

Picket Line Protocols for Graduate Workers (TAs, TFs, and RAs) at Queen's University

For the labour strike of PSAC 901 Unit 1 beginning March 10th 2025 at 12:01am.

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Local 901, Unit 1 Strike Protocols for Graduate Student Workers during the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Local 901, Unit 1 strike of Teaching Assistants (TAs), Teaching Fellows (TFs), and Research Assistants (RAs).

These protocols are intended primarily for graduate student workers who are currently under contract. If you do not currently have a TA, TF, or RA contract, click here to read the [Picket Line Protocols for Graduate Student Workers \(not under contract\)](#).

Preamble

PSAC 901 Unit 1 (Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, and Research Assistants) is in a legal position to go on strike on 10 March 2025, at 12:01 am. As Queen's University (the Employer) refuses to respect our bargaining demands and refuses to give us a fair and equitable deal, we are preparing to strike by this deadline.

We hope that Queen's will act to avoid this strike, but nothing in their approach suggests this will be the case and we must prepare to strike.

Withholding TA, TF, and RA Labour

Members *cannot* continue their TA, TF, and RA labour during the strike. Continuing to work during the strike (known as "strike breaking" or "scabbing") violates the PSAC National Constitution and can result in hefty daily fines and the loss of union privileges and benefits. We must not continue our work and we must not take up additional work. Doing so would not only severely weaken our strike and position at the bargaining table, but would also likely lengthen the strike.

Accessing Campus

We recognize that some graduate student workers may live on campus or access medical needs on campus. Please note that accessing your own home or medical needs is not considered a form of crossing the picket line.

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We understand that graduate student workers may feel a need to be on campus for various reasons during strike action, but the crossing of picket-lines should be kept to an absolute minimum, if necessary at all.

If members feel that they have no choice but to cross the picket line, but still want to show their solidarity, they can approach a Picket Captain and ask them for a Solidarity Button that members can wear while on campus. Picket Captains will also be able to provide information about other ways that members can support strike efforts.

Although we understand the importance of graduate students workers' non-contractual research, both to members themselves and to study permit status, we ask that members take every possible step to avoid allowing university operations to continue as usual. We strongly encourage members to consider how their own research output helps create value and prestige for the university as well as the ways that pausing research activities during a strike can put even more pressure on Queen's and departments to push for a fair deal. *If you have questions about doing your own research during a strike, we encourage you to attend a Strike Information Session. We will also be holding spaces on the picket line to talk through the grey area in the student/worker divide that the university uses to exploit our labour.*

We encourage members to consider how professors, administrative staff, and other on-campus organizations may pressure us to cross our own picket lines, and to consider how to not enter campus spaces unless there is a critically urgent need.

Strike Pay and Shifts

To qualify for strike pay, members must:

- Have an active TA, TF, or RA contract
- Complete a 4-hour picket duty shift as outlined below

To make the administration and receipt of strike pay smoother, members must:

- Fill out the [PSAC 901 Strike Sign-Up Form](#)
- Have a signed [RAND card](#)

Strike pay is \$84.79 per day and up to \$423.96 per week. To receive strike pay, members must complete a picket shift of at least 4 hours in a single day. Members may take on additional strike duties beyond a 4-hour shift but cannot receive strike pay above the daily rate of \$84.79.

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We also ask that members consider the risk of burn-out and take care of themselves. Picket duties will initially be available Monday-Friday.

Accommodated Duties

Members will be able to request accommodated picketing duties if they are unable to attend a physical picket line for all or part of their shift. Members can request these duties when they fill out the [PSAC 901 Strike Sign-Up Form](#).

Reporting Strike-Breaking Activities

If members see someone performing strike-breaking activities, we ask that they report these activities through [PSAC 901's Official Strike Breaking Report Form](#). If members are unsure whether someone's actions constitute strike breaking, they should make a note of this in their report.

In solidarity,

Jake Morrow
President, PSAC 901

Picketing Line Protocols for Graduate Student Workers (not under contract) follows on the next page.

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Picket Line Protocols for Graduate Student Workers at Queen's University

For the labour strike of PSAC 901 Unit 1 beginning March 10th 2025 at 12:01am.

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Local 901, Unit 1 Strike Protocols for Graduate Student Workers at Queen's University.

These protocols are intended primarily for graduate student workers who are not currently under contract. [Specific protocols intended for graduate student workers under contract](#) precede these protocols.

We call on all graduate student workers to support PSAC 901 Unit 1 members during our strike, which will begin Monday, March 10th, unless Queen's drastically changes its position and attitude at the bargaining table.

PSAC 901 Unit 1 members are you and your colleagues. We are the graduate student workers (TAs, TFs, and RAs) who play a vital role in the university; we lead tutorials, teach classes, run laboratories, grade assignments, and support professors' research.

