

We live in interesting times: What does that have to do with a Workload Document?

21 Jan 05 – In the light of numerous pressures which seem to be intensifying around us, such as the double cohort and the Employer's attempts to re-structure us, it is imperative that all units / departments have a detailed Workload Document to enable them to resist or roll back increases in teaching loads which may be demanded, imposed or induced.

What is a Workload Document? Every unit was supposed to prepare a Workload Document by April 2000 and submit it to the joint YUFA-Employer committee which administers our Collective Agreement (JCOAA). Some units did this; some units did not; some units provided only very sketchy information. Ideally, according to Article 18.08.1 of the Collective Agreement, each Workload Document was (1) to define the number of full courses which unit members normally teach and (2) to specify what constitutes a full course in terms of the variables listed on page 90 of the Collective Agreement (Article 18.08.1).

Why should the Document be prepared now? Units which did not prepare this Document, or which prepared only very skimpy versions, should seriously consider spending some time specifying how they currently define their teaching loads and / or how they did so in April 2000. These specifications, that is, their Workload Document, should then be submitted to the co-chairs of JCOAA. The reason for honing your Documents at the present time is to protect yourselves should you be ordered by the Employer (Dean / Principal), as many units and individuals recently have been, to increase your teaching loads by, for example, increasing your class sizes, adding administrative work to your teaching in terms of having to supervise additional TAs or marker-graders, intensifying your e-mail contact with students, having more contact hours, and so on. What the Workload Document does is define what your current / normal teaching practices are because our Collective Agreement protects these practices. However, to be protected, you have to know and delineate what your practices are.

From what, though, do we need to be protected? From the efforts of the Employer to increase and alter our workloads and teaching loads in view of the pressures of these interesting times. What do these efforts look like? Most typically, a Dean will ask you to increase the size of your class, or take on extra graduate students, or do more advising because, as we all are told, York University is in financial straits, because we all have to pull together in order to provide a good educational environment, because we all want new appointments and / or because we all have a vested interest in improving our professional and academic programmes. Because of such arguments in the past, individuals and units often agreed to do more work. When they did this, their new work level became the new normal; it became their current practice. So a year down the road, four years down the road, everyone was working harder and longer. And they are still doing so.

How does one stop this escalation? There are several alternatives. The first alternative is to say “no” to a request that you increase your work. In such a case, the Dean or Principal will either withdraw the request or will order you to do the work. According to labour law, you must comply if ordered. However, you can then file a grievance. Because our Collective Agreement only permits “minor, year-to-year fluctuations” for individuals, and because the teaching load of units is defined by the collegium, your workload will have to go back to the old normal. By filing a grievance, the individual or the unit is also stating that a new normal or a new current practice is not being established.

The second alternative is for a unit to make the workload changes which the Employer (Dean / Principal) has requested but to do so only by passing a clear motion, at a unit meeting, that such changes “to individual teaching loads and / or the normal workload of the unit are temporary fluctuations and do not constitute a change to current practice(s) as defined in the Workload Document.” By this means, the individual(s) and / or unit can insist that, sometime in the future, they can go back to the *status quo ante*, to their former workload because that workload is their normal current practice. In other words, your Workload Document defines your current practices; and your current practices are protected by the Collective Agreement. Without a Workload Document which details clearly the teaching work that you do and how it is determined and delineated, you are vulnerable to escalating demands. Without a detailed Workload Document, you can never prove what your current teaching practices are or were. It should also be pointed out here that a unit should never alter the practices in this Document without a formal motion, always bearing in mind that such a motion reflects collegial practices and thus sets out what is your normal workload.

What should go into a Workload Document? Look at the YUFA website and see some [examples of workload documents](#), both good and bad. The best are the most detailed, as in the cases of the Psychology Department (Arts) and the Department of Mathematics and Statistics (Arts). These documents define clearly what the “normal teaching load” is in terms of the number of “full course equivalents” which members are expected to teach, and they specify clearly how a full course equivalent is defined. The relevant variables for specifying a full course equivalent are listed on page 90 of the Collective Agreement (Article 18.08.1).

So, fix your Workload Document. Try to do it for the year 2000 and for the present time. Do this now. Your future teaching load may depend on it.