

## Questions Regarding A Potential Strike for a Better Future

- 1) **What would we be striking for?**  
We would be striking—as we have been negotiating—for a better future for our students, our university, and our community. A stable learning and working environment, one which appropriately compensates employees and, therefore, retains them, creates the conditions for learning to flourish among students, and supports a sustainable and viable university, which nurtures a diverse and growing academic and local community. If we strike, it would be in defense of a hopeful future for all of us.
- 2) **What does a strike authorization vote do?** A strike authorization vote passes power from the members to the union leadership to call a strike. The vote does not automatically trigger a strike. Union members cast votes on whether or not to authorize the Union's Executive Board and the UPI leadership in Chicago to call a strike if the leadership deems it necessary.
- 3) **Who can vote to authorize a strike?** Only union members. If a person does not belong to the UPI--are fair share--they cannot vote. We get a list of current union members every month and of current fair share payers. We will be using the March 26th list. It will be supplemented with any cards signed by new members and delivered to Rich Filipink before close of business on April 17th.
- 4) **I haven't signed a re-card card yet, does that matter?** It does not. Members' current membership under their old cards will work for this election.
- 5) **When could a strike occur?**  
If the membership authorizes a strike, a Notice of Intent to Strike will be filed with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board. There is a 10-day waiting period from the time we file our intent to strike before we can actually hold a strike. However, once that 10-day period has lapsed, the Union may call a strike at any time.
- 6) **Do negotiations continue during a strike?** Yes.
- 7) **Aside from not working, what are members' roles during a strike?**  
Walking the picket line is one of the most important duties members have during a strike. It provides a potent visual representation of strike solidarity and it serves the practical purposes of educating the public (in our case mostly students) and any strike breakers hired to work in our stead why we are on strike and to dissuade them from crossing the picket lines.<sup>1</sup> If a strike occurs, contact Patrick McGinty, [mcgintypjw@gmail.com](mailto:mcgintypjw@gmail.com), to schedule your picket time. We need strike captains--the persons responsible for keeping a particular picket going during a particular time slot by keeping up people's spirits, dealing with any problems that arise at a picket till union leaders can address it, knowing how to speak to the media if they drop by, etc. Strike Captains will receive training.

---

<sup>1</sup> It's unlikely that external scabs will be hired.

## If We Must Strike for a Better Future

Contact Patrick McGinty, [mcgintypjw@gmail.com](mailto:mcgintypjw@gmail.com), to volunteer for this important job.

- 8) **Besides walking the picket lines, what else can we do?** Ferry food and drinks to picket-walkers. Take picket-walkers to off-campus restrooms. Help the Communication Team with making and distributing flyers around campus and town explaining the strike. We will need poster makers and button makers--we have the machine. If a strike occurs, contact Jim La Prad, [jlaprad@icloud.com](mailto:jlaprad@icloud.com) if you are interested in helping with the Communication Team.
- 9) **I'm from the media, with whom do I talk?** Jim La Prad, Ph.D.  
Media Contact, UPI  
Professor, Educational Studies  
Western Illinois University  
(309) 340-1876  
[mediacontact@upilocal4100.org](mailto:mediacontact@upilocal4100.org)
- 10) **What would a strike look like for faculty?** If a strike were to occur, faculty would be asked to cancel classes, withhold all their labor from the University, and support the Union by picketing each day of the strike.
- 11) **What about Advisors, Admissions Counselors, etc.?** Same as faculty. Withhold their labor and join the picket line.
- 12) **It sounds like the university is threatening our health insurance. What gives?** We communicated the administration's vaguely threatening folderol to our benefits experts and

received this answer, "In response to the University's assertion that "[t]he University is not required to provide insurance benefits during a strike. A strike may adversely impact benefits, depending on the duration and timing of the strike", it should be noted that insurance benefits are provided by the State of Illinois through the Department of Central Management Services (CMS), and, as such, decisions concerning the termination of insurance benefits are largely outside of the control of the University.

While we cannot predict with certainty what CMS will do, in previous strike situations involving faculty at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2013, the University of Illinois at Springfield in 2017, and Southern Illinois University in 2011, insurance coverage remained unaffected for employees during those strikes. While we cannot guarantee employees will continue to receive insurance coverage during a strike, the Union would regard any attempt to cancel insurance benefits as a change in practice by the State of Illinois and would take the necessary legal action to prevent that from occurring or if it does occur to sue to stop it." Translation: Ignore the administration's scare mongering.

