



COURSE NAVIGATION

Teaching Assistant Handbook

A step-by-step guide to the entire TA process, from application to excelling at your job to turning in your final grades.



This TA handbook is brought to you by your TA and Invigilator union, AGSEM.
WWW.AGSEM.CA



Important Dates for Your TA Application:

FOR FALL COURSES:

POSTED: May 31 at the latest
APPLICATION DEADLINE:
no earlier than 15 working days
after posting

NOTIFICATION:
no later than 35 days after the
application deadline

FOR WINTER COURSES:

POSTED:
November 1 at the latest
APPLICATION DEADLINE:
no earlier than 15 working days
after posting

NOTIFICATION:
December 15 at the latest

FOR SUMMER COURSES:

POSTED: March 31 at the latest
APPLICATION DEADLINE:
no earlier than 15 working days
after posting

NOTIFICATION:
no later than 35 days after the
application deadline

Email your department administrator if you are unsure where to find TA postings.

Tip: You may apply for a TA position in multiple departments. Search the Workday postings for related academic units.

What is a Teaching Assistant?

A Teaching Assistant is a graduate student enrolled at McGill. TAs assist course instructors with tasks such as grading; holding office hours; leading conferences, labs, and tutorials; and managing assignments. All TAs at McGill are members of the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill (AGSEM), the teaching support union.

A Teaching Assistant is a worker. Being a TA can greatly enhance your expertise as a researcher and provide meaningful experience for your career, but when you TA at McGill, you are a worker and are compensated with *wages, not funding*.

How do I become a TA?

All TAs are hired after submitting an application form to a department, also known as a Hiring Unit. Your department should notify you of positions available for the next semester via email and post those positions publicly on Workday.

There should only be one application process per term for each Hiring Unit. On the application, you will list your preferred courses and qualifications. Postings will describe available courses, instructors, and the number of hours offered. Postings may be tentative or a course's details may be TBA, but most qualifications should be listed on the posting.

Remember:

- A department may not require separate applications for different courses.
- A department must accept your application in electronic form. If you have difficulty submitting an electronic form, let the administrators of the hiring unit know as soon as possible.
- No TA application form may require your academic supervisor's signature.
- When you apply for a TA position, your employment file is made available to the department. You can always request to view your employment file and add material.
- TA positions are offered by academic departments, not by course instructors. Every TA must be hired fairly and compensated at the standard wage.
- You should not be required to produce additional qualifications or interview for a TA position.

What happens when I receive a TA offer?

Step 1: Accept the offer by returning a signed copy of the offer letter to your department within 7 days. Submit your AGSEM membership form to the union (use the online form linked on the AGSEM website or email a pdf format to MAIL@AGSEM-AEEDM.CA). Since a TA position is a short-term contract, you must fill out a union membership form each time you accept a new position.

Step 2: Contact the course instructor and arrange a meeting. At your first meeting, you should receive a copy of the syllabus and a Workload Form. Fill out the Workload Form with the instructor and reach a mutual agreement on the distribution of hours. You have the right to view previous Workload Forms for the course on request. Determine your schedule for the semester.

Keep in mind:

- Conference or lab sections may not be scheduled until after the add/drop deadline, but you should know how many hours you will commit to leading sections when you sign the Workload Form.
- Enrolment may fluctuate. If you have committed to grading a certain number of assignments, make sure that your hours or workload are adjusted so that you are not given additional grading with no additional compensation.
- If you attend lectures, your instructor must include those hours on the Workload Form. If you feel attending lectures is necessary for your job performance, you must be compensated for that time.
- You must be paid for all hours worked, including all mandatory training (e.g. a departmental TA orientation session or the “It Takes All of Us” employee training)
- Your instructor must provide you with a “desk copy” of all materials assigned for the course. Don’t purchase your own books or course packets.
- You are entitled to be assigned more hours than initially scheduled, and you need to be paid for all of them.

Step 3: Set up your myCourses permissions, your staff email, and your office space.

- If using myCourses, make sure you are granted access as a TA or an Instructor.
- All TAs receive a staff email (YOUR.NAME@MCGILL.CA) in addition to their student email (YOUR.NAME@MAIL.MCGILL.CA). Messages sent through myCourses will automatically route to this email address. Make sure to set it up so that you don’t miss any communication!
- Sign up for office space if you are holding office hours for consultation with students. Each department is required to provide space to TAs. Contact your department’s administrator if you do not know how to access your work space.

