

On May 13, more than 500 Academic Student Employees and supporters turned to the UW Board of Regents meeting (and hit the Zoom capacity!) to demand that admin agree to a contract that meets our proposals. Check out some of the comments members gave or submitted in writing below:

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Sam Sumpter, Philosophy

My name is Sam Sumpter and I am Vice President of UAW 4121. We are the union of more than 5000 graduate and undergraduate Academic Student Employees at UW, and as you likely know, we have been negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement with UW administration since March.

As you will hear from others, ASEs have been working alongside other UW workers to perform critical work that makes UW the prestigious institution it is, both during the pandemic and as we move forward. We've reconfigured lesson plans at the last minute to provide the highest quality instruction we can while remote. We've adapted our research and found innovative ways to troubleshoot working in remote contexts. Many of us have even helped advance live-saving vaccine research and other research critical for supporting public health during the pandemic, including research that brings in significant grant funding.

We recognize that the pandemic has been difficult for everyone, and we also know that it has exacerbated existing inequities for marginalized people. For ASEs, many of whom are living on \$2500 a month or less, this has all been felt acutely, particularly for those of us who are not independently wealthy. This all disproportionately affects ASEs who are BIPOC, trans, disabled, caregivers, international, undocumented, or otherwise marginalized — dynamics that only make

it harder to make progress in our work, and that in too many cases are resulting in underrepresented folks dropping out of UW entirely.

In contract negotiations, we've proposed reasonable increases to our compensation, that would keep us competitive with peers, and would make clear UW's commitment to the recruitment and retention of diverse ASEs — both during the pandemic and beyond. Even a modest increase like what we're proposing would make a big difference.

Nearly 500 UAW members and supporters are here today urging you to support our efforts for a contract that meets these reasonable proposals. Thank you for taking careful consideration of our comments and the importance of this issue.

Vern Harner, Social Work

My name is Vern Harner and I am an ASE in the School of Social Work. As a pre-doctoral instructor, I've been honored to be recognized as one of two students last year to receive the UW-wide Excellence in Teaching Award, as well as being one of last year's Husky 100...but recognition like that has been bittersweet.

As an ASE, I am living on under \$2,500 a month in Seattle, and I can't find consistent summer funding. The current wage increases included in the University's last contract offer would help keep our wages up (just barely) with inflation, but this is not enough. I was recruited to UW because it is a top tier university...and I have been providing what the University has recognized as top tier work. However, in bargaining, UW's negotiating team has told us that THEIR goal is for our wages to be 80-90% of the median for student workers at our peer universities. However, we don't view UW or the work that we do as less than average.

While I've heard some faculty and administrators wax poetic about how being home more during the pandemic means realizing just how much they have to clean in their beautiful homes, I have spent the past 14 months in my 250 square foot apartment...while training these faculty how to provide accessible remote instruction during the pandemic. Adding a \$200 lump sum payment, or the equivalent, to the current contract offer from admin won't fix the skyrocketing cost of living in Seattle, but it *would* be impactful for every ASE who receives it—especially the most vulnerable, like hourly employees, parents, and international students.

Though I will only benefit from one of the three years of this contract, I have been putting everything I have into fighting for improvements—even attending bargaining the day after getting surgery for the first time. That is how much I care about academic student employees at UW. With respect, President Cauce and Members of the Board, your response to our proposals is your chance to show the student employees at UW how much YOU care. I want to thank the Board of Regents for taking careful consideration into this issue and I urge you to support and approve our efforts in collective bargaining to modest compensation increases.

Levin Kim, Information School

Hi everyone, my name is Levin Kim, and I'm a PhD student in the Information School and a head steward. I came to UW because I was drawn to its vibrant, interdisciplinary research at the intersection of technology and society.

One of the favorite parts of my job is working with undergraduate and masters students who are passionate about changing the world through technology and teaching. These students are not only incredibly smart programmers, user experience researchers, designers, and more, but are committed to understanding their roles and responsibilities as global citizens in an increasingly technologically mediated world. The students I work alongside are committed to enacting positive social change, standing up for their values, and holding institutions accountable. These students work as TAs and Reader/Graders for many of the foundational courses in schools and departments like the Information School and The Allen School of Computer Science. The computer science department alone employs 330 undergrad TAs for 50 undergrad courses, along with 34 undergrad RAs. The iSchool employs around 130 undergrad and masters' students as TAs, RAs, and Reader/Graders. Without the labor of these students, the iSchool and the Allen School at UW would not be some of the most prestigious and highly ranked programs in the nation.

