Unit 3 - Research/Graduate Assistants

2025-2026 Handbook

Welcome to Unit 3 at York!

As a full-time graduate student who does administrative, clerical, or research work at York University, you are a member of CUPE 3903 Unit 3. This handbook provides information on the rights and protections you have as a union member.

Table of Contents

Unit 3 - Research/Graduate Assistants **1**
Welcome to Unit 3 at York! **1**
Table of Contents 2
The Fight for Unit 3 is a Fight for Decent Work 4
Should You Be in Unit 3? 4
Being a Member Is Worth It 5
Pay & Funding 5
Wages 5
Other Forms of Funding for Master's Students 6
Grant-in-Aid 7
Graduate Financial Assistance 7
York Fellowship 7
International Tuition Offset 8
Other Forms of Funding for PhD Students in the Priority Pool 8
Grant-in-Aid 8
Graduate Financial Assistance 8
York Fellowship 9
International Tuition Offset 9
Priority Pool Funding Adjustments 10
Solving Problems 10
Workload and Overwork 10
Solving Misclassifications 11
Harassment and Discrimination 11
Refusing Unsafe Work 11
Applying to Positions in Unit 3 12
Workplace Accommodations 12
Benefits 13
Health Benefits & Application 13
Leaves 13
Funds You Can Access 14
Who to Contact 14
Staff 15
Executive Committee 15
Frequently Asked Questions 16
How Do I Find My Employee Number? 16
When Am I Entitled to Union Representation? 16
What do I do if I have a conflict with my Principal Investigator or Supervisor? 17
Can I hold a position within Unit 1 (e.g. Teaching Assistantship) at the same time as a

Position in Unit 3?.....17
What If I Am or Think I Might Be Working More Hours Than My Contract?..... 17
Do Unit 3 Positions Accrue Seniority?..... 18

The Fight for Unit 3 is a Fight for Decent Work

At the core of the history of CUPE 3903 Unit 3 is a simple concept: all work is work, and all workers deserve to have benefits and protections.

Unit 3 is composed of full-time graduate students who do research, clerical, or administrative work. As you can see from the timeline to the right, getting these positions recognized as unionized and worthy of protections is an ongoing struggle.

Unit 3 Historical Timeline

1999: Graduate Assistants get organized, apply to join CUPE 3903

2005: Research Assistants get organized, apply to join 3903 as a separate unit

2007: An agreement is reached to change who is included in Unit 3 to include Research Assistants

2016: York cuts the vast majority of positions within the unit, telling faculty members that the cost of hiring someone is nearly double what it actually is, and threatening their grants if they continue to hire.

2018: CUPE 3903 strikes for 5.5 months in part for the survival of Unit 3

2020: York changes over a decade of agreement between the employer and the union to try to exclude most research assistants from the unit.

Should You Be in Unit 3?

You may be reading this as someone who already holds a Unit 3 contract. But you may also be wondering if the work you do should be unionized, after being told by your department that it is not.

If you:

a) Are a full-time funded graduate student;
b) Work in administrative, clerical, or research work; and
c) That work isn't predominantly for your own degree progress (i.e. research you're doing as part of your thesis, MRP, or dissertation),

CUPE 3903 will take the position that you are a member of CUPE 3903 Unit 3.

If you're not sure, you can always contact us and we can discuss your particular circumstances.

This confusion around who is and isn't represented isn't an accident. York has been trying to fit more work into supposedly non-employment categories in order to **actively deny as many workers as possible the rights and protections they deserve**.

Being a Member Is Worth It

You may meet the description above, but hesitate to raise it, especially if you are working for your academic supervisor and want to keep a good relationship. As a member of Unit 3, you are entitled to:

- Health benefits for you and all your dependents at no additional cost. These benefits are vastly superior to the ones offered through YUGSA.
- Access to additional funding if you are a Master's student. This funding is especially significant for international students.
- Rules around workload and hours of work
- Protection from harassment and discrimination
- Robust parental, illness, and other paid leaves of absence
- Access to funds for emergencies, conferences, additional health costs, and much more
- The right to union representation whenever you encounter a problem with the employer

Being part of a union means you don't face your employer alone. If you think you should be unionized, get in touch. CUPE 3903's policy is that we will not take a position or file any grievances about the status of your position without your consent.