Questions to ask your instructor:

- When grading, how much and what sort of feedback should I provide?
- Should I aim for an average or curve my grades?
- How should I calculate attendance?
- What is your policy if a student wants their grade revised?
- What should I do if I am not comfortable grading assignments in a particular language?
- Will I need to use myCourses, Minerva, Zoom, or another digital platform? Where can I receive training?
- How do you prefer to submit grades?
- When will I get my textbook or course pack?
- Will I get a Uprint copy card?
- Do you have a grading rubric?
- Can you give me examples of discussion questions or lesson plans for my sections?
- What are rules and safety information for the lab?

Where can I turn for support as a TA and a graduate student?

Teaching and Learning Services McGill

WWW.MCGILL.CA/TLS

- Lots of resources, links, and events on developing pedagogy

SKILLSETS McGill

WWW.MCGILL.CA/SKILLSETS

- Semi-annual TA training
- Learn to Teach Day

AGSEM/AEEDM

WWW.AGSEM.CA

- Your TA and Invigilator labor union

Branches - McGill's Community Outreach Program at Enrolment Services

WWW.MCGILL.CA/BRANCHES

- Resources on issues related to diversity

Sexual Assault Center of the McGill Students Society (SACOMSS)

WWW.SACOMSS.ORG

- Confidential support and resources for community members experiencing or witnessing sexual violence

Step 4: Meet with the instructor after midterm to review the Workload Form and discuss your performance. The midterm review is mandatory. This is the time to adjust the distribution of hours if enrollment has fluctuated or if you feel you need more time for certain tasks. The instructor should request additional hours from the Hiring Unit, if needed, or reallocate work that will not fit within your contracted hours. **You are under no obligation to work over your hours, and you should not be pressured to do so.** Let the instructor know of any schedule changes or leaves as soon as possible (see more below).

How do I become a great TA?

Train! Visit the Teaching and Learning Services website to sign up for the SKILLSETS TA training, offered at the beginning of the Fall and Winter terms. Once you receive your first TA offer, you will be paid for up to 3 hours of the first training at the TA rate. You must register ahead of time to attend this training. SKILLSETS will provide several modules of general training targeting broad disciplines. Workshops like "Grading in The Humanities" give helpful tips and materials for specific TA tasks. SKILLSETS also offers unpaid workshops throughout the year for teaching staff and graduate students, focusing on developing pedagogy.

Train some more! For course-specific training, turn to your course instructor. They are required to provide you with necessary training for their course and you must be compensated. Don't hesitate to ask for training, guidelines, or feedback on grading, leading discussions, or pedagogy! Put it on the Workload Form! This training can be ongoing. Some examples include:

- Marking assignments together, or marking the same paper to make sure your evaluations are in sync.
- Asking your instructor to attend one of your labs or conference sections to give feedback.
- Formulating discussion questions or problem sets with your instructor before you lead a section.
- Delivering your own lecture on a topic relevant to your expertise.
- Ask the course instructor to explain how the syllabus was written and give your own feedback on the course structure.

Pay attention to feedback! At the end of the term, you will have the opportunity to receive feedback from both your instructor and your students.

- If you request an evaluation, or if your instructor prefers, they may provide a standard evaluation and discuss their responses with you after the course is finished. If you are interested in an evaluation, let your instructor know. Your department administrator should be able to provide them with the necessary material. Keep in mind that any formal evaluation will go in your employee file.

- Students in the course will have the opportunity to provide feedback on your TA performance during their course evaluations. All student evaluations are anonymous and are only available to you after grades have been submitted.
- If you feel that a student or instructor evaluation is prejudicial or unfair, you may request that it be removed from your employee file or add mitigating material to your file.

How do I balance my work, research, and life?

Teaching Assistants perform a vital role in McGill's curriculum, but teaching is one more task on the already overlaid plate of a graduate student. Being a TA should complement your graduate studies, not supplant it. It is in the interest of the university, as well, to promote a healthy work-life balance for graduate students, and to ensure that they finish on time and produce research that reflects well on McGill. As a worker, you have the right to put your research or your personal life first when it matters. This includes the right to unpaid leave throughout the semester, the right to amend your Workload Form if the tasks are taking longer than estimated, the right to take time off to attend an academic conference, prepare for your comprehensive examinations, or defend your thesis, and the right to set your own work schedule if you are taking classes and have your own assignments to complete.

