

UMFA STRIKE VOTE INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

I heard my professors, instructors, librarians, and archivists are discussing a strike – now what?

We continue to push to meet with the administration for a settlement at the bargaining table. We intend to give negotiations every possible chance to succeed. Strikes are rare at the U of M. Since 1995, UMFA has only gone on strike twice, in 2001 and 2016.

The strike vote is taking place October 30, 31, and November 1. A 'yes' vote doesn't necessarily mean that there will be a strike. Professors, instructors, and librarians will only go on strike if negotiations fail.

What are the issues?

This round of negotiations is referred to as an article-specific "re-opener". It means that articles in the Collective Agreement (CA) specific to salary and compensation are open to negotiations at this time.

In 2017, after the last CA was signed, UMFA and other unions went to court to challenge legislation that strictly limited salary increases for public sector workers. Government interference in bargaining in 2016, coupled with this legislation, resulted in the administration denying UMFA members the 4 years of salary increases it had already offered to give, which included annual increases of 1%, 2%, 2%, and 2%.

In 2017 both UMFA and the Administration agreed to account for the status of the PSSA during negotiations in 2020. The PSSA was declared unconstitutional this past June, yet the University has offered a 0% increase to compensation, in line with a mandate that came from the Province in August, and is refusing to budge.

Since 2016 the University has continued to be in a healthy financial situation due in part to annual increases in enrolments. The University reported an enrolment increase of 10.7% for the summer session and a 3.9% increase for Fall. Meanwhile, academic salaries at the University have continued to be the lowest amongst medical-doctoral universities in the country, making it difficult to remain competitive and retain faculty. Faculty at the U of M are currently ranked 13 out of 15 in terms of salaries paid to academics at similar institutions.

It seems like things have escalated quickly, what happened?

It may seem that way, but we have been bargaining since August. Since our first meeting with the Administration, they have not made any offers, nor have they changed their position. In early October, UMFA proposed that both sides' proposals be sent to a third-party arbitrator to settle. On October 16, the administration rejected this proposal. UMFA will continue to push the Administration for a settlement at the bargaining table.

Why did UMFA have its strike vote during the middle of a term instead of at the beginning, so students can choose to withdraw and get a refund without the possibility of penalties?

Our Bargaining Team has met with Administration a half-dozen times since the summer, and will continue to offer to meet, in the hopes of settling an Agreement at the bargaining table. We don't have an Agreement at this time because the university continues to insist upon a 0% increase to compensation. A strike vote can help motivate the Administration to be more flexible at the table so negotiations can proceed.

Students will not be penalized if there is a strike. We will work with Administration to make sure you don't lose credits, or fail to graduate on time. We understand students have legitimate fears. But no job action at the UofM has ever resulted in students losing their credits.

What will a strike mean for me? What can I expect?

If a strike is called, UMFA Members will not be teaching, supervising, or doing any committee work while the strike lasts. They won't be grading papers, or submitting grades. They won't be answering emails from students, or posting their lecture notes online. There will be various actions such as car rallies or very small clusters of picketers spaced throughout high visibility places.

Once the strike is over, our Members will formulate a plan to make sure you catch up on your coursework.

How can I show my support for UMFA?

We appreciate all messages of support we are receiving from students and staff. You can share your message of support by emailing UMFA at faum@umfa.ca. You can also find us on Facebook and Twitter and can help share our messages there. Other opportunities to show support will be shared on our social media channels as well.

You can call (204-474-9345) or email the University of Manitoba's President, Dr. Michael Benarroch at president@umanitoba.ca and ask that he take every possible step to prevent the strike by negotiating a fair agreement.

You can also ask your program's Student Association to pass a motion expressing support for UMFA, and have them send it to us and President Benarroch.

You can also speak to your UMSU or UMGSA representatives and ask them to pass a motion in support of our demands. The more voices the administration hears, the more likely they are to listen!