

CUPE 3906 Unit 1 Strike - Information Annex

1) Who we are

CUPE 3906 represents 2,700 Teaching and Research (in lieu) Assistants along with Sessional Faculty and Post-Doctoral Fellows (excepting Health Sciences) at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

Striking workers are members of Unit 1, which represents Teaching Assistants and members holding a Research Assistantship (in lieu of a teaching assistantship).

2) Where we are now

Unit 1 members, who are teaching and research assistants, have been on strike since November 3rd, 2009. We are fighting for smaller classes, adequate benefits funding, tuition increase protection and access to positions for upper year graduate students.

Instead of listening to the voice of the membership, which voted 199 to 91 against a motion to send the university's current offer to ratification on November 1, the university has behaved like a school-yard bully. The administration has yelled at picketers on the lines and the police that protect us. They sent messages encouraging members to strike break and have made them feel vulnerable with misinformation about whether or not they're part of the union.

These same tactics of intimidation have also been used at the bargaining table. Instead of budging on their untenable position and finally addressing the issues that matter to the membership, the university has re-tabled its current offer twice since the start of job action. In addition, they're now threatening to take everything off the table (including over one hundred agreed items) unless we ratify the deal by Monday November 9th. Until yesterday, they were insisting that the bargaining team unanimously recommend the deal to its members.

Realizing that this university will not listen to us until our entire membership votes decisively to reject this deal once and for all, the bargaining team has decided to take the current offer to a ratification vote. We do not endorse the deal and expect our members to turn it down. Right now we are concentrated on winning this important vote by as wide a margin as possible.

3) Why we must turn down this deal

The university's current package offers both graduate and undergraduate TAs an 85 cent wage increase in year 1 and a 55 cent increase in year 2. They have offered a small top up of their contribution to our dental plan: \$3 more per person for single coverage; no increase to family coverage (where it's needed the most). This increase 2.2% in year 1.4% in year 2 is well below the standard in the sector.

If the tuition increase is factored in, over the course of the contract domestic graduate TAs will lose \$736, international graduate TAs will lose \$1825 and undergraduate TAs will lose \$570.

The offer current on the table also fails to address any of the key issues that members have identified as priorities in this round of negotiations time and time again.

Our key issues are extremely modest. They include:

Class Sizes

- The ideal tutorial or lab size is 15 to 20 students. Right now many tutorials have upwards of 50 students. We have heard of tutorials with more than 80 students.
- We want to maintain the personal relationships with our students by putting flexible limits on tutorial and lab sizes. If we do this, we can protect ourselves from overwork.

Benefits Funding

- The university currently contributes \$150,000 to Unit 1 for benefits. This fund is in deficit because usage has outstripped the university's contribution. Instead of the incremental improvements to benefits funds we've seen in previous contracts, the university has proposed to freeze the fund at 2008 levels. This means we will no longer be able to provide the current level of benefits.
- We want to protect our benefits fund from erosion. Our membership is growing but our employer is not contributing in proportion. The result is looming cuts to vision, childcare, health and hardship benefits.

Tuition Protection

- Last year McMaster raised tuition by the maximum allowable rate, which was 8% for most graduate students and 4% for undergraduate

students. The University Administration has indicated it will enact the maximum allowable increase again.

- We want to ensure that higher education is accessible and affordable. We also want to protect ourselves from losing hundreds of dollars in take home pay per year. We are thus seeking to protect ourselves from tuition-fee increases. If we win this it will simultaneously provide a disincentive for the university to raise tuition fees in future years.

Access to Positions for Upper Year Graduate Students

- Average completion times for PhDs in many programs are 5 years or more. Some departments do not allow 5th year doctoral students and those past the 2nd year of their Master's to even apply for available teaching positions. As a result, experienced TAs are left out of teaching and are underemployed
- We are seeking a fair hiring process that allows graduate students to apply to all open positions. This will allow us to help improve the quality of education at McMaster by make use of our teaching experience and give us the financial security we need to complete our programs

Wages

- We are not looking for an hourly wage increase for grad TAs at all. We're only seeking to get an undergrad TAs enough of a wage increase to offset their average tuition increase.

