

# Organize UW Physics Town Hall Notes

## **Basic event/OrganizeUW info:**

- **Date/time:** Thurs. Feb. 11, 2021 @ 2pm-3pm
- Event page: <https://organizeuw.org/talk/physics/>
- Weekly video chat to talk to grad students involved in the drive:  
<https://organizeuw.org/post/volunteer/#weekly-video-chat-and-qa>
- Union drive email: [organizeuw@joincupe.org](mailto:organizeuw@joincupe.org)

## **Event outline:**

### **First half - presentations:**

- Graham: Introduction to town hall, the 8x8 platform
- Stephen: Brief introduction - Physics GSA
- Andrew: Introduction to OrganizeUW (Grad student organizer)
- Graham: Intro to CUPE and what unions do (CUPE organizer)

### **Second half - discussion:**

- Graham/us: Brief Q&A
- Brainstorm/discussion of issues we'd like to see improved in the Physics Department and how to address them. We will start with a few blurbs from Nik and Hadiya to get the ball rolling, but we'd love to have people jump in with ideas.
  - Nik and Hadiya kick this off in brief
  - Then turn to the floor

## **Some prepared concerns to kickstart discussion:**

### **Nik's concerns:**

1. Clarity in Pay
  - a. Clear pay dates
  - b. Take home pay is clearly indicated at the outset of your degree and locked in
  - c. The tuition rates as a portion of your pay are clearly indicated
  - d. Missed payments due to administrative oversight should not happen!
2. Clarification in what constitutes education and what is labour
  - a. Repetitive work outside the scope of your thesis or making you a better researcher is not education
  - b. Repetitive work; eg. collecting data as a part of your thesis is education and not covered
3. Safety
  - a. An institution which protects your identity and will defend your labour rights
  - b. Some limitations are that education safety is not covered by the union

### **Hadiya's concerns:**

1. TA

- a. Unclear expectations when it comes to roles and responsibilities for TAing (rubrics, marking expectations, instructions, time expected for each task, roles set out.. etc)
    - i. Setting boundaries with your instructor and also with the students - this is unclear on what university expectations are. All this information is super hard to find.
  - b. Expectations on hours
    - i. Not being paid when going over 110 hours; rather, instructors tell us to stop going over. Significantly reduced quality of feedback for undergrads.
2. Anti-racism SART
- a. Problem that unfortunately exists and is very difficult to abolish
  - b. While in everyday life on campus we might not see direct forms of racism,
  - c. Microaggressions --indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. Sometimes people are not 'directly' racist but the actions of individuals, society, can include microaggressions that are more difficult to pinpoint and change. Most of these are long-engrained trains of thoughts that are hard to dismantle, but that's where anti-racism work is really useful, especially with the diverse community we have
  - d. Science Anti-Racism Taskforce (SART)
    - i. Current plans/activities
    - ii. Lack of communication
    - iii. My experience on student-run committees and their efficacy
  - e. How the union can support their efforts
    - i. They have the tools to advocate for fair and equal rights for every member they represent, regardless of race or ethnicity. This would be more effective than SART
    - ii. Employers have a responsibility to ensure that workplaces are inclusive and free from discrimination, and this extends to not only in hiring, but also in the daily ongoings on campus.
- 

## **Notes from meeting**

### **Stephen: Brief introduction - Physics GSA**

- Events coming up, watch your emails for notice on relevant info!
- We want to be able to give people information, which is why we are co-hosting this event, so as to give the students in physics a chance to learn about unionization

### **Andrew: Introduction to OrganizeUW (Grad student organizer)**

- Organize UW - we are graduate students and contract sessional lectures
- Anyone who wants to sign a card and get involved can be part of the efforts!
- TAs, RAs, and sessionals are covered under the union (those who are employed as one of these in a given year are officially covered)
- Why unionize? We might all be asking this; the second half of our discussion we will all be talking to each other

- Better wages
- Better benefits
- Having a more powerful voice
- Better workplace protections
- Create a 'collective agreement' that is a core agreement b/w grad students and the university. This is democratically created and then bargained within the university
- Collective body can protect us when things go wrong -- legal protections, need for things that are lacking like maternity leaves, create funds for things like that if we need
- We are one of the last universities in Canada without a grad student union
- The drive started with a few grad students that started talking with CUPE in March
- Students in different departments have wanted to unionize for a long time and got together
- COVID-19 issues and concerns catalyzed this movement
- GSA council voted to support the drive with CUPE in July
- Going forward: signing union cards!
  - Sign a card yourself and tell your friends! Any volunteers are welcome to help us reach out to all students :)
  - Once we have 40-50% of employees signed up we can then file to vote
  - At that vote, if we have 50% people in favour, the union is created (ratified)
  - For a visual explanation, see: <https://organizeuw.org/post/process/>
- Current needs:
  - Card signers! Sign a card, ask your friends to do the same, connect them with the organizing team, etc
  - Join our meetings every Tuesday at 1:30pm for a casual chat about anything around organizing. Any questions, concerns, etc, pop by and meet some people
    - Link is on website; <https://organizeuw.org/post/volunteer/#weekly-video-chat-and-qa>
- Current activities and plans
  - Town halls, webinars for different topics with speakers from UW community and CUPE locals
  - Example is yesterday there was a webinar on climate change. Upcoming event on "Mental Health and Unions" on Feb. 25: <https://organizeuw.org/talk/mental-health/>
- To learn more, go to our website at [organizeuw.org](https://organizeuw.org) lots of information on here, including FAQ, background info, and a place where you can sign your card :)

