



Strike Prep Fall 2018

FAQ for Academic Student Workers

Teaching Assistants | Teaching Fellows | Research Assistants | Course Assistants | Tutors

I. The Basics

Why are we going on strike?

The union for academic student workers at the New School (SENS-UAW) has been in contract negotiations with the university senior administration since August 2017. In all these months, the administration delayed negotiating over economics seriously until we went on strike in May 2018. Since then they have continued to offer small discounts on tuition and healthcare, and small wage increases which will not benefit members in a meaningful way. After a democratic vote in February 2018, with 99.4% voting in favor, the bargaining committee was empowered to call for a strike, if necessary, to move the administration to negotiate fairly with our union. This semester we have been conducting a petition and have 200 academic student workers and counting signed on. If you would like to sign on to commit to strike, you can do so at bit.ly/sens-commit-to-strike.

What is our demand?

Although we've agreed to many non-economic proposals with the administration, they are stalling negotiations over critical economic proposals, including wage increases, healthcare benefits, childcare subsidies, and fee and tuition remission. To see where both sides stand currently, click [here](#). **We are striking to demand that the administration put meaningful economics on the table to secure a contract this semester.**

The New School claims it has no money. Is this true?

As it stands right now, SENS-UAW's entire proposed economic package would be an increase from 1.4% of the The New School's total operating budget to 1.85%. Though we don't have the endowment of institutions like Columbia or NYU, we have money, it's just being disproportionately allocated away from teaching costs and towards administrative costs. The New School has spent less on instruction, per student, than the median for 48 comparable institutions from 2011 to 2016. Where The New School is outspending its peers is in "institutional support." This means general administrative services, financial operations, legal operations and marketing and communication.

How was the decision to set a strike deadline made?

The strike authorization vote, which empowered the bargaining committee to call for a strike if necessary (with 99.4% voting in favor) added pressure on the administration to take our demands seriously, after they stalled not offering us any response on economics for four months. They tried to continue to stall to reduce our negotiating power over the summer, and we have come back as strong as ever, and now will be ready to strike.

By October 2018, both sides had finalized most of the non-economic articles in the contract, after months of push back against basic protections from the administration. On economic proposals, the administration has continued to make only small incremental moves on small offers on insignificant offers to begin with. For example, On October 23rd, the administration brought the eligibility threshold on their healthcare proposal down from an academic student worker having to work 10 hours and earn \$4500 in two semesters to \$4250 which increased the percentage of eligible student workers from 9 to a mere 11 % leaving most of our members deprived of any healthcare benefits.. In response to continued administrative intransigence and incompetency, the Bargaining Committee set a strike deadline for November 26.

Have we won anything in negotiations so far?

Yes! We've negotiated over most of our non-economic proposals, winning some historic protections that will not only improve our own academic community, but will form a strong basis for future private university student worker unions. These include:

- Extended reporting times for cases of discriminatory (including sexual) harassment
- Enforceable, grievable, nondiscrimination procedures for hiring
- Stronger intellectual property rights
- Late pay protections
- Hiring and onboarding procedures including workload protections and appointment letters

What are my legal rights for striking?

Work stoppage, or striking, is a right protected by federal labor law. The best way we can prevent The New School from taking the extreme step of breaking the law and firing someone is by having mass participation in the strike so that it is difficult to single out any individual.

Thousands of RAs and TAs have engaged in strikes over the last few decades at public and private universities. Retaliation is any instance where your employment conditions are changed

or decisions about your employment are made in retribution for activity with a union. All forms of retaliation are illegal, with the exception of the withholding of pay (or benefits) for the time in which you withhold your labor. In May 2018, no student faced legal action because they went on strike.

Are departments allowed to refuse to hire me in the future if I strike?

The law protects our right to strike and makes it illegal for The New School to retaliate for protected activity. Thousands of RAs and TAs have gone on strike across the US and have avoided this problem. Again, mass participation is our best protection against The New School even contemplating this kind of extreme action.

I'm an international student worker. Can I still strike?

International students have the same legal protections as all other members of our bargaining unit. They are protected from illegal acts of retaliation and have the same ability to file grievances as domestic students.

I support unionization, but I can't afford to stop working. What can I do?

The decision to participate in a strike is a big one. In the event of a strike that lasts more than seven days, all striking workers would be eligible to receive strike pay from United Auto Workers (the national union we are affiliated with) of up to \$200 per week for the duration of the strike. We will also raise money independently (a strike fund) for those who would face extreme hardship in a strike (e.g. those with families), as we did successfully in May 2018.

Do we go to the classes we are students in while on strike?

You would not have legal or academic protection if you refuse to go your own classes. However, we ask faculty outside our bargaining unit to hold their classes and other teaching activities off campus, to not cross the picket line in solidarity with academic student workers.

Do we continue working any other jobs at the New School we have? (i.e. administrative)

Yes, however, students who hold non-union jobs can strike those jobs as well in sympathy with the union. The only employees who cannot strike are ones who are covered by a contract with a no-strike clause.

II. How to talk to faculty about a strike

Make sure they know the basics. Make sure faculty know what SENS-UAW is, that we are negotiating our contract, and that we have a legal right to strike. Here is an [email template](#) you can send to your professor outlining what a strike entails.

Make sure they know the numbers. Make it clear that the University is NOT broke, and that their misplaced priorities are hurting both students AND faculty. Additionally, you can point out that our most critical demands at this juncture are wage increases, healthcare, childcare

subsidies, and fee remission. These benefits are critical so that we can teach and research to the best of our ability. New School students do not receive the same financial packages as our peer institutions, and it is critical that we address our financial precarity through contractual protections.

If your faculty members seem supportive, let them know there are ways that they can help. In May 2018, we circulated a faculty support letter with over 400 signatures. You can view this and share it with your faculty members [here](#). Faculty can also help by supporting SENS-UAW on the picket line and moving their classes out of targeted buildings in the event of a strike. You can also tell them to talk to other faculty and deans and explain why they should support SENS-UAW.

III. How to talk to students about a strike

Tell them about what's on the line. Many students simply don't know about the financial reality of academic student workers, and are sympathetic when they learn. [Compared to other institutions](#), The New School provides virtually no financial support or benefits for their student workers.

Remind them that our working conditions are their learning conditions. We can't be the best teachers we can be if we are stressing about our ability to make ends meet, or are putting off taking care of our health because we can't afford to go to the doctor.

Remind them that we care about them and have done everything possible to avoid a strike. Our proposals are reasonable and backed up by our members' needs, research, and rationale. We've shown ourselves to be willing to compromise and work with the administration. But if a strike is the only way to pressure our administration into respecting our economic needs, we have to be prepared to do so. They can sign a student support letter to stand in solidarity with their TAs and TFs (bit.ly/SENS-student-support).

We encourage students to contact the administration and resolve the strike before it even happens so their education is not disrupted.