

Winning Essays

Grain and General Services Union

Scholarship and Bursary recipients



Congratulations to our 2013 scholarship and bursary recipients* who were chosen to receive \$2,000 from GSU's scholarship program.

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* Grain and General Services Union scholarship recipients are selected by GSU's scholarship committee.

* GSU's First Nations University of Canada bursary recipient is chosen by the FNUC scholarship administration.



Grain and General Services Union's First Nations University of Canada bursary

Jaqueline Anaquod

Jaqueline Anaquod is a Cree/Saulteaux woman who grew up in Regina, SK. She is a full-time student at the First Nations University of Canada in the Health Studies program with a Concentration in Indigenous Health.

Jaqueline has a strong commitment to the preservation and revitalization of her Cree culture, traditions and language. She is passionate about working with her Aboriginal people and it shows through her strong commitment to community service. She is an Indigenous feminist, advocate and activist who pursues justice, freedom, and equality for all.

Her future plans are to work in health research initiatives, specifically in Aboriginal health issues. Jaqueline is single mother, her biggest accomplishment and greatest teacher is her daughter, Chanai. Jaqueline credits her traditional knowledge keepers, Elders and mentors who have provided her with direction and guidance to achieve balance in all her endeavors.

There is no essay requirement for this bursary.



Grain and General Services Union's scholarship recipient

Jennifer Brown

Jennifer Brown was born and raised in White City, SK. She graduated from Greenall High School in 2013 and is currently a first year student at the University of Regina, majoring in Museum Studies. Jennifer's plans for the future include not only obtaining her Master's degree in her chosen subject, but also obtaining a secondary degree in either Paleontology or Anthropology. After finishing school, her goals include curating an exhibit in a nationally recognized museum or sharing her knowledge in a learning institution.

Jennifer's father, James Brown, is a GSU sub-local 1.1 member working for Viterro in Balgonie.

"I would like to thank the GSU for awarding me this scholarship and supporting my future education. As well, I would like to thank the GSU for supporting my family throughout the years."

Jennifer Brown

GSU Scholarship Essay

July 1, 2013

*Taking A Stand: The Most Important Benefits To Be Fought For If One Was On A
Union Bargaining Team*

The collective bargaining process maintains the terms and conditions of any unionized occupation, including important matters such as wages, medical benefits, workplace safety, and hours of work. For a union, collective bargaining is a key activity that must involve all of its members to be successful. Unions need to fight for the wants and needs of the people under their sphere of influence, while also coming to a suitable compromise with employers. Bargaining committees don't just fight for their own ideas; they fight for the betterment of all their union members. The following depicts what I would fight for and why.

When bargaining for a suitable contract with employers, the first point raised is usually centered around money. Fair and equitable pay is an important and standard demand: Pay must be equal to, or higher than industry standard to maintain a competitive job market. Wages must also be high enough to keep up with the cost of living and maintain a suitable standard of living. Though most places of work have some form of pension plan, union members often seek better retirement benefits to secure their future and retire above the poverty line. In an economy where jobs are becoming increasingly scarce, job security is a focal point for union members. Unions protect their members by negotiating for job protection that ensures that their current jobs will not be outsourced.

While money is an important factor in contract bargaining, it is not always the most important topic for those you are representing. In a society where there's a pill for every problem, health benefits such as dental plans, vision care, and standard medical coverage are important and expensive items to barter for. Without medical coverage, members feel they are required to work even while sick and, as such, pose a risk to others they are working with.

Everyone wants to feel safe in their workplace. This includes access to proper equipment, job training, protection from discrimination, and suitable hours of work to name a few. Unions advocate for suitable training in the workplace and attempt to ensure their members are never confronted with discrimination. Standard hours of work and the mandatory breaks that accompany them are also items that bargaining committees make sure are not swept under the rug. These safety issues should be addressed at each and every bargaining session.

If I were on a collective bargaining team I would fight for the needs and wants of those I was representing: be it wage increases, job security and retirement planning, workplace safety, or medical benefits. Different demographics seek different benefits. Younger individuals often seek higher wages, while union members with families will opt for medical benefits and job security. Senior members are often looking for solid pension benefits that will keep them fluid in their retirement years. But, perhaps, the most important thing I want to ensure is this: that I bargain for the people I represent. They're the reason I am on the bargaining team to begin with and it is their wants and needs I will fight for.



**Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient**

Erika Dowling

Erika Dowling was born and raised in Prince Albert, SK. She graduated from Carlton Comprehensive High School in 2012.

