

Canadian Association of  
University Teachers

A large, stylized white graphic of a pen nib, pointing downwards and to the left, set against a green background. The nib is composed of several overlapping white shapes that create a sense of depth and movement.

Handbook for  
**Negotiating  
Starting Salaries**



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***Congratulations!***  
***on your job offer,***  
***but before you sign...***



LIKE MANY CANDIDATES for academic positions, you may feel lucky to get a job offer. The salary offered may seem very appealing compared with your income as a graduate student, and the prospects for renewing your position or for obtaining tenure may look impressive.

Initial terms and conditions for many academic positions are negotiated on an individual basis. This can put some candidates at a significant disadvantage and perpetuate inequities in the academy. Eliminating discriminatory pay and working conditions is an important human rights obligation for academic staff associations and unions, and the association can play an important role in helping you negotiate a fair deal.

You may feel reluctant to ask future colleagues about their salaries and other details of their individual appointments. You might assume that those colleagues who do provide information are able to represent fully what is possible in your own situation.

Meanwhile, the administration representative with whom you're dealing may be helpful and supportive. Although you might expect that misunderstandings after accepting the offer can be corrected, in many cases this may well not be true.

Perhaps you're worried that negotiating astutely for your future will cast you as a 'troublemaker.' Perhaps you doubt that there is scope for any negotiation at all. You may even feel embarrassed to ask that verbal agreements be put in writing, especially if you have been assured that the issues addressed are dealt with routinely for all employees. And the deadline for signing may be approaching rapidly.

For any or all of these reasons, you might sign a contract that will put you at a disadvantage for the rest of your career. Small differences in starting salary are magnified by annual percentage increases and can result in dramatically lower lifetime earnings and pension income. Differences in teaching load and resources to support your research can affect your ability to earn tenure and promotion. Women and members of equity-seeking groups are most likely to be disadvantaged in the negotiation process, perpetuating pay discrimination in the academy.

Your future academic staff association or union can help you obtain more complete information about the implications of an offer and the ins and outs of negotiating a fair and reasonable appointment. If you call before you sign, here are 10 important questions you should ask.



# 1

## ***What is negotiable?***

YOUR ASSOCIATION CAN advise you about the appointments process and the extent to which matters may be negotiable. For example, you may want to know the role of your Chair. Does the Chair represent your future employer? Is the Chair also a member of the academic staff association? Who is the most appropriate person in the administration with whom you should negotiate terms of your appointment? Can you be accompanied by or consult with an association representative?

Your association can provide you with a copy of the current agreement. It can help you judge what aspects of the employer's offer to you simply reiterate what's already in the agreement and what aspects are routine (as opposed to perks for you). It can help you to identify what verbal statements by the employer need to be put in writing. In some cases, your association can compare your offer to offers made to similarly qualified and experienced candidates and let you know whether it thinks your offer is fair.

You can also find out whether negotiations are underway for a new collective agreement. If so, you'll want to learn how to ensure improvements in the collective agreement will apply to you.

## ***Is the employer's salary offer fair?***

IF YOU WILL HOLD a contract academic staff position, be sure to determine whether all contract academic staff at the institution are paid at the same rate per course or whether compensation depends on qualifications or experience. You should also find out whether higher rates apply to any particular types of courses, and whether negotiation about compensation is possible.

Your starting salary is crucial, because it is the base for all future salary increases. Therefore it is essential for future tenure-stream/tenured employees to obtain information about the salary structure, especially the method of setting starting salaries and determining how they increase. These vary considerably from one university to the next. Any improvement to your starting salary will have considerable payoffs over your career. Some institutions have 'grid' structures, meaning that the salaries of new hires are based on formal qualifications and years of relevant experience. In such instances, your negotiations will focus mainly on how to count experience and qualifications, and, conceivably, on how to consider fairly your work experience outside universities or colleges (e.g., secondary school teaching, government library work, full-time parenting). With other structures, starting salaries may vary considerably, with the requirement only that they must not be below a set 'floor' for each rank. In this "free market" model, differences in individuals' negotiating power and savvy as well as discriminatory practices on the part of the employer can substantially affect their pay. You should also learn how annual salary increases are determined. Increases may depend on rank, experience, merit assessments, or other factors. Knowing the salary structure at your university or college will help you focus your negotiations and avoid mistakes with career-long implications.

