

# Michigan: Oakland University professors end strike

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Striking professors at Oakland University in the Detroit suburb of Rochester returned to work Thursday morning after their union, the American Association of University Professors, reached a tentative agreement with the school. Negotiations began in May.

In the face of determined resistance from strikers, the administration relied on the threat of a court injunction to push through a settlement in around-the-clock negotiations. An Oakland County judge had set a 10:00 a.m. Thursday deadline for holding a court hearing on the university's request for a preliminary injunction against the strike. He ordered the union and management to continue talks through the night.

The 600 professors walked out September 3 over concession demands by the university. The strike forced the cancellation of classes set to start Tuesday for 18,000 students.

The agreement, which must still be ratified by the membership, calls for a pay freeze in the first year of a three-year contract followed by raises of 1 percent and 3 percent in the final year, subject to renegotiation. The university originally wanted a three-year pay freeze.

The union gave ground on the issue of health care. While the contract preserves the traditional Blue Cross option for the term of the contract, it will be eliminated in 2011. In the meantime, the school is phasing in a two-tiered plan, originally opposed by the union, under which professors deemed "unhealthy" by a third party would pay considerably more than those deemed "healthy."

The union also agreed that faculty at the university's new medical school set to open in 2011 will be excluded from the present contract settlement.

The agreement reportedly limits the number of contract faculty the university can hire. The

administration wanted to create a new class of teachers, 20 percent of the faculty, which would work with no tenure or job security.

The union says it rebuffed attempts by the university to undermine faculty governance, the ability for professors to oversee the content of the courses they teach and other teaching conditions. An AAUP press release says "the tentative agreement protects the faculty's ability to block administration efforts to ignore the University Senate and other university institutions of governance."

Faculty members retain the right to all intellectual property developed on their own time.

Professors will give up two days' pay, not the one week's pay demanded by the university. The administration has not yet decided if the school year will be extended to make up for missed classes.

The strike won widespread public sympathy. Hundreds of students joined protests in support of the professors' demands. Some carried signs denouncing Oakland University President Dr. Gary Russi, who just pocketed a \$100,000 pay raise, bringing his salary to \$350,000 per year. A popular chant was "Not higher profits, higher education." A student group put up a Web site in support of the strike. A poll conducted by the Oakland Press showed 92 percent of respondents supporting the strike.

Over the past several years Oakland students have been hit with successive tuition hikes—9 percent this year alone, the highest percentage among state funded universities. Many students have to work part- or full-time to pay for school.

In recent years Oakland University, like other state funded schools, have seen funding reductions. The university currently receives 25 percent of its funding from the state of Michigan, 50 percent from tuition and

25 percent from grants and donations.

An AAUP spokesperson said the union will hold two or three membership meetings to review the contract prior to a vote.



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