Erika is currently a second year student in the College of Agriculture & Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan where she is majoring in Crop Sciences. This past summer Erika worked at the Viterra White Star location. As an employee, she became a member of GSU Local 1.

"I would like to thank the Grain and General Services Union for their generous scholarship. It is greatly appreciated and will be a huge help as I pursue my Bachelor of Science in Agriculture."

Assume you are a member of a union bargaining committee with the responsibility for bargaining a contract with your employer covering the employees at your workplace. What do you think would be the most important issues to be bargained into the contract — and why are they important?

As a summer student and new employee at an ag retail and grain facility my top priorities to include in a contract would be for the employer to provide safety equipment and hands-on training to all employees. On any given day there are countless grain trucks and semis, delivery trucks, forklifts, augers, tractors and other vehicles moving around my work environment. These vehicles are often transporting grain, fertilizer or chemicals that have the potential to cause personal and environmental damage if the employees are not properly trained and informed about how to handle them. This is why I think it is so important to have work boots, reflective coveralls or vests, a hard hat, gloves and safety goggles provided to the employees so we are visible and have less risk of coming into direct contact with the products we are handling.

In addition to the initial training of employees like me, who are working in the chemical sheds or around the yard, the permanent employees who work in the office, grain elevator or scouting fields would also benefit from additional training and continuing education. If the employer provided funding for seminars or training days it would give all of the employees an equal opportunity to further their knowledge in their particular area of work. In turn, more knowledgeable employees would be a great asset to the company.

Although these are issues that I think would benefit the employees at my workplace on a daily basis, I would be sure to survey my coworkers before I tried to negotiate a contract. All of the employees are at different points in their lives and have different priorities. For example, many of my coworkers have families of their own and would therefore benefit from having a reliable work schedule as well as time off to spend with their family. I would propose having days off for parental leave, sick leave, as well as bereavement days in the event of a death in the family. I think it would also be important to have increased pay for over-time to make it worth it for the employee to spend extra time at work instead of spending that time with family.

Job security is a concern for any employee, but it is especially real in the agriculture industry. Ag retail facilities are so busy when farmers are seeding and spraying and scouting fields throughout the spring and summer months, but when the winter comes there is a decline in business and employees may be laid off. In this case, workers should be given plenty of warning or partial salary.

I believe that the employees have a right to have their opinions heard and considered in the event of a major change in the company they are working for. An example affecting my coworkers right now is the Viterra take over. I have seen how a change in ownership or management can impact the employees of a company and cause stress over what is going to happen to their careers, workplace and customers. This is why I think there should be a policy of open communication between the employer and the employees so they can stay informed about what transitions are happening with the company that may affect their business.

Any workplace has a diverse set of personalities, so I think that it would be beneficial for there to be a process outlined on how to handle conflicts between employees or between employees and supervisors. I feel that having a process in place would help to resolve or even prevent a conflict from escalating and interfering with other employees or workplace operations. That way, everyone involved would hopefully have their concerns addressed and resolved in a fair and professional manner.

Finally, I think that it would be important to negotiate a strong health benefits plan for any members of the union and their spouse or family. As the nature of many of the positions at my workplace have many injury risks, I think that it is important to provide good care to an employee in the event of an injury at work. I think that helping to keep your employees and their loved ones in good health makes for a happier, stronger employee that will be more productive for you.

If I were to bargain a contract for my workplace, these would be the most pressing issues in my eyes. I think that these conditions would help provide a safe, knowledgeable, fair and happy work environment to the employees.



Grain and General Services Union's scholarship recipient

Alex Laird

Alex Laird is 20 years old. During the past two summers he has worked for Viterra Ag Retail in Swift Current, SK as a summer student.

For the past two winters since graduating from high school Alex has played hockey in the SJHL (Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League) for the Nipawin Hawks and the Kindersley Klippers. Alex currently lives in Saskatoon where he is attending the University of Saskatchewan, taking a four-year commerce degree.

"I would like to thank GSU for awarding me with this scholarship and I will do my best to put it to good use."

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Alex Laird and I am currently employed for a second year in a summer student position at the Viterra Ag Retail Centre in Swift Current, Sask., and am a member of the Grain Services Union. I have held a variety of jobs in both union and non-union workplaces, including a local privately owned seed company. As well, both my parents belong to unions; my dad works for Sasktel (Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada-33 years), and my mom is a Registered Nurse (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses-23 years). I have grown up enjoying the benefits of a union and as an employee have experienced how unions influence the lives of the employee in both union and non-union workplaces. My personal and work histories have given me a good understanding of what is important to the employee in a union contract.

