

Title: SMA Statement of Solidarity with Striking Precarious Workers

The Society for Medical Anthropology stands in solidarity with student workers, postdoctoral scholars, and academic researchers everywhere in their struggles for equitable working, learning, and living conditions. As a Society, over half of our membership is constituted by precarious workers: student workers, postdoctoral scholars, academic researchers, and those with adjunct or lecturer appointments. Students alone make up 47% of our membership. We recognize the strength of our discipline relies on the ability of these scholars to succeed, and that universities must address structural and material inequities to support the health and wellbeing of their scholars and students.

On November 14, 2022, 48,000 precarious workers of the University of California represented by four local units of UAW went on an unfair labor practice (ULP) strike following months of unsuccessful negotiations with the UC. The 12,000 postdoctoral scholars and academic researchers and 36,000 graduate student workers who have since accepted new labor contracts and returned to work were part of the largest labor strike in academia in the US. And yet, the UC strike is one of many recent labor actions in higher education, including [student worker strikes at Columbia](#) and [Temple University](#), an [adjunct strike at the New School](#), the [unionization of NIH fellows](#), and a [strike of university employees in the United Kingdom](#). These movements demonstrate growing resistance to [neoliberalization and austerity](#) in higher education and systems of oppression in academia that disproportionately exploit and abuse Black, Indigenous, and scholars of color, disabled scholars, and international scholars.

As an example, we highlight the original demands of the University of California graduate workers to underscore the impact that such demands may have on the health and wellbeing of precarious workers. Below, we list abbreviated versions of these demands, and more details can be accessed on the December 11, 2022 version of [fairucnow.org](#) (archived):

1. **Fair compensation:** A cost of living adjustment that lifts workers out of [rent burden](#).
2. **Community safety:** Defunding the UCPD, which has a [long history](#) of brutality, racial profiling, and surveillance that disproportionately harms [BIPOC students, workers, and faculty](#).
3. **Disability justice:** Universal Design for Accessibility across the UC, fully accessible technology, classrooms, conferences, and buildings, and a streamlined process to address access needs that does not place the burden of proof on disabled workers.
4. **Support for international graduate student workers:** End the [discriminatory practice](#) of charging international students Non-Resident Supplemental Tuition (NRST), reimburse visa fees, and remove English proficiency requirements for appointments.
5. **Dependent healthcare:** Health insurance premium remission for dependent children and adults of graduate workers.
6. **Support for parents and caregivers:** Expanded paid parental leave for birthing and non-birthing parents and expanded child care subsidies.
7. **Climate justice:** Expanded transit benefits that subsidize public transportation and encourage carbon-neutral commutes.
8. **Non-Discrimination and Anti-Bullying:** Clear and accessible grievance processes for protecting against and addressing instances of discrimination, harassment, and abuse.

Medical anthropologists have long critiqued many of the issues related to precarity addressed in the University of California graduate workers' original demands and by various groups of striking students and university workers. These issues include the [importance of adequate and affordable housing](#) as workers face [high rent costs](#) especially in high rent areas around university campuses and beyond; [wage fairness](#); improved [health care access and eligibility](#); [child care benefits](#) and family leave options; safe [classrooms](#) and working conditions including ample resources to respond rapidly to [emergent public health crises](#); the [violence of US policing](#) and its impingement on campus equity and diversity; [disability justice](#) and the [inaccessibility](#) of the university for disabled scholars; improved contractualized terms; and [more](#). In [a policy statement published in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*](#) in 2022, The Anthropology of Mental Health Interest Group articulated how structural inequities in academia contribute to mental distress among the most vulnerable anthropologists. They recommend institutional and departmental policies in line with many of the UC workers' demands.

The Society for Medical Anthropology stands in solidarity with striking worker-scholars advocating for more just working, learning, and living conditions. When precarious academic workers are so aggrieved that they will forgo the education and tasks to which they had dedicated their money, time, and person, humanitarian ethics demand solidarity. We urge SMA members, especially those with academic appointments to:

- Avoid picking up the duties of laborers on picket lines;
- Resist employer efforts to undermine strikers or pit academic workers against one another;
- Refuse to work in activities dedicated to replacement hiring for the duration of ongoing strikes;
- Affirm that striking graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and academic researchers will not be prejudiced in job, grant, and award applications; and
- Follow the recommendations and requests particular to specific strikes, such as declining speaking engagements with targeted employers for the duration of the strike.

Finally, we urge all SMA members to advocate for these and similar demands in their workplaces and organize with colleagues to resist the systems of oppression that exploit the most vulnerable in academia. As the largest organization of anthropologists committed to the health and well-being of communities worldwide, the SMA recognizes that workers everywhere benefit physically, mentally, and socially from fair working conditions. As anthropologists working in diverse contexts, these demands set an important precedent for both current and future anthropologists.

The Society for Medical Anthropology is a section of the American Anthropological Association. While this SMA statement is consistent with AAA's long-standing commitment to fair labor practices, the SMA does not speak for the Association.