

# NewsRelease



Public Service Alliance of Canada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Memorial University's Graduate Assistants ratify their first collective agreement**

**ST. JOHN'S, NL** - Members of the Teaching Assistants' Union of Memorial University of Newfoundland (TAUMUN) have ratified the first collective agreement for graduate assistants at Memorial.

"We are very proud of the agreement that TAUMUN has achieved," says Jeannie Baldwin, Regional Executive Vice-President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, "This is a well-deserved and long-fought victory for graduate student workers."

TAUMUN is the official bargaining agent for Memorial University's over five hundred graduate assistants. These workers are Masters and PhD students employed by the university on a part-time, semester to semester basis to carry out work that ranges from supervising and marking exams, to assisting in labs, to doing research and giving tutorials.

"This is a historic moment," said Juan Acevedo, President of the Teaching Assistants' Union of Memorial University of Newfoundland and a Master's candidate in the School of Engineering, "I would like to congratulate every member of TAUMUN, and to express our appreciation to PSAC for supporting us throughout our journey to success."

The first agreement provides for wage increases of 8 per cent retroactive to September 1, 2009, 4 per cent on September 1, 2010, and an additional 4 per cent in each of the subsequent two years, which will bring the hourly rate to \$21.15 per hour by the fall of 2012.

The agreement guarantees academic freedom and intellectual property rights to these graduate student workers, and contains a commitment by the university that job opportunities offered to graduate students as part of the recruitment process will normally be renewed for the duration of the student's academic program.

The union also achieved a commitment that non-union undergraduate teaching and research assistants will not be used to undermine the integrity of the bargaining unit.

The contract includes wide-ranging prohibitions against discrimination that exceed the provisions of most human rights legislation, including protection from discrimination based on gender identity and political opinion and activity. The local also achieved what it considers excellent Health and Safety language, including a commitment to provide a modified work program with no loss of pay or benefits to pregnant and nursing mothers who work in environments that could pose health risks to their fetus or nursing child.

Graduate Assistants at Memorial have been seeking union representation and a collective agreement since 2005. TAUMUN was certified in August 2009 when 96% of voters cast their ballots in favour of a union.

The bargaining team unanimously recommended the tentative agreement to its membership in four ratification meetings that took place on June 17 and 18 at Memorial's campus.

TAUMUN is an independently certified Union with direct chartered local status with the Public Service Alliance of Canada resulting from a servicing agreement between the parties. PSAC represents 172,000 workers across the country including over 18,000 in the academic sector.

Before the agreement can come into effect, it will go before Memorial's upcoming meeting of the Board of Regents.

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