Pay & Funding

Most graduate students are admitted to York University with a minimum funding package. The work you do within Unit 3 may interact with that funding in different ways depending on your degree type (MAster's or PhD) and the type of tuition fees you pay (domestic vs international). While the wage structure elaborated below is the same, other elements of funding may change, so be sure to check the correct section for your circumstances.

Wages

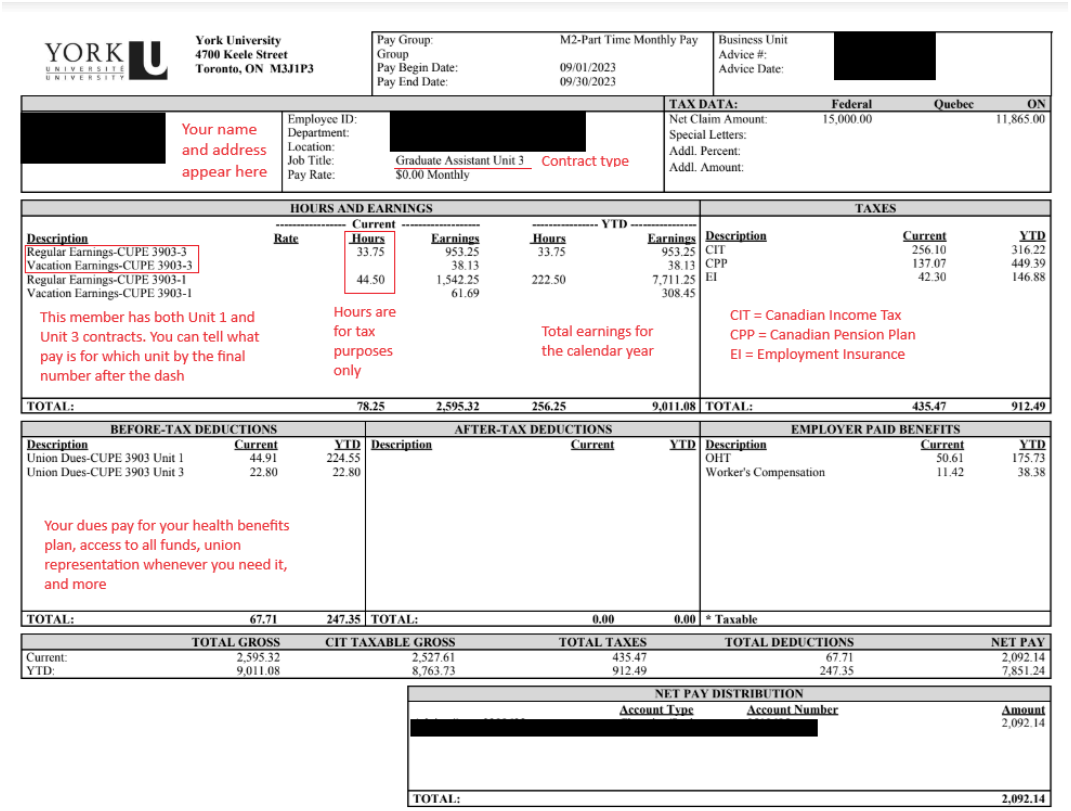
As a member of Unit 3, you are paid wages on the 25th of each month in which you have a contract. How much you receive will depend on the size and duration of your contract. Wages as of September 2025 are as follows:

Contract Size	Wages
135 hours (0.5)	$4,409.50
270 hours (1.0)	$8,819

A 270 hour contract is always over at least two terms, whereas a 135 hours contract could be over one or two terms. You are paid an equal amount every month, so you can divide the total contract wages with the number of months of your contract to see how much you can expect to receive every month.

You will also receive vacation pay in the amount of 4% of your wages, added to your monthly paycheque. If you have more than 5 years of service, your vacation pay will be 6%.

