



**May 4, 2024**

To Faculty, Staff, and fellow students:

This coming week, on May 6th-9th, Western's 1,100 undergraduate and graduate Educational Student Employees will take a vote on whether or not to authorize our union's elected bargaining committee to call a strike if the WWU Administration doesn't agree to a fair contract. This in no way makes a strike a certainty; rather, **we continue to hope that the Administration will agree to a fair contract as soon as possible.**

Two years ago we formed our union, [Western Academic Workers United](#) (WAWU-UAW), in response to real issues we face as we work our way through our education. There's a common myth that student work is something we do for the experience. But, just like other workers on campus, the vast majority of us rely on our incomes to afford rent and the rapidly rising cost of living in Bellingham.

Many of us work multiple jobs, on and off campus, and we're finding that **on-campus work is becoming increasingly unsustainable.** The rent in Bellingham has surged in recent years, outpacing our meager stipends and incremental minimum wage increases. In addition, without a union contract, our jobs are extremely precarious. We're often hired on only a few days' notice, and have our schedules changed at the last minute without notice, making it difficult to plan financially and around our other jobs.

Working your way through school in 2024 is hard enough when you have a stable job, but the current unpredictability and vulnerability of our jobs, paired with a mounting student debt crisis, is a recipe for disasters like dropping out and extending time to graduation. Paying student workers living wages is a critical ingredient for making sure that higher education is accessible to all, not just a privileged few. Without it, we risk spiraling into cycles of inequality and limiting opportunities for future generations. It's worth noting that other academic workers in the Pacific Northwest have recently negotiated substantial increases in pay to deal with the rising cost of living.

We developed our contract proposals through an open and participatory dialogue with all of our 1,100 members. We collected hundreds of survey responses, held multiple town hall meetings, and had thousands of conversations with members about the hardships they face making it through school. We've been at the bargaining table 19 times over 8 months. We've responded to the Administration's concerns, modified our proposals, and made a huge number of compromises, especially to make our proposals more affordable.

Despite our flexibility and movement, the Administration continues to condescend, stall, and ignore the needs of working students. **They are still refusing to agree to the following key priorities:**

- Fair, competitive wages that address the cost of living in Bellingham
- Tuition assistance for undergraduate workers
- Bereavement Leave
- Accountability when the University mishandles discrimination and harassment cases and adequate supportive measures for survivors

**On May 1st, Provost Johnson sent a communication which contained outdated (and therefore inaccurate) information about the Union's proposals**, including that we are asking for 50-80% raises. As of 4/29/24, WAWU is asking for approximately a 30% raise for hourly workers and a 56% raise for stipend workers. These raises reflect the skyrocketing cost of living in Bellingham and decades of nonexistent or inadequate raises for student employees. We have heard Western's concerns about the cost of our proposals and in response we have compromised and sacrificed significantly in order to reach a fair agreement. At some point Western will need to make substantial movement towards us as well. **For more details about our proposals, please see this [Fact Sheet](#) on our website, which will be updated as bargaining progresses.**

**We currently have 3 additional bargaining sessions with the Administration planned on May 6th, 13th, and 20th. Our hope remains that the Administration will reach a fair agreement.**

**In the event that the Administration doesn't offer a fair compromise, and a strike is called during this quarter, our 1,100 members will stop working and walk picket lines for the duration of the strike.** We will ask WWU employees, students, and members of the community to support us in a variety of ways, including by not crossing the picket line for the duration of the strike. In addition to the support of the Western community, union members across Whatcom County are supporting us and plan to respect our picket lines.

We know that rather than reaching a fair agreement, the Administration is already asking faculty, staff and other WWU student employees to commit to doing the work of striking Educational Student Employees. **We ask that you support our strike, and do not perform any of our work or job duties when we are out.**

We understand that a strike would be difficult for the entire WWU community and with approval from our membership, will call a strike only as a last resort. We understand how important our work is to the WWU community, we work directly with students, and are students ourselves. We are eager to meet with the University as often as necessary to reach an agreement. **We would like to ask you to [email the administration](#), or write your own, to President Randhawa, urging the Administration to show up and reach a fair agreement with Educational Student Employees.**

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch, or find more information on our [website](#). We appreciate your support, and look forward to solving this issue so we can all continue making WWU a better place to work and study.

Sincerely,  
Western Academic Workers United and the WAWU Bargaining Committee

*Ally Wehrle, Graduate TA*

*Ben Workman Smith, Graduate TA*

*David Cummins, Graduate RA/TA*

*Erin Grimes, Graduate TA*

*Erin Magarro, Library Tutor/Ethnic Student Center*

*Ev Coit, Graduate TA*

*Gabe Wong, Associated Students Peer Advisor*

*Jaime Blais, Graduate RA/TA*

*Jude Ziliak, Academic Advising and Student Achievement Center  
Peer Advisor*

*Lydia Henderson, Graduate TA*

*Mickey Jolliff, Graduate RA/TA*

*Mason Nicholas, Student Technology Center Computer Assistant*

*Paige Koenig, Graduate RA*

*Selena Knoblauch, Graduate TA*

*Taylor Christianson, Writing Studio Tutor*

*Theo Hytopoulos, Computer Science Faculty Assistant*

*Valerie Campbell, Financial Aid Peer Advisor*

*Lexy Aydelotte, Graduate TA*