Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement

2016-2018
Overview

• Collective Bargaining and the Collective Agreement
• Compliance with the Collective Agreement
What Is The GSA?

• Established as a separate corporate entity from the University under the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*
  • Seat on Board of Governors and right to negotiate a Collective Agreement

• Represents graduate students to the University and government
  • Collaborate and work closely with FGSR and Office of the Provost
Graduate Students’ Association
  - GSA Council
    - GSA Board
  - Post Secondary Learning Act
    - U of A Board of Governors
      - President
        - Provost
          - VP Academic
            - Deans (Faculties)
          - VP Finance / Administration
          - VP Research
          - VP Facilities / Operations
          - VP University Relations
          - VP Advancement

Source: Adapted from University of Alberta Governance 101 Slide
VP Labour Portfolio

- VP Labour (VPL) elected by all grad students

- Diversity of responsibilities
  - Labour, mental health

- Main labour-related jobs are:
  - Collective Bargaining
  - Assisting Graduate Assistants
  - Education on the Collective Agreement
A Collective Agreement is a legally binding written agreement, usually negotiated ‘collectively’, between two parties that regulates the terms and conditions of represented employees in their workplace, their duties and the duties of the employer.
What Is Collective Bargaining?

- Negotiation process between the GSA and the Board of Governors to renew the Collective Agreement
- Process outlined in Article 5 of the Collective Agreement
Graduate Students’ Association

GSA Council

GSA LRC

GSA Board

Post Secondary Learning Act

U of A Board of Governors

President

Provost

Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

Negotiating Committee (Director, Chair)

Negotiating Committee (VPL, Chair)

Negotiate terms for new Collective Agreement

Source: Adapted from University of Alberta Governance 101 Slide
2015-2016 Steps For Collective Bargaining

1. Labour Relations Committee (LRC) meetings to prepare for Collective Bargaining
2. Oct 1: GSA VPL and Provost exchange names of Negotiating Committees (NC)
3. GSA LRC and NC meetings to prepare GSA’s Opening Position
4. Nov 1: GSA VPL and Provost exchange Opening Positions
5. Nov 24: GSA presentation to Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee (BHRCC) - they decide mandate ($$) for negotiations
6. Dec to Apr: Parties bargain in good faith to reach a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) describing terms of a new Collective Agreement
7. MoS to GSA Council for Ratification (May)
8. MoS to BHRCC Meeting for Ratification (May)
What Is a Memorandum of Settlement

Memorandum of Settlement

• “A formal document executed by the bargaining parties setting out the terms voluntarily negotiated for a collective agreement. Such a memorandum typically requires ratification to become effective.” (hrcouncil.ca)

Ratify/Ratification

• To confirm by the action of expressing consent, approval or formal sanction, of something done or arranged by an agent or representatives (dictionary.com)

• Common in collective bargaining agreements. One or more people are authorized to negotiate and sign an agreement with management. A collective bargaining agreement can not become legally binding until the members ratify the agreement.” (Wikipedia)
Graduate Students’ Association

U of A Board of Governors

President

Post Secondary Learning Act

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee

Negotiating Committee (VPL, Chair)

Negotiating Committee (Director, Chair)

GSA Council

GSA LRC

GSA Board

Source: Adapted from University of Alberta Governance 101 Slide
Summary Of 2015-2016 Collective Bargaining

Signed two Memoranda of Settlement

1) Increased funding to Graduate Student Support Fund (GSSF)
2) Increased funding and changes to the Collective Agreement

& Continued support for the Graduate Student Assistance Program (GSAP)
MoS 1: Graduate Student Support Fund

• Four funds for ALL grad students:
  • Academic Travel Awards ($500 x 1 for Master’s; $500 x 2 for PhD)
  • Childcare Grants ($1,000 per child per year)
  • Emergency Bursaries (up to ~$2,500)
  • GSA Recognition Awards (held annually in April)
MoS 1: Graduate Student Support Fund

• Negotiated during Collective Bargaining
  • $514,000 in 2012-2013 (increase of $30,000)
  • $609,000 in 2013-2014 (increase of $95,000; 1 year agreement)
  • $674,000 in 2014-2015 (increase of $65,000; 2 year agreement)
  • $689,000 in 2015-2016 (increase of $15,000)
MoS 1: Graduate Student Support Fund

