

## RA Unionization

At the end of Summer 2019, rank-and-file TSSU activists began a well planned organizing drive to get RAs at SFU to sign membership cards to join TSSU. The campaign was initially kept secret until November 2019 when there was enough momentum that the organizing team was confident they could get majority support for the Union.

Pressure from the campaign, the labour movement, local politicians, and more forced SFU's hand, and on November 15, 2019 SFU and TSSU signed a Memorandum of Agreement of Voluntary Recognition ("Agreement") recognizing TSSU as the bargaining agent for research assistants (RAs) and grant employees. Over 924 currently working RAs had signed membership cards out of approximately 1300-1500 working at the time.

## Who's Included?

Explicitly included as part of the Agreement are Research Assistants and grant employees (RAs) who are paid as scholarship or stipend, undergraduate research award employees and work-study employees, University Research Assistants, and other similar workers. Postdoctoral fellows and University Research Associates are explicitly excluded.

## Bargaining and Breaches

Bargaining is one of the ways that we improve our working conditions! A Collective Agreement (CA) is a single contract that limits the rights of management and sets out pay, benefits and working conditions. In the 30 months since the Agreement was signed, SFU failed to keep to the timeline. Their breaches of the agreement included refusing to: give data to TSSU, bargain on time, include those who they agreed to include, and take all reasonable steps to implement the agreement.

## Arbitration

In early 2022, after years of delays, breaching of the agreement, and broken promises on the part of SFU, TSSU used our right to bring in an arbitrator to make a binding decision. On September 12th, the arbitrator agreed with TSSU and in his 137 page decision decided:

- most RAs paid compensation from grants as scholarship/stipend are included in the agreement, with the narrow exception of "true scholarship" individuals paid "purely for their own individual academic pursuits with no expectation of duties to be performed."
- SFU breached all consequential clauses of the agreement including clauses 1, 2, 4, 8 and the Appendix; and
- SFU owes TSSU damages.

## The arbitrator's words:

"[SFU's] approach was not in the spirit, intention or words of the agreement." [para 439];

"Often [TSSU] was treated as an interloper rather than a collaborator." [para 440];

"The behaviour is not a credit to SFU as an institution or its organizational capability to act in a manner on which contracting parties can rely with confidence." [para 441];

## What's next?

TSSU demanded that SFU return to bargaining and SFU relented and agreed to meet on September 22. Bargaining will set the terms and conditions of employment that apply to RAs. Bargaining concludes with a "tentative agreement" which then needs to be ratified by a referendum vote of RAs.



In addition to bargaining, we need to implement the process of who is a "true scholarship" and who is an employee. Employees will be covered by the ratified Collective Agreement. This "classification process" must be done by the end of 2022.

Finally, SFU and TSSU must determine the amount of damages owed to TSSU. If we cannot agree by November 14, 2022, then we will return to the arbitrator and he will make a ruling.

## What we're fighting for:

Now that we're at the bargaining table, here's the key priorities identified by RAs for the first Collective Agreement:

- **bring transparency** by ensuring every RA and grant employee gets an outline of: their job expectations, pay rate, hours of work, etc. Also ensure jobs where there's meant to be a competition are posted centrally online
- **protect against key inequities** our members experience such as bullying and harassment, intellectual property theft
- **value research workers by building a fair wage and benefit floor** to ensure that every RA has a living wage and access to a base level of benefits, including employer paid MSP (international student health fee), and protections of the employment standards act, WorksafeBC, paid training and orientation, etc.
- **Extend existing TSSU Collective Agreement rights to RAs.** This includes human rights and harassment protections, health and safety protections, grievance procedures, the childcare fund, intellectual property protections, tuition deferment, and more.

**Join us at [Insert Event Here]!**

# RA Unionization Timeline:

<b>2014</b>	Grad students bring the idea of unionizing RAs up to TSSU
<b>2018</b>	RAs plan a union campaign.
<b>Aug 2018</b>	Card signing starts for 1st campaign
<b>Sept 2018</b>	The campaign gets ~200 signed cards in 6 weeks, not fast enough.
<b>Oct 2018</b>	First campaign is paused and the Research is Work! motto is born
<b>Jan 2019</b>	TSSU membership discusses hiring a dedicated organizer.
<b>June 2019</b>	Our staff organizers build a team of grassroots organizers from the previous campaign
<b>Sept 2019</b>	Card signing begins in secret. The organizing team grows to 75 people.
<b>Oct 2019 (end)</b>	We go public with over 500 cards signed and 150 organizers.
<b>Nov 2019</b>	With over 900 cards, SFU offers to voluntarily recognize us. We win!
<b>Jan - June 2020</b>	Over 1000 RAs fill our surveys indicating their wants and needs
<b>June 2020</b>	SFU finally starts giving us lists of RAs after being ordered by a mediator. TSSU members elect a contract committee to bargain
<b>Oct 2020</b>	TSSU gives formal notice to start bargaining!
<b>March 2021</b>	After another mediation SFU finally agrees to begin bargaining!
<b>May-Oct 2021</b>	But SFU Admin delays and cancels bargaining dates.
<b>Nov 2021</b>	SFU proposes an offer with no health benefits and \$17 minimum wage with no increases.

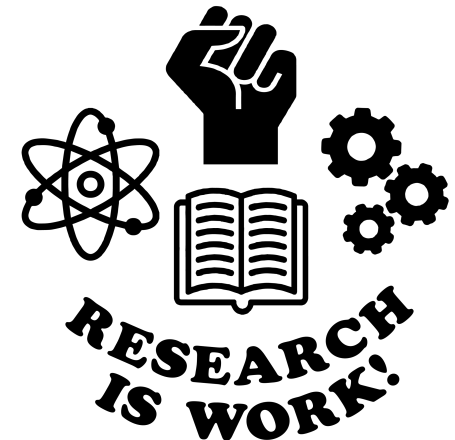
<b>Dec 2021</b>	TSSU and SFU bring a mediator to bargaining. SFU refuses to discuss bargaining and tries to negotiate to exclude a large group of RAs from TSSU
<b>January 2022</b>	TSSU files for arbitration on SFU's failure to follow the 2019 agreement.
<b>March 2022</b>	SFU and TSSU discuss and agree to resume RA negotiations using a special "without prejudice" process.
<b>April 4th, 2022</b>	More than 70 TSSU members and allies rally to demand that University admin bargain a fair first contract for RAs.
<b>April - May 2022</b>	SFU and TSSU negotiate under the new process. Negotiations get stalled by SFU
<b>May 19th, 2022</b>	TSSU and CWJ rally together and deliver a joint letter with demands to SFU Admin
<b>July - Aug 2022</b>	TSSU and SFU present their cases to the arbitrator backed by testimony and thousands of pages of documents.
<b>Sep 12, 2022</b>	Arbitration win! The arbitrator rules that SFU has violated all material terms of the agreement and owes damages to TSSU.

## How to get involved!

1. Come by AQ 5129 on Burnaby Campus to get a supporters package to help spread the word!
2. Help us organize and join our actions! Get in touch with Maria and Félix :) (TSSU Organizers): [organizer@tssu.ca](mailto:organizer@tssu.ca)
3. Get in touch with Amal and Naima (TSSU Chief Stewards) for questions about RA Bargaining and the Collective Agreement: [chief\\_steward@tssu.ca](mailto:chief_steward@tssu.ca)

# The University Works Because We Do!

**RAs unionized with Collective Power!**



**With Collective Power, we can win the rights they deserve!**