



Member Handbook 2026 – 2027

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1. Key contacts

Executive Committee

A union executive is responsible for the leadership and administration of the local. The duties of all union leaders are to advance members' interests and solve their problems.

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|--|---|
| ● Evren Altinkas (Vice President External): | <u>vpe@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Saria Asif (Finance Officer): | <u>finance@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Scott Duchesne (President): | <u>president@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Steve Donnelly (Grievance Officer): | <u>grievance@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Sobal Iqbal (Equity Officer): | <u>equity@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Ahmed Mahmood (Health and Safety Officer): | <u>hs@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Amanda Wuth (Vice-President Internal): | <u>vpi@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Michael Yu (Unit 1 steward): | <u>unit1@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |

College Stewards

Stewards are the first point of contact with the union for members. This interaction often shapes members' opinions of the union. They communicate, educate, and represent members of their college or department/school to the Executive.

Contact your College Steward if you have any questions about Union issues. They will put you in touch with the right person to help. We recommend cc'ing the appropriate Unit Steward as well (see above).

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|---|---|
| ● College of Biological Science: | <u>cbs@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Lang School of Business: | <u>cbe@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Ontario Agricultural College: | <u>oac@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● College of Engineering and Physical Sciences: | <u>cpes@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● University of Guelph-Humber: | <u>guelpghumber@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● College of Social and Applied Human Sciences: | <u>csahs@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● College of Arts: | <u>coa@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Ontario Veterinary College: | <u>ovc@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |

If you do not hear back from your College Steward within 48 hours, please contact your Unit 1 or Unit 2 Steward using the email address listed above.

CUPE 3913 Staff

If you have a question about benefits, contact Shelly. If you have a concern about a possible workplace issue (e.g., a Collective Agreement violation, harassment, or discrimination), please contact Jeff.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ● Jeff Cornelissen (Labour Relations Officer): | <u>labourrelations@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |
| ● Shelly Sarkisian (Admin & Finance Coordinator): | <u>adminfinance@cupe3913.on.ca</u> |

2. Introduction

This handbook provides Members of CUPE 3913 with information about the Union, their rights and responsibilities, key definitions of common work-related terms, and contact information. All words in bold appear in the glossary at the end of this document. If you have any questions or would like more details on a particular topic, don't hesitate to contact the president at **president@cupe3913.on.ca**.

The Union considers this handbook a living document. We appreciate any and all suggestions from Members to update and/or improve its content.

3. FAQs about Unions & CUPE 3913

a. What is a Union?

A union is an organization of workers dedicated to protecting the interests of all its members and improving their wages, hours, and working conditions.

b. How does CUPE 3913 Work?

CUPE 3913 sets its organizational structure and bylaws by majority vote. We are currently working on revising our bylaws, but you can find CUPE 3913's current bylaws on our [website](http://cupe3913.on.ca) (cupe3913.on.ca).

The local represents two 'units' of employees (see c., below) and negotiates **Collective Agreements** (CAs) with the employer (i.e., The University of Guelph) on their behalf. The Collective Agreements outline expectations for wages, benefits, and working conditions, among other issues.

Once a Collective Agreement is in place between the Union and the employer, CUPE 3913's primary task is to ensure that it is not violated by the employer or its management. The Collective Agreement is renegotiated every few years to improve the workplace and members' working lives.

c. What is CUPE 3913?

CUPE Local 3913 represents two types of workers at the University of Guelph, divided into two units, each with a separate Collective Agreement:

- **Unit 1 - Teaching Assistants (TAs)** - The bargaining unit comprises all Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Graduate Service Assistants (GSAs) employed in work directly related to the academic enterprise, as well as Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (UTAs). This unit comprises the majority of our Membership.
- **Unit 2 - Sessional Lecturers (Sessionals)** - The bargaining unit comprises Members employed under contract as Sessional Lecturers to teach in university degree-credit courses.

d. How do I know if I'm a Member?

