



28 March 2024

AUGSA has called a Special General Meeting to take place on April 18th at 6PM MT to propose levying a 1% core due for academically employed graduate assistants (GAs) in support of the employment agreement between Athabasca University (AU) and the Athabasca University Graduate Students' Association (AUGSA), named the AU/AUGSA Collective Agreement.

This SGM is scheduled to formalize the implementation of the union due only. The following background and potential next steps are intended to provide an overview of information that relates to the union due implementation and AUGSAs work towards improving union representation.

BACKGROUND

As prescribed by the Alberta Labour Code and the Post-Secondary Learning Act, the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) must function as a trade union for Academically Employed Graduate Students. This has been the case for AUGSA since at least 2014 under the AU/AUGSA Collective Agreement.

The AU/AUGSA Collective Agreement was last renewed in 2019 for the 2019-2022 period. At that time, zero GAs were employed at Athabasca University. Due to zero members under the agreement, as an interim measure to representing the union during the bargaining process, the AUGSA Council stepped in to bargain on behalf of GAs until enough GAs were employed at Athabasca University to represent itself as a membership under the AUGSA umbrella. In 2022, AUGSA and AU began bargaining a new agreement using the same interim measure due to lack of members under the AU/AUGSA Collective Agreement. In March 2024, AUGSA and AU finalized the renewal of the AU/AUGSA Collective Agreement for the 2023 and 2024 period. The agreement expires in June 2024. Approximately 25 GAs are now employed under the AU/AUGSA collective agreement, which indicates signs of advocacy progress, growth, and opportunity for graduate students at Athabasca University.

In 2020, the Alberta Government released [Bill C32: Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplace Act, 2020](#). This bill included Graduate Students' Associations (GSAs) in its scope and outlined requirements to be met in their roles as bargaining agents for academically employed graduate students. This included the charging of dues and an effective date of August 1, 2022 to begin providing financial statements to its members. AUGSA postponed implementing the union due for core labour union activities until after the collective agreement was ratified. The bargaining process took longer than anticipated.

The amendment to the [Post Secondary Learning Act](#) is written as follows:





(4) Section 95(2) is amended by adding the following after clause (f.1):

(f.2) in the case of a graduate students association in its role as bargaining agent for academically employed graduate students, the charging of union dues and the amount of those dues;

AUGSA is the last GSA in Alberta to implement the union due. The University of Alberta GSA (UAGSA) due is 1% of regular wages. The University of Calgary GSA (UCGSA) due was 0.5% and increased to 0.6% of regular wages in 2024. A comparison of union dues provided confidence that 1% of gross regular wages is fair, considering that AUGSA has a smaller membership in comparison to other Comprehensive Academic Research Universities (CARUs) in Alberta.

The Graduate Labour Union Committee, formerly called the AUGSA Bargaining Committee, formerly called the Labour Relations Committee under the Associations' former bylaws, will be chaired by an elected Labour Relations Representative, and exists to carry out the function of ascertaining and acting on the wishes of the academically employed graduate students. The Graduate Labour Union Committee will provide representation, support, and education to academically employed graduate students at Athabasca University. This includes but is not limited to collective agreement negotiations, the handling of disputes with the employer, and advocating for a high standard of graduate student employment.

The due collection equates to approximately \$1,900/annually. This is calculated by the \$190,000 in annual wages paid out to graduate students on average over the past two years at Athabasca University. The funds are intended to be used to ensure the Graduate Labour Union is able to advocate for worker rights, educate members, and negotiate a better Collective Agreement going forward. Unused funds will go towards a contingency fund, which consists of a legal fund and a strike fund. An annual budget and financial statements will be made available on the AUGSA website as required.

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

With the renewed collective agreement set to expire in June 2024, and active graduate students now employed under the agreement, AUGSA is working to establish the remaining foundational components to properly represent and support its academically employed members. Some of the key next steps towards properly representing the Graduate Labour Union include:

- 1. Implement 1% union due and meet financial reporting requirements;**
2. Amend AUGSA policy to formally include the elected labour relations representative and establish the member-led Graduate Labour Union Committee, who must be active GA members under the AU/AUGSA collective agreement. This committee remains an independent committee from AUGSA Council;
3. Develop the Graduate Labour Union Committee Terms of Reference;





Athabasca University
Graduate Students'
Association

RECOMMENDATION

To approve a 1% union due applied to graduate assistantships under the AU/AUGSA Employment Agreement effective July 1st, 2024.

Sincerely,

Russell Rupok
Chair, Bargaining Committee