But we are also facing serious financial hardships and precarity. Our income has fallen further and further below the poverty line each year, leaving many of us struggling with food and housing insecurity. Our funding packages have been stagnant for decades and are often half and less than half the annual minimum wage in Ontario, which equals over \$36,000. This means we struggle to put food on the table and a roof over our heads. We are often forced to work in unsafe and inequitable conditions, making it even harder to do our jobs. We came to Queen's because we want to do research that we think is important, that can change our lives, communities, and society for the better. The financial precarity Queen's puts us in does not allow us to do that. Last year, PSAC 901 spent roughly \$100,000 on emergency grocery support for members. *This is why we must fight. This is why we are calling on members to support our union through the following calls to action.*

We call on all graduate student workers to refuse to cross PSAC 901 picket lines (physical or virtual), whether members are under active contract or not.

Officially, for the purposes of a legal job action, PSAC 901 Unit 1 members are student workers who have current TA, TF, or RA contracts. Locally, we recognize that all graduate student

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workers at Queen's University are 901 members, but only those under current contract will technically be in a legal strike position and therefore be withdrawing labour that qualifies for strike pay—a hardship support to bridge the loss of income.

However, crossing a picket line negatively impacts all graduate student workers, even those without a contract. It can be seen as a public declaration that you are not participating in—and are even actively undermining—your colleagues' fight for graduate student worker rights. Strike breaking (also known as scabbing) is when someone does the contracted work of employees who are striking. In this case, scabbing would mean performing contracted work of TAs, TFs, and RAs. Scabbing not only undermines our union's efforts and threatens workers' rights and livelihoods, but it can also result in fines for the individual scabbing.

There are grey areas that the Employer will use to its advantage to weaken our line and attempt to divide us. These include graduate courses, events held on campus, and research done outside of TA, TF, and RA contracts. These areas are frequently treated by the Employer as aspects of our “student identity” as opposed to our “worker identity.” The bargaining team has been negotiating important items that will benefit the whole community, including tuition minimization, an equitable funding/labour ratio, and measures to address housing and food insecurity. These items reduce the divide between our student and worker identities, forcing the Employer to treat us as graduate student workers—not either/or, but both.

Any instance of graduate student workers crossing the picket line—including crossing to attend graduate courses, events held on campus, or undertaking research done outside of TA, TF, and RA contracts—weakens our picket line and our position at the bargaining table and risks demonstrating to the Employer that we accept the student/worker divide. Every act of crossing weakens the strike. Every refusal to cross strengthens it.

As such, we strongly urge all graduate student workers—whether under contract or not—to make every effort to avoid crossing their own picket lines, be they physical or virtual.

We call on all graduate student workers to familiarize themselves with their rights and to exercise their right to participate in union activities.

Section 2 of the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) states that “Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (...) (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of

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association." The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* applies to all those living and working on lands claimed by Canada.

Section 5 of the [Ontario Labour Relations Act](#) states that "Every person is free to join a trade union of the person's own choice and to participate in its lawful activities."

These rights have been upheld by the Supreme Court to include participation in union activities for both domestic and international workers. Every PSAC 901 member has the right to strike and it is illegal for your employer or employment supervisor to infringe on that right.

These rights protect graduate student workers' freedom of association and association with a union, and we intend to uphold and defend these rights in every instance, whether graduate student workers are currently under active contract or not. This means that graduate student workers without a contract can and *should* exercise their legal right to refuse to cross picket lines.

We understand that for many international students, study permits are dependent on class attendance and participation. *It is the responsibility of your professors to release you from attending class and completing class requirements.* No one needs to approach a faculty member alone. If you would like help to talk to your professors or other supervisors, please connect with us by filling out the [General Assistance Contact Form for PSAC 901 Strike](#).

We call on all Faculty and Staff to remove any and all barriers for graduate student workers to participate in their own union's legal strike against the university.

We have explicitly reminded all Faculty at Queen's of your rights too through the Queen's University Faculty Association (QUFA) via the [PSAC 901 Unit 1 Strike Protocols for QUFA Members](#). We have called on professors and staff to remove all barriers to participation. We ask graduate student workers who feel comfortable and empowered to do so to remind professors that they have a right to refuse to carry out their duties for the duration of PSAC 901's strike, under the QUFA's Collective Agreement, Article 12.3. We are among the lowest-paid workers on campus. As we prepare to go on strike, we call on our profs to show their solidarity and join us on our picket lines rather than crossing them.

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We urge graduate student workers to encourage professors to excuse missed assignments, meetings, events, and all other responsibilities held during and immediately after the strike. Students can use the [email templates provided by the PSAC 901 Strike Committee](#) to email their professors. Please note that this document also includes a template to email undergraduate students about the strike.

We urge all graduate student workers, whether under contract or not, to make a reasonable attempt to be excused from every class held during the strike. Faculty members have been encouraged to cancel classes and/or excuse absent students. This is not something that you should have to undertake on your own—we encourage graduate student workers to combine forces with their departmental student governments to contact their Department Heads or Leadership teams and ask them to contact faculty members. [Various email templates](#) have been made available to assist graduate student workers as they ask members of the university community to stand in solidarity with our union. Included in this folder is an email template addressed to professors that outlines the ways in which they can stand in solidarity with PSAC 901.