When you accept a Work Assignment as a TA or Sessional, you automatically become a Member of CUPE 3913. Once you begin working, you are entitled to the benefits of Union

Membership includes the ability to submit health benefits claims, attend Union meetings, and file grievances. You remain a member for **four (4)** semesters after your last Work Assignment (e.g., if you have a Work Assignment in Fall 2026, you will remain a member until the end of the Fall 2027 semester). However, if you go beyond four (4) semesters without a Work Assignment, you are no longer a member. Your Membership will be reinstated when you accept another Work Assignment.

e. What kinds of Work Assignments are available?

Unit 1 (TAs) Members can only have two kinds of assignments:

- 0.5 TAs - 70 hours of work per semester
- 1.0 TAs - 140 hours of work per semester

If you are offered a full term's assignment lower than 0.5 (70 hours), please contact us.

4. Rights & Responsibilities of CUPE 3913 Members and the Employer

Beyond the terms of a Collective Agreement (CA), employees and employers also have rights and responsibilities in the workplace established by federal law. In these workplaces, the Union is responsible for representing employees in grievances (see below), arbitrations, and contract negotiations with the employer.

a. Employer's Responsibilities

The University is responsible for:

- The safety of the workplace - they must ensure a physically and psychologically safe work environment for their employees.
- Ensuring that work assignments are clear and upheld by their employees.
- Alerting the Union of any changes that may violate the CA.

b. Member Rights

- All workers have the right to a safe workplace free from physical and emotional harm, including discrimination and harassment. As a result, everyone has the right to refuse unsafe work without fear of reprisal.
- You have the right to have a Union representative at disciplinary, grievance, and overtime negotiation meetings.

c. Member Responsibilities

- **Tracking your working hours** - Members are expected to track their working hours to ensure they do not work beyond the total hours allotted in their contract or the maximum weekly hours allotted in their contract.
- **Communicate with CUPE 3913** - if you think there is a work-related issue of any kind. If we don't know what's going on, we can't help. Speaking up doesn't just help you; it helps every other current and future Member of the Union. See Key contacts to learn more about how to contact us.

d. Why do I need to track my hours?

Regardless of the assigned hours for your Work Assignment (see 2 e. above), it is imperative that your work not exceed those paid hours. If you exceed your hours, it is your responsibility to alert the professor you are TA'ing for so they can arrange payment for your extra hours. However, if you don't track your hours, you won't know whether you've exceeded your work agreement hours or are being overworked (<https://cupe.ca/overwork>). Additionally, without tracking, it may be easy for your supervisor to challenge the number of hours you've worked, which may affect whether you are able to be paid for the extra time you've put in toward your TAing duties. Tracking your hours also benefits your supervisor, so they know where to allocate hours in the future when planning their courses and whether the course needs more TAs.

e. How do I track my hours?

There's no one correct way to do this, though most TAs keep an Excel sheet with the date, time spent, and a description of the activities they undertook. An example might look like this:

Date	Hours Used	Activity
Sept 4	1.5 hrs	Initial meeting with professor to fill out and sign Work Agreement Form; training on how to grade assignments
Sept 9	1 hr	Reading class materials
Sept 10	2 hrs	Attending class
Sept 12	0.25	Responding to student emails
Sept 15	4 hrs	Marking Assignment 1
TOTAL	8.75	

You can find a template tracking document on our website.

f. What happens when I run out of hours?

If you realize you are going to run out of hours, you must inform your supervisor. For example, if you have only two (2) hours left and fifteen (15) ten-page essays still to mark, it is unlikely you will finish your work in the allotted time. Before you run out of hours, inform your supervisor that you have only a few hours left. They are responsible for contacting the department to ensure that any extra hours you work are paid at the Schedule B rate. Extra work cannot be paid if it is not tracked!

5. What happens when Rights and Responsibilities aren't fulfilled?

a. What are some potential violations of the Collective Agreement?

All of the following constitute direct violations of the Collective Agreement between CUPE 3913 and the University of Guelph. If you experience any of these or become aware of them occurring to others, please contact our President, Unit 1 Steward, Unit 2 Steward, or Labour Relations Coordinator – or all four.

- as soon as possible (see **Key Contacts**).

