

UIC United Faculty – The Power of Organized Thinking

STRIKE FAQ

Who can go on strike?

Anyone who is in the bargaining unit is authorized to go on strike, and whether or not you participated in the strike vote to participate. Striking is a right of every union represented employee regardless of whether you are a membership or not in the organization. However, access to certain financial assistance programs offered by IFT/AFT/AAUP are only available to members who have signed UICUF union cards.

What does a strike look like for faculty?

Faculty are asked to cancel all classes, office hours, and participation in committee work and other activities and to support the union by picketing for a few hours each day of the strike. There will be designated locations on campus which faculty and supporters can go for instructions and signs. We will also have a place to get coffee and snacks. Look for email with more details if we strike.

Picketing will be peaceful, and is a good opportunity to show our resolve to the administration, as well as stand in solidarity with our students, fellow faculty members, supporters from the university and community. Strike activities include, but are not limited to:

- legal picketing at entrances to campus buildings,
- rallying in central/visible locations on campus
- peacefully distributing literature to students and the public,
- speaking out to the public as to the purpose of the strike,
- serving on the contact team for the local, state and national media,

For a successful strike we need to mobilize numerous volunteers to show our solidarity and strength.

But what if I just want to stay home from work and not do any of those activities?

There is no such thing as being partially on strike. Support of a strike means we do not report for work or perform work duties for the duration of the strike. But it also means that we get out and do as much as we can to make the action successful. We each must decide what that means given the nature and scope of our work at a public research university.

How does picketing work?

Picketing is a lawful expression of our first amendment rights. It is our most visible expression of purpose and solidarity. We can picket at any public place, but we cannot completely block an entrance or exit, or cause a danger to health and safety. Before any picketing events, we will confer with IFT legal counsel, the Chicago Police Department, UIC Police, and the Illinois State Police to ensure that we are in compliance with their directives, local ordinances and state laws. All picketers will be given a list of proper conduct on a picket line.

Before the first date of our strike, members will receive an email informing them of our central meeting location for picketing. They will then be given signs and directed to walk back and forth in front of doors to buildings where classes are commonly taught. Members should not yell at those who decide to cross the line; but our picket lines ARE the message that anyone in the bargaining unit who enters the classroom is undermining our solidarity.

Will my pay be docked for going on strike? What about insurance?

The university has the legal right to withhold pay during a strike but the issue must be bargained with the union. UICUF also has a substantial strike fund for members in need, and zero interest loans are available through the IFT/AFT as well. We believe that there should be no disruptions to health insurance since, assuming a strike later in April, we will be “pre-paying” for our monthly insurance on April 15 when we receive our paychecks. During other recent strikes at University of Illinois, including our strike in 2014, the employer still provided health insurance.

Will the university know who participated in the strike?

You are under no obligation to inform management in advance as to whether you will be taking part in a strike or other action. No one individual can be isolated for his or her involvement— a majority of the membership will be taking collective action and standing in solidarity together. Recording or threatening to record the names of employees who engage in protected activity is against the law.

If you are asked by your department head or chair about striking: Don't answer. Their request about whether or not you will be working - even if phrased innocuously - can be perceived as chilling your rights under the IELRB. You should show them a copy of the strike notice UICUF filed and tell them it is illegal for them to ask faculty about participation. If they persist, immediately inform a union representative or [email us](#).

Can I be fired or disciplined for striking?

No. Your right to strike is protected under Illinois law- whether you have signed a union card or not.

A strike is legal under Illinois Law if procedural conditions are met. To “fire” us or attempt to retaliate against us because of participation in this legal action violates the Illinois Labor Act (115 ILCS 5/14a) which prohibits an educational employer from:

- “interfering, restraining, or coercing employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed under the Act.”
- “discriminating in regard to hire, tenure of employment or any term or condition of employment to encourage or discourage membership in any employee organization.”

Dismissal, termination, non-renewal, or other forms of discrimination to break a strike will be vigorously opposed. IFT/AFT/AAUP legal funds are earmarked to protect these rights.

Many workers in the University of Illinois system have been on strike, and none were disciplined or fired. Any bargaining unit members who believe they are being singled out for disciplinary action as the result of participation in this strike should contact their union representative immediately.

What about Students, Graduate Employees, Civil Service Employees and others on campus?

During the strike, individuals may be crossing the line specifically because they are not in our bargaining unit.

This includes some lecturers whose appointments make them ineligible for membership. Many, including TAs, have clauses in their own union contracts that prevent them from striking in sympathy with other unions. Some people will have the ability to work elsewhere or to take a vacation or personal day, but others have no choice but to work on the days of our strike. We will not try to persuade them not to cross, though we will provide them flyers that inform them of what we are doing and why, and we will invite them to picket with us once they are out of class or off work.

Can the university use graduate students to teach my classes while I’m on strike?

Graduate assistants and teaching assistants are protected from teaching load increases through their Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) union contract.

My unit requires me to document which days I do and do not work. How do I deal with this?

You should not provide any information about whether or not you worked on the days UICUF was on strike. It is an unfair labor practice for administrators to document who does and does not participate in a strike. If someone challenges you on this, you should show them a copy of the strike notice UICUF filed and tell them that they cannot ask faculty about participation. If they persist, you should immediately inform a union representative or [email us](#).

How do I communicate with my students about the strike?

We are a union of professionals and we know that our members don’t like taking any action that affects students.

However, when we take action, we are making a case for the quality of the service we provide. We believe that our students will be hurt far more by management’s actions than our own. Observing the strike is defending the interests of staff and students alike. Undermining the strike will only serve to encourage management and we will all suffer more in the longer term. Formally, it is management’s responsibility to explain to students if classes are to be cancelled on strike days. However, you may wish to talk to your students before the strike explaining why the union is taking this action, and we have provided a one-page leaflet for this purpose.

I have federal grants that require me to continue working. What should I do?

You may continue working on grant-funded research that mandates you continue working—our strike is of labor contributed directly to the university, with whose administrators we are negotiating. But classes, committee meetings and other university functions are included in the strike.

If a strike happens, what about my access to university equipment?

Remove anything you’ll need from your office before the proposed strike date. Please do not pop-in to your office or lab during the strike - even for a minute.

How does my immigration status affect my right to strike?

Individuals who are H-1B visa holders and permanent residency visa holders (Green Card) have the right to strike as a lawful activity. F-1 visa holders have the right to strike or not strike unless the US Department of Labor certifies the strike, at which time F-1 holders must not report for work (in essence F-1 visa holders cannot be used as strike breakers.) There are no specific rules about strikes for J-1 visa holders. The safest advice for J-1 visa holders is to stay within the wording of the Exchange Visitor Program in which they are enrolled. It is clear that J-1 visa holders cannot be used as substitutes or replacements for other employees who are on strike. Questions or issues about visa matters should be directed to the designated strike committee contact person.

Email questions to uicunitedfaculty@gmail.com. For immediate concerns, call or text Jeff Edwards at 773-895-6499.