4) How we got here – A history of this round of negotiations leading up to the strike

CUPE 3906 Unit 1 has been without collective agreement since August 31, 2009. We began bargaining in June. After months of stalling, the university finally tabled a monetary offer on August 6, 2009. This package offered a small wage increase but no new money for benefits funds, which are currently in deficit. It also did nothing to address key issues such as class size and overwork, tuition protection, and access to positions for upper year graduate students. Each of the university's subsequent offers have mirrored this model, usually with an additional small wage increase.¹ The university has consistently refused to

¹ The only real exception to this was a package that moved some of the wage increase previously offered and put it into benefits. This package was only on the table for a few hours. The current package offers an insignificant amount of benefits money in the form of a small top up for their contribution to the dental plan: \$3 increase per person for single coverage. They have not offered any increase to family coverage, which is where it is needed the most.

address the union's key issues, arguing that they are "philosophical issues" that it will never move on.

The parties jointly filed for conciliation in September. CUPE requested a no board report on October 7, 2009 after the university refused to meet them at the table for the first scheduled day of conciliation. A strike/lockout deadline was set for October 31 at 12:01am.

A strike was called on Saturday October 31 after the university walked away from the table shortly after tabling its "final offer." The university made the offer with the full knowledge that the bargaining team would reject it and that it would likely result in a strike. The union remained at the table until noon on Saturday.

Facts and Figures

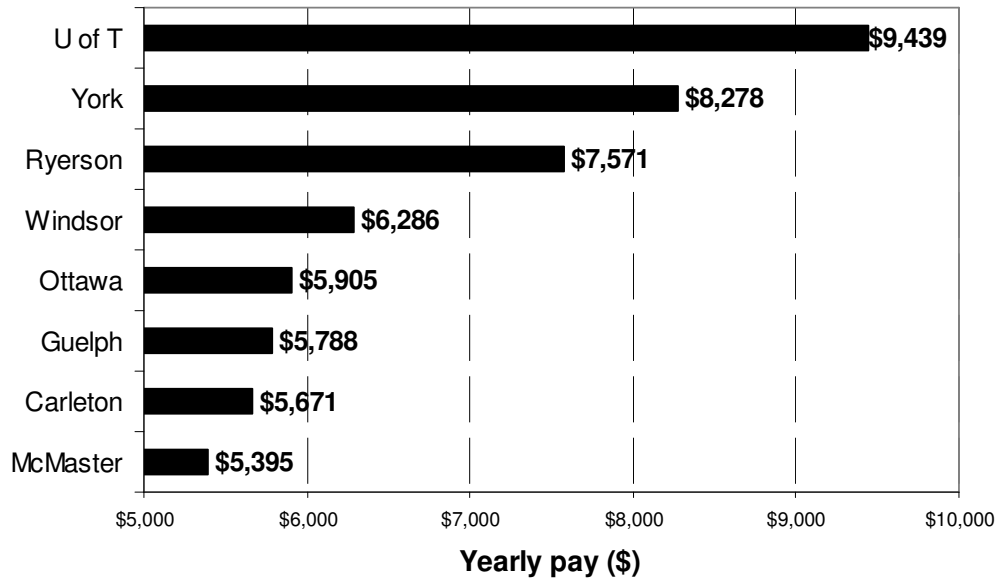
1) By the Numbers

	UNION'S PACKAGE			UNIVERSITY'S PACKAGE		
	Domestic Grad	Internat Grad	Undergrad	Domestic Grad	Internat Grad	Undergrad
Year 1	+\$163	-\$79	+\$45	-\$199	-\$566	-\$175
Year 2 Cumulative	+\$256	-\$291	+\$78	-\$537	-\$1259	-\$395
Cumulative	\$419	-\$370	+\$123	-\$736	-\$1835	-\$745
	+2.1%	-1.9%	+2.3%	-4.0%	-9.5%	-11.5%

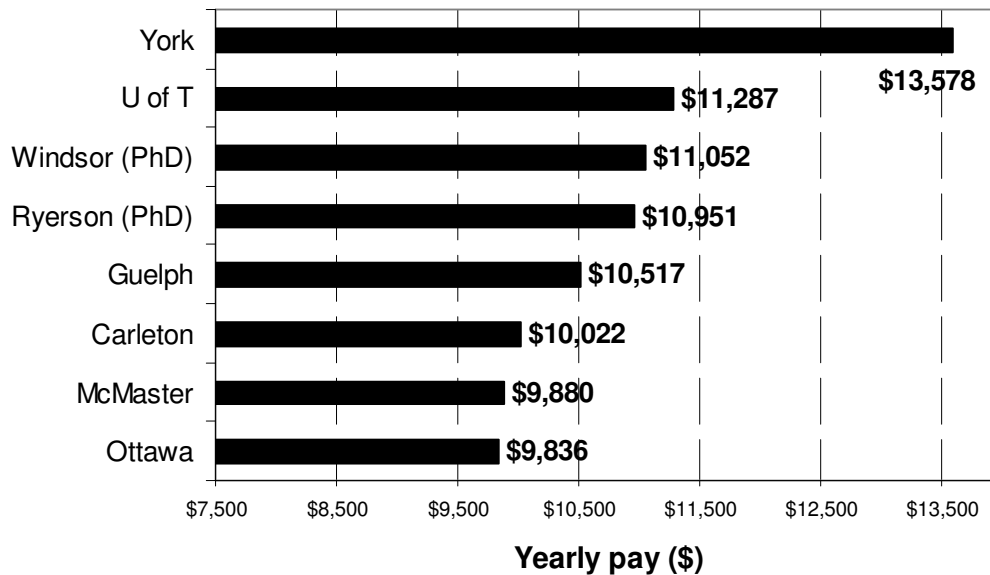
* Comparable Tuition Hike to 2009-10 assumed as indicated in Board of Governor's Report