Since your TA position is a short term contract, it may seem unnecessary to take unpaid leave, but there are some benefits.

For short-term unpaid leave: for short-term illness, the birth or adoption of a child, termination of a pregnancy, bereavement, research travel, an academic conference, or preparation for a comps exam or defense, you are entitled to unpaid leave. You can take time off from work and your duties will be adjusted so that you don't lose pay, but you won't be paid additionally for your time off. This might mean taking a couple weeks off from conferences in exchange for grading more papers later in the term. Let the instructor know as far in advance as possible and work out an adjustment of your duties that is agreeable to everyone. The instructor is responsible for the course and must find the means to cover your work.

For long-term, unpaid leave: for prolonged medical, maternal, paternal, parental, or research leave, you will be excused from your TA position for the remainder of the term and your pay will be adjusted based on the hours you have already worked, or if you have not applied for a TA position because of your upcoming leave, you can get an extension of your Priority Pool status (see below). You may exercise this leave from your job as a TA without taking a leave from your academic program. This means that you do not need to forgo employment just because you won't be able to work for the entire semester. You may require a doctor's or midwife's note in order to take this leave and you should present this information at least thirty days before you intend to take leave, unless an emergency occurs.

What sort of leave may I take as a TA?

- **Medical leave for yourself:** 3 weeks
- **Medical leave for your partner, or your child:** 10 days
- **Maternity:** 18 weeks, no earlier than 16 weeks before delivery.
- **Paternity:** 5 weeks, no later than 52 weeks after the birth.
- **Parental:** 52 weeks, no later than 70 weeks after birth or adoption
- **Birth of a child, adoption:** 5 days, first 2 paid.
- **Termination of a pregnancy:** before the 20th week: 3 weeks; after the 20th week: 18 weeks.
- **Death of a family member:** 1-3 days.
- **Academic Conference:** unspecified (determine length with course supervisor)
- **Prep for a comp exam or thesis defense:** 7 days
- **Field work, including any training or research abroad:** up to 1 year

Priority Pool Pop Quiz

I am a PhD4 in Econ, I have only ever been a TA in Poli Sci. Do I have priority for a TA position in Econ?

No. You can still be hired in Econ, but only after the PP applicants have been hired.

I started a PhD program in Computer Science but then transferred to Computer Engineering. For how long do I have priority?

If you started a new program, your priority should follow your current degree program.

I am a PhD3 in Music Research and I just received my first TA position this year. Does this mean I have four years left?

No, you have three years left if you started in PhD2, since the clock starts ticking when you enter your program.

I am a PhD5 in Physiology. I applied for one course but I got another that I don't prefer. I thought I had priority?

You do! You applied for a TA position, not for a specific course. There is currently no right of priority for your preferred course.

Extensions of your Priority Pool status: When you take leave before a semester begins or during the course of a semester, you will not be paid, but you may request an extension of your Priority Pool status for the length of time that you will be away. This means you can take leave for a semester or two, during which you do not apply for a TA position, and not worry about losing the opportunity to gain the same amount of income during your graduate program. Some things to know about extensions:

- You may request an extension of Priority Pool status when you are already in a department's Priority Pool. This means that you may request extensions in multiple departments if you have worked in them before.
- Extension will apply following when you would have left the Priority Pool. If you are a PhD4 and take a year of leave, you will have priority for PhD6..
- Always copy your AGSEM delegate (or TA Grievance Officer if you do not have a delegate for your department) when requesting extensions. Current delegates for all departments are listed here: WWW.AGSEM.CA/DELEGATES-COUNCIL

Do I have any job security as a TA?

Yes! TAs are entitled to preferential hiring based on seniority. This is called the Priority Pool. Each department or Hiring Unit has its own Priority Pool. You enter the Priority Pool by accepting a job in a department and the length of time you have in the Pool is determined by the date of your initial enrolment. Master's students have two years of priority from the date of their initial enrolment. Doctoral students have four years of priority from the date of their initial enrolment in their academic program (even if they were previously Master's students at McGill).

How does the Priority Pool work?

