

Picketing in a Pandemic?

A Strike FAQ

Updated 6 November, 2020

General Job Action Information

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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 remained ready to bargain, they did not engage in conversation and held strong to the *status quo*, 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 demonstrated our commitment to peaceful resolution of this round of bargaining, with no disruption of student programs. Administration continues to refuse it.
- After 3 days of voting (from October 30 to November 1), 80% of voting UMFA Members approved potential strike action over the University of Manitoba Administration's refusal to agree to binding arbitration, with a turnout of 85% of the UMFA membership.
- On November 5, UMFA and the university agreed to mediation, but UMFA set a bargaining deadline of Sunday, November 14 at 11:59 p.m. in order to avoid protracted, unproductive mediation. Should no agreement be reached by that time, a strike would begin at 6:00 a.m. on Monday, November 16.

2. Job action during a pandemic

What does it mean to be on strike?

To be on strike requires withdrawal of your labour from the Employer and participating 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.
Communication with students regarding academic matters must cease.**

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Heads, Associate and Assistant Heads, Coordinators, or by Graduate and Undergraduate Chairs of Departments, must be withdrawn.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?

Normal picketing tactics are unadvisable given the rampant spread of Covid-19 in Winnipeg of late, so UMFA members will be expected to engage in online and socially-bubbled picket activities that get our message across.

These typical strike duties will include:

- **Daily Weekday Online Picketing**
Each day, UMFA will provide a list of priority issues that we hope to promote using social media, or direct to certain target audiences such as MLAs, or members of The University of Manitoba's Board of Governors. Members will be asked to promote those issues by posting content on social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TIK TOK. Further, members will like/dislike or comment on content posted both to social and mass media sites, along with forwarding news stories with a favourable spin so as to trigger google analytics to share those stories with others.
- **Daily Weekday 1-hour Picket Cluster Meetings**
Each weekday, members will join in a 1-hour Zoom-based meeting hosted by an UMFA Picket Captain with members of their picket cluster (assigned based on responses to the member survey) so as to share and develop strategy and celebrate achievements
- **Socially-distanced Mass Rallies**
Once each week, members will be expected to participate in safe demonstrations such as car rallies (honk-a-thons) on campus and at strategic off-campus locations like the Manitoba Legislature.

For those who have legitimate medical reasons that preclude their participation in typical strike duties, alternative strike duties will be assigned by the Job Action Committee.

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.

I have concerns about my personal financial obligations during the strike. Is there any form of temporary assistance available for the period of the strike so that I can still meet my financial obligations?

UMFA has established a Hardship Fund to which Members can apply for assistance. Loans will be provided on the basis of need. If a strike is called, we'll make application forms available online. We also recommended that you contact your financial institutions as soon as possible to explain the situation and discuss payment options during a strike or lockout. Such institutions can be surprisingly accommodating and may offer supports, services, or options you don't know about.

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.