

SENS - UAW NEWSLETTER

- Fall 2020 -



WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL. WE'RE YOUR UNION, SENS-UAW LOCAL 7902, THE UNION OF ACADEMIC STUDENT WORKERS AT THE NEW SCHOOL.

Welcome back to school. We're your union, SENS-UAW Local 7902, the union of academic student workers at The New School. Our union also includes part-time faculty at TNS, Health Services workers at TNS, and adjunct faculty at NYU.

OUR HISTORY

After years of organizing around student and worker issues, we affiliated with the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) in 2014, which represents more student workers than any other union in the U.S. After a supermajority of student workers at TNS signed stating they wanted to form a union, we petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for a union election while asking the university administration to voluntarily recognize our union. A three-year legal battle followed wherein the New School hired union-busting lawyers to try to silence us at every turn.

However, we prevailed. In 2017, 99.4% of us voted yes to form a union (502 "Yes" to 2 "No) in an official union election. When, in 2018, the university stalled during bargaining and offered measly economic benefits, We went on strike with overwhelming support from students, research centers, unionized staff, and over 400 faculty members. In the spring of 2019, We secured a strong first contract, which was ratified by 89% of our members

Since then, we have continued to stand up to the school's administration when it attacks our rights as unionized workers.

In the fall of 2019, for instance, when the school moved to take away healthcare coverage from

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our spouses and children, we filed a grievance and linked up with other campus groups. As a result of our contract and organizing, the school reversed its decision and will continue to provide dependent healthcare coverage. More recently, when the Trump administration tried to kick F-1 visa students out of the country under the pretext of COVID-19, we connected with lawyers, elected leaders, and other unions of student workers to push back. Ultimately, the Trump administration reversed course, allowing F-1 students to stay in the country even if their school is online-only.

Summary of Union Benefits

A union is all about collective power. As individual employees, each of us is powerless to shape university policies. But when we come together and organize, we gain power over the university administration. We translated this power into a union contract that provides us with rights and benefits. It's impossible to enumerate all of them here. Below, you can find an incomplete summary:

1. Annual Wage Increases
2. Health Insurance Premium and University Services Fee Rebates
3. Protection against Discrimination and Harrasement
4. Pay for Cancelled Assignments
5. "Just Cause" protection from being fired arbitrarily.
6. A grievance procedure to enforce your rights and benefits

DUES

What are dues? Unions aren't funded by wealthy donors or millionaires; they're funded by the workers that they comprise, including you! Union dues are 1.44% of your total compensation of your position. There's also a one-time, \$50 initiation fee. After you've signed up to become a member, dues and the initiation fee are deducted automatically from your paycheck and sent to the union.

To be clear, union dues do not represent a decrease in your pay. The pay raises we negotiated in our contract outweigh the amount we pay in dues.

It costs money to run a union. The dues money goes towards enforcing our contract with TNS, hiring organizers and lawyers when necessary, and ensuring we get the benefits we negotiated for. Right now, the UAW staff who are working with us are doing so thanks to the dues we are paying.

Fighting Back Against the University: Grievances and the Grievance Procedure

When the university administration violates our contract, either by instituting a policy that hurts all of us or by mistreating one of us as an individual, what do we do? Fight back!

One of the most powerful tools that we have at our disposal with which to fight back is our contract's grievance procedure. If the university violates the contract and will not fix the issue, we can appeal to a neutral, third-party arbitrator who has the power to make a decision with which the university must comply. In short, the grievance procedure takes power away from university administrators and gives it to us, student workers.

Below is a **summary of the grievances we've filed (and won)** against the school since we won a union contract in 2018

Pay for Online Training

Because all classes will be online during the fall 2020 semester, the school instituted a new policy requiring all part-time faculty, teaching fellows, and teaching assistants to take an eight-hour online training. Since the training was mandatory, it was effectively work. And per our contract, the school must pay us for our work. We filed a grievance and were able to win \$200 compensation for training.

Working While Outside the U.S.

The school sought to prevent those of us currently not in the United States because of COVID-19 from working in the fall 2020 semester. We filed a grievance. As a result of our grievance and faculty pressure, the school reversed itself and is now allowing students and faculty to work while outside the U.S. in the fall 2020 semester.

