



Indiana University Graduate Employees Strike FACULTY FAQs

1. Why are the graduate employees at Indiana planning on a strike?

Graduate employees have been working hard for over three years to end fees and bring their stipends in line with the cost of living in Bloomington. A [2019 College report](#) demonstrated just how far below the living wage the average stipends fell. Read the graduate employees' own [FAQ about striking](#).

2. Is striking legal in Indiana?

Yes. Strikes are recognized in state, national, and international law as the necessary accompaniment of the right to bargain collectively. In the last few years Indiana workers at John Deere, GM, Hostess, BP have [gone on strike](#).

3. Can public employees unionize in Indiana?

Yes. Public school teachers, for example, are unionized with [ISTA](#), and the police are unionized with [ISFOP](#). As IU's policy [HR-12-20](#) recognizes, "rights of employees, independently, to associate themselves together, whether that association is known as a union or by some other name, is recognized in Indiana, and there is no legal bar to the collective presentation of their employment interests to the public officials charged with the duty of fixing the terms of employment (Indiana Attorney General Opinion #55)." Note also Indiana [AG Opinion #22](#) on the prevailing right to bargain collectively by public employees.

4. What about here at IUB? Are there other unions on the IU Bloomington campus?

Yes. IUB has at least three unions on campus ([CWA](#), [AFSCME](#), [IATSE](#)).

5. But can public employees strike?

There are some limits—but, yes, workers at Indiana University can legally strike. Indiana Code (4-15-17-1) [explicitly exempts](#) state educational institutions from the prohibition on striking. In fact, *obstructing* labor organizing is a [violation](#) of Indiana Code (22-7-1-3).

6. Is it legal for *faculty* to support a strike? Is it a contract violation to support a strike?

Yes, it is your first amendment right to support a strike; and, no, it is not a contract violation. Supporting a strike falls squarely under the protection of academic freedom.

7. How do I avoid crossing a picket line or performing "scab" labor?

Both the [Supreme Court](#) and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) [protect your right](#) to refuse to cross a lawful picket line. The decision not to cross a picket line or perform the labor of someone on strike is a matter of ethics and loyalty. Refusing to cross shows your support for picketing workers, the union, and the labor movement as a whole. Crossing a picket line shows support for the employer in the dispute.

8. What about teaching my class on Zoom or in alternative location? What about grading for AIs on strike?

Graduate workers are asking you to define what it means to support their strike. It may mean changing your syllabus to include an "independent learning module," for a day or for a few weeks; it may mean teaching a unit on labor history; it may mean taking your class elsewhere or online. Talk to the AIs in your department for help in determining what it means to support the strike. Regarding grading for striking AIs—grading for an instructor of record on strike is replacement labor. If you are the instructor of record working with AIs, consult with them. Graduate instructors care about their students; at the same time, strikes have to be disruptive to be effective. Communication is key to finding the right balance.

9. What should I tell my undergraduate students?

That there is a labor dispute between graduate employees and the administration. That you are urging the administration to come to a fair settlement with graduate employees so everyone can be taught by fairly compensated instructors and make timely academic progress. Consider adding a unit on the labor movement.

10. What about teaching my graduate class?

The IGWC-UE has emphasized that the strike is [not intended](#) to interfere with academic progress. If a graduate student interprets attending a class as crossing a picket line, consider making alternative arrangements to assure academic progress. Suggest ways such students can meet independently to keep up with reading.

11. Would a graduate union be in conflict with the academic freedom of faculty?

No. The AAUP has been the main organization defining and defending academic freedom in the US for over 100 years. In an [amicus brief](#) filed with the National Labor Relations Board in the matter of Columbia University (NLRB 2016), the AAUP argued that “academic freedom is promoted by collective bargaining.” Moreover, the AAUP holds collective bargaining does not harm faculty-student mentoring relationships, reflecting instead the reality that student employees are performing the work of the university when fulfilling their duties.

12. Would a graduate contract be in conflict with BFC policy?

No. A graduate employee contract is negotiated to be consistent with existing policy. [NLRB \(2016\)](#) ruled in just this question: “there is no good reason to doubt that unions and universities will be able to negotiate contract language to delineate mutually satisfactory boundaries of their respective rights and obligations.”

13. Does a graduate employees union lower employee morale?

An [empirical study](#) cited in the 2016 Columbia decision says no. Recent reporting in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and the [Economic Policy Institute](#) likewise say no. New graduate student unions have been certified at Harvard, Tufts, Columbia, Brown, The New School, Brandeis, NYU, American University and Illinois State. These new unions—plus an over 50-year history of graduate employee unions at public universities, starting at [University of Wisconsin in 1969](#), and including [Michigan State](#) University, the institution where the Provost and the President both served as tenured faculty—demonstrate that unionization is compatible with the highest academic ideals.

14. By affiliating with the United Electrical Workers (UE) are graduate students bringing a 3rd party onto campus?

Union locals affiliate with a national organization for the same reason that you likely affiliate with others in your insurance policies or your retirement accounts—mutuality allows a smaller group to pool resources with a larger group, so it can better weather disruptions and better exercise its voice (that’s why we let groups TIAA-CREF and Anthem on campus). The UE will assist the IGWC in formulating bargaining positions, providing legal advice, sharing infrastructure for communication, and resources for organizing.

15. Who are the United Electrical Workers?

The [UE](#) is a democratic, member-led union, founded in 1936 specifically to oppose the racial and gender discrimination prevalent in the AFL. It is widely considered to be among the most democratic and progressive unions in the country. It represents graduate employees at the [University of New Mexico](#) and is currently organizing graduate workers at [MIT](#). The UE’s approach to collective bargaining is based on the autonomy of the locals and membership involvement.

16. There is already a Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG), what does a union add?

The GPSG has been an important university-sponsored organization for graduate students [since 1983](#), and has lobbied the administration on important issues from library fines and health benefits to the creation of G 901 courses. But it is not an independent organization recognized as the graduate employee’s bargaining agent, responsible for negotiating wages, benefits and working conditions with the administration. The GPSG has unanimously passed a [resolution](#) supporting graduate worker unionization.

17. What will help the graduate employees?

Sign the [non-retaliation pledge](#). Urge your department to join other departments in issuing such a pledge. Join a picket line or a day of solidarity. Participate in or organize a teach-in. Add an independent learning module to your syllabus, for a day or for a couple of weeks. Do not grade the work of any instructors of record who is on strike. Do not teach your AIs' sections. [Donate](#) to the strike fund.

18. What will hurt them?

Crossing physical picket lines. Grading the work of striking AIs. Teaching your AIs' sections. Sharing names of strikers with the administration. Granting or requesting administrative access to your AIs' Canvas sites. Any sort of retaliation in advising, mentoring or letters of recommendation, or in the evaluation of labor or academic work.