**Graham: Intro to CUPE and what unions do (CUPE organizer)**

- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Assigned to support the organizing department in the academy.
- We are quite a large union, the process at the local level on campus though is to sign up as many people as possible.

- When you sign it, you're not signing to just belong to the local UW community but also to the national CUPE community.
- Go to [organize campaign website](#) for UW, but also cupe.ca to look at resources and information, please check it out!
- CUPE is Canada's largest union. 700,000 members across the country
- In the university sector we have 70,000 post secondary education members (25% of non-faculty. We don't represent faculty).
  - This is covered in 225 bargaining units (discreet individual collective agreements)
  - This is what we're trying to do here at UW
- We're double the size of the next largest union of Canada, we take that responsibility very seriously.
- We are a broader public sector union. We represent workers in anything in the public sector, we are the frontline workers for public services delivery in Canada
- We are a member driven union, if you see pink flags that's us
- We also represent healthcare workers, (just not the nurses and doctors but everyone else in care services).
- We are a very diverse union, majority of our membership are women, over 60% which makes us unique, it's because we represent those frontline service workers where most are women. Diversity is front and centre in what we do. We have a human rights department.
- In post secondary education specifically, we have our own little structures that allow for democracy within the union and the workplace. In Ontario, we have the Ontario university workers coordinating committee (OUWCC) we currently cover 18 universities and 41 democratic structures called a local. At UW we already have one, but it's not for academics so we would be in another one.
- We have 79 collective agreements covering 8200 sessional instructors, 21,000 TA/RAs and 1200 Postdocs. Pretty good standing in the university sector. We're the largest academic standing union other than profs in the province.
- Local autonomy: it means we support you, but you decide everything you want. You set the terms. As a staff person I'm here to support you but I cannot interfere with the local governance of your local, I'm simply here as a resource.
- CUPE resources are the best. We have a national representative (staff person that supports bargaining, research process, etc)
- We have people like ourselves that are assigned to support you where you need: research, legal, communications, education, health and safety, human rights departments.
  - These are all in house folks
- Sector political campaigns in Ontario: the Ontario university sector is dedicated to reducing precarious employment on campus.
  - Stop contracting out
  - Expand benefits and pension coverage (for blue collar sector and contract faculty and whatnot)
  - Increasing cleaning standards (bc we represent the cleaning staff on campus)

- Increase public funding (have campaigns and lobbying going on to increase quality of education and reduce tuition fees)
- For international students, make UHIP OHIP! Get rid of privatized insurance for international students and give them access to full public health coverage.
- Organizing:
  - We've streamlined now, you don't get an email, you go directly to the card to fill that form in :D
  - We are limited with how we can do this, there are better ways we want to do this but we are limited by the Ontario Labour Relations Board

**Question:** CUPE has no faculty members? Do they work with a different union?

**Answer:** Faculty associations are a professionalized entity so they have their own association and structure. Canadian Association of University Teachers or OCUFA, too. They are their own distinct entity. Many faculty associations were not historically true unions because there is collegiate governance.

**Question:** Voting procedure -- so there is first collecting the card signatures, and then there's a 50% of all members. Is that eligible voters, or those who choose to vote?

**Answer:** Cards stay a year after they are signed. When we file at the board we give it to the labour board, who will then ask for a list from the employers, they take that list and then they'll ask, do they have 40% support? CUPE likes to have at least 50% to ensure fair democracy. A week after, they certify that list, which is facilitated by the Ontario Labour Relations Board, open to everyone on campus who fall into the TAs, RAs, sessional instructors group. Yes, it's 50% of those who choose to vote and not everyone available.

Let's pass it over to Nik and Hadiya to address issues they'd like to see the union tackle.

