



# POST-SECONDARY



This profile is intended to provide CUPE members with basic information about the sector they work in from a national perspective. Find all our sector profiles and more information online at [cupe.ca](http://cupe.ca)

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CUPE represents 57,172 members from 126 locals in the post-secondary education (PSE) sector. Our members work in universities, colleges, and student-led organizations.

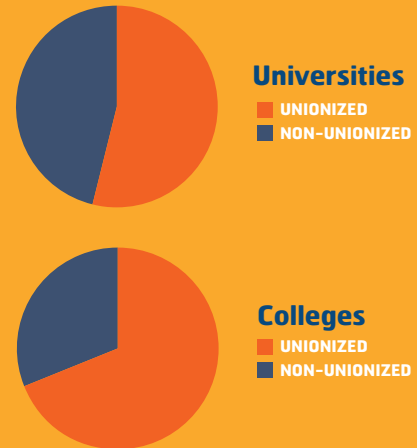
CUPE members hold a wide variety of positions in the sector. We represent instructors, researchers, teaching assistants and other academic workers. CUPE also represents support workers in areas such as landscaping, libraries, food services, maintenance, caretaking, information technology, and administration.

Around 400,000 people work in universities, colleges, vocational and trade institutions in Canada. Of those 400,000, approximately 45,000 are full-time university faculty members outside of CUPE's jurisdiction.

Union density in both universities and colleges is lower than the rest of the public sector. The unionization rate in universities is about 54 per cent, and 69 per cent in colleges. Unionization rates have grown modestly since the late 1990s.

CUPE is a major union in universities, representing approximately 25 per cent of all non-faculty employees. CUPE has far fewer members in colleges, with significant memberships in two provinces, BC and Quebec.

## Union density in post-secondary sector



## Funding

Despite overwhelming evidence that investing in PSE makes sense for Canada's social and economic well-being, the barriers to accessing higher learning are greater than ever. Universities and colleges have seen the proportion of government funding plummet since the 1980s. In 1982, over 80 per cent of university operating revenue came from government funding. Today, Canada's public funding covers just over 57 per cent of the cost of university and college education. Tuition fees have risen at over three



**2 PRIVATIZATION**  
Food and janitorial services are prime targets.

**2 CASUALIZATION**  
Universities are shifting more and more teaching load to part-time and temporary instructors.

**3 SOLIDARITY WORKS**  
In every region members are pushing back concessions.

**4 ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION**  
CUPE members are fighting for high quality, affordable public education.

times the rate of inflation since 1990, and the average student debt upon graduation is over \$26,000.

Students have been on the frontlines in the fight against the defunding of post-secondary education. Most visibly, in the fall of 2012 Quebec students, supported by many unions including CUPE, went on strike to protest massive tuition hikes proposed by the Liberal Charest government.

In addition to affecting students, including CUPE members working as teaching and research assistants, the loss of federal funding has had significant impacts on CUPE members in other ways – affecting both the quality of the service and the working conditions of our members.

 **ISSUES**

**Outsourcing and privatization**

In addition to creating a student debt crisis, loss of government funding has encouraged university and college administrators to contract out more work that was previously done by CUPE members. Targets for privatization include food services and janitorial services.

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colleges offer courses which can be used towards public university degrees. The result has been fewer course offerings for CUPE sessional instructors.

**Casualization and job security**

There is a trend of failing to fill vacated full-time food service and janitorial services, and instead relying on part-time and casual workers. In Ontario we are seeing staff layoffs in areas such as caretaking, food services, and maintenance – while universities simultaneously post for casual positions in the same areas.

Positions for full time, tenure-track teaching are being replaced with sessional instructor positions at much

lower pay, fewer benefits, and little job security. Some sessional instructors have worked for over 20 years but still need to apply for their job every four months.

In total, 39 per cent of university positions and 24 per cent of college ones are temporary.

 **PENSIONS**

Most university pension plans are employer sponsored. Most college plans are multi-employer plans established and regulated through provincial legislation. For the most part, these are defined benefit pension plans. Attacks on these pension plans have formed a major part of bargaining and have had huge impacts on the whole of bargaining since the great recession began in 2008.

The attack has had particular impact on our members working in colleges. New Brunswick has scrapped a guaranteed defined benefit pension plan in favour of a target benefit plan that shifts plan risk from the employer to employees. In Alberta, our college members are part of the Local Authorities Pension Plan that the conservative government of Alberta has been threatening to reform. Like in New Brunswick, the Alberta government aims to shift the risk for plan shortages from the employer to employees, with plan deficits paid for by retirees in the form of reduced benefits. A well-coordinated and sustainable multi-union campaign against the gutting of the Alberta pension plan has put the government on the defensive, putting the inevitability of the reforms into question.

In Ontario the government would like to make changes to pension plans in the university sector. At present each university has its own plan, and the government would prefer to move to some sort of jointly sponsored pension plan. Discussion included the pooling of investments, the creation of one central plan for all universities, or joining an existing multi-employer pension plan. In response to these suggestions Ontario's universities and the various unions that represent workers in the sector have been studying the issue and have been involved in dialogue with all participants.