As a member of a bargaining committee I would try to focus on the issues of job security, safety, benefits and wages. I have been working at Viterra during a very stressful time due to the sale of Viterra to Glencore and the resulting restructuring of the company. I have experienced the effects of job uncertainty and feel it is important to offer job protection whenever possible (even for summer students!!). Corporate decisions are made without consulting the employees, but have a direct impact on their lives and the lives of their families. I realize these decisions must be made, but would advocate for corporate responsibility to their employees.

Job safety is another issue that needs to be addressed in every contract. The company and employee share the responsibility of ensuring a safe workplace. At Viterra, employee and customer safety is a top priority. I would work hard to maintain and improve upon existing workplace safety regulations.

Medical and dental benefits are also essential to improve the lives of employees and their families. The mental and physical well being of an employee adds positive value to the workplace and brings prosperity to the company. Benefits are a commitment from the company to the employee and their family. They also act to draw and retain quality, skilled employees who are willing to make a long-term commitment to the company.

Finally, wages are another major issue that needs to be part of a contract. Competitive wages are an important benefit that attract and retain quality, skilled employees. A company's success is driven by its employees and when the prosperity of a company is shared with employees it directly influences employee recruitment and retention, and improves workplace moral.

In closing, there are numerous on-going issues which need to be continuously addressed in union contracts such as hours of work, pensions, vacation and sick time allowances, etc. However, I feel job security, workplace safety and benefits such as wages, medical and dental coverage are the cornerstones to a successful union contract for both the employee and company.

Sincerely,

Alex Laird



**Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient**

Erin Rauert

Erin Erin Rauert was born in Humboldt, SK, and raised on a farm near the town of St. Gregor, SK.

Erin graduated from high school in 2012 and she is currently enrolled in her second year of Arts and Science at St. Peter's College in Muenster. After Erin receives her English Writing Diploma from St. Peter's she intends to enrol in law school at the University of Saskatchewan.

Erin's mother, Deanna Rauert, is a GSU Local 1 member.

"I am extremely grateful to be a recipient of the GSU scholarship. Opportunities like these allow me to continue my education."

As a member of a union bargaining committee, it would be of most importance to express the best interests of all employees within the bargaining unit I would be representing. Taking on this responsibility, I would choose to focus on areas which would benefit every employee. The most important issues to be bargained into the contract to achieve this goal would include pension and medical benefits, safe working conditions with reasonable hours of work, and a defined wage increase for all employees.

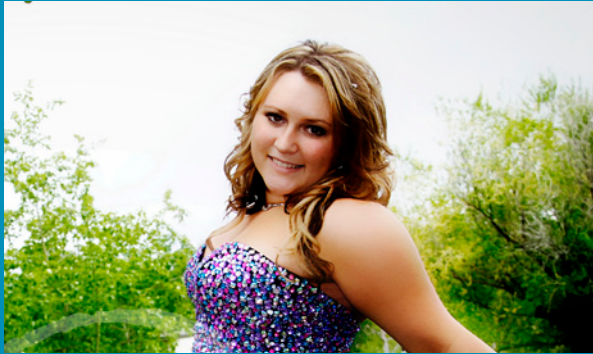
A reliable pension is one of the most important benefits that can be negotiated within a union, because it ensures the ability to retire, as well as security after retirement. A good pension plan benefits every worker in some way, despite the length of time they spend within the union and all employees would appreciate the security that it brings. I believe it is important for workers to achieve a full pension after being a committed employee for many years. A portion of medical and dental coverage is another crucial benefit in which I would focus on negotiating, because again, it benefits all employees equally. For families faced with health issues needing numerous prescriptions, a medical insurance plan is key or else it becomes very costly, and with no coverage, certain employees may have to spend a majority of their income on these medical obligations. For traveling workers, it would be necessary to cover all travel expenses and I would attempt to negotiate that driving workers receive a company vehicle for all company traveling to avoid wear and tear on their own.

Ensuring proper working conditions would be next on my agenda as a member of the union bargaining committee. I would highly value having the knowledge that my workplace was as safe as possible and that I would not be over-worked, under-paid, or mistreated as an

employee. I would attempt to negotiate specific safety regulations and programs to teach workers how to handle any equipment or dangerous goods they may be dealing with. It would also be important to negotiate to have a safety committee monitoring all employees to ensure no one is jeopardizing the safety of others. Reasonable work hours along with proper overtime, holiday, and vacation pay would be negotiated into my union contract as well.