Your association may be able to help you assess how your offer compares to the salaries of other members of the association. It can tell you what factors are taken into account in your institution, such as discipline, degree qualifications, and level of work experience (both inside and outside post-secondary education). You can learn whether a pay equity programme for women faculty members is in effect and whether it would affect your salary. Your association may have negotiated a process for identifying and correcting salary anomalies, which can help eliminate discrimination in compensation.

For both contract and tenure-track academic staff, salary comparisons to other universities and colleges in the province or Canada-wide can be pertinent. Do not rely upon provincial "sunshine lists" for salary data as these lists only include information on salaries above a certain level. Your association is best placed to provide accurate data and to tell you where salaries in your institution stand in relation to salaries elsewhere. Further, you can find out whether salaries have been stagnant or improving in recent years. Knowing about variations in taxation, and costs of housing, food, daycare, and even parking in university towns across Canada also may help you to put the offer in context.

### 3

## ***Can I negotiate moving costs?***

MOST INSTITUTIONS PAY for some travel and home relocation expenses. Some even help to defray immigration fees or the cost of selling a house. Your association can give you the details and advise you about what may be negotiable.

When you negotiate monetary provisions, keep in mind the difference between one-time-only payments and increases that continue annually. For example, an extra \$500 toward the one-time-only cost of moving is less beneficial than \$100 added to annual salary over the course of a career. The difference is magnified when you consider that salary levels affect benefits such as pensions, and that future annual raises may be calculated as a percentage of your salary.



### 4

## ***Are rank & tenure negotiable?***

AT SOME INSTITUTIONS, starting rank and even tenure status can be negotiated. Check with your association for advice on addressing these matters.



# ***What are the processes for contract renewal & tenure?***

RENEWAL AND TENURE recommendations are usually made by department or faculty-based peer review committees. Boards of Governors typically make the ultimate decision, with advice from senior administration. Negative decisions can almost always be appealed.

If you are offered a contract academic staff position, you should check with your association about the process and prospects for contract renewal. For example, you should know whether or how your seniority at the institution in general, or in a particular course, is taken into account in future hiring processes. The association can also inform you about procedures for job postings and about processes to appeal hiring decisions. Finally, be sure to ask whether there are any mechanisms for moving from a contract position to a tenure-stream one.

If you are offered a tenure-track position, be certain you understand the length of your initial appointment. For example, if tenure is typically decided in the fifth year, your initial appointment may be for two or three years. Your association can inform you about procedures for renewal, and tenure, and any requirements for periodic review or feedback.

While each association has its typical timelines between hiring and tenure, your association can also explain other options. For example, you may be able to extend the tenure process for parental leaves or other reasons. It may be possible to delay the tenure process (e.g., by being hired into a post-doctoral fellowship position) or to accelerate the process (e.g., by getting credit for prior work experience inside or outside a university or college). Note that with a “grid” salary structure, years of prior experience may affect your salary and your timeline towards tenure.

Last but not least, your association can provide information about criteria and standards for tenure. Your department or faculty should inform you about how your unit applies these criteria and standards.



## ***What support can I obtain for research & creative activity?***

READ THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT to know what funds are available for conferences, computers, thesis completion, sabbaticals and other leaves, research and laboratory start-up costs, and other professional expenses. You should also inquire about faculty and departmental funds for these purposes. Librarians should ask whether the agreement provides for dedicated research time.

In addition, your association and department can tell you what level of teaching assistance and secretarial support to expect, whether a teaching resource centre is available, and what you can expect for office, lab, or studio space, a computer, a photocopying account, library access, and the like. Where the agreement does not specify the funds or services you need, find out what your future colleagues have been able to obtain.