Dependent Health Coverage for the 2020-2021 school year

Administrators heartlessly sought to prevent us from adding our partners and children as dependents on the student health plan, forcing international students to either let their children and partners go without health coverage or go onto medicaid and risk being deemed a public charge by the Trump administration. We filed a grievance and forced the school to continue to provide dependent coverage.

Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal (GFPJ) Workers are a Part of Our Union

A group of workers in N SSR's philosophy department were reclassified from RAs to Student Assistants, thereby removing them from the union and depriving them of union benefits. We took this case to arbitration and won. GFPJ workers are now a part of the union. Furthermore, the school had to provide those improperly removed from the union with retroactive benefits.

Int'l Student Fee

The school imposed a new, \$90 fee for all international students who started a new program at the school during or after the fall 2019 semester. We took this case to arbitration and won. If you're charged the international student fee and you work 75+ hours in a semester, the school must rebate you 100% of the fee.

Late Pay, Underpayment, Health Insurance Rebates

In addition to the grievances discussed above, we've also filed grievances on behalf of many

individual student workers, winning them pay and benefits.

1. A number of student workers in Parsons, SPE, and N SSR who should have received a rebate on their health insurance premiums for the spring 2020 and fall 2019 semesters did not. We were able to win all of them rebates, totalling over \$600 per person.
2. A grad student in Parsons was forced by their professor to work extra hours beyond what they were paid for. We were able to win them hundreds of dollars in additional pay for the hours they worked.
3. Several student workers were required to attend disciplinary meetings with their supervisors. Union reps attended the meetings with them, ensuring their rights as union workers were respected, and working with them to ensure they could keep their jobs.
4. An undergraduate, Lang student-worker was misclassified as an RA while in fact he was performing TA work. We won over \$500 in back pay because TA work is compensated at a higher rate than RA work.
5. A film student in SPE's writing program was not paid for all the hours they worked. We won them over \$500 in backpay.
6. A PhD student in N SSR was not paid for work they performed over the course of several months. The school claimed they never officially received the job she'd been working. We won them over \$1,000 in backpay.

WHEN THE UNIVERSITY VIOLATES OUR CONTRACT, EITHER BY INSTITUTING A POLICY THAT HURTS ALL OF US OR BY MISTREATING ONE OF US AS AN INDIVIDUAL, WHAT DO WE DO? FIGHT BACK!

Newly formed Labor Coalition to fight back against union-busting and layoffs

As a result of falling enrollment and financial issues, the school has sought to cut expenses by cancelling courses taught by TFs, TAs, and part-time faculty; laying off staff; consolidating several schools; and cutting entire departments.

While we understand that the school must respond to its financial difficulties, we think it is unconscionable that the school's administrators would continue to pay themselves hundreds of thousands of dollars, in some cases even millions, while we, the workers on whose labor the school runs, bear the brunt of the cost cutting measures. TNS brands itself as a social-justice university. It's time for the school to practice what it preaches.

To build a united front against the school's unfair, union-busting response to its financial difficulties, SENS and other TNS unions have come together in a newly formed Labor Coalition at The New School. We demand that the school administration recognize this coalition. We demand that we, the workers, have a seat at the table and a voice when it comes to the school's restructuring decisions.

**GET MORE INVOLVED IN YOU UNION!
RUN FOR UNION LEADERSHIP POSITION!
OUR UNION IS ONLY AS STRONG AS THE
COMBINED EFFORTS OF EACH OF US.**

Our union is only as strong as the combined efforts of each of us. Are you interested in developing your organizing skills? Guiding our organizing strategy? Fighting for workers' rights and helping your peers in the process? Our union will be holding elections for leadership positions during the middle of this semester. There will be 12 open seats on the joint council, which is our union's elected, democratic leadership body. It is critical that we fill these seats to ensure that student workers continue to have a voice in our union's strategy and actions. If you are interested in running, we can help and explain more. Please get in-touch by contacting your union rep. or by emailing us at sensuaw@gmail.com.