



HARVARD GRADUATE STUDENTS UNION

HGSU-UAW Local 5118 | a union of student workers at Harvard University

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Harvard Graduate Students Union Ends Historic 40-Day Strike at Close of Academic Year; Fight for a Fair Contract Continues

HGSU-UAW's Historic 40-Day Strike Demonstrated the Essential Role of Graduate Workers at Harvard; Ends Strike but Will Continue Organizing Until Core Demands Are Met

CAMBRIDGE, MASS. – Today, the Harvard Graduate Students Union (HGSU-UAW Local 5118) announced the end of its 40-day strike, the longest in the union's history, with the close of the academic year. Withdrawal of graduate student labor disrupted the teaching and research operations of the university and demonstrated the centrality of student workers to Harvard's academic mission. Carrying the momentum of student worker power, the HGSU-UAW's bargaining team will return to the table this summer determined to win a fair contract: one that provides living wages, real recourse for harassment and discrimination, protections for non-citizen workers, and provisions for union security.

Throughout the 40-day strike, HGSU-UAW maintained active picket lines that spanned Harvard's Cambridge and Longwood campuses, with thousands of members showing up on weekends, through pouring rain, and in 97-degree heat. Faculty and student workers led over a dozen teach-ins on labor history and contract issues; community members and politicians spoke at rallies and community lunches, and delivery picketers disrupted over 200 shipments, in some cases forcing labs to ration essential materials. Prospective students and their families learned of Harvard's treatment of its student workers during Visitas weekend. Community members from around the world witnessed Harvard's recognition of student contributions ring hollow at Commencement, as many of the very same students being celebrated stood on the picket line for common-sense labor protections and a living wage for their peers.

Research laboratories ground to a halt, course material was left untaught, and assignments went ungraded. [Harvard's response revealed our impact](#). The university attempted to unilaterally enact new reporting requirements for striking workers, a move HGSU-UAW believes violated labor law. In communications that grew increasingly urgent as the semester drew to a close, Harvard pressured its faculty to report on their students and take on the burden of labor that student workers had withdrawn. In some cases, final exam and assignment requirements were diluted and AI was hastily deployed to assign grades. While neglecting to provide its student teachers

pay parity at the bargaining table, Harvard offered new funding opportunities to hire replacement workers who could submit final grades. For 40 days, Harvard witnessed just how much of its academic mission relies on the labor of graduate student workers.

After 14 months of bargaining without meaningful progress, disruptions caused by the strike finally prompted the university to engage with the union on a few of its core issues. The university expanded benefits to all graduate students, offered full dental coverage for PhD students, and made a 1% increase in its 4-year raise offer. While these proposals fall far short of the union's demands for a living wage and do not address workplace protections like grievability of harassment and discrimination or non-citizen protections, they were the first indication of engagement from the university on the union's priorities.

HGSU-UAW's contract priorities aim to bring Harvard's student workers in line with basic standards already established at peer institutions. The university's annual salary of \$26,000 for its Teaching Fellows is less than half of the [living wage](#) for the Boston-Cambridge metropolitan area and substantially lower than compensation provided to graduate students at peer institutions. The union's proposal to include options for third-party investigation of claims of harassment and discrimination is modeled after provisions included in several peer graduate student worker contracts and other union contracts at Harvard. Our ask to require immigration enforcement agents to produce a warrant to access private spaces is in line with federal law and is a contractual protection assured to student workers at institutions across the country. Every other union at Harvard has a contract that includes union security provisions like a union shop.

Though we have still not reached a fair contract that includes these demands, we are hopeful that we have now reached a bargaining trajectory with the university that will allow us to do so. Our strike was powerful, and the university can no longer ignore the collective power of its organized student workers. The university's obstinance at the bargaining table made a strike necessary, and its recent movement has created the conditions necessary to bring our members off the picket line.

HGSU-UAW is deeply grateful for the outpouring of support that sustained its strike. We owe our success first and foremost to the students and faculty advisors who showed grace and understanding despite the disruptions in their coursework and research. We are thankful for the support we received from elected leaders in local office, who emphasized that our strike was part of a broader fight for workers' rights. Leaders from fellow Harvard unions and delivery drivers who refused to cross our picket lines reminded us that labor is strongest when it stands together. Our organizing was made stronger by community members who walked in picket lines alongside us, played live music to accompany our chants, honked as they drove by, donated to our hardship fund, and showed up with donuts and coffee in moving shows of solidarity.

The end of the strike is not the end of our fight for a fair contract. Our members leave the picket line more organized, more unified, and more committed than ever to advocate for the basic protections they deserve. For 40 days, Harvard witnessed how essential graduate student labor is to its academic mission, and the consequences of its absence. We hope that Harvard will not need to be reminded of it.

About HGSU-UAW Local 5118

The Harvard Graduate Students Union - United Auto Workers (HGSU-UAW Local 5118) represents over 4,000 student workers across Harvard University's 13 schools in their capacity as teachers and researchers. Harvard student workers from all departments joined together in April 2018 to form HGSU-UAW. They are fighting for equitable pay to keep up with the rising cost of living, legal and financial support for non-citizen student workers, protections from harassment and discrimination, and "fair share fees" to equitably distribute the expenses of union representation.

About UAW

The International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) is one of the largest and most diverse unions in North America, with members in virtually every sector of the economy. UAW-represented workplaces range from multinational corporations, small manufacturers and state and local governments to colleges and universities, hospitals and private non-profit organizations. The UAW has more than 400,000 active members and more than 580,000 retired members in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. The UAW represents roughly 100,000 higher education workers nationally, including university staff, postdoctoral researchers, adjunct professors, and graduate student workers.

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