Note that, in any event, the Employer is responsible for providing accommodation, such as equipment and services, for persons with disabilities. If you require accommodation, the association can help you to acquire them.

If you are entering a tenure-stream or tenured position, you should inquire about sabbatical provisions. The agreement may specify how previous years of work experience, whether at a university or elsewhere, are converted into credits toward a future sabbatical. It should also specify sabbatical salary as a percentage of regular salary. Sometimes, negotiation is possible for additional years of credit towards your first sabbatical.



## 7

# ***What about teaching workload?***

TEACHING WORKLOAD ISSUES differ for librarians and faculty members, and for contract and tenure-stream/tenured faculty members. You should check the workload provisions of the collective agreement for your type of position, and ask future colleagues about practices in your department or faculty.

Librarians should check if the agreement covers scheduling in the library. You could also check with colleagues about flexibility in scheduled hours per week, expectations for weekend and evening work, and whether any elements of scheduling are individually negotiable.

Contract academic staff should look into how the following are compensated: course preparation, cancelling a course on short notice, or responding to grade appeals and other issues after your contract ends. You could also check on class size limits and who can override those limits.

For tenure-stream/tenured faculty, teaching workload issues include: the number and sizes of classes in a typical year; how factors such as graduate supervision or Internet course design are calculated in teaching load; and whether there is a teaching load reduction in the early years of employment.

# **What about committee work & service?**

MAINTAINING A REASONABLE balance among teaching, research and service is important for successful renewal, tenure, and promotion, as well as your health. You should read your agreement, consult with the association, and talk to colleagues in your future department or faculty, as well as your department head or dean, about expectations.

For a contract academic staff position, you should inquire whether you are expected and/or eligible to participate in committees, faculty councils, the Senate, and other governance bodies, and whether you are paid for this work.

For a tenure-stream/tenured position, your association may also be able to inform you about the level of participation in committee work and other service that is expected and about what scope you have for negotiating service contributions.

You might want to find out whether you can be required to take on administrative positions, such as programme director or department chairperson, and what teaching release and extra pay is associated with such positions.



## ***What benefits & leaves are covered?***

LEVELS OF HEALTH care coverage are ordinarily not described in a collective agreement. However, you can obtain information about benefit plans from the academic staff association for purposes of comparing job offers from two institutions or assessing the attractions of a university workplace. These benefits include coverage for extended health, prescription drugs, vision care, dental care, psychotherapy, and long-term disability. For a contract academic staff position, check if your coverage is year-round or just limited to the term of each contract. You can also check the agreement for information on eligibility and provisions of pregnancy, parental, caregiver, and medical leaves, as well as other unpaid and paid leaves.

## ***Should I worry about retirement & pensions?***

PENSION PLANS ARE a significant part of your compensation. The association can explain how the pension plan works, and give you its assessment of how effectively it is run. In particular, you should determine whether the pension plan has a minimum vesting period, whether it is a defined benefit or defined contribution plan, or hybrid plan, and if it has inflation protection (in the case of a defined benefit plan). Although these factors aren't usually negotiable, they can help you to assess and compare job offers. If any of these terms sounds unfamiliar, the association can help you out. Finally, if you are already a member of a pension plan, check if it is transportable to your new employer. If you must leave the old plan, see if you can purchase years of past service in the new one. You may need professional financial advice before making any transfer decisions.

**To find out how to contact your  
academic staff association  
call CAUT at 613-820-2270 or  
go online at [www.caut.ca](http://www.caut.ca).**

*Like many candidates for academic positions,  
you may feel lucky to get a job offer.  
The salary offered seems very appealing  
compared with your income as a graduate student,  
and the prospects for renewing your position  
or for obtaining tenure may look impressive.  
Yet signing a contract too quickly could put you at  
a disadvantage for the rest of your career.*

*This handbook, prepared by the  
Canadian Association of University Teachers,  
is a resource you should review before signing  
any university or college contract.*