Each semester, a department must assign any available TA positions to applicants with priority, starting with the highest level of priority. Priority declines as following:

- Doctoral students in their fourth year (e.g. PhD5 if they started their program at PhD2, or PhD 4 if they started their program at PhD1)
- Doctoral students in their third year
- Doctoral students in their second year
- Doctoral students in their first year (e.g. PhD1, but also PhD2 if they started their program at PhD2)
- Master's students in year 2 (meaning MA2, MSc2, etc.)
- Master's students in year 1

Important things to keep in mind about the Priority Pool:

- This only applies to applicants with priority. A PhD4 applicant who has never been a TA in that department before does not have priority.
- Applicants who are more advanced in their programs may still have priority if they receive extensions of their Priority Pool entitlement for things like field work or maternity leave. This applies to the term(s) immediately following when they would have left the Pool. So a PhD6 who has taken one year of maternity leave will have the highest priority.
- Applicants with Priority Pool status are given priority for a TA position, but not for the specific TA position that they want. Many departments will try to assign higher priority applicants to a position that they prefer, as indicated on their application, but there is no entitlement to those specific courses.
- Priority may be weighed with qualifications, but this must be decided on a case-by-case basis. If there is some reason why an applicant with priority does not meet the qualifications for available TA positions, then they may not be able to exercise this entitlement. In most cases, qualifications are sufficiently broad or there are enough positions available that this does not cause a conflict, but if you have Priority and are denied a position over insufficient qualifications, you should contact your AGSEM Delegate to follow up.
- You may have Priority Pool status in multiple departments if you have worked in multiple departments. This can be great if you want to have a lot of options available to you, but you can only work in one TA position on the basis of priority each term.
- Departments may reserve a certain number of positions for applicants who are not in the Priority Pool, based on the number of TAs who have left the pool in the last year. This is how many departments assign TA positions to incoming grad students.
- You are not in the pool automatically because you are enrolled in a department.

How do I grade assignments?

When you fill out your Workload Form, your instructor will tell you what sort of grading duties you will have. This should be a specific number of assignments or a specific portion of assignments (maybe only the assignments for your section or $\frac{1}{3}$ of the assignments). You might also grade only a portion of each assignment, such as a short answer on each exam (this is often a part of “crowd-marking”). You will also determine the amount of time that you should spend grading each assignment in order to determine the overall amount of time that should be dedicated to grading. At this point, it is important to let the instructor know how much time you think is reasonable to spend grading each assignment. Don't feel pressured to accept an arrangement that you don't think is fair. Keep in mind that grading requires reading, re-reading, calculation, developing a rubric or solving a problem set, and writing feedback. You may always look at Workload Forms for past courses to see what the standard practice has been.

Stay organized. Make sure you do not lose assignments and that you double-check if any are missing right away, before you start grading. McGill generally requires that TAs do not take exams off-campus to grade, although you should ask your instructor what their policy is, since many TAs are not given regular office space. Keep all of the exams together and make sure that grades are written down in a standard place.

Give feedback. Depending on the type of assignment, you will probably need to provide some feedback. Be legible and constructive. Don't write too much, which may confuse students. It is part of quality teaching to explain your grade.

This will save time for you and the instructor. If a student wants their grade revised or explained.

Be professional. Don't write harsh or sarcastic comments. Don't joke about your students with other TAs. Definitely do not post about student work on social media. This hinders a supportive learning environment and it is harassment. Make sure that each student's grade is confidential.

Track your progress. You don't have to do all the grading! You only need to do the amount that you can reasonably complete in the time you were allotted. Time yourself for each assignment, and make note of whether you go over your time. It is important to understand and explain why this initial breakdown of hours is often insufficient:

- Enrolment shifts throughout the term and you may end up with more students.
- Some assignments take more time than others. A weak assignment requires more feedback, more calculation, and more discussion. A lot of weak assignments means a lot more work.
- Grading in a non-native language takes longer for most TAs. This is work!
- Developing a standard method of evaluation, refining your calculation, and recording grades are not automatic. You will refine this as you go through assignments. This is work.
- Being a first-time TA means it may take you longer to work out your grading method at first. This is part of on-the-job learning.
- Your instructor should know if the time they estimated for grading is insufficient, this will help them assign tasks effectively next time. **Teaching is collaborative and everyone needs feedback!**

Tip: Many TAs are concerned with developing authority, confidence, and creativity in the classroom. Some strategies for finding your voice in front of the class:

- Teaching and Learning Services (mcgill.ca/tls) offers useful guides, rubrics for different disciplines and formats for organizing discussion.
- Attend TLS, SKILLSETS, and departmental events. These include the SKILLSETS TA Training, held twice a year, and the Learning to Teach Day.
- Ask your AGSEM delegate to organize TA workshops in your department. This is a good strategy for developing skills that are specific to your discipline.
- Ask your course instructor to attend some of your sections and give you feedback. Ask your fellow TAs to do so, and give reciprocal feedback.