**Nik:**

- Timeliness of pay.
  - Don't know when you are getting paid
  - Clarity on pay and ability to check that you're good in terms of clerical paper work.
    - Mentioned issues of students
  - Clarity on how much you're getting paid at the end.
    - His prof literally just asks his students

**Student:**

- Timeliness of payment of scholarship chunk - erratic
- Keeping track of hours. Onus is on the student
- Increasing workload

**Missed the question(s). Graham responding:**

- Prep work included as TA work in collective agreement

- Most collective agreements not have half TAs because they're usually  $\frac{2}{3}$  the work of a full TA anyway
- Dues 0.85% for CUPE, then local fee on top of that. Generally negotiate a wage increase that is greater than this amount from the university.
- Negotiations would start at \$45/hr TA wage since the university offered it during the unionizing campaign.

#### **Hadiya:**

- Very difficult to carry out your duties well if there aren't clear boundaries and expectations.
- Frequently frustrated by changing expectations throughout the term.
- Profs offloading work onto TAs.
- TAs generally aren't actually compensated for going over time, even if they give their prof is warned about it. The prof usually just says to do a lower quality job to cram it in.

#### **Graham:**

- A tool is provided for members to track their hours. If there is a situation that arises with way too much work. You call the union and this documentation is collected. During a monthly management meeting, the union deals with it for you, with the university. If they don't solve the issue, the union files a grievance (legal) and then the university is legally obligated to fix the issue. If they ignore the grievance, the university gets fined, has to find someone else to do the work, and the fine money goes to the local union.
- Collective agreements
  - Generally dozens of pages and outlines many supports and minimum standards.
  - Examples:
    - Ergonomics
    - Leave provisions
    - Support for work
    - Disability supports
    - Tuition fee increases can be limited to prevent "wage increases"
- GSPA "wage increase" that increases TA pay but takes away money from scholarships. Union would file an unfair labour practice and campaign against the university in a public way for undermining pay to grad students.
  - Need a union to lock this in and protect us

#### **Hadiya**

- Often difficult for students to make systematic changes without buy in from the university
- We have a science anti racism task force
  - The council is faculty
  - POC
  - Two undergrad reps
  - 1 grad rep
- Highlights things which are not being done well b the university
- Faculty and students are too buys to have real buy in

- Racism is a fact at this time
- We've only had two(?) meetings of the task force with no action items to address the issues on campus
- SART UW - all the work to date - very lacking
- RAISE was targeted by neo-nazi's highlighting the need for action on this item
- CUPE - lost connection - cat vs router ; cat 1 router 0
- CUPE has helped other universities in the past to offer support on activist issues
- CUPE can help by
  - Making workplaces inclusive
  - Equal pay for equal work
  - Throw to graham for examples of support

**Graham responding:**

- CA's can force divestment from fossil fuels
- Provincial and federal level of CUPE coordinates with national and provincial activist organizations
  - Facilitates conversation between grass roots and big guys
- CUPE can "book people off" which buys you out of your TA obligations
- To fund you to work on activism instead of TA work
- Get paid to be an activist!!!
- The decision of funding for this and what issues get this kind of function is democratically decided by the local
- With the infrastructure of the federal level organizers
- We have a strike fund which can pay you while to fight the power for better wages!
- CUPE has major committees along anti-racism, gender equality, etc on the federal level which provides help for local activism

**Student talked about stuff discussed at the GSA:**

- Pay/grant increases not keeping up with costs of living
- Can unionizing affect our total compensation?

**Reply from Graham:**

- On the whole UW is not paying grads the same overall funding package as the U15 universities
- Quality of supports etc is not up to par with other U15 institutions

**Question:** Difference between request for card vs signing a card?

**Answer:**

- RFC is an ask for a card which is mail to you
- Labour board is a bit outdated
- There has been recent streamlining of the signing process on our website

**Question:** Can we see pay before and after unionizing to see the effect

**Answer:**

- Most universities have unionized in the 70s-80s so it's a bit nonsense to compare

- Look at the pay difference between union and waterloo universities to see what you're missing out on
- We should get comparable pay to UFT, york or any other major university

**Suggestion from the chat:**

- How can unionizing help undergraduate students, maybe get an endorsement from WUSA in conjunction with an article?

**Question from student message afterwards** checking if their question was answered and provided an interesting chart shown below: "Asked how the union will address the large gap between the median income of the physics grad students and the minimum living cost (+ tuition)?" It was touched upon, but if further questions please connect at weekly calls or message us to discuss further.

Funding vs Living Cost Analysis in the Science Faculty

Grad Group	Median of Annual Funding	2021/22 Annual Living Cost	Difference
Domestic Masters	\$27500	\$34611	-\$7111
Domestic PhDs	\$38000	\$34611	\$3389
International Masters	\$27500	\$51078	-\$23578
International PhDs	\$38000	\$51078	-\$13078

(compiled from GSPA presentation to the GSA)