• Negotiated during Collective Bargaining
  • $ 514,000 in 2012-2013 (increase of $ 30,000)
  • $ 609,000 in 2013-2014 (increase of $ 95,000; 1 year agreement)
  • $ 674,000 in 2014-2015 (increase of $ 65,000; 2 year agreement)
  • $ 689,000 in 2015-2016 (increase of $ 15,000)
  • $ 789,000 in 2016-2017 (increase of $ 100,000; 2 year agreement)
  • $ 814,000 in 2017-2018 (increase of $ 25,000)
MoS 2: 2016-2018 Collective Agreement

• Defines Graduate Assistantships Types
  • Teaching Assistant, Principal Instructor, Research Assistant, Graduate Research Assistantship Fellowship
• Provides requirements for Letter of Appointment
• Outlines minimum stipend rates
• Provides Assistantship Time Use Guideline Template
• Describes leaves and benefits
• Specifies Health and Safety requirements
• Stipulates a Dispute Resolution process
MoS 2: Increases To Stipends

Stipend = award + salary (GTA/GRA), or award (GRAF)

• 1.6% increase to salary portion of stipend in year 1; total increase of 0.9%
  • Collective Agreement stipulates Award increase tied to graduate fee index (tuition increases set by government legislation at Alberta CPI, but frozen 2015-2017)

• 2.0% total stipend increase in year 2
Changes To The Collective Agreement Categories

Previous CA had two kinds of Graduate Research Assistants

• RAs working on a research project not for degree program (up to 12 hours per week)

• RAs being funded for thesis or course-based research project for degree program (no hours associated with these RAs, uses ‘pay scale’)

![Table showing 2015-2016 Award and Minimum Salary Rates for appointments from September 1, 2015 to August 31, 2016]
Changes To The Collective Agreement Categories

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2014-2016
Grad Assistant

GTA

GRA

For money/experience

Funding for degree

For all assistantships:
Award: not taxed
Salary: taxed
Changes To The Collective Agreement Categories

Separated Research Assistants into two distinct categories

- **Graduate Research Assistant (GRA)**
  - Hired to work on a specific project (unrelated to thesis), duties solely support faculty research; up to 12 h/w

- **Graduate Research Assistantship Fellowship (GRAF)**
  - Financial assistance while doing thesis or research project activities necessary for completion of degree requirements; no work hours attached

### 2016-2018
Grad Assistant

- **GTA**
  - For money/experience
  - **GRA**
  - **GRAF**
  - Funding for degree

**GRA, GTA assistantships:**
- Award: not taxed
- Salary: taxed

**GRAF assistantships:**
- Not taxed
- T4A
Changes To The Collective Agreement Categories

2014-2016
Grad Assistant

GTA
For money/experience

GRA
Funding for degree

For all assistantships:
Award: not taxed
Salary: taxed

2016-2018
Grad Assistant

GTA
For money/experience

GRA
Funding for degree

GRAF
GRA, GTA assistantships:
Award: not taxed
Salary: taxed

GRAF assistantships:
Not taxed
T4A
Other Changes To The Collective Agreement

• Used GTA and GRA to emphasize that positions are specifically for graduate students

• Used ‘Graduate Assistant’ to be more comprehensive of the new GRAF category and to highlight that GTAs and GRAs are playing dual roles and are more than just ‘students’

• Clarified hours of work
  • GTA/GRA appointments can be combined for a total of up to 12 hours per week
  • Can work 12 hours as a GTA and/or GRA on top of a GRAF

• Added benefits: up to one week of Bereavement Leave
Other Changes To The Collective Agreement

• Added statement that “An impending or current leave shall not be used as the basis for denying an offer of a Graduate Assistantship for a future Academic Term” (§15.05)

• List of key information to include in a letter of appointment (Appendix A)

• Updated Time Use Guidelines (Appendix C)

• Revised Short Term Academically Related Employment (Appendix E)
Collective Agreement Summary

• U of A has several kinds of Collective Agreements – AASUA, NASA & GSA

• Collective Bargaining is a negotiation process between the GSA and the Board of Governors to renew the Collective Agreement

• GSA CA protects grad students and provides benefits

• Assistantship categories revised this year

• Increased funding for GSSF and stipend rates
PULL UP!
WE'VE STRUCK A DEAL!

I HATE THESE 'DO OR DIE' NEGOTIATIONS!