Am I a teacher? Do I have to manage a classroom?

As a TA, you play an important role in delivering the curriculum that McGill teaching staff create. Your students will look to you as an expert. This is why training is so important and why you should feel empowered to ask your course instructor for any training or guidance that you need. TAs may take on certain roles as teachers when they run conferences, labs, or tutorials. At the same time, TAs are not instructors with the authority to change the content of the course. Make sure that any initiative you take regarding lesson plans, grading, and communication has been approved by the instructor. For instance, some TAs may want to use features on myCourses to enhance learning, but an instructor may object to this.

How do I create a learning environment that is safe, supportive, and equitable for me and for my students?

Be understanding. As a graduate student, you know what it is like to face mounting pressure and juggle deadlines. Let students know at the beginning of the term that they can discuss any difficulties that they have with you. You should always make the instructor's policies clear, however. In most cases, TAs do not have the authority to grant extensions, excuse absences, or change the requirements of an assignment without instructor approval.

Help students navigate their resources. The Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), the Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support, and Education (OSVRSE), and the Sexual Assault Center of the McGill Students Society (SACOMSS) are a few of the resources that students in distress may access. They offer advice, referrals, and accommodations related to disability, mental health, physical health, or trauma. Let students know about these resources at the beginning of the term, as benefits like OSD accommodations require advance registration.

Be trustworthy and discreet. Encourage students to seek out resources offered by professional and trustworthy services, but this may arise because a student discloses a health or psychological concern to you. Always maintain this information in confidence and confer with the student before you pass along any information to the instructor.

Educate yourself. SACOMSS and Branches - McGill's Community Outreach Program at Enrolment Services offer training and resources to help you recognize the needs of marginalized students. Request that your AGSEM delegate organize an equity training for your department. Common practices that TAs employ to make a more equitable classroom include: running small-group discussions to give students a more comfortable space; using a "progressive stack" method when calling on students, which might mean giving some priority to women or people of colour; respecting pronouns and preferred names; providing content warnings if students request them or if you feel they may be necessary.

Be appropriate and professional. This is the best way to develop both authority and empathy. Your students are not your peers. Never meet with students off-campus or at a bar. Keep office doors open. Do not make comments about a student's appearance. TAs must follow the same guidelines as professors when it comes to relationships with students. Intimate relationships with students compromise your responsibility to teach. According to McGill's Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Discrimination, this means that any advances or relationships between TAs and students, as well as those between students and faculty, "ought to be known" as unwelcome conduct and is therefore sexual harassment.

What is collective bargaining?

When you become a TA, you also become a member of the teaching support union, AGSEM (Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill). You become part of Unit 1, the bargaining unit for TAs (Unit 2 is for Invigilators and has a separate collective agreement). This means that as soon as you become a TA, you also take on the rights and responsibilities of a union member, including:

- the right to representation and the resources of the union in order to protect your labor rights;
- the right to vote on all matters related to the union's collective bargaining, constitution, executive officers, political action, and initiatives;
- the right to hold office, become a delegate, and propose mandates to the union;
- the automatic deduction of 2.5% union dues from your paycheque.

What is the collective agreement and how does it affect me?

The collective agreement (CA) is the contract negotiated between AGSEM and McGill to define your labour rights (other than those rights contained in provincial and federal law). It applies to all TAs. This means that each department must only offer TA positions that conform to the rules of the CA - every applicant, regardless of their preferences or those of the instructors, must be given the same wage, priority rights, and other benefits. Each department must have copies of the CA available for TAs to access. The CA can also be accessed in French or English on the union's website. The CA is a dense, multilingual, legal document. Therefore, the union also provides practical, common-sense translations of key articles on its website. The CA normally lasts for four years. After it expires, AGSEM negotiates a new CA. The current CA for Teaching Assistants was signed in January, 2021 (retroactive to 2019) and is in effect until July 31, 2023.