I cannot stress enough how hourly ASEs, as well as ASEs in general, are integral to the functioning of the UW. And yet, they are also expected to pay a significant portion of their wages back to UW as part of their student fees. Many hourly ASEs make \$1300 per month or less, barely more than the average cost to live in university housing. Without the lump sum or equivalent wage increase, high fees will only continue to disproportionately impact underrepresented ASEs.

ASEs as a whole teach the majority of contact hours at the university and do the majority of the research that brings in millions of dollars to our university and makes it so prestigious. Fairly compensated ASEs are better teachers, better researchers, and better advocates for the UW. UW purports to care about equity, and especially during a pandemic it is crucial to remove the financial barriers that disproportionately hurt the most marginalized amongst us. Therefore, I am asking you to provide a lump sum or equivalent wage increase to all ASEs, including hourly ASEs.

Jacob O'Connor, Biochemistry

My name is Jacob O'Connor and I am a head steward and an ASE in the Biochemistry department. Researchers like myself have been designated critical employees by the university because our work is essential to continuing the development of health related technologies. ASEs in my lab have worked directly on developing technologies that will lead to future COVID vaccines and treatments, and every ASE in my department was told by our chair that we can't let the pandemic stop our work, because our research is the work that will prepare our society for future health crises.

As we've been asked to risk our health to come in and perform our research during the pandemic, UW has continued to ask us to pay them for the privilege. UW has charged us fees for facilities we cannot safely use in a pandemic and parking fares as people transitioned away from communal transit during a global pandemic to minimize their risk. We've suffered through the fear and isolation of a global pandemic in order to do the work that UW needs to function. Now, UW is taking away a key piece of compensation we were relying on. This is completely unacceptable.

We already were struggling. Before the pandemic our compensation barely kept up with the cost of living in this city. I know parents in my school who rely on food stamp assistance to get by because childcare is so expensive. I know others who rely on the income-restricted units created by the multi-family tax exemption program in order to live in the city. Our budgets are tight, and that's before exacerbating factors our members can face, such as disability. We need to be able to afford to live in this city if we are to continue to do the essential research that makes this University work and that society relies upon to develop new therapies. We need for the opportunity to do this work and receive this education to be open to everyone, not just the independently wealthy. We need management to recognize this by offering us a contract that meets our proposals.

Kyle Kubler, Communication

Hi everyone, my name is Kyle Kubler, I'm a PhD candidate in the Communication department and a bargaining committee member with UAW4121. As Academic Student Employees, we currently pay, at a minimum \$248 in fees per quarter. Another way to put that is roughly 10% of our first month's pay goes to fees that largely support the renovation and upkeep of the buildings we work in. In my case, because I was only able to get an hourly reader/grader ASE appointment this quarter, I had to pay close to \$3000 in tuition and fees for the 2 credits I need to defend my dissertation in 3 weeks. All the COVID relief money I've saved since the pandemic went toward being able to graduate. To ask employees to pay fees to work is a uniquely unfair practice that disproportionately impacts low-income ASEs and hurts UW's ability to attract competitive graduate students.

We are currently in contract negotiations with the University to try and find a number of solutions to this issue. We first proposed waiving these fees for ASEs, which management has rejected.

We then proposed a continuation of our current contract language which includes a lump sum payment to offset fee costs, which management also rejected saying that it was too logistically difficult despite its current implementation. We are hoping to come to deal with management as soon as possible but the issue of fees is a major sticking point for our members.

Offsetting the cost of fees would help bring our wages in line with projected inflation as well as bring us closer to our peer institutions in terms of total compensation. If UW is serious about being a competitive research and teaching institution in a city with some of the highest cost of living in the country, we need to see a change in management's current last, best, and final offer.

We are flexible to multiple ways of resolving this issue. Fee waivers, a lump sum payment, or equivalent benefits are all options we're open to. We're here today to ask the board of regents to support these resolutions so we can reach a deal with the university as soon as possible

Amzi Jeffs, Mathematics

My name is Amzi Jeffs and I am a PhD Candidate and NSF Graduate Fellow at the University of Washington. I am joining my fellow union members to demand that the UW administration improve their "last, best, and final" contract offer to ASEs, in particular by including an annual lump-sum payment for all academic workers, including undergraduate and hourly workers.

The fees that we pay each quarter are a burdensome and humiliating expense, especially given the valuable work that we do to make UW run every day. It is a stain on UW's reputation that academic workers, who already struggle to make ends meet in one of the most expensive cities in the U.S., are subjected to additional quarterly charges.

