

Job Action Handbook

Mount Royal Faculty Association

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Introduction

A Message to Members of the Mount Royal Faculty Association

As we navigate each round of collective bargaining, we may find ourselves at a pivotal moment for our university and our profession. Whether you are a long-standing faculty member who has seen many contracts come and go, or a new colleague experiencing your first bargaining cycle, you likely share the same goal: a fair, equitable Collective Agreement that respects the important work that faculty do to serve our students and to make Mount Royal a leading undergraduate university in Canada.

You may be asking, "*Why are we receiving a Job Action Handbook now? Does this mean a strike is inevitable?*"

The answer is no. No strike is inevitable, nor is a strike the Association's primary goal. Our goal is – and always has been – to reach a negotiated settlement at the table that improves our working conditions and protects the quality of education at MRU.

Our working conditions are the students' learning conditions.

However, the most effective path to a fair deal is *preparation*.

As Mount Royal employees, our power at the bargaining table is directly linked to our resolve away from it. The Employer must always understand that while we prefer dialogue, we are fully prepared to withdraw our labour if that step is needed to protect our rights and our future. This handbook is a physical manifestation of that resolve. It demonstrates that the MRFA is not just hoping for a good outcome; we are engaged, organized, and prepared to mobilize to secure a fair collective agreement if necessary.

Why This Handbook Matters

The prospect of job action—a strike or a lockout—can be a source of anxiety. Uncertainty breeds fear. The purpose of this handbook is to replace that uncertainty with knowledge.

This document is our roadmap. We want to demystify the job action process, stripping away the unknowns to reveal a clear, manageable plan. Within these pages, you will find concrete answers to the questions that keep us up at night:

- *How does the bargaining process actually work?*
- *What happens to my pay if we go on strike?*
- *What exactly is a "lockout," and how do we protect ourselves against it?*
- *How do I answer questions from my students?*
- *What happens to my research projects or my leaves during a strike?*

By understanding the mechanics of strike pay, picket duties, and essential services protocols now, we remove the Employer's ability to use fear as a bargaining chip later. When we are informed, we are calm. When we are calm, we are formidable.



Our Collective Strength

The history of our own Association teaches us a simple truth: solidarity works. Alone in the Alberta postsecondary sector, the MRFA never gave up or bargained away our right to free collective bargaining. In 2003, the MRFA voted 93 percent in favour of a strike. Needless to say, a new collective agreement was reached over the weekend before the strikes were to begin. Solidarity then was key; solidarity now is key.

Every time we read a bargaining update, attend a town hall, or wear an MRFA button, we show our solidarity with our Negotiating Team, which gets stronger. Every time we demonstrate that we understand the process—including the power of a Strike Vote—we shift the dialogue at the table back to our interests, our concerns.

I encourage you to read this handbook thoroughly. Discuss it with your colleagues. Ask questions of your Department Liaisons. Use it to prepare your personal finances and your professional plans.

This handbook is a signal of conflict to come, but a declaration of solidarity. We are prepared for every outcome, we are committed to standing with each other, and we are ready to secure the Collective Agreement we deserve.



In solidarity, Lee Easton

*Professor - English, Languages, and Cultures
Past MRFA President (2020-2024)
2024 Collective Bargaining Round Job
Action Coordinator*

The Roadmap

Stages of Bargaining

The progression toward a new collective agreement or job action follows the Collective Bargaining Index. You can view the full live version of the index [here](#).

Collective Bargaining Timeline

The outline below provides an overview of a typical bargaining timeline in the months leading up to and during a bargaining year.



= Current Placement in the Bargaining Index*

*This placement marker will shift in accordance with the current stage of the bargaining process.



Stage 1 -	Stage 2 -	Stage 3 -	Stages 4 - 7*
Prepare.	Interest Exchange.	Negotiations.	Protracted Negotiations, Formal Mediations, Alert, Engage.
Until January of the bargaining year	January - February of bargaining year	February - June of bargaining year	June 30th of bargaining year - onward*
			*If no agreement is reached by June 30th of the bargaining year. <i>Extensive member engagement and support are needed throughout the fall in protracted negotiations.</i>

For more details and updates on bargaining, visit mrfa.net/bargaining

Questions and input can be sent to labourrelations@mrfa.net

Collective Bargaining Index

Stage 1: Prepare

No bargaining is currently occurring.

The Association is reviewing internal documents and establishing connections with organic leaders.

