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## Outsider - The Voice of the Tutor

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### Ratification of Collective Agreement

The collective agreement, at long last, has been ratified with a solid majority for ratification. Thanks to all who voted and to the bargaining committee who fought the fight. See the link to the agreement in all its detail.

<http://3911.cupe.ca/www/memorandum-agreement-20122014>

### 625 000 conversations – Rob Wiznura

Let's talk turkey: union turkey. For those of you who haven't been following the federal conservatives, there is a multi-scaled attack on organized labour. Bill C-377 is the tip of the iceberg, with much more to follow, including "Right-to-work" legislation. CUPE is initiating what it calls "625 000 conversations." We need to talk about unions, our role, what we hope/expect from our union, where it has failed, where we find weaknesses, what we need to celebrate. Time to come out of the closet or we won't have a union.

I'll begin with a brief discussion about Faculty Associations. Many of our members might wonder "why bother with a union? In the other places I work I fall under the FA, which is fine by me." I'd like to challenge that assumption with a bit of evidence and comparisons.

First off, there are many fine people in Faculty Associations and we have many, many supporters on the AU Faculty Association, so this is not targeted at any individual or organization. Nonetheless, faculty associations are there to serve their core: faculty. Again and again, across the province and across the country, we see this in play.

A few examples come immediately to mind. In Ontario, many FAs have written into their collective agreements that all part-time/temporary academics must be laid off before any faculty are considered for layoffs. Recently, a member of AU faculty commented that there were no layoffs during the Klein cuts. That might sound strange considering that we were reduced from 250 to 150 members between 1992/93 and 1994/95. A further 70 members suffered substantial work assignment reductions. I guess, in some minds, that constitutes "no layoffs"! Currently, at Grant MacEwan, workloads for faculty have been increased, as have class sizes, reducing available work for part time people. The FA of Grant MacEwan was very concerned about faculty workload but never said a word about the reduced availability of work for part-time people. Moreover, the FA of Grant MacEwan approached administration with the suggestion of a 2% cut in pay for *all* in order to maintain current workloads for *faculty*.

Let's compare the difference for a part-time person at Grant MacEwan and a CUPE member.

In terms of benefits, Grant MacEwan gives part time people access to prescription drug coverage. That's it. No dental, no glasses, nothing. As well, Grant MacEwan cuts off coverage at age 65. Grant MacEwan has no allowance for pension, RSPs or the like. We have negotiated, as you should know by now, a small RSP pension benefit. Work at Grant MacEwan depends upon availability and the whim of the chair. I have known people who have been told (by e-mail) that, after 10 years of teaching, no courses were available for them. We have layoff provisions in place and seniority counts in terms of protection and in terms of new positions. Grant MacEwan does provide PD funds to part time people, but unused portions are put in a pool for *faculty* at the end of each year. We have the personal PD fund, which is more generous and which stays put. We also have the pool from which people can apply for conferences and the like.

And there are the little things, like being able to take 6 credits of courses (or giving the credits to your spouse or kids). If you get involved, there are opportunities like serving on national committees, going to conventions, going to week-long labour school.

Greater benefits, greater security, greater representation.

Are unions perfect? Only as perfect as our members (speaking for myself then, not very). But they do believe in the democratic process. Our meetings are open to all our members and everyone has a vote (ask CLAC members if they have a vote at meetings!). Every expenditure, every action, every decision has been voted on. I, for

one, have been impressed by the transparency and openness of our meetings. Most organizations I have been involved in have been much more reclusive (with half the meetings *in camera*, and so on).



So start talking. Join our Facebook page. "Like" us. Tell your friends who aren't our members to join the discussion on Facebook. One doesn't need to be a member of a union to

need a union or to see the value of a union. And our youth, who have been inundated by the media and the school system about the irrelevancy of unions: let them complain about the CPP and EI on our Facebook page. Let's start a widespread conversation about labour: in our homes, halls, workplaces, wherever. I was at a potluck recently talking to a bank executive about unions (oh let's be honest: I was arguing). Move the conversation forward. Maybe even attend a meeting or two.

When I started, I served as the secretary. I chose that so I would have to shut up and listen and learn. Of course, now I am a regular Foghorn Leghorn. There are plenty of positions, committees and the like, but even chatting on Facebook is important. Connect. Participate at whatever level you can.