To make UW an equitable and fair institution, the Board of Regents must come out in support of an additional lump-sum in the current ASE contract, and move towards eliminating fees for all students. With an \$8 billion yearly budget, UW can absolutely find a more equitable way to fund the services that fees are currently used for.

Jessie Seiler, Epidemiology

My name is Jessie Seiler and I'm an ASE in the epidemiology department within the school of public health. As you can imagine, this has been a difficult and fascinating time to be a student of epidemiology. I've been grateful for my education, grateful for my mentors, and more than all that grateful for the chance to work in some small ways on the pandemic response. I had the chance to work directly on projects that shifted the local COVID response here in WA state, as well as in India and other nations. I've been grateful, too, for my safety in this time in which economic precarity has cost so many people their lives.

But it is terrifying to be two years into a PhD and find that my financial security is threatened again. I know we're used to thinking of academics as all coming from a privileged class, but today's students here at the University of Washington are coming from a more diverse socio-economic background than ever before. For myself, as privileged as I am to do the pandemic response work I love, I haven't been able to afford to live anywhere but a basement unit without an oven or fridge. Many of us grew up without the safety net that comes from having a family with educational credentials and upper-middle-class wages.

And I think that's a really good thing: we're bringing new perspectives to every field in academia, and the world is a better place for that diversity of experience. You should be proud of creating a school where that can happen. But please don't shut us out of the sciences we love and the commitment to serve that means everything to us.

We have come to the University of Washington to better ourselves and the world. But between our wages barely keeping up with inflation and the loss of the lump sum payout, it's feeling like the University of Washington is not interested in the excellence and passion that we bring. I want to serve. It's what drew me to public health in the first place, and then finally to the University of Washington. Please consider our requests related to the ASE contract and help us stay here so that we can learn how to make the world a better place.

Amal Nanavati, Computer Science & Engineering

My name is Amal Nanavati and I am an academic student employee (Research Assistant) at the University of Washington. I am joining others with UAW4121 in demanding a \$200 lump sum for all academic student employees, hourly and salaried.

We should NOT be required to pay to work — any mandatory fees are unacceptable. It is particularly unacceptable that, when accounting for mandatory fees, an hourly TA being paid at the base rate comes out at a net LOSS (\$3,254 total in wages at \$16.69/hr and 19.5 hrs/week, \$3,829 in fees for a resident student). UW purports to care about equity, and especially during a pandemic is it crucial to remove the financial barriers that disproportionately hurt the most marginalized amongst us.

\$200 may not seem like much, but the fact that even \$200/yr will make a difference in ASE lives shows how difficult it is to live in Seattle with our net compensation (wages minus fees). ASEs teach the majority of contact hours at the university and do the majority of the research that brings in millions of dollars to our university and makes it so prestigious. Fairly compensated ASEs are better teachers, better researchers, and better advocates for the UW (including the work we did last year to lobby for additional money in the covid stimulus bill for academia). Therefore, I strongly urge you to support and approve our efforts in collective bargaining to receive a \$200 lump sum payment for all ASEs.

Pritam Das, Civil & Environmental Engineering

I am Pritam Das, and I am an ASE in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department at the University of Washington. I am a new international student (from India) at UW, and the costs associated with living in Seattle were a huge shock when I first moved here. Most options for single studios near UW campus are more than 45% of my current salary, which is very risky in the context of maintaining financial stability.

I am joining others with UAW4121 to demand a \$200 lump sum payout (or equivalent) be added to our contract for all ASEs.

While the changes in the next contract regarding wage increase is very welcome, it has just allowed us to keep up with inflation. Being an international student, it is especially difficult for me to shell out funds towards various student fees, while also paying bills and saving up for my yearly visit back home to see my folks. The \$200 payout is very important for ASEs, and especially for the International Students community, who have it especially difficult in maintaining financial stability.

I want to thank the Board of Regents for taking careful consideration into this issue, and I strongly urge you to support and approve our efforts in collective bargaining to receive a lump sum payment.

Delaney Glass, Anthropology

We are requesting a \$200 lump sum, waiver, or equivalent. This modest ask will help workers (who contribute immensely to UW monetarily, through scholarship, and daily labor) who already pay 50% of their income on rent in Seattle. While this request does not keep up with inflation or cost of living, it would make a tremendous impact on our lives.

Lorin Gardner, Psychology

My name is Lorin Gardner, I am an undergrad researcher in the ASE union in the Psychology department. I am joining others in the ask for a \$200 lump sum or equivalent payment in addition to everything in the last/best/final offer. I am also asking for a further increase to the 2/3/3 % wage increases. The current offer barely keeps up with inflation and does not keep up with the absurd increases in housing costs across Seattle.