Significant preparatory actions in this stage include:

In January of the academic year prior to a bargaining year, Members of the Bargaining Team are to be ratified by the Membership.

In fall of the bargaining year, Bargaining survey and department visits from the Collective Bargaining Caucus to inform the development of the bargaining mandate.

In January of a bargaining year, Members vote to ratify the mandate.

Stage 2: Interest Exchange

Teams exchange letters of intent to begin bargaining.

Significant preparatory actions in this stage include:

- Staff collection of updated personal contact info from the membership

Stage 3: Negotiations

Teams meet to discuss the new agreement.

The risk of job action is low, but the Association is taking steps to ensure preparedness.

Significant preparatory actions in this stage include:

- Communications focus on bargaining transparency and member engagement
- Association staff begin reviewing vendors and pre-purchasing materials

Stage 4: Protracted Negotiations

Occurs after the current agreement expires, typically June 30.

Informal mediation often takes place toward the end of this stage.

Note: *The expired CA remains in effect until a new agreement is reached or a strike/lockout occurs.*

Significant preparatory actions in this stage include:

- Communications focus on bargaining transparency and member engagement
- Members participate in polling and demonstrate solidarity
- Towards the end of stage 4, members may be called on to sign up to serve as Picket Captains

Stage 5: Formal Mediation

This process must be completed before any legal job action can occur.

Significant preparatory actions in this stage include:

- Ramping up Communications with external stakeholders (e.g. students, parents, and the public) about the Association's positions and the impacts of Job Action
- Members will be participating in polling and demonstrating solidarity
- Members will be signing up for Picket Captain training

Stage 6: Alert

This means that bargaining has stalled. We enter a mandatory 14-day cooling-off period.

Significant preparatory actions in this stage include:

- The Association calls for an Alberta Labour Relations Board (ALRB) supervised Strike Vote.
- There is a final opportunity for Members to update their personal contact information.
- Members' direct deposit details will be collected to facilitate payment of strike pay, should job action commence.

Stage 7: Engage

72 hours' notice has been served. Official strike or lockout begins.

The subsequent pages of this handbook provide the answers to what this stage will look like for you.

If you need more information, please email office@mrfa.net

Staying Informed and Engaged

Staying active and informed is the most effective way to support your Bargaining Team and ensure the Association remains strong and effective at the bargaining table. Knowledge truly is power in this process.

How to Stay Informed

Attend Meetings: Participate in regular MRFA meetings and campus discussions to hear direct updates on bargaining progress.

Engage with Your Department Liaison: Reach out to your MRFA Department Liaison, who is your direct link for passing questions or concerns to the Executive Board.

Read Official Updates: Check your inbox for the MRFA Weekly Bulletin and specific bargaining update emails to stay current on the latest news.

Submit Your Input: Reach out to the Negotiating Team at negotiations@mrfa.net with your comments or concerns.

Provide your personal email address: In the event of a strike or lockout, you are likely to be locked out of your MRU email accounts. It is imperative that you provide your personal email address so the Association can contact you during job action.

Note: *Your personal email is also required to facilitate the processing of strike pay.*

The Power of Polling

Throughout the bargaining process, the MRFA may conduct surveys or polls to gather member input. These results are vital.

They Shape Our Position: Aggregate survey data form the basis of the bargaining mandate and your Negotiating Team's Statement of Interests.

They Demonstrate Unity: High poll participation shows the Employer that the membership is engaged and mobilized.

They Gauge Resolve: Polling helps the Executive Board understand member willingness to support escalating job actions if negotiations reach an impasse.

Financial Preparedness & Strike Pay

Financial stability is the backbone of successful job action. Members are encouraged to prepare a personal "rainy day" fund, be mindful of the provisions below regarding strike pay, and make note of the Association's financial preparedness.

Members' Financial Preparedness and Strike Pay

Strike Pay Rate: The current rate is \$150.00 per shift for members who perform their assigned strike duties. All Members are guaranteed a minimum of 3 shifts per week.

Payroll Processing: Pay is processed biweekly by a contracted payroll company (Payworks).

Eligibility Requirements: To receive pay, you must:

- 1 - Participate in assigned strike/lockout actions.
- 2 - Provide the Association with personal email and direct deposit information.
- 3 - Do not cross the picket line without an authorized pass.
 - Passes are provided for those covered by the Essential Services Agreement - i.e. Student Counsellors, and
 - Picket Passes may be approved for those who request one due to the necessity of research/scholarship continuity.