Your wages and vacation pay are your gross revenue (i.e., the amount *before* taxes). The amount you will receive will be lower once all deductions are accounted for. When in doubt, take a look at your paystub. It will break down how much you got paid from which sources. Please note that the hours of work and rates of pay on the paystub exist for tax purposes.



YORK UNIVERSITÉ UNIVERSITY

York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON M3J1P3

Pay Group:	M2-Part Time Monthly Pay
Group	
Pay Begin Date:	09/01/2023
Pay End Date:	09/30/2023

Business Unit
Advice #:
Advice Date:

[redacted]

Your name and address appear here

Employee ID:
Department:
Location:
Job Title: Graduate Assistant Unit 3
Pay Rate: $0.00 Monthly

Contract type

TAX DATA:	Federal	Quebec	ON
Net Claim Amount:	15,000.00		11,865.00
Special Letters:			
Addl. Percent:			
Addl. Amount:			

HOURS AND EARNINGS

Description	Rate	Current Hours	Current Earnings	YTD Hours	YTD Earnings
Regular Earnings-CUPE 3903-3		33.75	953.25	33.75	953.25
Vacation Earnings-CUPE 3903-3			38.13		38.13
Regular Earnings-CUPE 3903-1		44.50	1,542.25	222.50	7,711.25
Vacation Earnings-CUPE 3903-1			61.69		308.45
TOTAL:		**78.25**	**2,595.32**	**256.25**	**9,011.08**

This member has both Unit 1 and Unit 3 contracts. You can tell what pay is for which unit by the final number after the dash

Hours are for tax purposes only

Total earnings for the calendar year

TAXES

Description	Current	YTD
CIT	256.10	316.22
CPP	137.07	449.39
EI	42.30	146.88
TOTAL:	**435.47**	**912.49**

CIT = Canadian Income Tax
CPP = Canadian Pension Plan
EI = Employment Insurance

BEFORE-TAX DEDUCTIONS

Description	Current	YTD
Union Dues-CUPE 3903 Unit 1	44.91	224.55
Union Dues-CUPE 3903 Unit 3	22.80	22.80
TOTAL:	**67.71**	**247.35**

Your dues pay for your health benefits plan, access to all funds, union representation whenever you need it, and more

AFTER-TAX DEDUCTIONS

Description	Current	YTD
TOTAL:	**0.00**	**0.00**

EMPLOYER PAID BENEFITS

Description	Current	YTD
OHT	50.61	175.73
Worker's Compensation	11.42	38.38

*** Taxable**

	TOTAL GROSS	CIT TAXABLE GROSS	TOTAL TAXES	TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	NET PAY
Current:	2,595.32	2,527.61	435.47	67.71	2,092.14
YTD:	9,011.08	8,763.73	912.49	247.35	7,851.24

NET PAY DISTRIBUTION

Account Type	Account Number	Amount
[redacted]		2,092.14
TOTAL:		**2,092.14**

Other Forms of Funding for Master's Students

In addition to your wages, you will receive various types of other funding at different times, deposited to your student account as a Master's student holding a Unit 3 position.

Grant-in-Aid

Grant-in-Aid (GIA) is a part of your remuneration. It is processed through your student account on or around the 25th of each month. It should be deposited directly into your bank account and not be applied to any amounts owing in your student account.

GIA on a 270 hour (1.0) contract is **$4628, or $578.50 per month**. For a 135 hour (0.5) contract, you will receive half the total GIA ($2314), divided over the length of your contract. You don't accrue GIA past the 1.0 mark (e.g. if you have 1.0 in Fall/Winter and 0.5 in Summer, you will receive GIA over the first 8 months, but not on the Summer contract).

Graduate Financial Assistance

Graduate Financial Assistance is an amount negotiated over the years by CUPE 3903 in order to help offset the cost of tuition. It is **applied to your student account once per term** (before November 1st, March 1st, and July 1st) as long as you are enrolled full-time and have held a contract that year (regardless of whether you are currently on contract). The amount you receive depends on your year of study and your visa status.