- 13) **So what about health insurance during a strike?** Health insurance is paid in advance. If you work the first day in a month, you have health insurance for that month. CMS does not have a history of withholding insurance during the first calendar

## If We Must Strike for a Better Future

month of a strike, e.g. if a strike occurs on the 10th of a month, CMS will cover you till the end of that month.

14) **What happens after the end of the month as regards health insurance?** You should exercise your option to use COBRA.

15) **Will my pay be docked for going on strike?** The University has the legal right to withhold pay during a strike, so technically you can be docked for the days you do not work. Any potential strike will be called in such a way to attempt to avoid disruptions to health insurance and minimize any loss of pay.

16) **I have a nine month contract and am on 12-pay. Can the university withhold my pay this summer?** It can prorate the time a person spends on strike, and deduct that, but it cannot withhold someone's entire summer pay. 9-month employees have already earned this money and it cannot be withheld from them. Pension payments would also be made and health insurance--again as they are already paid for via 9-month earnings.

17) **I am retiring in May, will going on strike affect my pension?** If we go on strike in May, the union is cognizant of retiring members' needs and would be understanding.

18) **Will the university know who participated in the strike?** The strike vote itself is confidential. Striking by its nature is public. Just as a student's absence from class is

a public fact (seat is empty), if someone is on strike, their absence is visible to management.

Regardless, no one individual can be isolated for their involvement in a strike — a majority of the membership will be taking collective action and standing in solidarity together. You are under no obligation to inform management in advance as to whether you will be taking part in a strike or any other action.

19) **How do I communicate with my students about the strike?**

Formally, it is the administration's responsibility to explain to students that classes are to be cancelled on strike days. However, you may wish to talk to your students before a strike and explain to them that our goal has been – and continues to be – to build a better future for our students, our university and our community. Let them know that we are still hoping to avoid a strike, but that if a strike occurs, you will be unavailable for office hours, email communications, courses, etc. We will be providing additional information for students and faculty in advance of any strike activity.

20) **Will my WIU e-mail account be unavailable during a strike?** The university can shut employees out of its e-mail servers during a strike. That would likely include the ability to forward e-mail from WIU accounts to our private e-mail accounts. Likewise, access to library databases, to Western Online, to WIUP could also be denied. Or not.

## If We Must Strike for a Better Future

Management did not do any of these at UIS in 2017 during their strike.

- 21) How will the union communicate with us during a strike?** The UPI will utilize its FaceBook presence for updates. <http://bit.ly/2qz0pgS> We will also be using off-campus e-mail addresses provided to us by our members. If you have not yet provided yours to us, please send it to Michelle Filipink at [mfilipink@upilocal4100.org](mailto:mfilipink@upilocal4100.org)
- 22) Can I talk directly to the Union Leadership?** Always. William Thompson 309-318-9111. If I don't get back to you right away, it is likely because I am in negotiations.
- 23) Can I call in sick or take personal days during a strike?** Using those benefits means you are still "at work." When you are on strike, you are not at work.
- 24) Can I be fired or laid-off because I am on strike?** No. Your right to strike is protected under Illinois law. The strike vote is one of the mechanisms that make any strike action we take legally protected. You have a right to withhold your labor in a concerted action (strike) and cannot be laid off or fired because you used this right. This would be viewed as retaliation.
- 25) Can I go to my office during a strike?** Going into any campus building involves crossing "the picket line."<sup>2</sup> Before a strike occurs, remove

everything you think you will need (and that belongs to you) from the office. It is possible that the university may attempt to ban strikers from all university facilities.

- 26) I teach online. Can I teach my online classes?** You're on strike—withholding your labor. So no online work.
- 27) What about emailing students?** Emailing students is part of our job—and we are on strike.
- 28) Answering emails from students?** Technically, no. Again, if a strike occurs, we are withholding our labor. That said, there may be good reasons to answer some emails.
- 29) What about first-year temporary faculty members. They are not in Collective Bargaining Unit . Can they cross the picket line?** Temporary faculty are not in the CBU—therefore, not on strike.
- 30) What if someone is in Collective Bargaining Unit, but not a Union Member. They never signed a card. Are they on strike?** Good question—and a moral one. As they are not union members, they would not be on strike--though they could honor the picket line and not work. It is not unusual for fair share payers to not publicly support the strike, but, then, not come to work either. Fair-share payers who do cross (dishonor) the picket line will reap the rewards of a strike without taking any risks or suffering any loss. They

---

<sup>2</sup> Even if no picketers are visible in front of, say, the Documents and Publications building or the

---

Art Gallery, there is a picket line there. It is there 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## If We Must Strike for a Better Future

will also be intentionally and publicly working to undermine the interests of friends and colleagues who are on the picket line.