 **BARGAINING**

In the recent past there have been some very difficult rounds of bargaining in the post-secondary sector, as CUPE members have faced increasing concessionary demands.

In the fall of 2013, CUPE 1393 at the University of Windsor took to the picket lines in a month-long strike, refusing to give in to the employer's demands to gut the contract's job evaluation plan and bumping system.

In 2012 the University of Regina pushed hard at the bargaining table to establish a high-risk defined contribution pension plan for new hires. CUPE 5791 and its members pushed back against the proposal. Members signed petitions and held town hall meetings. The end result of this mobilization was some minor changes to the existing defined benefit pension plan – a good deal that both parties could live with. This effort was a great example of a strong bargaining team and members taking a stand against two-tier deals that sell out new and young workers.

At Simon Fraser University, CUPE 3338 served strike notice on October 1, 2012, and over a period of eight months held rotating strikes, study sessions, and overtime bans in order to pressure SFU to negotiate a fair collective agreement. Contract negotiations were hampered by SFU's insistence that discussions of the pension plan be tied to bargaining – a position

the BC Labour Relations Board deemed as bad faith bargaining. Ultimately the local achieved a no-concession four-year agreement that was consistent with other university settlements.

The fall of 2012 also saw job action at BC's colleges, as CUPE 4627, 4951, 2773, 2081, 3479 and 1858 all hit the picket line to back their contract demands. The locals engaged in two-day strikes, departmental shutdowns, and rallies forcing the government to the bargaining table. Their action resulted in an agreement that would include no concessions and wage increases in line with those received by university workers.

**Allies**

CUPE and our coalition partners have long advocated affordable and accessible public post-secondary education for students in adequately funded colleges

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and universities. Historically, our main partners in this struggle are students represented by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), La Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), La Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), and L'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ).

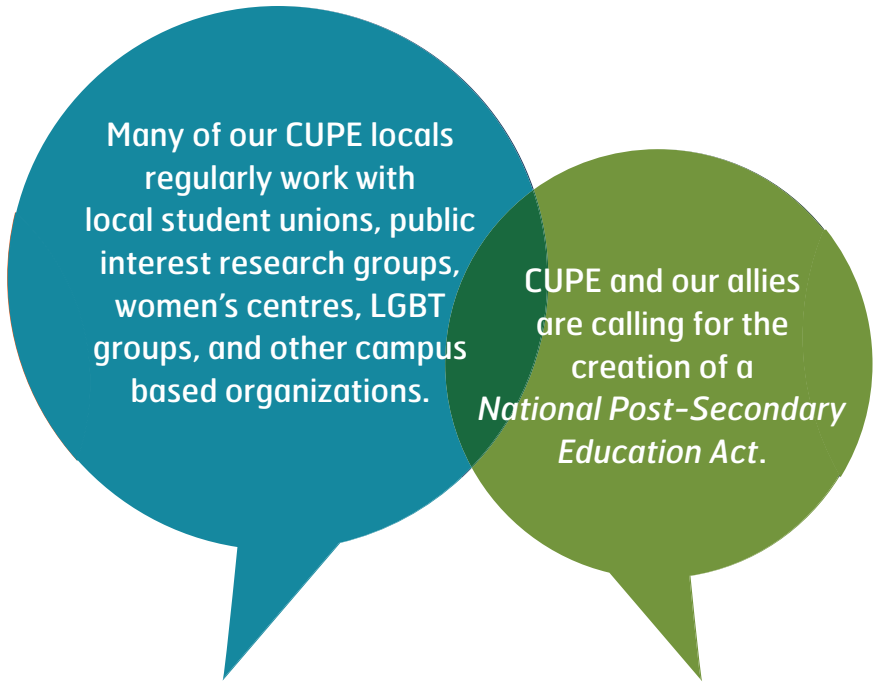
Many of our CUPE locals regularly work with local student unions, public interest research groups, women's centres, LGBTTI groups, and other campus based organizations. Many campuses have regular inter-union meetings to discuss issues of shared concern – such as pensions, benefits, contracting out, and other bargaining issues.

Other research institutes and groups that support our issues include the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), the Broadbent Institute, NDP, CLC, Federations of Labour and other unions.

**CAMPAIGNS**

**National Post-Secondary Education Act**

CUPE and our allies are calling for the creation of a *National Post-Secondary Education Act* (PSE Act) that will properly



restore the federal government's support for PSE, ensure that provincial governments meet national standards, and reduce tuition fees and student debt.

**The Future**

The post-secondary education sector suffers from severe underfunding that dates back to 1995.

We have witnessed the further entrenchment of the corporatization of colleges and universities. While at one time the leadership of these institutions was mostly senior academics and

experienced public servants, today leadership is increasingly coming from the private sector on a mission to transform the institutions themselves.

To reverse this corporatization trend, and to restore proper funding to our institutions, building coalitions with students, other unions and community groups will continue to be essential in the struggle for affordable, high quality, public post-secondary education provided by public employees who are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

**The new cupe.ca: Resources for members**

- More information for your sector
- Tools to help you and your local
- Success stories from across the country
- And more!