	Year 1	**Year 2**
Domestic Students	$919/term	$1153/term
International Students	$1408/term	$1680/term

York Fellowship

Another form of funding applied to your student account once per term is the York Fellowship. Securing a Unit 3 contract **should not** affect your fellowship amount.

The fellowship is applied to your student account once per term and will be applied against your tuition if you have any amounts owing. The amount of your fellowship depends on your visa status.

Domestic Students	$5,403
International Students	$ 8,467

International Tuition Offset

Visa students who pay higher international tuition fees will receive **$7,533 ($2511/term)**. This is the International Tuition Offset (ITO) to index their fees to the 2012 amount. This was a provision we enforced through the 2015 strike to protect international student members. The ITO is applied once per term to your student account and will be applied to your tuition if you have an amount owing.

Am I in the Priority Pool?

Most PhD students are in the Priority Pool, which guarantees both work and funding for six years, as well as other rights. If you are a full-time PhD student who has held at least one Teaching Assistantship in the past, you are in the Priority Pool!

Other Forms of Funding for PhD Students in the Priority Pool

PhD students in the Priority Pool have certain levels of guaranteed funding. This means that your funding while in Unit 3 may be a bit different. If you hold a Unit 3 position **instead of** your typical Unit 1 position, the below applies. If you hold a 0.5 Unit 3 position in addition to a 1.0 TAship, you do not receive additional funding from your Unit 3 position (only your wages and vacation pay).

Grant-in-Aid

Grant-in-Aid (GIA) is a part of your remuneration. It is processed through your student account on or around the 25th of each month. It should be deposited directly into your bank account and not be applied to any amounts owing in your student account.

GIA on a 1.0 (270 hours) contract is is $4713, or $589.12 per month. You don't accrue GIA past the 1.0 mark (e.g. if you have 1.0 in Fall/Winter and 0.5 in Summer, you will receive GIA over the first 8 months, but not on the Summer contract). This applies to your combined Unit 1 and Unit 3 contracts: no matter how it's divided, you never get more than 1.0 worth of GIA.

Graduate Financial Assistance

Graduate Financial Assistance is an amount negotiated over the years by CUPE 3903 in order to help offset the cost of tuition. It is **applied to your student account once per term** (before

November 1st, March 1st, and July 1st) as long as you are enrolled full-time and have held a contract that year (regardless of whether you are currently on contract). The amount you receive depends on your year of study and your visa status.

	Year 1-2	**Year 3+**
Domestic Students	$844/term	$1057/term
International Students	$1409/term	$1680/term

York Fellowship

Another form of funding applied to your student account once per term is the York Fellowship. Do not let the name fool you – this is money guaranteed to you by the collective agreement as additional funding for priority pool members.

The fellowship is applied to your student account once per term and will be applied against your tuition if you have any amounts owing. The amount of your fellowship depends on your visa status.

Domestic Students	$5,403 ($1,801/term)
International Students	$8,467 in years 1-2 (2,822.33/term) $7,837 in years 3+ ($2,612.33/term)

International Tuition Offset

Visa students who pay higher international tuition fees will receive **$6,709 ($2236.33/term)**. This is the International Tuition Offset (ITO) to index their fees to the 2012 amount. This was a provision we enforced through the 2015 strike to protect international student members. The ITO is applied once per term to your student account and will be applied to your tuition if you have an amount owing.

Priority Pool Funding Adjustments

In order to meet your minimum funding, you may also receive a funding adjustment, deposited in your student account, in the amount of the difference between what you've received and what you would have received if you had held a Teaching Assistantship instead.

This adjustment is, by default, deposited at the end of the academic year (i.e. the summer semester). Some departments are willing to make these payments monthly or semesterly; be sure to request this when you accept the position. In all cases, they should be applied to your student account.

