

**POSITION ON STRIKES ON CAMPUS<sup>i</sup>**  
**School of Social Work, McMaster University**

Social Work has, historically, sought to ally with social movements seeking to foster individual and collective welfare and to enhance social justice. Accordingly and in keeping with its philosophy and mission, the School takes the position that as social workers we stand in solidarity with unionized persons engaged in legal action to defend clearly-articulated rights and entitlements.

In the event of legal strike action taken by McMaster employees, it is the School's practice to alert students to the implications of a strike, call attention to what may be learned from the process, and address questions and concerns likely to be on students' minds. Every work stoppage and strike situation is, of course, different but the main points in the School's communication to students are as follows:

***The School's position:***

*The School of Social Work will support the union's legal right to engage in a work stoppage and to picket. The School will not support engagement in replacing the work of striking employees. The School will do what it can to urge the University Administration to find ways to arrive at a fair and expeditious settlement, and to provide the necessary conditions for normal academic activities.*

***Practical implications:***

*We will wait to learn from the union about the kind of support it seeks and, if picketing is planned, call students' attention to the distinctions and implications of different kinds of picket:*

- 1) An information picket would mean that union members distributed material about their concerns at campus entrances. This would cause delays but campus activities would likely continue.*
- 2) A picket line designed to stop or slow work on campus would mean that some faculty and other University employees may choose not to cross the picket line. The School will leave the decision whether to cross such a picket line up to the individual.*

***Rights & Responsibilities of Students, Staff and Faculty***

*Students' rights and responsibilities in the event of work stoppages are outlined in:*

*<http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/RightsResponsibilities-WorkStoppages.pdf>*

*The employment contracts of permanent faculty, managers, staff, sessional and contractual faculty vary considerably at McMaster – some are afforded the right not to cross a picket line of striking or locked out employees, while some are not and their options are therefore more limited.*

***Implications for students' learning:***

*Regrettable as a strikes are, they present unique learning opportunities of direct relevance to the School's overarching mission to engage in social work education, research and practice that is committed to enhancing social justice. Consequently you can expect your instructors to, for example:*

- Explore social work's historical alliance with social movements seeking to foster individual and collective welfare.*

- *Use the issues raised by the strike to illustrate key aspects of social work practice, social work ethics, social policy, and the challenges of organizing collective action to bring private troubles onto the public agenda.*
- *Consider the unequal entitlements of different employee groups and consider the transferable implications for understanding power relations in other workplaces.*
- *Suggest that you meet at the picket line and analyze your experience and observations.*
- *Suggest that, in class time, you engage in self-directed activities concerned with these themes.*

---

<sup>i</sup> A policy on strike action in field placement settings is included in the Field Manual.

March, 2013