

Why vote yes? A Strike Vote FAQ

Updated 23 October, 2020
General Job Action Information

1. [Background](#)
2. [What is a strike vote, and why would I vote 'yes'?](#)
3. [Picketing during a pandemic](#)
4. [How do I explain all this to Students, Neighbours, and Friends?](#)

1. The Background:

- Our proposal has three elements: restitution for lost salaries due to the unconstitutional PSSA; salary asks for this year, including a revision of the salary grid so that it's more equitable; and needs related to working during the pandemic.
- Normally the university would demonstrate interest in at least one element of our proposal. While we remain ready to bargain, they have not engaged in conversation and have held strong to the status-quo, a 0% scale increase.
- The university made us a salary offer in 2016 and because of the PSSA wasn't able to give it to us, and have been saving that money in their operating surplus. Despite the pandemic, they have the funds to pay us.
- Our offer of arbitration demonstrates our commitment to peaceful resolution of this round of bargaining, with no disruption of student programs. Administration has refused.
- We need a positive strike vote to show them that they need to take our proposal for binding arbitration seriously.

2. What is a strike vote, and why should I vote yes?

What is a strike vote?

A strike vote is a legally mandated secret-ballot vote open to everyone in a bargaining unit. A yes vote by a majority of those who vote gives the Executive Council the power to call a strike should one be needed.

A yes vote doesn't necessarily mean there will be a strike. A strong vote on its own might see the administration start to take bargaining seriously, where up until now they've made absolutely no moves at the bargaining table.

*At Monday's General Meeting there will be a vote on whether or not to call a strike vote. **It is not the strike vote itself.***

We're in the middle of a pandemic. Why should I vote yes?

We've given our best arguments, presented a petition with some 700 signatures, and publicly protested around the Administration Building. Without a strike vote we have no other way to

pressure the administration to change its position. Not taking a strike vote means we have little recourse but to accept the status quo – a 0% increase to salaries, the same salary grid, no additional financial support for child and dependent care, and no payment of the salaries that the government snatched away.

At this point neutral, third-party arbitration is the best way forward for both sides: where the administration has rejected all our reasoning, an arbitrator will have to take it into account; where the government has mandated a 0 percent increase, the binding decision of an arbitrator will allow the University to say the final decision was in line with the law and going rates in the post-secondary sector.

The administration has responded to all our requests with a flat no. A strong yes vote will demonstrate that we're serious about our proposals, and that they need to make some movement at the bargaining table.

There are other reasons to vote yes:

- The University is in good financial health, and can afford to pay (Read: [The UM's Financial Condition](#)).
- We're the strongest union on campus. If we take a 0% increase, other campus unions will also have to take that hit. If we win an increase, there's a better chance that they can too.
- We're paid some of the lowest salaries among medical-doctoral institutions in Canada. The administration acknowledges this problem, and is on record stating that they want to change it. We need to give them an incentive to do so.
- Enrolments are up – in terms of credit hours, over 10% in the summer and over 3% in the fall – this means there's still a demand for a University education, and that the University is receiving more income.
- We're working more hours because of the pandemic, and inflation is effectively shrinking our salaries.
- The government intervened in negotiations in 2016 because they knew the salary offer the administration made would set the tone for the rest of the public sector. We joined a coalition of unions to fight the Pallister government's wage-restraint legislation because we were all under attack. If we accept another 0, we set a precedent that other employers are sure to follow. If we get an increase, other unions can point to *us* as a precedent.

The administration has heard our arguments and is unmoved. No one wants a strike, but if we don't demonstrate a willingness to withdraw our labour, the administration has no reason to change its current offer.

3. Picketing during a pandemic

What does it mean to be locked out or on strike?

For most, this will mean involvement in socially-distanced demonstrations, or cluster pickets (see below) for at least 3 hours each day, from Monday through Friday. Picket Benefits will be \$200/calendar day (i.e. \$1,400/week) and are tax-free.

To be on strike requires withdrawal of your labour from the Employer and engagement instead in strike duty. Striking members must cease all teaching, supervision, advising, library work,

service, and administrative duties. Members must not hold, or make available, online or off-campus classes. All service duties, such as participation on any committees must also be discontinued. All administrative services provided by UMFA Members, including Heads, Associate and Assistant Heads, Coordinators, or by Graduate and Undergraduate Chairs of Departments, must be withdrawn. Examples of such service are the processing of tenure and promotion files, and the approval of submissions under administrative IT systems such as Concur.

Beyond withdrawal of services, members are required to contribute to job action in order to receive strike benefits.

