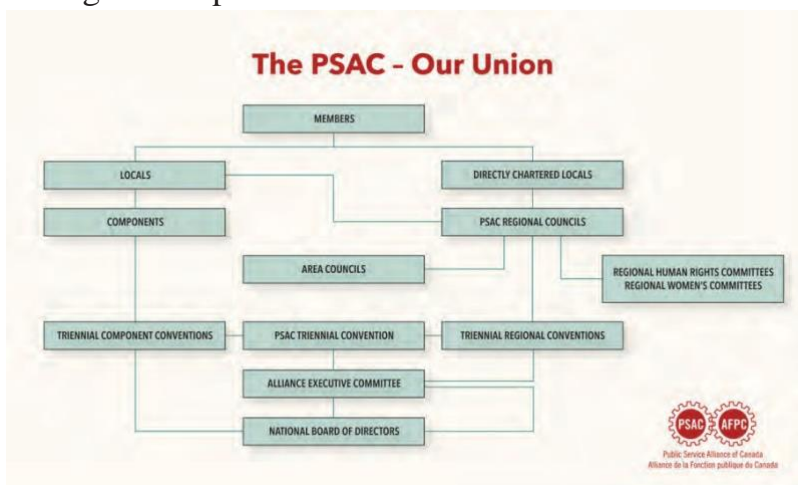


Public Service Alliance of Canada
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

As Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows, we are members of a Directly Chartered Local within the PSAC. The Local is where members connect to the union. It is where they go for help, where they meet to discuss workplace concerns, where they elect their local representatives, and where local members vote on proposed contract settlements.

STRUCTURE OF THE PSAC

Locals are the foundation of the union. Locals are either a part of a component or a directly chartered local. Components bring together members who work for the same government department. Locals that are not part of a component are directly chartered, meaning they are represented directly through PSAC rather than through a component.



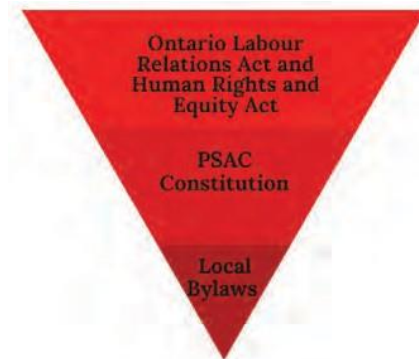
The PSAC National Triennial Convention is the union's governing body. Delegates to the convention are elected at their respective component conventions, by area councils, and by directly chartered locals with more than 100 members. At the convention, delegates can move motions to make changes to the PSAC Constitution.

STRUCTURE OF LOCAL 610

PSAC Constitution and Bylaws:

PSAC Local 610 is governed by federal and provincial laws, such as the Ontario Labour Relations Act. It is also governed by the PSAC Constitution, and the locals own bylaws.

The bylaws and policies define how union officers are selected, what they are responsible for, and how the decisions of the local are made and implemented. Periodic amendments to the bylaws can be made if approved by the members at a General Membership Meeting.



Policies are annually reviewed by committees, and are endorsed or amended if necessary by the Executive Committee. For more information, you can review the PSAC constitution, and the local's bylaws on our website.



The Executive Committee:

The executive committee is comprised of elected representatives that help to maintain the smooth operation of your local union. The President and Chairs maintain the local's committees, and assist with the administrative tasks of the local. The Chief Stewards help to organize and mobilize members within their division, as well as assist with grievances. The executive committee meets bi-weekly.

Chief and Departmental Stewards:

Local members elect six Chief Stewards that represent each division within the union. Four Chief Stewards represent each division of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), Arts and Humanities, Bio-Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences. There are two Chief Stewards that represent Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows.

The Chief Stewards are tasked with maintaining Departmental Steward networks within each division. Stewards are elected or appointed within each department. Departmental Stewards solicit information from members of their departments to assist with the work of their Chief Steward.

Stewards play an important role in the union, as they assist with the union's communications, and serve as a voice for their department's needs. Please consider becoming a Steward for your department!



COMMITTEES

Committees are open to all members with the goal of facilitating the union's ongoing projects, as well as assisting with the allocation of benefits to members such as financial assistance and scholarships, among others. There are several standing committees that are always active, as well as ad hoc committees that become active when necessary, such as during bargaining. Look for committee call outs in your e-mails! What follows is a list of standing committees.


Bylaws Committee: Review and propose amendments to the local's bylaws. Report recommendations during General Meeting.

Finance Committee: Assist the finance chair with the spending of the local, and assist the finance chair with their duties.

Communications Committee: Assist the communications chair with coordinating and evaluating communication strategies.

Food Support and Resources Committee: Provides assistance to members who require food support, and allocates resources.

Financial Assistance Committee: Reviews member's applications for financial assistance on a monthly basis.



Mobilization Committee: Work to mobilize members to respond to labour and social justice issues.

