

BALANCING WORKLOAD:

GOOD FOR RESEARCH, GOOD FOR STUDENTS, GOOD FOR YORK

YUFA Bargaining Backgrounder #3
September 2015

Since at least 2006, one of YUFA's key bargaining objectives has been the achievement of a teaching load for York faculty that is both competitive with other universities and creates the conditions for high quality teaching, learning and research. Given its position as a comprehensive university with a significant research profile, large and high profile graduate programs, and considerable undergraduate teaching responsibilities, York is an anomaly compared to similar universities around the country. Despite the ever-increasing pressure to intensify research and take on more service responsibilities many York faculty still have heavier teaching responsibilities than do their colleagues at comparable universities.

How Does York Compare to Other Universities on Workload?

It is common knowledge that, at most comparable universities in Ontario, the default maximum load for faculty members with research responsibilities is 2.0 full-course equivalents (FCEs) or less. Recent studies by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and the Council of Ontario Universities show that most Ontario faculty teach approximately 1.5 FCEs in science disciplines and 2.0 FCEs in the humanities and social sciences. At York, while we are competitive in the STEM disciplines, most academic units in other fields have a normal maximum teaching load of 2.5 FCEs. York faculty are very aware of this discrepancy: in YUFA's bargaining survey, 56% of professorial stream faculty said that their teaching load was higher than that of their colleagues in similar areas at other universities, while only 4% said it was lower.

Over the last six years, York has become even more of an outlier as other universities move to reduce teaching loads for tenure stream faculty. Our colleagues at Wilfrid Laurier and Carleton have succeeded in negotiating teaching load maximums for professorial stream faculty of 2.0 FCEs. In both of these cases, teaching load reduction is part of a strategy for strengthening the research intensity of the university, and was achieved without job action through creative work and good will at the bargaining table.

Over the same period, York's administration has strongly resisted similar proposals from YUFA, despite possessing similar or greater financial resources to support this policy. Our employer's preference has been to make faculty members compete for a limited number of research releases in a time-consuming process, diverting energies that could be better spent on our core responsibilities. Despite the Administration's insistence in the [Strategic Research Plan](#) that increasing research intensity is a central priority, they have not moved to create the concrete conditions in which faculty could meet this goal. Instead, the call for research intensification without reducing teaching load simply means that faculty are expected to do more of everything.

Rebalanced Teaching Loads: Positive, Achievable and Affordable

A key YUFA objective in the current negotiations is to address the York administration's anachronistic resistance to this increasingly common standard. Among those faculty whose load is anomalously high, 85% said in the bargaining survey that reducing their unit's normal teaching load should be a very high bargaining priority. Faculty know from direct experience that higher-than-average teaching loads have a compounding negative impact on research, teaching, and faculty recruitment. If York faculty members lack the same amount of time for their research as colleagues at other universities, we risk both York's scholarly reputation and the goal of boosting research intensity. While infrastructure and support for research activities can help, it cannot substitute for the fact that faculty's time is finite. Unrealistic teaching loads also make it much harder and more stressful for us to devote the attention and time our undergraduate and graduate students deserve, significantly impairing the student experience that the Administration has also expressed as a priority. New Alternate Stream faculty hired specifically because of their pedagogical expertise have been burdened with loads of up to 3.5 FCEs, raising concerns about whether such a load is compatible with the excellence in teaching for which they strive, which they need to earn tenure, which York students should be able to expect, and which is the stated purpose of the Alternate Stream. Finally, as we all know, high normal teaching loads in our departments often create challenges in recruiting and retaining colleagues.

Rebalancing faculty workload is an achievable and affordable goal. Reducing the default maximum teaching for both faculty with research responsibilities and for Alternate Stream faculty that can readily be paid for out of the new contingency funds York has built up, largely as a result of asking our members to pay much higher pension contributions (\$4,000 per year on average). The total cost of our teaching load proposal may be 1.5% of the total university budget, and perhaps much less. Importantly, we assume that many new tenure-stream faculty would be hired to teach the freed-up courses, so that the "paramount goal"—as expressed in the [Provost's White Paper](#)—of boosting the tenure stream complement is achieved as well.

YUFA has heard the employer's concern that the reduction of maximum teaching loads must be accompanied by assurances that individual faculty members are also making contributions to research and service. Following our colleagues at other universities, we have proposed language to provide such assurance without sacrificing our objective of bringing the default maximum professorial teaching load down to 2.0 (or lower). We remain very disappointed that the employer thus far has not responded positively to our attempt to craft a reasonable and balanced solution to this issue, especially given that both faculty groups and administrations at other universities have found such approaches acceptable. Why not at York?

Need more information about the 2015 Bargaining Round?

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