## Where we've been and where we're going

Sometimes, especially after a collective agreement ratification (with all its contentiousness and anxiety), we need to step back and assess where we've been and start thinking about where we'd like to go. Here is a quick timeline, for the record.

### **CUPE 3911, 1988 – today and tomorrow**

- 1988: certification as Local 11 of the Canadian Union of Educational Workers (CUEW).
- 1989: mandatory data entry in TRIX; tutors join the computer age.
- 1990: first collective agreement with Athabasca University, reached through *arbitration*. Major achievement: homestudy tutors are recognized as permanent (albeit part-time), not contract, employees.
- 1992: second collective agreement, reached through mediation. Major achievement: eligibility lists; the beginning of orderly posting/offering of tutor work assignments.
- 1993: third collective agreement, reached through bargaining. Major achievement: layoff pay and recall are instituted.
- 1993: tutors bear the brunt of AU's share of Kleincuts; we are reduced from 250 members to 150 members between 1992/93 and 1994/95. A further 70 members suffer work assignment reductions.
- 1994: CUEW ends; we join CUPE.
- 1995: fourth collective agreement, reached through bargaining. We are forced to accept a 5% rollback (as are most other Alberta public sector workers).
- 1995: the Call Centre results in a new configuration of CUPE work in some programs at AU, and the elimination of some CUPE jobs.
- 1997: mandatory email interaction with students and with AU as an organization; the employer begins to require more flexible delivery.
- 2000: Fifth collective agreement, reached through issues-based negotiations. Major achievements: academic opinion clause; increase in maximum work assignment for learning facilitators; individualized study (formerly homestudy) tutors paid for student block overloads.
- 2001: Annual PD benefits increased and made cumulative for three years.
- 2002: Sixth collective agreement, reached through bargaining. Major achievements: CUPE members who take 3 month or shorter AUFA term assignments remain CUPE 3911 members; collective agreement language specifically exempting home office workers from the employer's occupational health and safety responsibility is changed to language requiring the employer to ensure the occupational health and safety of all its CUPE employees.
- 2004: The first ever Article 19 Academic Leave is granted.
- 2005: Seventh collective agreement reached through bargaining. Major achievements: first-ever health benefits plan for our members established; first-ever payment of RRSP money to our members; common AUGC/CUPE interest to find an appropriate retirement income scheme for CUPE 3911 members is recognized in the formation of a joint committee.
- 2006: Membership reaches 300 for the first time.
- 2010: Collective agreement achieved through bargaining. Major achievements: enhanced benefits and reasonable sick leave provisions
- 2013: After a year of bargaining and mediation and more bargaining, ratify agreement that includes a pension and protects benefits. However, we also suffer a one-

year rollback in pay. Fighting the imposition of a call centre model across the institution.

**The future:**

Attitudes within AU change and tutors are finally recognized and treated as full members of the academic community. Tutors can work full time if they wish and piecemeal is no longer the model for tutoring. The call centre model is relegated to a dark past. Compensation (wages and benefits) are finally comparable to other groups. All tutors, including those living and working outside Alberta, are part of CUPE 3911. Membership meetings explode and become known for their raucous nature, sometimes ever erupting in song. CUPE 3911 becomes a model for Labour Unions across the continent. We are instrumental in the reconfiguration of funding for post-secondary, which becomes both stable and adequate, across the country. Universities become stable institutions and our members enjoy greater stability in employment. Governments change the electoral system so that representation is proportional to actual votes cast. Canada becomes of leader of progressive labour legislation.

We can always dream, can't we?

**Help make these changes a reality: become active in your union!**

**SIGN YOUR  
CARDS!!!**



Many of you have received a letter from us in the mail asking you to sign your membership forms and return them to us in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided. We do need to solidify our membership list, so please take the time to complete this process.

**Come check out our Facebook Page!!**

<https://www.facebook.com/CupeLocal3911?ref=ts>



**Contact Us**

<http://www.3911.cupe.ca>

[cupe3911@gmail.com](mailto:cupe3911@gmail.com)

(780) 421 3276

1200, 10011 – 109 St

Edmonton, AB

T5J 3S8