Gender Equity Committee: The Gender equity committee shall advocate for improved rights, resources, and support systems for women, trans, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals at Western University and in the broader London community.

Labour Management Committee: Meet periodically to discuss issues relevant to ongoing labour relations between the employer and the local.

The Health & Safety Committee: This will be the first point of contact for all health and safety concerns. The key responsibilities of this committee will be to educate our members on their rights within the workplace and help the union enforce the Ontario Health and Safety Act.





THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

The Collective Agreement (CA) is a legally binding, collectively bargained contract that is renegotiated every three years. In this contract, it outlines the rights and responsibilities of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows as well as the employer, Western University. The latest CA can be found on our website.

Some of the rights outlined in the CA for GTAs:

- Overtime pay
- TA appointments
- Benefits (physical health benefits, mental health fund, employee assistance plan)
- Personal leave (sick days, pregnancy / parental leave, bereavement leave)

Some of the rights outlined in the CA for Postdocs:

- Overtime pay
- Paid expenses (travel and research)
- Benefits (flex credits, life and accident insurance, employee assistance plan)
- Personal leave (sick days, pregnancy / parental leave, bereavement leave)



The Letter of Offer (GTAs):

When UWO offers you a position as a TA, you are presented with a Letter of Offer. The Letter of Offer verifies that the conditions of your employment are governed by the CA; it is important that you keep a copy of the letter in your records.

Duties Specification Agreement (GTAs):

A TA requires an average of 10 hours of work per week, with a maximum of 140 hours per term or 280 hours per year. Unless agreed to, an employee cannot be required to work:

- More than twice the set weekly average in any one week during the work period
- Nor can hours be carried forward from one term to another
- An employee shall not be required to work outside of their set term of employment
- No employee shall be required to work more than eight hours per day

At the beginning of each term your TA supervisor will present you with a Duties Specification Agreement (DSA), that divides the hours of your contract among the various duties you and your supervisor agree you will perform. The DSA functions as a contractual agreement between you and your supervisor. It also functions as a description of the employer's expectations that both you and your supervisor have agreed to and can refer to if necessary. If your workload conflicts with the DSA, contact your Departmental or Chief Steward.



THE ONTARIO LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

Most employees and employers are also legally bounded by the Ontario Labour Relations Act. All employees are encouraged to read this act. The purpose of this act is to:

1. Facilitate collective bargaining between employers and trade unions that are the freely-designated representatives of the employees.
 2. Recognize the importance of workplace parties adapting to change.
 3. Promote flexibility, productivity and employee involvement in the workplace.
 4. Encourage communication between employers and employees in the workplace.
 5. Recognize the importance of economic growth as the foundation for mutually beneficial relations amongst employers, employees and trade unions.
 6. Encourage co-operative participation of employers and trade unions in resolving workplace issues.
 7. Promote the expeditious resolution of workplace disputes.
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RESOLVING WORKPLACE ISSUES

One of the most important services the local provides is advice, support, and legal assistance if a member experiences a workplace issue or violation of the CA. The first person you should contact if you have a workplace issue is your Departmental Steward.

Workplace issues can usually be resolved informally, in a conversation with the course supervisor or department, without filing an official grievance. Even if your specific concern is not a grievable offence, it is still important to raise any workplace concerns so that it can be better addressed in the future.

It's important that you raise any concerns you wish to address as quickly as possible. Any potential employment violation must be brought to the attention of the employer within 21 days of its occurrence, or from the date you became aware of the occurrence. The issue will then be informally addressed within 5 days of informing the employer.



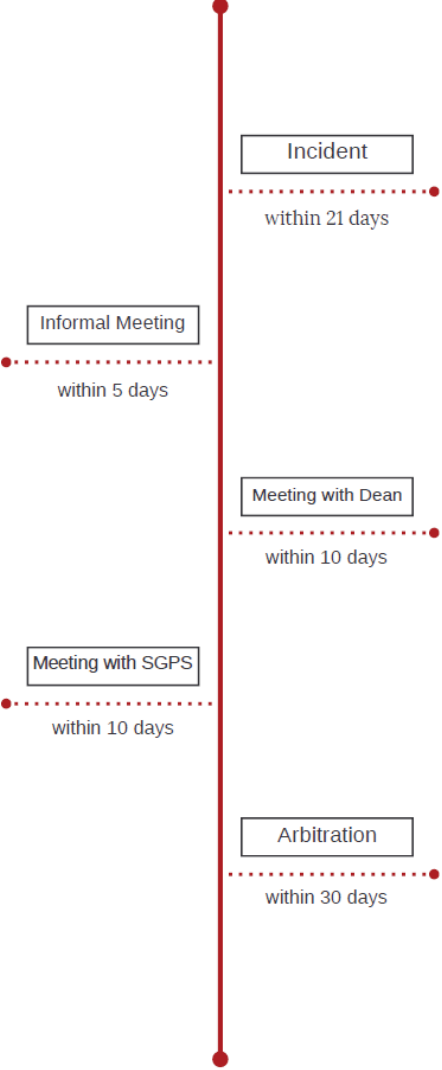


GRIEVANCES

A grievance is any work-related dispute involving the interpretation, application, administration, or violation of the Collective Agreement or federal and provincial labour law. It is in the best interest of both the local and the employer to address grievances as quickly as possible.