I am lucky enough that my tuition is covered by my parents, and I am still drowning. I have another job on top of my research work and full time enrollment at school just to keep up with rent. Students that don't have the financial support I have access to (students who are disproportionately students of color, transgender, immigrants, or otherwise marginalized) could not be in my position. They would be priced out of working for UW, priced out of the opportunities afforded by undergraduate research. I find it disgusting that UW plays lip service to progressiveness and justice and equity but does nothing to make this a material reality on our campus.

Emily Roskey, Social Work

My name is Emily Roskey and I am an ASE in the Social Work department at the University of Washington. I fully support the union's demands for a \$200 lump sum payment (or equivalent) for ASEs to be included in our next contract. ASEs should not have to pay for the renovation of our work sites out of our paycheck. Additionally, our wages have not kept up with cost of living or inflation. I want to thank the Board of Regents for taking careful consideration into this issue and I strongly urge you to support and approve our efforts in collective bargaining to receive a lump sum payment.

Sami Davies, Math

I am Sami Davies and I am a 5th year PhD student in the math department. Living in Seattle is extremely expensive; Seattle is one of the most expensive cities in the country, in part because average renting costs are more than two times the average in the U.S. As an ASE, I am not paid a wage that keeps up with this cost of living. Fees are particularly brutal, especially in the fall when we have to pay them just after a missed pay period. I fully support our demands for a \$200 lump sum payment, or equivalent, for ASEs to be included in our next contract.

Momona Yamagami, Electrical & Computer Engineering

My name is Momona, and I'm an ASE in the Electrical & Computer Engineering department. When we first transitioned to remote learning last spring, I was a TA for a large senior-level course. Because I'm the main point of contact with my students, I was the only one who recognized how much they were struggling with virtual learning during a racial reckoning, and I made a point to individually reach out to each of them and offer one-on-one support. However, as a student myself, especially an international student, I experienced and continue to

experience significant cost to attending UW because of my immigration status that makes it challenging for me to fully devote my time to supporting the students in my class. When I first came to UW, I arrived with only two suitcases, and had to pay for all my furniture, clothes, and household items. I had to borrow money from friends and family so that I can pay the deposit and first, and last month's rent on my apartment because I didn't have a credit score. All this without even getting my first paycheck.

These costs are compounded by UW's low wages and the fact that I have to pay high fees to teach and do research at UW. This is why I'm urging you to accept our reasonable compensation proposals. We recognize that the university's current wage proposal is an improvement from when we started negotiations. However, many of us are struggling to get by, and while an additional \$200 doesn't sound like much, it would be the rough equivalent of a 1% wage increase for many ASEs, and would improve UW's ability to recruit and retain underrepresented ASEs. This is recognized by the hundreds of community supporters who have signed on to our solidarity petition, including dozens of faculty members. As one signer stated: "Student workers at the UW deserve a living wage and equitable work and living conditions where they do not just survive but thrive. They are an essential part of the university community and deserve to be recognized and treated as such." With UW's current proposed contract, myself and many of the other ASEs are just surviving. Help us thrive so we can stay here and continue providing meaningful support and instruction to students that makes UW a leading undergraduate institution without being stressed about whether we can afford next month's rent or next quarter's fees.

Ethan Campbell, Oceanography

My name is Ethan Campbell and I'm a graduate research fellow in the School of Oceanography at the University of Washington. While I'm funded through an external fellowship at the moment, I've been an ASE for six previous quarters and will return to being an ASE again this fall.

I am joining with members of UAW4121 to urge you to consider offering ASEs a fee waiver, an annual lump sum payment, or the opportunity for students to vote on the existing fees that are currently imposed without students' democratic input. The approval that a few students gave the Board of Regents to enact fees such as the IMA Bond fee as many as 20 years ago does not mean that current or future students approve of these fees.

In the School of Oceanography, we consistently lose talented prospective PhD students to peer graduate programs (namely the MIT/WHOI Joint Program and UCSD's Scripps Institution of Oceanography) that do not charge their students fees to serve as RAs and TAs. In a location as expensive to live in as Seattle, fees totaling about \$750 annually make our program less competitive, and are a real contributor to the financial insecurity that too many ASEs experience.

ASEs should not have to pay to work. Let's be honest—the University can afford the minimal (~\$0.9M) cost of providing a \$200 annual lump sum payment to its 4,500 ASEs, and it can probably afford to reduce the fee burden by substantially more. It would be the right thing to do.

I thank you in advance for taking into consideration our request.