- **Your supervisor doesn't schedule a meeting with you before the semester begins.** Supervisors are required to meet with TAs five (5) days before classes begin to review the contract and discuss TA expectations, per our CA.
- **You have not received safety training for an in-person lab.** This is a health and safety violation. Supervisors must provide you with in-person safety training in the lab; a Courselink course is not sufficient.
- **You see or are offered a TA work position that is less than 0.5 (70 hrs).** Departments have attempted to assign 0.25 Work Assignments; however, our Collective Agreement explicitly requires that Work Assignment contracts be for a minimum of 0.5, or seventy (70) hours per semester, with the exception of separate invigilation contracts.
- **Your supervisor is pressuring you to work more hours than outlined in your contract (e.g., 70 hours for 0.5 or 140 hours for 1.0).** You are free to consent to work overtime – with the clear stipulation that you will be paid for that overtime. However, you are also free to refuse any work outside the hours stated in your contract.
- **You are not informed about overtime pay when you agree to work more hours than your contract allows.** You are entitled to overtime pay for any hours worked beyond what is stated in your contract, but you and your supervisor must agree that you will work overtime, and your supervisor must obtain approval from the department.
- **Your supervisor tells you to enforce safety protocols.** This is not the responsibility of our members. The University and its employees are responsible.
- **Your supervisor bullies or discriminates against you.**

b. What is a Grievance?

When rights or responsibilities outlined in our Collective Agreement aren't met (as in the examples above), it's important that members let us know. In many cases, we can resolve issues quickly, though in others, more serious responses are required. In those instances, a member may choose to file a grievance. A grievance is "defined as any difference arising out of the interpretation, application, administration, or alleged violation of the Agreement" (CUPE 3913 Collective Agreement, 1.04 (h)).

If you believe a violation of the Collective Agreement has occurred to you or to another Member or Members, please contact our Grievance Officer at grievance@cupe3913.on.ca.

6. FAQs about Health Benefits

Health Benefits

The benefits period runs for each academic year (e.g., for 2025-26, the academic year begins September 1, 2026, and ends August 31, 2027). Any claims for that period must be accrued during

the academic year and submitted by the end of it.

a. What benefits do I have?

Unit 1 Members are eligible for:

- \$600 per academic year for vision, mental health counselling, or prescription medications.
- \$500 per academic year for other expenses through the Financial Assistance Fund (FAF).
- Coverage period: one (1) year from the date of the last Work Assignment (e.g., if your last Work Assignment was in the Fall 2026 semester, you can submit claims until the end of the Fall 2027 semester).

Unit 2 Members are eligible for:

- Up to \$1,300 to claim expenses for themselves, their partners or spouses, and dependents.
- Coverage period: one (1) year from the date of the last Work Assignment (e.g., if your last Work Assignment was in the Fall 2026 semester, you can submit claims until the end of the Fall 2027 semester).

b. How do I claim my health benefits?

Claims are submitted through the CUPE3913 website after logging in. Click 'dashboard' to access the benefits submission section. You should have received a welcome email with your login information. Before your first claim, you must complete your contact information in the benefits submission section of the website. For more information, contact Shelly, our Administration and Finance Coordinator (see Key Contacts).

7. FAQs about Work Assignment Postings & Hiring (Units 1 and 2)

a. Units 1 & 2: When and where are available work assignments posted?

Work Assignments are posted on the University of Guelph's hiring website. [Click this link](#). There are no standardized posting deadlines for departments or schools; however, postings usually occur mid to late in the semester. Your department may send an email to let you know that jobs have been posted, but the Union encourages you to check your department or school's Work Assignment postings regularly.

b. Unit 1: What is a Job Security Period (JSP)?

A Job Security Period (JSP) is a period of guaranteed work as indicated in your Offer of Admission. To fulfill your Job Security Period, you must apply for at least one (1) Work Assignment in your home department during the semester(s) indicated in the Income/Funding portion of your Offer of Admission. Your application must indicate that you are applying within your Job Security Period. For example, if your Offer of Admission states you are guaranteed one GTA per academic year (spanning the fall and winter terms), you must apply for a Work Assignment in one semester per year, and that application must indicate that you are applying within your Job Security Period. The Level of Consideration in your application indicates whether your application is being submitted within your Job Security Period.

c. Unit 1: What are Levels of Consideration?

There are three (3) levels of consideration for GTA Work Assignment applications.