- 31) **If someone is not a negotiated employee, but sympathetic to the union, can they walk with us on the picket line?** Yes, they can! Students are welcome. Alumni are welcome. Children are welcome. Non-negotiated employees can come on their lunch break. If doing that feels too risky, send good vibes or find some other way to support those on the picket lines (Food and water is always appreciated!)

- 32) **I belong to the union. I support the union. But I don't want to hurt my students by going on strike.** A strike will not hurt students' near or long-term ability to have complex, enriching lives, and secure gainful employment. Strikes at schools regularly occur across the nation and students end up doing just fine. They often walk the picket line with their teachers. Any immediate impact from the strike as regards grades, etc. can be remedied after the strike is over. Seniors will still walk through graduation.

Not going on strike, on the other hand, may well hurt students as the loss of compensation and benefits makes the university less attractive to both new and current faculty.<sup>3</sup> When faculty resign, the curriculum resigns along with them. When advisors resign, the institutional knowledge they possess walks out

---

<sup>3</sup> Over the last two years, faculty have resigned at twice the usual rate.

the door. When admissions counselors leave, they use their expertise to help other schools increase their enrollment. The educational quality of the university declines, contributing to enrollment decline, which in turn makes the learning and work environments ever more unstable, contributing to further enrollment decline and greater instability. This is not the formula for a better future for our students, our university, and our community.

- 33) **Will a strike hurt enrollment?** It's hard to say. Will the grad student strike at UIUC, a strike that received national attention hurt enrollment at the UIUC? It may increase the number of graduate students applying at the UIUC as the strike increased both graduate student wages and benefits. The strike has made the UIUC more attractive for talented graduate students. The faculty at UIC went on strike a few years back, received pay increases, and a contract, and their enrollment has only gone up.

- 34) **I repeat last question: WIU is not UIUC or UIC.** Again, whether a strike would hurt enrollment and, if so, by how much is difficult to say. Why students come or do not come to WIU is a simple question with a difficult answer or set of difficult answers and we haven't gotten a full grasp on them yet.<sup>4</sup> It is in no one's

---

<sup>4</sup> For instance, decreasing tuition by 3% at WIU has removed income from the university without stopping or even easing the enrollment slide. That seems counterintuitive--and that's what we mean by complex and "difficult to say."

## If We Must Strike for a Better Future

interest for enrollment to further decline. Nor is it in our interest to decrease educational quality—which also has strong enrollment implications. Cutting union pay and benefits (retirement being the biggest one) takes money out of the classroom and away from serving the students and sends it where? Where has the money we've taken out of the classroom since 2010 gone? It's not gone back into the classroom or into academic services for students. Encouraging faculty to leave the institution or decrease their institutional commitment (lower their morale) is in no way good for students.

35) **Why won't the administration take the same permanent cuts they want to impose on us?** If I understand them correctly, they are tired of taking furloughs themselves. They believe they have suffered enough. Likewise, they are *not* tired of UPI members taking permanent cuts and not getting raises. They believe we ought to suffer more. That's about it, really.

Management's refusal to take the same cuts they want us to take undermines their own argument about the need for the cuts, dire fiscal need.<sup>5</sup> Fairness and logic would demand that if the need for cash were so serious, management would take permanent cuts alongside employees. Indeed, they'd exhibit leadership and take deeper permanent cuts. But the 2% cut is not about the budget. The need is not dire. Fairness has nothing to do with it. The 2% cut is about

management's desire to erase the 2% raises that both UPI and AFSCME took in 2016. They're trying to permanently cut AFSCME's (civil service) salaries, too, and for the same reason. People off campus are routinely astonished and appalled that the administration is not taking the same, or deeper, cuts. It seems obvious that you don't ask employees to take permanent cuts if you are not taking permanent cuts yourself. It's a matter of trust or its violation.

---

<sup>5</sup> It's also phenomenally maladroit leadership.