

Wright State Faculty Union Strike: What Students Should Know

 wys.org/post/wright-state-faculty-union-strike-what-students-should-know

By April Laissle & Jess Mador



Wright State students line up to ask questions during a student-government-sponsored townhall meeting ahead of the planned faculty strike.

April Laissle / WYSO

Wright State University's faculty union is preparing for a campus-wide strike next week. The strike by more than 500 union members is set to begin Tuesday. And Wright State students -- many of whom just returned last week for the spring semester -- are concerned about how the strike could affect them.

For more on the latest developments with the faculty strike, WYSO editor Jess Mador spoke with WYSO reporter April Laissle.

Listen

Listening...

5:31

Jess Mador: Wright State students organized a town hall meeting earlier this week to discuss the strike and how it could impact them and you attended that, April. Tell us what did you find out at the forum?

April Laissle: Well, mainly I learned there's a lot of confusion among students right now. I asked a few students there why they came to the event and what concerns they had. And here's a little sampling of what they told me:

Student Jonathon Yenser: "I wasn't sure whether it was even worth it to show up to classes. There's people telling me that the work that we do in the class could go for a grade, and the work that we do in class probably won't go for a grade, so I'm just trying to figure out some answers, figure out what I'm going to do."

Student Shyanne Rice: "I don't know. It's really making me mad because it's like, I feel like they're keeping stuff away from us. They're not telling us the whole truth. So, I guess we'll just have to see next week."

Student Elyse Angle: "You know, we're trying our best to kind of downplay it and forget about it but that's not possible when the chaos is visible from the student perspective and it's distressing. Like, really distressing."

Jess Mador: Wow. So those students that we heard from clearly sound confused about the messages they're receiving on campus about what's going to happen next week.

April Laissle: Definitely. One of the big things they're concerned about is financial aid. All Wright State students got an email from the administration on Wednesday kind of outlining the ways in which the strike could impact financial aid. The email basically said that students could lose federal financial aid if they stop attending classes. Now, what this really means is that for students on federal financial aid like Pell Grants for example, their

aid could be changed if they drop out of classes entirely. That's called withdrawal. Or if, at the end of the semester, their instructor marks them as unofficially withdrawn because they stopped attending classes altogether. Now, that determination is at the discretion of the instructor at the end of this semester. In all likelihood the strike will be over at the end of the semester and the determination will be made by the students' original faculty member and not the substitute during the strike. For reference, most higher-ed strikes last year ended in about a week. The other thing that Wright State students were concerned about was whether the work that they would do during the strike would count. The union has said that it wouldn't, that any work completed at the direction of a substitute wouldn't be accepted. Wright State officials have said the university is going to remain open and that substitutes will fill in for striking faculty. Some classes could also be combined or conducted online. But they have said that students should still show up to classes and complete the work.

Wright State students can find more information about federal financial aid policies [here](#).

Jess Mador: It sounds like there's a lot for students to take in. What else happened this week? I know there have been many developments coming out of the administration and the union leading up to the strike next week.

April Laissle: Yes. So there have been some developments related to the actual contract negotiations. Let me just take you back to the beginning here to explain. On January 4 the administration determined that they'd reached an impasse in their contract negotiations with the union and they announced that they were done negotiating. They implemented the employment terms laid out in what they called their last best offer. The union didn't agree to those terms although technically they're now working under them. They announced their plans to strike essentially to get the administration to come back to the negotiating table and hammer out a deal so they can work on a mutually agreed-upon contract, not just the imposed employment terms. The union also filed unfair labor practice charges with Ohio's Employment Relations Board, it's called SERB, essentially alleging that the administration had engaged in bad faith bargaining. The

latest is that last night the administration came out and said they'd be willing to negotiate next year's contract if the union dismissed those ULP charges. The union declined the offer because they're still determined to get a current contract nailed down and they say they don't want the imposed employment terms to become a new baseline for the next contract. On the other hand the administration says they'd spent two years trying to figure out this agreement and they just want to move past it and start work on the successor agreement. So, in the email the administration sent out last night explaining this new offer they put on the table, they said it would be impossible for them to renegotiate because, I'm going to quote here, "all the negotiations for the contract that expired in 2017 ended once we reached impasse." I read that statement to John Doll. He's a veteran labor attorney and an editor on labor for the American Bar Association.

Attorney John R. Doll, Doll, Jansen & Ford: "Yeah. That's not a true statement. I mean, they have the right if they're at ultimate impasse to implement but it doesn't end the negotiation. It doesn't keep them from negotiating a new agreement."

Jess Mador: Is he saying that there is at least a likelihood that the union and the administration could come back to the bargaining table and avert the strike?

April Laissle: Well, he didn't say that but he did say that it's definitely possible for them to return to the table and try to hammer out a deal but there's no indication and no telling when or if that will happen soon.

Jess Mador: As we've mentioned the strike is set for Tuesday. What should we expect?

April Laissle: The faculty has been preparing for the strike for the last couple of weeks and they already have picket line locations determined. They'll start picketing at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday if no deal is reached.

Jess Mador: Thank you, April.

April Laissle: Thanks.