2) McMaster TA Pay is at the BOTTOM of the PACK

Current Undergraduate Full TA pay comparison



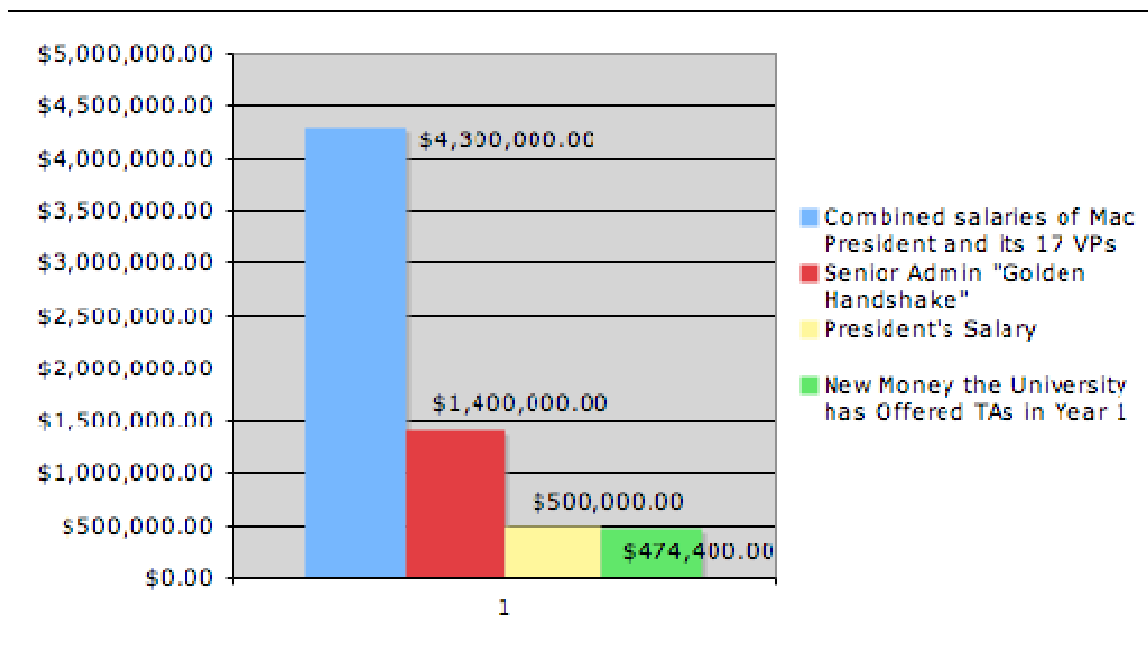
Current Graduate Full TA pay comparison



3) Mac Expenditures in Perspective

McMaster's total budget is \$830 million. Our president is the highest paid university president in the Province. He earns \$500,000 a year. Upon retirement, he'll a get 300,000 and a 1.4 million "golden handshake" paid out over 14 years (at one dollar under 100,000 so that it doesn't have to be reported in the provincial salaries disclosure list). His pension along could pay for 40 TA positions! Other senior administrators have received similar "golden handshakes" and have equally bloated salaries, benefits, bonuses and pensions. McMaster pays a combined \$4.3 million for the salaries of its president and 17 vice presidents!

While the university spares no expense on salaries and perks for its top execs, it claims it can't spare more than \$474,000 in new money for TAs next year. This is despite extracting an extra \$2 million dollars in tuition from graduate students and 5.5 million in new government funding due to an increase in graduate enrolment.



For information on the some of the more egregious spending on Mac execs see this Hamilton Spectator article complete with links to their contracts: <http://www.thespec.com/article/458156>