Wages are also very important. Competitive starting wages must be negotiated into the contract to attract employees to a company. The opportunity to gain a higher wage based on good performance is important within a union as well, as it keeps workers motivated and rewarded for their efforts. I would negotiate set yearly performance review to allow employees who are beneficial to the success of the company the chance to be recognized for their contributions with a bonus or wage increase. Finally, to have the knowledge of exactly how much wages would increase in a year over the balance of the contract would be a major benefit, as it allows employees to know what to expect from their union. This defined wage increase, by percentage per year, would be one of the most important things I would be negotiating because all workers deserve that knowledge.

When negotiating a union contract if I were part of a union bargaining committee, I would choose to focus on the above because these are things that I highly value and I know others do as well. Competitive wages, great benefits, and a safe and fun work environment would all be assets to any company and would be appreciated by all employees.



**Grain and General Services Union's
scholarship recipient**

Darrienne Sauer

Darrienne Sauer is a self-described country girl from Kelvington.

Darriene graduated from Kelvington High School this year. She is currently enrolled in the Arts and Science program at the University of Saskatchewan, and she hopes to eventually study veterinary medicine or pharmacy.

Darriene's father, Darren Sauer, is a GSU sub-local 1.14 member and her mother, Tracey Sauer, is a member of SGEU.

Important Bargaining Issues

The first step to Bargaining a successful Collective Agreement would be to listen to Membership issues. A Collective Agreement is for the members, the Union and the Employer; therefore the Members should have some say as to what is important for them to have in their Collective Agreement. A look back on past grievance issues should provide any clarity as to areas where language needs to be firmed up. Once this is completed and the tweaks are taken care of, you need to look at major issues or wants of the membership. I believe the following issues would be the top priorities for union Members:

1. **Benefit Plans:** Ensuring that members' benefits meet the needs of the rising costs of health care is important. It is very important to everyone to remain healthy by providing them access to dental, optical, prescription medicine, chiropractic, massage, preventative medicine such as vaccinations to keep employees and their family's health. Being able to afford to provide this kind of care eases the burden and stress on families. Access to sick leave and disability plans is also very important to lessen the burden of being sick and unable to work. Without sick leave, people go to work and may cause injury to themselves or others because they cannot afford to lose the pay.
2. **Family Leave:** Being able to take time off to attend the needs of family is important. After all most people work to support themselves and their family, but they need to be able to balance both work and family. GSU has a great Pressing Necessity Leave and Serious Illness Leave that allows for their members to be off work for emergent or illness situations but not for Family Leave situations, such as graduation, wedding, birth of a grandchild. It would be very nice if we could start to look at positive life experiences and hold them within the same regard as the negative ones.

Important Bargaining Issues

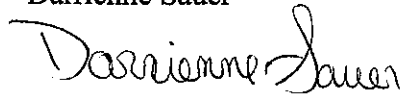
3. Wages: Of course one of the top priorities in any work situation would be wages. Cost of living goes up and everyone wants to see their wages go up too.
4. Pension: At my age I find it funny that as soon as you start to work, the first thing you think of is retiring, so Mom and Dad say, and in order to do that, you need to have a good pension plan. If you cannot bargain one that will provide a retirement income that you can survive on, then you will need to look at other retirement investment options, as the Canada Pension Plan may not be there when the younger generation retires. If the Union cannot Bargain a strong pension plan then they should look at a matching RRSP contribution program or other options to assist members to retire with dignity not with poverty.

These are the issues that I believe that the Union itself needs to be strong on due to the Saskatchewan Governments new proposed amendments to the Labour Law Review- Bill 85. The Sask Party has already tried to make major amendments with Bill 5- The Public Service Essential- Services Act, Bill 6 The Trade Union Amendment Act and Bill 80- The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, which the first two are still under review but the third they did pass. Now with the proposed Bill 85- Unions will have a whole new battle field. They will now have to refight for Rights that were fought and won 100 years ago. Unions will need to make sure that there is strong language to protect Job Security/Contracting out of Services, Maintenance of Membership, dues deduction, Raiding of Membership, Decertification language, Hours of work, Vacation, Over-time, Seniority and more. If this Bill does go through, there may not be a wish list for the Collective Bargaining Agreement as it may be so diluted and torn apart that the Unions will be starting from scratch. Instead of Unions working with Employers to provide better working conditions and

Important Bargaining Issues

relations for all, they may first have to rebuild their Union from what membership is left for them, that is of course if the old existing Union is still the Union in place. It is a scary world out there for Unions Right now and it may be a fight, but one worth fighting for.

Darrienne Sauer

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darrienne Sauer".