

CALIFORNIA

UC Santa Cruz academic workers strike over handling of pro-Palestinian protests



Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters gathered last week at UC Irvine, which could be one of the next campuses to join the academic workers' strike. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

By Howard Blume and Jaweed Kaleem

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Hundreds of academic workers at UC Santa Cruz became the first to walk off their jobs Monday morning, a rolling strike that could cripple instruction and some university operations as workers allege that their free speech rights were violated during protests that involved attacks on peaceful union demonstrators.

The strike at UC Santa Cruz is the first of a potential series of labor actions that could move across campuses in the University of California system at the critical end of the quarter with finals and commencement in the coming weeks, their union said. The strike is based on the union's claim that the UC response to campus protests has amounted to unfair labor practices. They are demanding that UC officials negotiate with pro-Palestinian demonstrators, stop what they say are actions hostile toward nonviolent activists and grant amnesty to those facing disciplinary action related to the unrest.

United Auto Workers Local 4811 represents 48,000 graduate student teaching assistants, tutors, researchers and other academic workers, the largest union in the 10-campus system.

“The rights of union members across the UC system are at stake, and workers on every campus are incensed by UC's conduct and the violence it summoned against the Palestine solidarity protests of which we are a part,” Rebecca Gross, unit chair of UAW 4811 at UC Santa Cruz, said in a statement Monday morning. “Santa Cruz is proud to be the first campus to Stand Up, and other campuses will follow unless UC remedies these charges.”

University officials characterize the job action as illegal because the academic workers have a valid contract with a no-strike clause.

The strike authorization, with support from 79% of those union members who cast ballots, called for university officials to “commit to de-escalation and negotiate in good faith with protesters over their urgent moral concerns.”

The union has cited the violent mob attack on a pro-Palestinian encampment at UCLA and subsequent arrests of union members when police moved in to clear the camp, calling the actions “an assault on our fundamental right to free expression.” At UC Irvine last week, police [arrested 47 protesters](#) allegedly involved in taking over a building.



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UC officials charge that academic workers' strike over pro-Palestinian protests is illegal

May 17, 2024

In broader terms, pro-Palestinian protesters have demanded, among other things, that universities divest from Israel and weapons companies.

Over the weekend, the UAW 4811 Instagram page forecast potential next targets.

“UCLA next” said one post with an eyeball emoji, while other posts suggested UC Davis, UC Irvine and UC San Diego could be called into the rolling strike.

The union has not formally called for strikes at those campuses.

However, there could be independent action by union members that is not authorized by the union. Some members and pro-Palestinian campus groups have said they will go on strike or protest in support of academic workers in Santa Cruz.

On Instagram, an Academics for Justice in Palestine group at UC Santa Barbara posted that its followers should walk out at 11:30 a.m. Monday: “We walk out in solidarity with our union siblings at UC Santa Cruz who stand up and strike today for free speech, workplace safety and academic freedom! Get ready UCSB... We are ready to strike!”



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‘Maximize chaos.’ UC academic workers authorize strike, alleging rights violated during protests

May 16, 2024

UC leaders filed their own state unfair labor practice charge against the union Friday, calling on the labor board to order student workers to “cease and desist” the walkout.

“This strike directly violates the [collective bargaining agreement’s] no strike clauses, and has no relation to UAW members’ employment with the university. Instead, as the UAW and its members’ communications make clear, UAW strikes to support protest activity surrounding the conflict in the Middle East,” UC said in its filing with the state’s labor board.

In a letter sent to graduate student workers on Wednesday, UC officials warned students against striking.

“Participating in the strike does not change, excuse or modify, an employee’s normal work duties or expectations. And, unlike a protected strike, you could be subject to corrective action for failing to perform your duties,” the unsigned letter from the UC office of the president said.

Rafael Jaime, UAW Local 4811 co-president, said in a Monday morning statement that “the ball is in UC’s court — and the first step they need to take is dropping all criminal and disciplinary proceedings against our colleagues. ... The faster UC resolves this, the fewer people will have to walk off the job.”

Workers ratified their current contract in late 2022, winning significant pay increases and benefit improvements.

The union argues that the strike is within its legal rights because it’s connected to an unfair labor practice charge workers filed in early May with the [state’s labor board](#).

J. Felix De La Torre, general counsel for the labor board, said that a decision on the cease-and-desist order sought by the university could come early this week. He added that the labor board has also offered a mediator in an effort to help resolve the dispute.

For two weeks, students at UC Santa Cruz, including unionized graduate students, have maintained a pro-Palestinian encampment on campus in support of divestment from

Israel. The strike comes as protesters and the university administration have indicated that they've reached a standstill. Protest leaders said Thursday that they were “under imminent threat of police sweep” after they said the university gave them formal notice to “cease all camping activities on university property.”



CALIFORNIA

UCLA Academic Senate rejects censure and ‘no confidence’ vote on Chancellor Gene Block

May 17, 2024

Santa Cruz is a smaller UC campus of 19,764 students, with nearly 2,000 in graduate school. In 2020, the university [fired dozens](#) of grad students from their teaching assistant positions after strikes there. At least 17 arrests were made during a related student-led demonstration.

Jaime, who is a doctoral candidate in UCLA’s English department, said that to resolve the strike, the union needs “to see a real commitment from the university to respect our rights to free speech and peaceful protest on campus.”

Speaking before the strike decision, Jaime said a strike would mean “all academic work would cease, including research, teaching and grading.”

Student workers will receive \$500 weekly in strike pay, or about 33% less than the average teaching assistant makes for a 20-hour work week, he said.

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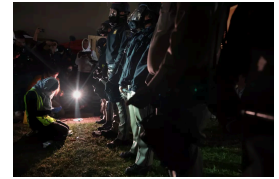
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May 1, 2024



Howard Blume

Howard Blume covers education for the Los Angeles Times. He's won the top investigative reporting prize from the L.A. Press Club and print Journalist of the Year from the L.A. Society of Professional Journalists chapter. He recently retired "Deadline L.A.," a past honoree for best public-affairs radio program, which he produced and co-hosted on KPFK-FM (90.7) for 15 years. He teaches tap dancing and has two superior daughters.



Jaweed Kaleem

Jaweed Kaleem is a national correspondent at the Los Angeles Times. Based in L.A. with a focus on issues outside of California, he has traveled to dozens of states to cover news and deeply reported features on the complexity of the American experience. His articles frequently explore race, religion, politics, social debates and polarized society. Kaleem was previously based in London, where he was a lead news writer on Russia's war on Ukraine and spearheaded European coverage for the Times, including the Global California initiative. Before joining The Times in 2016, he reported on religion for HuffPost and the Miami Herald, where he was a member of a Pulitzer Prize finalist team recognized for coverage of Haiti. His reporting has also received awards from the Society of Professional Journalists, the Society for Features

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