

Making gains for educators since 1993

Welcome to AGSEM! Last year was a bargaining year for Teaching Assistants and we successfully negotiated a new Collective Agreement which will govern our working conditions, including the rate of pay, for the next three years until June 30, 2014.

AGSEM represents approximately 3000 employees at McGill University and is the largest labour union on campus. AGSEM comprises Teaching Assistants, Invigilators, and Course Lecturers and Instructors. Since AGSEM was established in 1993, its priorities have been to improve working conditions for the groups it represents and to preserve a high standard of education for all students at McGill University.

In April of 2010, AGSEM unionized Invigilators, the first successful unionization drive for academic workers at McGill since 1993. In August 2011, Course Lecturers and Instructors were unionized after two decades of unsuccessful attempts. With three bargaining units, Teaching Assistants (Unit 1), Invigilators (Unit 2), and Course Lecturers and Instructors (Unit 3), AGSEM will continue to build on the employee rights and benefits gained by our brothers and sisters in the past.

What Is a Teaching Assistant?

A Teaching Assistant, or TA, is a graduate student who is employed by the University to assist a course supervisor with the instruction and/or evaluation of students in a course.

How Can You Become a Teaching Assistant?

Look for job postings on the AGSEM bulletin board in your department. New jobs should be posted according to the following schedule: March 1st for Spring/Summer courses; April 30th for Fall/Full Year courses; and October 15th for Winter courses. You may also consult the TA job postings on the Career and Planning Services website: www.mcgill.ca/caps. All applications for Teaching Assistantships must be submitted through the CAPS website.

Each posting should include all you need to know about the position: course title and number, estimated number of available positions, total number of hours of work per term, effective dates of appointment, summary of duties, salary, required qualifications, and the application deadline.



The Unit 1 Executive Committee works with the other Units to oversee the daily operation of the union with the help of an Administrative Coordinator, a paid employee. Members of the Executive Committee are elected annually at the spring Unit Assembly, to which all Teaching Assistants are encouraged to attend and have voting privileges. AGSEM members are also welcome to attend quarterly Delegate Council meetings, but only departmental delegates are eligible to vote. In addition, every spring the all-Units Annual General Assembly is held for members of all three Units of AGSEM, which include the Course Lecturers and Instructors, Teaching Assistants, and Invigilators.

The Unit 1 Executive Committee (TAs)

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Guide for New Teaching Assistants
2012-2013

Who Gets Hired?: The Priority Pool

TAs are divided into three groups:

Category 1

PhD 1–4 or Masters 1, 2 who have not been TAs before (typically new students)

Category 2

PhD 1–4/5**or Masters 1, 2, who have been a TA at least once (“priority pool” TAs)

Category 3

PhD 5/6+** or Masters 3+ who have been TAs before (“students who have left the priority pool”)

Preference is given to the most senior, qualified Category 2 TAs. If the number of qualified applicants is greater than the number of positions, then appointments are granted, in decreasing order of priority, to Category 2 TAs registered as PhD5 (if still a Category 2), PhD4, then PhD3, PhD2, Masters 2, PhD1, Masters 1. If there is a tie between individuals with equal priority, then the applicant who has worked the greatest number of hours will be appointed.

If you have never been a TA before, don't worry!

There are spaces reserved for Category 1 applicants. This helps to ensure that new TAs have a chance to join the pool. The number of positions that are reserved is equal to the number of former Category 2 TAs who left the priority pool in the last term. After these positions are filled, priority pool applicants are hired. If positions are still available after all priority pool applicants have been hired, they may be filled by remaining Category 1 and 3 applicants.

Graduate students who have an authorized leave of absence can request that their position in the priority pool be deferred for up to one year. If you are away for a year to complete field work, or for medical reasons, you may request that your Category 2 status be maintained for an additional year.

** Students who began their PhD at the PhD2 level can remain in the priority pool for four years until they reach the PhD5 level. PhD 1 students are no longer in the priority pool at the PhD5 level.

