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UAW 4121 Members have voted to ratify a new contract with the University of Washington

Highlights of the contract include increased wages, full tuition waiver, \$0 premium healthcare, and increased protections against discrimination.

After being on the brink of a strike a few weeks ago, more than 2,100 members of UAW Local 4121, the union for academic student employees (ASEs) at the University of Washington, have voted to approve a new three-year contract with the University that includes significant improvements to compensation and rights.

“The University made big moves in the final day and a half of bargaining to avert a strike,” said Liz Mills, a RA in the Information School and member of the UAW 4121 bargaining committee. “Our members have responded in kind with historic turnout to ratify the agreement and position ourselves to fully implement its terms. We’re excited that this process helps create a more inclusive campus that can continue to be competitive with our peers and stay current with Seattle standards.”

The Union and University began bargaining for a new contract on December 5, 2014, and reached a tentative agreement just hours before the current contract expired on April 30, 2015. Over the course of negotiations, thousands of ASEs mobilized in a variety of ways—including signing petitions, staging rallies and protests, requesting support from faculty and students, and voting to authorize a strike.

For many, the major improvements in the contract were related to compensation, including a commitment by the University to completely waive tuition (both the Operating and the Building Fee) for TAs and RAs with 50% FTE appointments. Other improvements include clear language establishing steps to the minimum wage for hourly ASEs, language to create a more family-friendly environment (including access to lactation stations), and stronger protections against micro-aggressions: an issue ASEs made a key part of their campaign.

“This contract is a positive step toward preventing hostile work environments due to biases based on gender, sexual orientation, and race,” said Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, Philosophy TA and member of the Muskogee Nation of Oklahoma.

Since UAW Local 4121 members ratified their first collective bargaining agreement with UW in 2004, members have seen substantial improvements in their pay, benefits, and workplace experience as the result of member participation in bargaining and actions across campus. This process gives academic student employees a strong voice and leads to a more inclusive and equitable campus.