Solving Problems

Workload and Overwork

As soon as possible and no later than the end of the first month of your contract, your supervisor must meet with you to discuss your duties and sign a workload form. This form estimates the time required to complete your duties. If something doesn't seem right, this meeting is also an opportunity to discuss with your supervisor, e.g. if your workload form doesn't have any preparation time, or you've been assigned duties that don't match your job classification.

If everything looks fine at first, but you later realize that you are working more hours than you should, talk to your supervisor as soon as possible. Ideally, the two of you can find a solution, e.g. reducing your duties or paying you for the extra hours.

If your supervisor is not receptive to your overwork issues, get in touch with the union. We can file a grievance on your behalf.

It is very important to keep good track of your hours from the start of the semester, or as soon as you realize you may have an overwork problem. The better your record-keeping, the more likely you will be paid what you are owed in full.

Solving Misclassifications

If you believe that you should be a member of CUPE 3903 Unit 3, but have been told that your position is not unionized, first ask your principal investigator or supervisor. If they confirm that they meant to exclude you from the unit, however, get in touch with the union as soon as possible.

We will discuss the kind of work you do and how it relates (or not) to your degree progress. If you're eligible for membership, we can then file a grievance to get your position "flipped", i.e. converted to a unionized position. While this process is expedited, grievances always take time; in order to get your benefits and other protections as soon as possible, it's important to report your situation to the union promptly.

Harassment and Discrimination

Harassment is any behaviour that should be reasonably known to be unwelcome. It is usually repeated, but it can be an isolated incident if the behaviour is serious. Discrimination is differential treatment of an individual on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, or any other protected grounds. Harassment and discrimination can occur from your course director, other TAs, students, etc. Regardless of the perpetrator, the employer has a responsibility to guarantee you a workplace free from harassment and discrimination.

Harassment and discrimination are not only a violation of the collective agreement; they are a violation of the law. Don't accept that this is "how things are" or that you should "go along to get along". If something doesn't feel right, come talk to us. Even if you're not sure it amounts to legal harassment or discrimination, we can talk through your options, help think through next steps (including if you don't want to go through formal complaints or processes), or just hear you out – whatever level of support you need.

Your first point of contact is Nadia Kanani, CUPE 3903 Staff Representative Equity (equity@cupe3903.org). Any conversation you have with Nadia is strictly confidential, and does not obligate you to take any further steps.

Refusing Unsafe Work

All workers in Ontario have the right to refuse unsafe work. In order for your refusal to be legally protected, be sure to follow the correct steps:

1. Inform your supervisor or department Chair immediately and move to a safe location. If your supervisor agrees the situation is unsafe, do your best to inform others of the situation while it is being remedied.
2. If your supervisor does not agree, inform them that you are refusing unsafe work. Get in touch with the union immediately. This triggers an investigation done jointly by the supervisor and union representative.
3. If the investigation deems the situation unsafe, the employer must remedy the situation. If it is deemed safe and you disagree, tell your supervisor. They must then contact an investigator from the Ministry of Labour.
4. During all these steps, stay in a safe area. You may however be asked to fulfill your duties from a safe location (e.g. asked to move to a different classroom rather than cancelling class).

As long as you make your complaint in good faith, you cannot be disciplined for refusing to work in a situation you believe to be unsafe, even if the Ministry later deems the situation safe. Formal complaints must be made by individuals (i.e. you cannot refuse unsafe work in solidarity with a colleague's situation).

Applying to Positions in Unit 3

All Unit 3 positions are posted at https://cupejobs.uit.yorku.ca/.

To see what positions are available, click on your faculty. It will automatically open to a tab labelled "Postings". Unit 3 positions will be listed next to "CUPE 3".

Click on the term you want to apply for to open a list of postings. You can read the postings to assess which meet your qualifications. Each posting will have information on the person who will receive your application.

Always follow the instructions on the posting with regard to what you should submit. If not specified, we recommend an updated CV and cover letter.

Workplace Accommodations

Did you know that if your work is impacted by illness, disability, or family status, you are entitled to workplace accommodations?