What will job action involve in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Conventional picket lines are out of the question. UMFA has contracted Occupational Hygienist Dorothy Wigmore (<https://www.wigmorising.ca/services/>) to advise on issues surrounding the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), hygiene and ventilation, and to develop guidelines for safe job action based on all applicable local, provincial, and federal legislation, ensuring that neither UMFA members, their families, nor the public at large, experience enhanced risk owing to UMFA-coordinated activities.

These activities will include:

- **An Active Social Media Presence**
UMFA will produce content advocating our position to the broadest audience possible on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TIK TOK.
- **Socially-distanced Mass Rallies**
We will organize safe, yet effective demonstrations such as car rallies (honk-a-thons) on campus and at strategic off-campus locations like the Manitoba Legislature.
- **Picket Clusters**
We will disperse small groups of picketers (≤ 5 individuals) among strategic locations to get our message out to decision-makers and stakeholders. A list of such locations is being developed by the Job Action Committee, but tentatively will include locations on-campus, the Manitoba Legislature grounds, the offices of Members of the Provincial Legislative Assembly, and other high-visibility public locations, particularly where members of the labour movement have been subject to unjust treatment under the Pallister government's unconstitutional implementation of the Public Services Sustainability Act.

Will I need to declare to the administration that I'm on strike?

No. To strike, you don't have to make any formal declaration. To receive the strike benefit (\$200/calendar day), you have to perform strike duties and withhold your teaching and service work from our Employer. Do that, and you're on strike.

Will my health benefits continue if I'm on strike/locked out?

UMFA will pay the cost of maintaining health benefits. This means you will have access to the dental plan, extended health benefits, and your other benefits during the period of the strike. Your life insurance will continue to be in effect.

How much money do I receive when I'm on strike?

Picket Benefits will be \$200/calendar day (i.e. \$1,400/week) and are tax-free. For most, this will mean being involved in socially-distanced demonstrations, or cluster pickets for at least 3 hours each day, from Monday through Friday.

I will be unable to walk the picket line due to a medical condition. Does this mean I can sign up for another activity?

All members who are able to walk a picket line are encouraged to do so. There are a number of different activities that Members can sign up for while on strike. This includes services like transporting members; clerical duties including phoning members, students and parents and handling mail-outs; and communications including assisting with media releases, handouts and updates to Members. There will be a strike support questionnaire to all Members in advance of any strike action where Members rank their preferred activity.

What kind of assistance is available in terms of childcare during a strike?

Unfortunately, we're not in a position to provide childcare. Please indicate your preferred strike duties according to your existing childcare arrangements.

Members on Leaves/Reduced Appointments

If I'm on Maternity Leave, Parental Leave, Sick Leave, or Long Term Disability, will my salary/benefits continue to be paid?

Yes. In the event of a strike or lockout, if you are currently on leave for the above reasons you will continue to be paid and have access to your benefits. You will not be expected to participate in demonstrations or rallies, and will not be eligible to strike benefits (aka 'picket pay'). Any ally can, however, show solidarity by participating in rallies or demonstrations, and on social media.

If I am on research/study leave, will I be on strike/locked-out if a strike/lockout occurs?

UMFA Members are withdrawing their teaching and service labour. Members on research/study leave will not be expected to participate in any form of job action, and will not be eligible for strike benefits (aka picket pay). Any ally can, however, show solidarity by participating in rallies or demonstrations.

I am currently on administrative leave. What are my obligations in the event of a strike?

UM staff who are on administrative leave after holding a position other than that of Department Head (e.g. Associate Dean) are not Members of the UMFA bargaining unit, and are neither eligible for strike benefits nor legally able to strike. Any ally can, however, show solidarity by participating in rallies or demonstrations.

If I am on a reduced appointment, do I receive the full strike benefit amount or half that amount?

If you are a Member of UMFA and perform your assigned strike duties, you will receive full strike benefits.

I might be on a scheduled vacation during a strike/lockout. Will I still be able to support the picket lines/receive the strike benefit?

Depending on circumstances, strike benefits may or may not be provided for Members who leave Winnipeg for vacation during a strike/lockout. Contact the office to discuss your individual situation in the event of a strike.

Strike and Tenure

Does supporting a strike influence my future tenure/promotion?

No. Participation in union and strike activities is a legally protected right in Canada. If you feel you may be experiencing retaliatory or discriminatory behaviour due to union activities, please contact the UMFA office for assistance.

Does the time spent in lockout/strike extend my tenure clock?

Upon return to work in 2016 we negotiated an agreement that stated that “Probationary periods shall be extended by not less than the number of days on strike, **unless the Member declines the extension....**”. In the event of a strike or lockout this will have to be negotiated with the administration.

Conducting Research During Strike /Lockout

Should I continue my research during a strike/lockout?