BRADFORD
Supporting Graduate Assistants

• Interpret terms of the Collective Agreement
• Provide advice and support for students
• Respond to questions by emails, phone calls, drop in visits or appointments from grad students, faculty and staff
  • Work closely with Heather Hogg, Labour Professional, and GSA office team
• Follow up with professors, departments, FGSR, Provost’s Office as needed
• Collaborate with departmental/faculty staff, FGSR, Provost Office to meet terms of CA
• Educate students, faculty, administrative staff on CA
• Advocate for graduate students
Types Of Questions, Concerns And Issues

Easy/Routine
- Maternity/vacation leave, check payment rates or hours

Moderate
- Meetings with students about paid vs worked hours

Complex/Challenging
- Changes to spring/summer payment, issues of payment by department, issues with job classification, assisting students with difficult supervisor
Compliance With The Collective Agreement

• Common issues for grad students
  • Recruitment strategies for GTA/GRA positions by department/faculty
  • Inappropriate or no letter of appointment
  • Incorrect type of appointment (GTA, GRA, GRAF, STARE)
  • How to receive benefits (especially maternity leave)
  • Incorrect stipend
  • Poor or unsafe work conditions or environment

• Factors influencing Compliance
  • Student-supervisor relationship
  • Departmental/Faculty culture (decentralization)
  • Staff knowledge and understanding of CA
  • Staff turnover
Resolving Compliance Issues

• Generally depends on students coming forward with issues
  • Students ask for clarification and/or advice
  • Easy issue: may try to resolve informally themselves
  • Complex issue: may refer/accompany student to also work with an Associate Dean or Dean FGSR, Ombudsperson, Office of Safe Disclosure
• Option for formal grievance in CA
• Students rarely move forward with formal complaints (fear of repercussions)
Challenges of Enforcing Compliance

• Complaints can lead to repercussions (subtle or not) due to power imbalance (student-supervisor relationship)
  • Letters of reference
  • Funding
  • Support/mentoring to advance academic career
  • Supervisor can choose to no longer supervise a student

• Student apathy

• Not all students satisfied with changes to Collective Agreement
  • Award vs salary

• May affect payment during periods of transitions
  • Slow and/or incremental changes by University administration

• No ‘stick’ to enforce compliance
  • Rely on moral suasion, education
Compliance Over Time

- Improving Compliance has been in GSA’s Strategic Work Plan (SWP) since 2011
- External factors strongly influence annual SWP focus
  - Government cuts to Post Secondary Education funding
  - Collective Bargaining
  - Previous discussion to abolish FGSR
  - Change in Leadership at U of A and in Alberta
Compliance Over Time

Examples of incremental changes over last 4 years include:

- **2013:** Dedicated Faculty Relations Officer in Provost’s Office to respond to questions by Depts/Faculties and to promote and follow up on issues with compliance
- **2013-2014:** GSA/Provost’s Office publish CA Information sheet to assist and educate staff and grad students
- **2013:** GSA invited to present to BHRCC for first time (now annual event)
- **2013:** Graduate Tuition and Funding Data Collection Committee formed
- **2013:** Survey departments for appointment letters and check websites to for range of issues
- **2013:** Smartforms assist with payment of minimum stipend rates
- **2013:** Information Sessions for contact staff in FGSR, Departments, Graduate Coordinators, APOs
- **2015:** Education of incoming Graduate Coordinators and New Professors on CA by FGSR
- **2015:** GSA Exec advocate to new Leaders on Compliance (President, Provost, Dean FGSR)
- **2015:** GSA ask for financial commitment to enforce compliance during Collective Bargaining
- **2015:** Use student questions to amend departmental advertisements and overhaul stipend payment to ensure compliance
- **2015-2016:** Request by Provost to define ‘graduate student’ for the University’s SWP
- **2016:** Present GSA CA to senior administrators including Dean’s Council, GPAC, ALES Cabinet
GSA’s On-going And Future Work

• Work with Provost’s office and HR to ensure appropriate letters of appointment are being offered to all GTAs/GRAs/GRAFs
• Advocate that letter of admission include clear funding expectations and employment duties
• Develop tracking system to show range of issues and meet with departmental councillors on an annual basis
• Continue to educate students, professors, departments, faculties, administration on GSA Collective Agreement
• Change University culture to define grads as more than ‘just students’
• Advocate for funding packages for all thesis based graduate students
For Administrators, How You Can Help

• Ensure appropriate letters of appointment are being offered to all GTAs/GRAs/GRAFs in your faculty

• Confirm departments have clear guidelines on how graduate students are selected for positions

• Train all faculty members on the GSA Collective Agreement

• Aim to offer a sustainable living funding package to all thesis-based graduate students (covers cost of living and tuition)

• Create a culture where graduate students are treated with respect and as junior colleagues
Grad Student questions:
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Department/Faculty questions:
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