Example accommodations can include different work duties or schedules, classrooms closer to accessible transit, access to specialized services or equipment (e.g. ASL interpreters,

anti-fatigue mats, etc.), remote work, or whatever accommodation is most appropriate in your particular situation. You don't need to know what accommodation would work for you to start a conversation; we will help you get what you need. Get in touch with Nadia Kanani, CUPE 3903 Staff Representative Equity (equity@cupe3903.org).

You will need documentation from your doctor or other relevant practitioner. We can help you figure out how much information you need to disclose, and help you navigate the bureaucracy.

Benefits

Health Benefits & Application

As a member of CUPE 3903, you receive comprehensive health care coverage for you and your dependents (spouse or children) as part of your contract.

- Vision Care: $400 every two years (Glasses, Contacts + Eye Exam)
- Dental Care: $3000 every year (Oral exams, certain dental procedures)
- Prescription Drugs: 100% coverage of prescribed medication
- Paramedical Services (counselling, naturopaths, podiatrists, physiotherapists, registered massage therapists and chiropractors): $2000 for any one expense; for a total of $3000 every year.

Find out more, including how to enroll, at cupe3903.org/benefits/benefits-plan/.

Leaves

Several kinds of leaves are available to CUPE 3903 members. You may take a leave if you need time off for conferences, injuries or disabilities, jury duty, bereavement, care-giving, emergencies, sickness, transgender transition, and the birth or adoption of a child.

Some leaves are straightforward, while others may require that you meet certain thresholds or provide particular documentation. We recommend that if you wish to take or think you may be eligible for a leave, you contact a 3903 Staff member to assist you.

You can find out more at cupe3903.org/equity-rights/parental-leave/ (for parental leave) or cupe3903.org/equity-rights/about-leaves-of-absence/ (for all other leaves).

Funds You Can Access

Did you know that CUPE 3903 has several different funds that you can access in different circumstances? You may be eligible to get money for emergencies, health care expenses, childcare, conferences, and more!

Find out more about all the available funds at cupe3903.org/funds/other-funds/.

Who to Contact

With 14 executive committee members, five staff members, and multiple committees, it can be hard to know who to contact for any given issue. While we provide some guidelines below, any member of staff or executive will be happy to direct you to the correct person if you are not sure.

I have a question about my collective agreement	Lead Steward Unit 3 Grievance Officer Staff Rep/Mobilization Coordinator Staff Rep Equity (specifically for equity-based CA provisions)
I want to talk about collective actions/organizing my department/becoming a steward	Lead Steward Unit 3 Your existing departmental steward
I'm considering a workplace accommodation	Staff Rep Equity
I'm experiencing harassment or discrimination	Staff Rep Equity
I want help accessing a leave of absence	Staff Rep Equity (for equity-based leaves) Staff Reps or Staff Rep/Mobilization Coordinator (for all other leaves, including parental leaves)
I have questions about my funding	Lead Steward Unit 3 Staff Rep/Mobilization Coordinator
I want to file a grievance	Either Staff Rep Staff Rep Equity (equity-based grievances)
I want to speak to someone in French (for any kind of advice and/or representation)	Staff Rep/Mobilization Coordinator
I'm wondering about the status of my application to a CUPE 3903 fund	Contact the fund committee directly

Staff

Name	Position	Email
Raj Virk	Staff Representative	staffrep1@cupe3903.org
Julian Arend	Staff Representative	staffrep2@cupe3903.org
Maija Duncan	Staff Representative/ Mobilization Coordinator	mobilization@cupe3903.org
Nadia Kanani	Staff Representative Equity	equity@cupe3903.org
Sharmeen Khan	Financial Officer	finance@cupe3903.org

Executive Committee

Position	Email
Chairperson	chairperson@cupe3903.org
Vice-President Unit 1	vpu1@cupe3903.org
Vice-President Unit 2	vpu2@cupe3903.org
Vice-President Unit 3	vpu3@cupe3903.org
Secretary Treasurer	treasurer@cupe3903.org
Recording Secretary	recsec@cupe3903.org
Grievance Officer	grievance@cupe3903.org
Lead Steward Unit 1	lsu1@cupe3903.org
Lead Steward Unit 2	lsu2@cupe3903.org
Lead Steward Unit 3	lsu3@cupe3903.org
Lead Steward Unit 4	lsu4@cupe3903.org
Lead Steward Unit 5	lsu5@cupe3903.org
Communications Officer	communications@cupe3903.org
Trans Feminist Action Caucus Co-Chair	tfac1@cupe3903.org
Trans Feminist Action Caucus Co-Chair	tfac2@cupe3903.org

Frequently Asked Questions

How Do I Find My Employee Number?