We call on all graduate student workers to consider the negative impacts of crossing picket lines.

We recognize that some graduate student workers may live on campus or access medical needs on campus. Please note that accessing your own home or medical needs is not considered a form of crossing the picket line.

We understand that graduate student workers may feel a need to be on campus for various reasons during strike action, but the crossing of picket-lines should be kept to an absolute minimum, if necessary at all.

If members feel that they have no choice but to cross the picket line, but still want to show their solidarity, they can approach a Picket Captain and ask them for a Solidarity Button that members can wear while on campus. Picket Captains will also be able to provide information about other ways that members can support strike efforts.

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every possible step to avoid allowing university operations to continue as usual. We strongly encourage members to consider how their own research output helps create value and prestige for the university as well as the ways that pausing research activities during a strike can put even more pressure on Queen's and departments to push for a fair deal.

If you have questions about doing your own research during a strike, we encourage you to attend a Strike Information Session. We will also be holding spaces on the picket line to talk through the grey area in the student/worker divide that the university uses to exploit our labour. We encourage all members who feel conflicted about this divide to reach out to their stewards, picket captains, or to other executive members to talk this through.

We encourage members to consider how professors, administrative staff, and other on-campus organizations may pressure us to cross our own picket lines, and to consider how to not enter campus spaces unless there is a critically urgent need.

We call on all graduate student workers to refuse to enter buildings that may become unsafe in the event of a PSAC 901 strike.

We urge members to refuse to enter any building that they deem unsafe. Queen's Upper Level Management has been doing last-minute contingency planning for "high-risk laborator[ies]," which "contain radioactive, biohazard, or chemical materials" or "woodworking tools, cranes/hoists," and "X-Rays, lasers." We recommend that all workers who may be asked to do work on Queen's Campus refuse unsafe work. We also recommend citing [Section 43.3 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act](#).

As a graduate student worker, you have the right to refuse to enter any building you deem unsafe. If you would like assistance in asserting this right, please connect with us by filling out the [General Assistance Contact Form for PSAC 901 Strike](#).

We call on all graduate student workers to stand in solidarity with PSAC 901 Unit 1 in our strike and to help strengthen the line by reporting all instances of strike breaking or scabbing.

We ask graduate student workers to document and report any strike-breaking activities they are assigned (e.g., marking assignments, creating asynchronous content, taking on tutorials or lectures, assisting in RA or TA laboratory work) to [PSAC 901's Official Strike Breaking Report](#)

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[Form](#). If you are unsure whether someone's actions constitute strike breaking, please make a note of this in your report. Reports can be made anonymously. We will reach out to members who may be inadvertently strike-breaking or who may be facing pressure to strike break, and we will offer them support in refusing to perform strike-breaking activities.

Our approach is not to police members, but to address the ways members may feel pressured to work against the strike and those who are pressuring them. By doing so, we can empower every member to participate fully in our shared job action.

If you are frustrated, annoyed, or upset because of the disruptions caused by the PSAC 901 strike, remember not to blame unionized workers (your colleagues) for striking or for being put in a place where they have to make difficult decisions. We are a union—a community. Our unity is our strength.

Every instance that members can refuse to cross physical and virtual picket lines strengthens our strike and our position at the bargaining table. We thank you for standing in solidarity with your union and banding together to fight for workers' rights. We will stand strong together until we are able to reach the fair and equitable deal that all our members deserve.

In solidarity,

Jake Morrow
President, PSAC 901

Further Information on Picket Lines

What is picketing?

Picketing is a form of protest carried out outside a place of work to **block access** to a place of business, **disrupt** an employer's productivity, and **publicize** the existence of a labour dispute, in this case a strike that will be legally allowed to begin March 10th.

If you are a member of PSAC, you will be picketing as a part of your strike duties in key areas on campus to help create visibility and disrupt everyday life at Queen's with your physical presence in solidarity, along with the withdrawal of your labour.

Why is disruption important?

The disruption caused by the withdrawal of our labour and presence on the picket line shows the employer two things: **(1) our labour is necessary** for the proper functioning of their business and **(2) our workforce is united** and will not be ignored. It is this disruption that pressures the employer to provide a fair deal. The stronger the disruption, the quicker the strike.

What is crossing a picket line?

The phrase "crossing a picket line" literally means walking through or past the picket line to access the "business", or in this case, Queen's Campus and its buildings for any reason other than picketing. It also looks like accessing any alternative temporary service that Queen's may contract to replace the withdrawn labour. Crossing the picket line weakens the line and the impact it can have on pressuring the employer. It can signal to the employer and striking workers that the labour is not necessary.

How can I prepare?

Bring home what you think is necessary from your office (e.g., perishables, plants, and necessary research materials). Take out the books you need from the library now. Download the required software on your home computer. Set up an "out of office" email reply. Talk to your supervisors and professors to decide how your communications will change during the strike. Consider which resources on campus you may need to access during the strike and which are avoidable (for example, you may *not* need to go to the gym, but you might *need* to go to Student Wellness Services).