Who is in charge at AGSEM?

You are. Being an active member is the most important form of involvement with the union. Inform your delegates of issues in your department, attend events and ask questions, select your delegates in your department, make sure that your union is involved when you resolve problems in your department, and attend General and Unit Assemblies. At an assembly you can:

- Ask questions of your representatives.
- Join committees or run for office.
- Vote on proposals from union officers or other members. When you vote on these proposals, whether you approve or disapprove of the proposal, you give union officers a mandate. ***Mandates given by members must be carried out by union officers.***
- Propose a motion. If you have your own idea or your own concern, bring it to the members. A majority vote in favor of your motion means that you have given the union officers a mandate.

What is an Assembly?

Members vote and raise motions at Assemblies. Typically, Assemblies are held twice a year, but during bargaining years, Special Assemblies may be called when there are new developments in negotiation.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY: This is where TAs and Invigilators come together to vote on executive and committee offices, union budgets, political messaging, and any changes to our constitution.

UNIT 1 ASSEMBLY: This is where TAs vote on their own Bargaining Committee and give that committee mandates that are specific to TA working conditions.

What sort of work has the union done? What skills do I need?

Are you a good writer or designer?

Develop new and creative forms of communication, including the website, social media, and the upcoming newsletter. Help AGSEM expand its media presence.

Are you a good organizer?

Help train delegates and find new ways to engage members. Examples include the AGSEM BBQ and the upcoming Grade-a-thon. Find ways to create mutual aid with other campus groups. This year, there are ongoing campaigns to develop TA training for students in distress with the help of OSD and to develop strategies for combating sexual violence with the help of OSVERSE and SSMU.

Are you a numbers person?

Collect data, find new ways to research our members and community. See Mobilization surveys from past years.

Are you interested in politics or bargaining?

Help the Bargaining Committee develop strategies for negotiation or creative solutions to bargain for. Be a link with other unions or campus groups. We recently founded FUSE, an inter-union council with other MTL universities. Let's keep it up!

How can I get involved with AGSEM?

Organize! Your colleagues are often your best resource for improving your teaching. You have the support of AGSEM when it comes to improving the local conditions for TAs in your department. Get supplies and money for food and drinks for your departmental event. Want to create a caucus to address issues particular to your identity? Want to organize an inter-departmental workshop to develop pedagogical methods across fields? What to host a conference on the precarious PhD? AGSEM is so down.

Become a delegate: Small departments may elect one delegate. Large departments of over 60 TAs per semester may elect two delegates. Departments with 100 or more members may elect three delegates. Delegates are typically elected by your PGSA, although if your department does not have a delegate, you may be appointed by AGSEM. Departmental delegates receive an honorarium of \$125 per semester (that includes summer!) and are responsible for:

- Attending training and monthly Delegates' Council meetings.
- Informing members in their department of the latest updates, events, and issues going on with the union and being the first point of contact if members have questions, concerns, or potential grievances.
- Holding one event per semester in their department to mobilize members of the union. This could be something like a bargaining Q&A, a pizza party, or an open forum on TAs at your PGSA. Ask the union for help!
- Reviewing tentative TA appointments each term. Delegates will receive TA appointments from their department before they are announced and must review them for any potential violations of the collective agreement. Delegates must respond in a timely and respectful manner to department administrators to ensure that any issues are resolved and that TA offers are distributed without delay.
- Learn more here: WWW.AGSEM.CA/DELEGATES-COUNCIL and WWW.AGSEM.CA/DELEGATE-RESOURCES

Join a committee or working group: Any member may join a committee that speaks to their skills and interests. They can also propose a new committee. Committees work to improve the union as well as to provide oversight and are a crucial part of union democracy. Current committees include: Mobilization, Equity, Audit, Constitution, External Affairs, Mutual Aid, Bargaining, U-Drive. Committee, and all working group members are paid each semester (honoraria vary from \$85-\$165) or TA rate per hour, and they determine their own objectives and pace of work. Learn more here: WWW.AGSEM.CA/COMMITTEES

Run for an executive position: Current executive positions include: President (must be bilingual), TA Grievance Officer, Invigilator Grievance Officer, Mobilization Coordinator, External Communications Officer, Secretary-Treasurer, Macdonald Campus Officer and, during bargaining year, Chair of the Bargaining Committee. All positions are elected each year and execs are paid a stipend equivalent to between 90- and 180-hour TA position each term. Executive Committee meetings occur bimonthly and all monthly reports are available to AGSEM's members upon request. Execs also attend Delegates' Council meetings, Assemblies, and other meetings as their positions require. Executives contribute a lot of labour to implementing the goals of the union, but they are not the highest authority in AGSEM. That's you, the member.

