

## Why is the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) involved?

The Public Service Alliance of Canada already represents GTAs, who are certified as the Graduate Teaching Assistants Union - PSAC Local 610. PSAC has filed an application before the Ontario Labour Relations Board to represent Graduate Research Assistants at Western. PSAC also represents RAs at the University of Quebec at Montreal, Concordia University, and Laval University in Quebec. PSAC represents other researchers that help Canadians stay healthy. They study high-profile diseases such as SARS and BSE and test water and food samples so that outbreaks of Salmonella and E. coli can be contained.

We contacted PSAC to find out how we could improve the working conditions of PTRAs and obtain benefits similar to those of the GTAs at Western and of the RAs across the country. PSAC agreed to work with part-time RAs at Western to assist us in our effort to unionize.



**First: Sign a Union card!**

Contact us, we'll have someone from the Organizing Committee get a card to you.

## WANT TO DO MORE?

Contact a PTRA organizer:  
519-317-3285

Stop by the **GTA Union - PSAC 610**  
**Rm. 1313, SOMMERVILLE HOUSE**  
Monday to Friday: 10 AM - 2 PM  
**Tel: 519-661-4137**

Visit the GTA Union website  
at <http://www.gtaunion.com/>  
and click on the

*"Part-Time Research Assistants at Western"*  
link.



Through membership,  
we are all stronger.

## YOUR PSAC CONTACTS:

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**PART-TIME**

**Research Assistants at Western**

**ORGANIZING CAMPAIGN at WESTERN**

**What you Need to Know**



Public Service Alliance of Canada  
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

# What you Need to Know

## Who is a Part-Time Research Assistant?

**P**TRAs are employees who perform research work for a professor and are generally paid at an hourly rate. PTRAs can, but need not be registered graduate students. Indeed, PTRAs are often persons who have completed either undergraduate or graduate studies and are seeking employment in the field. If a registered graduate student is hired by a professor as a PTRAs, the work performed by the graduate student is under the specific direction of the professor for the professor's academic and professional gain and the student's financial gain and work experience. PTRAs are distinguished from Graduate Research Assistants (whose campaign and vote to join PSAC was held last year) by the fact that their work is generally not related to their own thesis or research project. PTRAs usually work under a contract with source deductions for income tax, CPP and EI.

## Why are Part-Time Research Assistants forming a union?

**A** group of PTRAs discussed some of the real gains that have been achieved by the Graduate Teaching Assistants Union over the past number of years, such as: better wages and benefits, paid vacations and leaves, and employer contributions to health insurance. We realized that we are not in a position to make such gains unless we organize: we will then have the legal ability to negotiate our pay and terms and conditions of work with the Administration collectively.

## Would we be the first University where Research Assistants are Unionized?

**N**o. RAs at other universities such as the University of Ottawa, McMaster University, and York University, to name a few, are already covered by a collective agreement.

## I thought I was already part of a Union?

**G**raduate Teaching Assistants are part of the GTA Union. However, when you are working as a Part-Time Research Assistant (PTRAs) in any term (fall, winter and/or summer) you are NOT covered by a union

contract. By unionizing, PTRAs will be covered by a collective agreement.

## Didn't I sign a Union card already?

**I**f you are a graduate student you have probably signed a GTA Union membership card in the past as a GTA or a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA). The membership card that we ask you to sign now is to support the efforts of Part-Time RAs to gain the same right to Union representation that GTAs already have and that GRAs are close to obtaining with the help of PSAC.

## Who can sign?

**A**nyone who presently works as a Part-Time Research Assistant (see the first question above), whether as a graduate student or not, can sign a card. Under the Ontario Labour Relations Act, if you have worked as a PTRAs in the past and you have a reasonable expectation of returning to employment as a PTRAs, then you can also sign a card. Still not sure of how you are classified? Contact a member of the PTRAs organizing committee.

## What are the steps involved in the Organizing Campaign?

- Step 1.** Card-signing: organizers will be reaching out to PTRAs in the upcoming weeks to get union membership cards signed.
- Step 2.** Apply for certification to the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB): once a majority of us have signed our union membership cards, the application will be made.
- Step 3.** Come out to the Representation Vote: the OLRB orders a representation vote of workers in a proposed bargaining unit of Part-Time Research Assistants. We are hoping to have the application submitted and the representation vote over the course of the next several months.

## What kind of gains can part-time RAs expect to achieve by unionizing?

**F**airness and respect in the workplace are often reasons why workers join unions. Union workers also enjoy better pay than non-Union workers. Since their

first collective agreement was negotiated in 1997, GTAs have had more say in their workplace, we have enjoyed a \$1392 pay increase, standardized hours and pay, health benefits, a grievance procedure, paid maternity leave, sick leave, participation in the Western pension plan. PTRAs can aim for these types of improvements.

## When will we start paying dues?

**Y**ou will only start paying dues when a collective agreement for PTRAs is ratified and you are then in a position to realize those benefits. Remember, dues are offset by increased wages, which are only one of the many benefits unionized workers enjoy. Also, dues are tax deductible.

## How much are the dues? How are they collected? Where do they go?

**P**SAC dues work well for us since they are collected on a percentage basis. PSAC's dues rate is considered quite low relative to other Canadian unions, at approximately 1.5% of base salary. Dues pay for experts in the fields of negotiations, arbitration, grievance and adjudication representation, union training and education, health & safety and legal advice to name a few. The Local's share of dues pay for services that are available to the members at the local level, for example, local administered group health benefits and needs and bursaries funds.

## Will my supervisor know that I signed a Union card?

**I**t is your right to sign a card and join a Union. Signing a union membership card is completely confidential. The Organizing Committee members conduct the campaign with strict confidentiality. The representation vote, conducted by the Labour Board is by secret ballot.

Despite strict confidentiality, you can and should speak up and encourage other workers to sign a card. Remember that freedom of association is your legal right: be Union and proud! Contact the other organizers to get involved.