- Level One (1) indicates that you are applying within your Job Security Period.
- Level Two (2) indicates that you are not applying within your Job Security Period and have not exceeded the prescribed length for your program of study.
- Level Three (3) indicates that you have exceeded the prescribed length for your program of study.

Earnings from Work Assignments completed during your Job Security Period (Level 1 consideration) count towards your guaranteed funding outlined in your Offer of Admission. Earnings from additional Work Assignments completed outside your Job Security Period (Level 2 consideration) are paid in addition to your guaranteed funding.

d. Unit 1: Can I apply for a Work Assignment in any department?

Yes. However, hiring is based on the 'Levels of Consideration' in our CA, so candidates from within the course's department will be considered before those from outside the department.

e. Units 1 and 2: What are seniority points? How do they work?

Both Unit 1 and Unit 2 Members accrue seniority points each time they successfully complete a Work Assignment. These points are used in the hiring process to determine which Member is to be hired for an assignment. In a case where Members applying for a Work Assignment are equally qualified, the Member with the highest number of seniority points will be offered the position.

f. Unit 2: What is a Right of First Refusal?

When a Unit 2 (Sessional) Member successfully completes a Work Assignment, they will have a 'Right of First Refusal' for that course for an additional six (6) semesters. This means that the department/school must first offer the course to the Member if it is open (i.e., not being taught by a faculty Member) during that period.

g. Unit 1: How do I fill out a Work Assignment Form (WAF)?

Your WAF is a formal agreement that outlines what is expected of you in your role. Unit 2 Members do not complete and sign WAFs; instead, they accept an offer for a Work Assignment, and the terms of that acceptance are set out in the offer.

For Unit 1 Members, Work Agreement Forms should include:

- **A clear breakdown of how hours are allotted.**
- **Deadlines for *each item* to be graded** (e.g., if there are weekly labs, there must be a grading deadline for each lab report).

Contracts must be reviewed with your supervisor at an initial meeting (which also counts towards your total working hours!) before signing. An example of a Work Assignment Form for Unit 1 appears on the following two (2) pages.

Work agreements must be signed by both the TA and the supervisor and submitted to the department after your initial meeting at the beginning of the semester.



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8. FAQs about Payment (Units 1 & 2)

a. How do I access my pay statement? What do the codes on it mean?

Electronic pay statements can be viewed and downloaded from the Employee Self-Serve portal: [Click this link](#). To log in, enter your date of birth (including a "/" between month, day, and year) and the last 4 digits of your Social Insurance Number. The codes in the Earnings section of your pay statement indicate the source of funding. Earnings coded as:

- 0146 indicates funding from your Graduate Research Assistantship
- 0166 indicates funding from your Graduate Teaching Assistantship.

b. Why is the gross pay listed on my pay statement higher than the amount deposited into my bank account?

The gross pay on your pay statement reflects your earnings before mandatory deductions. These deductions include Income Tax (FED TAX ON), Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Employment Insurance (EI), CUPE Union Dues (3913), and Tuition Fees (TUITION). Your earnings after deductions are shown as Net Pay on each pay statement and should match the amount deposited into your bank account.

c. My net pay has changed, what happened?

Near the start and end of semesters, you may notice fluctuations in the amount of earnings from your GRA and GTA. This is normal, as GRA and GTA start and end dates do not always align. It is strongly recommended that you review the first few pay statements (at a minimum) at the start of every semester to ensure your gross pay is listed correctly. Once the semester and your GTA hours are underway, your pay statements should remain stable throughout the semester. If you notice any errors in your pay statements or have questions about them, please contact the University.

9. Training & Assistance with TA'ing or Teaching

a. Courselink Issues

As a Unit 1 and Unit 2 Member, you will be able to view and make changes on Courselink that students cannot. Beyond accessing course materials, you will likely use Courselink for three main functions:

- Marking using a built-in rubric
- Inputting grades
- Monitoring discussion boards

If you're ever unsure about how to do something, contact the supervisor of the course you are assigned to, or Courselink support. [Click here](#).

b. I don't feel prepared for my role – how can I get help?

The supervisor should provide you with everything you need to perform your duties, and your fellow TAs are also there to help. If you and your fellow TAs are not being supported by your supervisor, that's an issue.

