



Graduate student workers picket Monday at the entrance to the UC Santa Cruz campus. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

EDUCATION

UC Santa Cruz student workers launch strike over treatment of pro-Palestine protesters



BY HILLARY OJEDA
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Quick Take

Nearly 1,500 UC Santa Cruz graduate student workers walked off the job on Monday after the union voted to strike in protest of how the University of California, at multiple campuses, used police to arrest pro-Palestine protesters and clear encampments. The student organization running UCSC's encampment announced that it was moving the encampment from Quarry Plaza to the base of campus in solidarity with the strikers.

Nearly 1,500 UC Santa Cruz graduate student workers walked off the job on Monday after the union voted to strike to protest how the University of California, at multiple campuses, used police to arrest pro-Palestine protesters and clear encampments.

UCSC is the first campus to go on strike after United Auto Workers 4811, which represents about 48,000 graduate students across the 10 UC campuses and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, voted last week to launch a job action over the treatment of protesters. The union's executive board is using the "stand-up" strike model, which in this case, means that they'll be calling on specific campuses to strike at different times.

Union unit chair Rebecca Gross said she and her fellow striking workers canceled sections, didn't attend labs and stopped work starting Monday morning. She added that she doesn't know if union leadership has decided yet whether other UC campuses will be called to strike next. As of Monday, other campuses have been asked to continue working or to engage in other activities to raise awareness.



Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

She said UCSC student workers expect to continue striking until their contract ends on June 30 or when the University of California resolves unfair labor practice charges the union filed against the UC after an encampment for Palestine at UCLA was attacked by counter-protesters and then raided by police – who arrested 200 protesters.

“[The charges] are about worker safety, worker control over their own workplaces, amnesty for workers facing disciplinary charges and right to free speech on public university campuses,” Gross said.

Gross did not have an estimated number of classes that were canceled because of the strike. At about 10 a.m. Monday, the university announced that classes would be offered through online instruction.

Campus spokesperson Scott Hernandez-Jason did not respond to repeated requests for information about the impact of the strike on classes and campus research centers, including how many sections had been canceled. In an online notice, the school initially said all morning classes should shift to remote instruction except for those held at the Coastal Science campus and classes where instructors had already made alternate

arrangements with students. Later, all afternoon classes were also moved online. The notice did not specify how long classes would be held remotely.

School administrators also announced changes to campus shuttle routes because of the strike. The university said campus shuttles are doing a modified Loop route from Cook House at the base of campus to West Remote, and that Santa Cruz Metro isn't operating on campus but instead dropping all passengers at the Barn Theater. Officials said striking activities could cause bus delays.

At Bay Drive and High Street at the base of the campus, more than 100 people, the majority of whom were graduate students, gathered to picket by noon Monday. Many held signs saying, "UAW on strike unfair labor practice."

By mid-afternoon, hundreds of protesters blocked the streets carrying signs. Several tied a banner to traffic poles across High Street that stretched more than 40 feet and read: "There are no universities left in Gaza."

Campus police officers had stopped traffic from entering the intersection. Santa Cruz Police Department Deputy Chief Jon Bush said city police were not involved in controlling traffic in the area of the strike. He added that UCSC administrators had not yet requested any assistance from Santa Cruz police related to the encampment or the strike.

FROM FRIDAY

UC Santa Cruz grad workers prepare to be first among UC's to strike, starting Monday

Dozens of students who have been camping at Quarry Plaza since [establishing a Palestine solidarity encampment on May 1](#) packed up their tents and belongings Monday and joined the picket lines. In a statement, the UCSC chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine said it was relocating the encampment to the base of campus in solidarity with striking student workers. Shortly before 2 p.m., more than 30 tents had been set up in a gravel parking lot across the street from the picket line.

Gross and other graduate student workers said they didn't know exactly why the union's leadership had [called on UCSC to be the first to strike](#) but pointed to the strong history of labor activism at the campus. In [December 2022](#), UCSC's graduate students broke with their counterparts at other UCs and [voted to reject a contract](#) to end a six-week systemwide strike. In 2019, UCSC graduate student workers staged an unauthorized job action, or "[wildcat strike](#)."



Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

Summer Sullivan, a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate in environmental studies and a head steward for the union at UCSC, said the energy at the picket line felt great Monday morning.

“UCSC in particular has always had a rich history for organizing,” she said. “We’re the first campus called out in a statewide strike as a testament to that. So we’re holding down the line until our sibling campuses are called out.”

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At the picket line, more than 50 people went back and forth across High Street holding signs and banging drums. Loudspeakers played upbeat music next to tables of food and stacks of signs. Flags hanging on the tables bore phrases like, “UC Labor for Palestine,” and “*huelga*,” which is “strike” in Spanish. Statewide union president Rafael Jaime, a Ph.D. student in English at UCLA, participated alongside UCSC students.

At noon, a group of more than 30 faculty members and other supporters marched up to the picket shouting, “Free Palestine” and “UC, UC, you can’t hide, you’re committing genocide.”

Gross, the union unit chair, said the union is still tallying up the number of workers on strike and the impact. The initial estimate was about 1,500 of the more than 2,000 workers at UCSC were striking as of Monday morning.

FROM MAY 11

UCSC student protesters say negotiations over ending encampment have failed

On Friday, the UC said in a [statement](#) that the strike was illegal, announced it filed an unfair labor practice charge against the union and asked the state to order the union to not strike.

The Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) ultimately decides if the strike is legal, according to Gross and the Council of UC Faculty Associations, which acts as an umbrella organization of the faculty associations at each campus.

UCSC Campus Provost Lori Kletzer, in a [message](#) to the campus Friday, shared the UC statement and said the university will work to minimize the strike’s impacts.

“UC and UC Santa Cruz both have a long tradition of respecting the civil expression of individual views,” she wrote. “Individual graduate student employees are free to exercise their rights so long as such participation does not conflict or interfere with their work responsibilities and does not violate university policies, including the Student Code of Conduct.”

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