Once you are offered your first contract, you will be assigned an employee number by payroll. This number will be important for a number of reasons: health benefits, access to paystubs and tax documents, interacting with the York bureaucracy, etc. If you've held a different kind of contract at York (e.g. Teaching Assistantship), you should have the same employee number.

The easiest way to find your employee number is on your paystub, which you can find on HR Self Serve (https://hrselfserve.info.yorku.ca/). Unfortunately, signing up for HR Self Serve requires you to know your employee number.

Here are some ways to find your employee number:

- Ask your hiring unit. The PI or department/faculty you work for will have your employee number in order to process your pay. So if you're getting paid, they have your employee number!
- Look at your Sun Life card. Either check the "member ID" section of your benefits card or on sunlife.ca go to "coverage information" then "quick view" to see your member ID. Your Sunlife member ID is your employee number.
- Ask the Treasurer. The union gets membership lists regularly, so feel free to reach out to the CUPE 3903 Treasurer (treasurer@cupe3903.org) for your employee number. Please note, however, that the lists we receive from the employer are often incomplete, so we may not have your information yet if you have only recently signed your contract.

When Am I Entitled to Union Representation?

You are entitled to union representation in any matter concerning your employment. This can take the form of copying the union on emails or having a union representative present at an in-person or online meeting. Union representatives can also send communications on your behalf if you prefer. When filing a grievance, you will always have union representation. If you want representation but aren't sure whether we can help, just ask! The answer is probably yes, and if no, we can often provide other support

What do I do if I have a conflict with my Principal Investigator or Supervisor?

Members in Unit 3 work closely with their supervisors, which can make resolving conflicts a sensitive matter.

Your supervisor does get to direct you in the nature and the manner of the tasks that you are asked to do, as long as they are respecting your hours of work and are not engaging in discriminatory, harassing, or bullying behaviour.

Your first step for most conflicts is to speak with your supervisor and see if there isn't a solution or compromise you can live with. If that is not successful, you are encouraged to come speak to the union so we can discuss your options (intervening informally on your behalf, formal grievances, outside resources, etc.).

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you are strongly encouraged to contact the union's Staff Representative Equity, Nadia Kanani, at equity@cupe3903.org.

Can I hold a position within Unit 1 (e.g. Teaching Assistantship) at the same time as a Position in Unit 3?

Yes! Full-time graduate students can hold up to 1.5 contracts, which can consist of a mix of TAships and Unit 3 positions. If you hold both in one semester, however, it may be subject to FGS review of your degree progress.

What If I Am or Think I Might Be Working More Hours Than My Contract?

When you start your contract, your supervisor should provide you with a workload form that outlines your assigned duties and allots time for you to complete your work. The maximum number of hours for a half (0.5) contract is 135, and the maximum for a full (1.0) contract is 270. On average, you shouldn't be working more than 10 hours per week. As soon as you think you're going to be overworked or run out of allotted hours, the first step is to contact your supervisor to discuss potential solutions. If you can't resolve the problem with the supervisor,

you may need to file an overwork grievance (see page 10). Do not start working before the official start date of your contract or continue working after the official end date of your contract.

Do Unit 3 Positions Accrue Seniority?

No. Work done by full-time graduate students isn't assigned by seniority, but for members who are looking to transition into contract faculty work at York, the seniority you accrued in most Teaching Assistantships can help you make that shift. However, since Unit 3 work is not teaching work, if you choose to take a Unit 3 position instead of a Unit 1 position, you won't be accruing seniority in that term.