[The Office of Teaching and Learning](#) also has resources and programming specifically designed for both new and returning GTAs to gain skills and confidence:

If you are a Sessional instructor or a seminar leader, check out these resources:

- [Teaching strategies for in-person learning](#):
- [Teaching strategies for hybrid/blended learning](#):
- [Teaching strategies for remote learning](#):

10. Getting Involved in the Union

a. Becoming a Member in Good Standing (MGS)

All TAs and Sessionals within their political membership are represented by CUPE 3913 and can submit benefit claims, attend meetings, and participate in the grievance process. However, we strongly encourage all new TAs and Sessionals to become **Members in Good Standing (MGS)** by scanning the QR code or filling out this form: [Click here](#). There is no cost to become an MGS, and the form is quick and easy to complete.

Benefits of becoming an MGS include:

- **Staying informed** on issues that matter most to TAs and Sessionals at the University of Guelph.
- **MGS get to vote on Union matters** - Have a direct impact on these issues by ensuring your voice is heard.
- **Demonstrate strength to the University** - Having many MGS demonstrates to the University that we are a strong Union, allowing us to push for initiatives that can improve working and living conditions for TAs and Sessionals (e.g., higher wages, job security, fair working conditions).
- **Community** - Help establish a community of graduate students and course instructors that are navigating precarious work.



b. How do new Members stay up to date on Union news?

- **Newsletter** - We email Members a monthly newsletter to keep you updated on current and future events. The newsletter contains student resources, contacts, links, and announcements for keeping up to date with CUPE 3913 initiatives - be sure to read these regularly.
- **Social media** - CUPE 3913 news and current events are posted on multiple social media platforms. Follow us on Instagram (**GRYPHON3913**), Facebook (**CUPE LOCAL 3913**), and Twitter (X): **@GRYPHON3913** to stay updated.
- **Become a Member in Good Standing to vote on key issues** - Becoming a Member in Good Standing (MGS) allows Members to attend and vote at Union meetings. Scan the QR code above to become a Member in Good Standing.

- **Fill out Member Surveys** - This information helps us focus our efforts preparing for upcoming negotiations with the University.
 - **Sign petitions** - We fight for fair labour practices on campus, but sometimes we lend support to other Unions fighting for fair practices on other campuses. Help support us by signing petitions.
 - **Socials** - Throughout the academic year, we host social events for our members as a way for folks to get to know each other and to chat about work issues. All Unit 1 and Unit 2 Members are welcome!
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- **Take on a position with the Union** - CUPE 3913 is run by graduate students and sessional lecturers. If you are interested in helping ensure a fair and healthy work environment, please consider getting involved! Many positions offer an honourarium in recognition of your service. We are always looking for stewards, caucus chairs, and Executive Committee members as well. Please reach out to any of us with questions (see Key Contacts).

11. Glossary

Arbitration: When a grievance is filed, a hearing is held in which the Labour Relations Coordinator presents the case. The University then decides either to accept the grievance and any or all of the terms of settlement outlined in the filing, or to deny it. If the University denies it, the Union can take it to arbitration, where an arbitrator mediates a settlement.

Collective Agreement: Collective Agreements are negotiated between unions and employers and set out the terms and conditions of employment for a group of employees, known as the 'bargaining unit,' who are represented by a Union. The Collective Agreement establishes the workplace rights of both employees and the Union.

Local: A local is a unit of a larger Union; i.e., CUPE 3913 is a 'local' of CUPE Ontario and CUPE National. A local establishes its organizational structure and sets its own bylaws. Both the structure and bylaws must mirror, but not replicate, those of the Union; i.e., the structure and bylaws of CUPE 3913 follow the CUPE National Constitution. However, it also has autonomy to amend the terms of the Constitution to reflect the local's practice.

Member in Good Standing: Every Member of CUPE 3913 has access to benefits and the grievance process, can attend and speak at all CUPE 3913 meetings, and can vote on strike mandates and the ratification of collective agreements. Members who wish to become Members in Good Standing (MGS) also have the right to vote on Union amendments, motions, and elections.

Overwork: When a Member works beyond the agreed-upon hours of the Work Assignment or performs duties outside its terms.