If your matter is not resolved informally, you can file an official grievance to the Dean of the faculty within 10 days of the informal discussion. The Dean will set up a meeting with up to 2 union representatives, and 2 employer representatives to discuss the grievance within 10 days, and then respond within 7. If the grievance is not resolved it will move to the vice-provost or School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS). SGPS is required to respond to the grievance within 7 days. If it is still unresolved the grievance may enter arbitration within 30 days of SGPS response. The arbitrator will make the final decision on the grievance.

Given these time constraints, it is very important that you come forward with your concerns as soon as possible. Even if you may have doubts, it might still be worth it to seek out the union's assistance to ensure that all workplace issues are dealt with.






BENEFITS

Extended Health Plan: The EHP is a supplement to your existing health insurance. If you were a TA during at least one semester of the current academic year, you may be reimbursed for eligible procedures. You can find out more information about how and when to apply and what is covered. Postdocs receive some benefits directly from the employer and can contact Western Universities Human Resources for more information.

UHIP Assistance Fund: The local has a fund available for TA members who pay UHIP fees. The forms are usually submitted around June, and can be found on our website.

Food Support and Resources: The local maintains a budget to help TAs who experience an unexpected financial emergency that diverts income from their food budget. Those who qualify receive grocery store gift cards. Learn how and when to apply on our website.

Financial Assistance Fund: The financial assistance fund is to support members who experience unexpected financial need. The following expenses can be funded; medical emergencies, personal emergencies, academic/conference travel, and child care. For TAs forms are due by the 1st of every month, and are adjudicated by the appropriate financial assistance committee. Postdocs deadlines are August 31st, January 31st, and April 30th.



Employee Assistance Plan: Members have access to professional counselors that can assist with a broad range of personal and work-related issues. The service is confidential and available 24/7, just call 1-877-433-0701.

Mental Health Fund: TAs fought and won funding to support mental health during the last round of bargaining. This fund will help members afford vital mental health services such as licensed therapy, and medications.

**INFORMATION AND FORMS ARE
AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE
www.pfac610.ca**

BARGAINING

Bargaining is a big part of being in a union. Each Collective Agreement has an expiration date, requiring the employees and the employer to renegotiate. PSAC Local 610 has two bargaining units: Graduated Teaching Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates. Bargaining, and preparing to bargain, begins before the Collective Agreement expires.



In preparation for bargaining, it is important that members come forward, or fill out surveys supplied by the local, expressing their needs that are not reflected in the current Collective Agreement. The bargaining team then takes these demands to the employer and bargains for a better agreement. During bargaining it is important to stand in solidarity with your union, to show the employer that we support, and will fight hard for a better agreement.

The Postdoctoral Associate Collective Agreement expired December 31st 2019. The PSAC Bargaining Team is pleased to report that the University Team came to the table prepared to discuss a health and dental plan. While the discussions were preliminary at this point, the Employer showed a willingness to engage with our proposal to allocate money from the current flex credit system into an Employer sponsored Health and Dental plan. We are still far from agreeing on what such a plan would look like and how much it would cost, but at least they are now talking to us about a plan.



The Teaching Assistant Collective Agreement expires on August 31st 2020. This means that Teaching Assistants will begin the early stages of the bargaining process in the coming months. Keep a look out for surveys, and mobilization events. Also, please come forward with any ideas you might have that could improve the current Collective Agreement.



CONTACTS

The Executive Committee:

President	prespsac610@gmail.com
Communications Chair	commmspac610@gmail.com
Gender Equity Chair	genderequitypsac610@gmail.com
Administration Chair	admnpac610@gmail.com
Postdoc Chair	postdocpsac610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Arts and Humanities	artschiefstewardpsac610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Bio Sciences	bioscichief610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Physical Sciences	physcichief610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Social Sciences	socialscichief@gmail.com
Chief Steward Postdoc	postdocchiefpsac610@gmail.com

Staff:

Administrative Assistant	staffpsac610@gmail.com
Bookkeeper	staff2psac610@gmail.com

Elected, Non-Executive Officers:

Occupational Health and Safety	healthandsafety.psac610@gmail.com
Chief Returning Officer	crospac610@gmail.com

OFFICE HOURS
MONDAY To Friday
9:00 to 2:00



www.PSAC610.CA 519-661-4137 1313 SomervilleHouse

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