Accepting the Offer of a Position

If you are offered a TAship, you should receive written notice within 35 working days of the application deadline. This notice should include two copies of a letter of offer and an AGSEM membership form. The letter should state the course title, the number of hours, and the salary; sometimes you may not be assigned to a course until later (this is most common in the fall term). You must accept the position within five days by signing and returning one copy of the letter of offer with a completed AGSEM membership form. If the TAship is cancelled after you signed and returned the letter of offer, you are entitled to another available position of the same remuneration. If no other position is available or the withdrawal was due to insufficient enrollment, you are entitled to 2/5th of the appointment salary.

Now that You've Got the Job, Protect Yourself! Complete a TA Workload Form and Keep an Updated Copy!

TA Workload Forms: Mandatory for All TAs

Course supervisors and TAs must agree on the type and amount of work to be done (including time spent attending lectures). At the beginning of the appointment (before the add/drop deadline for the course), TAs and course supervisors will meet and discuss the anticipated work schedule. The result of this meeting will be recorded on a Workload Form. The total anticipated hours of work cannot exceed the total hours specified in the letter of offer unless both parties agree and full remuneration is given at the stipulated rates. If a Workload Form is not provided by the department, one can be downloaded from our website. TAs should keep track of the time it takes to complete assigned tasks. To help prevent the problem of unpaid overtime, course supervisors and TAs must meet again within 2 weeks of the mid-term to review the objectives and make appropriate revisions to the Workload Form. All versions must be completed carefully, signed and dated. Keep photocopies of the original and revised versions.

Overtime

If it appears that the workload is going to take more time to complete than was allocated, you should discuss this matter with the course supervisor as soon as possible. Usually an amicable solution can be found (e.g. increasing the number of hours of the appointment or redistribute the workload). If you did not complete a TA Workload Form and did not consult with your supervisor about revising the workload form, you may not be eligible to be reimbursed for any extra hours you have worked. If an amicable solution cannot be found, contact AGSEM so that we can help you decide what to do next.

Formal vs. Informal Performance Evaluations

Criteria for the formal performance evaluations must be submitted to you, in writing, at the beginning of the term. Once per term, the course supervisor may conduct a formal, written performance evaluation. Within thirty days of the evaluation, the written evaluation must be discussed with you. You must sign the written evaluation as confirmation that this discussion took place and may record any comments that are relevant to the evaluation. An informal performance evaluation may take place whenever the course supervisor feels it necessary to bring comments or concerns to the attention of a TA. Formal written evaluations will be included in the employee file while informal ones will not.

If You Have a Problem...

Problems sometimes arise, i.e., a job was given to someone with less priority or experience than you; you are working more hours than you agreed to; your working conditions are unsafe. If you need help or advice, please contact the TA Grievance Officer.

The first step in resolving any problem is an informal problem solving/complaint stage. This involves an informal discussion between you and the course supervisor. If after taking this step the problem is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can arrange a meeting with the Grievance Officer. They can help you decide what the best options are for you and your situation. If a formal grievance is required, it is the Grievance Officer's job to work with you and to file a grievance on your behalf. Grievances must be filed in a timely manner—you should contact the union as soon as the issue arises. AGSEM encourages employees to fight for their rights, but the union will not file a grievance without the consent of an employee.

Speak Out Against Unfair Hiring Practices, Unsafe Work Situations, Harassment, and Unpaid Overtime!

What Is a Grievance?

A grievance is a complaint filed by the union on behalf of a member alleging that the employer has violated the Collective Agreement. According to the Collective Agreement, Human Resources first submits grievances to the Hiring Unit (Department) Chair. If a solution is not found, the grievance goes to the Dean of the Faculty responsible. If this second step fails to resolve a problem, an independent arbitrator hears the case. The arbitrator's ruling is final. The arbitration procedure is laid out in the Quebec Labour Code.

Departmental Delegates

Delegates are elected by AGSEM members in their department to represent their interests at Union Council meetings and to serve as a liaison between students, administrators, and AGSEM's Executive Committee. Delegates ensure that the TA hiring process is fair, equitable and transparent. If you do not know who your delegate is, please check the AGSEM web page, or contact AGSEM. If it turns out that your department does not have a delegate, you should consider becoming one. You will receive a small stipend (\$75/semester) for your student advocacy work.

How Do You Get Involved?

For a union to effectively function, it requires the participation of its membership. So, AGSEM is always looking for activists who would like to help out. If you would like to help in any way, please send us an email to: mail@agsem-aeedem.ca.