How does TA bargaining work?

The Bargaining Committee (BC) only exists when AGSEM approaches the expiration of our Collective Agreement. In April 2022, members elected a Pre-Bargaining Committee to develop a bargaining proposal, which will be presented to members at a Unit Assembly in the spring of 2023, when members will vote to adopt the proposal. The BC will begin bargaining in the summer of 2023. Just as the BC represents all members at the table, HR represents the “other side”, which is the Board of Governors at McGill. The BC regularly provides updates to members at DC meetings and Assemblies and will call a Special Assembly if there is a development. This could mean: that bargaining has reached an impasse and members must vote on whether to amend our mandates or pursue other strategies; or that bargaining has reached a tentative agreement between the BC and HR, which can only be made official by a vote from the members.

What are the issues for TA bargaining?

Workload: TAs have told the union repeatedly that they frequently work more hours than they are allocated, which amounts to working for free. They have also reported difficulty amending the amount of hours they have, or achieving a reasonable workload with their course instructors. Members want recognition of the fact that our work ethic is a reflection of our dedication to our students, a resource that McGill should be happy to invest in.

Priority: Many members have issues with the Priority Pool, especially when it comes to their ability to work in courses that suit their qualifications as well as the ways that it limits employment for Master’s students. Members also want to preserve a system of priority and job security, but with flexibility.

Fair Compensation: Members recognize that while McGill shares a tier with schools like University of Toronto and top universities in North America, our graduate students lag behind these schools in wages and funding. Our members face challenges when it comes to healthcare, costs of parenting, international fees, and inequitable use of TA positions to compensate for graduate funding. McGill has succeeded in lobbying the province to de-regulate international tuition and has planned tuition hikes for students at all levels. For international grad students, this means a higher disparity in compensation. For all grad students, this means that McGill is expanding revenue and members assert that TAs deserve a better share.

Training: Members very frequently report a lack of meaningful training and guidance from their course instructors, departments, and the university. SKILLSETS training is helpful, but regarded as too broad. Instructors often leave TAs to “figure it out,” and graduate programs do not offer pedagogical training, even when many fields are geared toward higher education. Members choose to TA because they want teaching skills and both TAs and their students deserve a better quality training for TAs.

Protections against sexual violence and discrimination: As graduate students, AGSEM members are subject to the same risk of sexual violence as other McGill students. TAs also serve as intermediaries between professors and students and may serve as bystanders or witnesses to sexual violence. Members are concerned about punitive, time-consuming, and ineffectual reporting policies and potential retaliation from abusive faculty. Members want clear protections that support a professional working environment free from unwanted sexual advances, requirements which apply to TAs with respect to their students as well. Members deserve a sexual violence policy that understands that TAs are both graduate students and workers.

Who are my current AGSEM execs?

PRESIDENT: Mario Roy, MSc, Agricultural Economics

SECRETARY-TREASURER: Matei Petrescu, PhD, Physics

MOBILIZATION OFFICER: Kiersten van Vliet, PhD, Musicology

TA GRIEVANCE OFFICER: Jean-Philip Mathieu, PhD, History

INVIGILATOR GRIEVANCE OFFICER: Teresa Joseph, PhD, Neuroscience

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER: Marta Beszterda, PhD, Musicology

MACDONALD CAMPUS OFFICER: Karan Kumar, PhD, Agricultural Economics

TA BARGAINING CHAIR: Karan Kumar, PhD, Agricultural Economics

Email us at MAIL@AGSEM-AEEDM.CA

Apply for a TA
position

You'll figure it out?

X
Turn in your final
grades—done!

There's more to it than that.

More for graduate students to gain
More we can offer our students
More we can do when we work together

McGill Teaching Assistants navigate the course
together.

AGSEM supports you.