

University of Michigan graduate student strike wins wide support

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The University of Michigan graduate students' strike to demand the shutdown of in-person learning amidst the coronavirus pandemic is winning ever-wider support.

On Wednesday, members of the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO) rejected an offer from the university that met none of their demands and voted to continue their strike in the face of threats of retaliation.

Defying the administration, the third day of picketing Thursday was the largest yet. Hundreds of strikers, students and other workers joined the picket lines. The strike was to be only four days, ending Friday. However, there is a growing recognition among students that ending the strike abruptly will mean none of their demands will be met.

One hundred Residential Advisors, who are not in a union, began a stoppage a day after the graduate student instructors. An RA tweeted, "It's the end of the second day of our strike and two of our RA's are already in/preparing to go to quarantine housing awaiting test results. We're all scared we'll be next. This is why we're striking. Our lives are on the line here, every day."

University of Michigan dining hall workers announced they will join the strike on Friday evening. The dining hall workers are demanding widespread testing for all staffers and "a clear and transparent sanitation plan which is consistently enforced by management."

As the number of COVID-19 cases spreads on the campus, the dining hall workers are also demanding an end to penalties for missing work until the group decides it is safe to return to their jobs. The group is student-led and, like the RAs, not members of a union.

Support from other students at other campuses facing

similar situations has also started to pour in, including from Columbia University, where graduate students issued an open letter in support of the Michigan students.

The WSWWS spoke with a graduate student, D.B., who is a Ph.D. student in sociology. "This reopening for work and school proves universities and society at large care more about profits than the health of students and the town residents.

"Our current economic and political system operates at the expense of countless lives, and COVID has only proven that further. We need a revolution. As for the vote last night, it's clear the GEO members see the importance of protecting the most marginalized people in our community and will not give up the fight for justice!"

Another GEO striker, TJ, a fourth-year Ph.D. student in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology, said, "Last night I voted to continue the strike. The offer from the university covered only a fraction of the pandemic demands, and our anti-policing demands were completely refused.

"It's clear that U of M underestimates its own students, staff and faculty. More and more of us are striking each day to show them their mistake. I've talked with undergrads picketing who joined the strike because they agree with our demands and they care about grad students. As a grad student, I will absolutely support undergrad and worker strikes for as long as they last."

Alexis, a senior engineering student said he supports the strike: "Clearly, as we can see with graduate students, it's the same exploitation that's been happening within education that's been occurring since forever in the US. So I'm really happy, I'm ecstatic, to see this level of collective action, not just from GEO

but from everyone that's decided to strike or send messages or walk out of their jobs in solidarity.

Students from other universities are also taking actions against the dangerous conditions on their campuses. At the University of San Diego, nearly 600 students, faculty and staff signed an open letter to demand the school drop plans to reopen. They urged the school to cancel in-person classes, limit housing to those with no other options, and cancel plans on layoffs and furloughs.



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