As UMFA Members we are withholding teaching, administrative and service duties. If you have research activities underway that have time constraints or laboratory responsibilities you will be provided with passes to cross the picket line in order to maintain the viability of laboratories, care for animals, or carry out other duties necessary to prevent the loss of data and assure the resumption of normal research activities after a strike/lockout.

Supervising/Communicating/Working with Students

Am I allowed to advise/communicate with students using personal contact info during a strike?

As advising and communicating with students is part of your regular work, it should cease for the duration of the strike.

Will students continue to participate in course work during a strike/lockout?

The administration does not require students to attend classes during a strike. However, students are responsible for keeping up with all assigned class work. Once classes resume, remediation plans will be developed. Students can learn more about their rights and responsibilities by contacting UMSU.

Clinical Practices and Supervision

I offer clinical services to the community and students. Will I continue to offer these services in the event of a strike/lockout?

Where emergency situations arise, passes will be provided as necessary. Contact UMFA to discuss specific details related to your situation in the event of a strike.

4. How do I explain all this to Students, Neighbours, and Friends?

What can I tell my students about potential job action?

If your students ask you questions about a possible strike, you can tell them that you'll talk about it at the end of the class. Stress that it won't be during class time, that they don't have to stay to hear the answer if they don't want to, and that what you say won't be on the exam or graded in any way.

What you might tell them: UMFA, which represents professors, instructors, and librarians, is currently bargaining with the Administration over salary and compensation for damages we suffered because the UM collaborated with the provincial government's Public Services Sustainability Act, which has now been ruled unconstitutional. We're also discussing salary increases for the current year.

However, the Administration has walked away from the bargaining table and no further talks are scheduled. UMFA wants the Administration to agree to submit all proposals to a neutral third party for arbitration. This is the best way to ensure a fair outcome for everyone.

In 2016, the University Administration offered UMFA members salary increases that sought to address the fact that UMFA salaries are among the lowest in the country for medical-doctoral universities. The government secretly intervened, and the administration reduced their offer to zero. When the provincial government soon after created wage-restraint legislation that meant no salary increases for four years (0%, 0%, .75%, and 1%, the amount mandated by the PSSA), the University did not have to comply, but did. This law has been ruled unconstitutional. We're asking for the increases that the administration initially wanted to give, but didn't.

UMFA salaries have not kept up with the cost of living. UMFA salaries are already almost at the bottom of the U15 list of Universities, the list against which the University of Manitoba Administration measures itself. Even salaries at the University of Saskatchewan are tens of thousands of dollars higher than at University of Manitoba.

Not only is this unfair, but it also creates problems for recruitment and retention of new faculty, which has an effect on students.

The university is in a very good financial situation, and enrolments are up. Because of the pandemic, our workloads are also way up.

UMFA is asking the administration to agree to submit all proposals to a neutral third party arbitrator.

We don't know whether there will be a strike, and we will have to live with uncertainty for a while. We hope we don't have to strike. In the 2016 strike, regulations were passed stating that students could not be penalized for their attitude towards the strike, the university calendar was modified to allow courses to finish, and a notation was put on students' transcripts to show a strike had taken place during that year.

We're the strongest union on campus. If we take a 0% increase, other campus unions will also have to take that hit. If we win an increase, there's a better chance that they can too.

The government intervened in negotiations in 2016 because they knew the salary offer the administration made would set the tone for the rest of the public sector. We joined a coalition of unions to fight the Pallister government's wage-restraint legislation because we were all under attack. If we accept another 0, we set a precedent that other employers are sure to follow. If we get an increase, other unions can point to *us* as a precedent.

You can also point them to this link – [an FAQ for students](#).

What can I tell my neighbours about job action?

You want a fair deal, but the university administration hasn't changed position at all over eight weeks of bargaining.

In 2016 the university administration, recognizing that UMFA members were underpaid relative to counterparts at other Canadian research universities, offered thousands of dollars more in salary as part of their bargaining offer. That offer was pulled off the table after the government intervened. The Labour Board declared that move illegal and fined the university.

The next year the Pallister government introduced the unconstitutional Public Services Sustainability Act, further eroding our salaries. We're asking that those losses be made up.

Enrolments are up; tuition fees are up; workloads are up; the University is in good financial health; and the PSSA has been struck down. Yet, the administration refuses to offer any increases to compensation. Sending our proposals to binding arbitration is the best, and fairest, way forward.

We're the strongest union on campus. If we take a 0% increase, other campus unions will also have to take that hit. If we win an increase, there's a better chance that they can too.

The government intervened in negotiations in 2016 because they knew the salary offer the administration made would set the tone for the rest of the public sector. We joined a coalition of unions to fight the Pallister government's wage-restraint legislation because we were all under attack. If we accept another 0, we set a precedent that other employers are sure to follow. If we get an increase, other unions can point to *us* as a precedent.