Tax Status: Strike pay is non-taxable, and no deductions are made.

Tools: Use the [Impact Calculator](#) and review the [Strike Pay Policy](#) to determine what you need to be prepared for job action.

Banks/Creditors: If job action is imminent, the MRFA provides a form letter to help you request a temporary suspension of mortgage or loan payments.

Note: *If you want more details about your financial preparedness for job action, review the [Financial Preparedness Session \(Fall 2024\)](#) recording.*

Your Associations' Financial Preparedness and CAUT Defence Fund Benefits

The MRFA maintains a robust Contingency Fund designed to protect your rights and support our fight for improved working conditions. The Fund ensures we are fully resourced for all grievances and arbitrations on an ongoing basis and that we have funds to support Job Action, if necessary.

In the event of job action, you will receive the following financial support:

Strike Pay - is provided jointly from the MRFA's Contingency Fund and the CAUT Defence Fund.

Health Benefits - The MRFA will cover the full cost of maintaining your health benefits without interruption.

The target balance in the Fund will be sufficient to cover two consecutive job actions. The Association continues to allocate funds to the Contingency Fund to build up to this target balance. Detailed financial reports are available to members anytime via email at facultyrelations@mrfa.net and by attending MRFA Meetings.

Note: *The Association shall endeavour to negotiate a strike protocol that enables Members on sabbatical, medical, parental and other leaves to be exempt from job action and continue to receive regular compensation. Strike protocols are established by both bargaining teams before a strike/lockout can commence.*

The Importance of a Strike Vote

Strength at the Table and Protection Against Lockout

A Strike Vote is a legally mandated secret-ballot process regulated by the Alberta Labour Relations Code. It is often the most critical tool a union has to achieve a fair deal without actually walking off the job.

For more information on this topic from a session hosted by the MRFA in the 2020-2024 round of bargaining, watch [The Power of Faculty Demonstrating Support](#).

A Strike Mandate Is Not a Strike

It is essential to understand that a "YES" vote does not automatically mean a strike will occur.

Granting Authority: A positive strike vote grants the MRFA Executive Board the authority to initiate a strike if they determine it is the only way to reach an acceptable agreement.

Avoiding Conflict: History shows that a strong "YES" vote often reduces the likelihood of a strike. It frequently compels the Employer to return to the table and seriously address the membership's priorities to avoid a disruption.

A Negotiating Tool: A strike mandate provides the Negotiating Team with critical bargaining leverage. It signals to the Employer (and mediators) that members are serious and united behind their proposals.

Why Your Vote Matters

Turnout Is Key: A high turnout shows a wide cross-section of faculty is mobilized.

Strength in Numbers: The stronger the mandate (e.g., a high percentage of "YES" votes), the greater the pressure on the Board of Governors to negotiate fairly.

The Alternative: Without a successful strike vote, the Association has limited recourse to resist the Employer's imposition of unfair terms or to push for necessary improvements.

In the Alberta labour relations context, a successful strike vote serves as a vital shield for the union and its members. Specifically, it provides protection in a number of ways.

1. Countering a "24-Hour Lockout"

In Alberta, an employer may use a strategic "24-hour lockout" to terminate the "bridging provisions" of an expired contract (Section 130 of the Labour Relations Code). Once these provisions are terminated, the employer is legally allowed to unilaterally impose new, often less favourable, terms and conditions of employment. Having a strike mandate in hand allows the Association to respond immediately with strike notice, preventing the employer from dictating terms indefinitely and forcing the dispute toward resolution or a return to the previous contract's standards.

2. Preserving the Status Quo

Without a strike mandate, a union has limited recourse if an employer decides to "starve out" the membership by locking them out and then offering to let them back to work only under "mandated terms" (such as lower pay or reduced benefits). A strong strike vote signals that the membership is prepared to withdraw their labour entirely rather than accept a sub-standard, employer-imposed contract, thereby protecting the integrity of the existing agreement's standards during the gap between contracts.

3. Preventing a "Forced Return" on Employer Terms

If an employer locks out staff and the union has no strike mandate, the employer holds the "procedural floor." They can essentially set the price of admission for returning to work. A strike vote flips this power dynamic, ensuring that any return to work is negotiated as part of a formal settlement or "Return to Work Agreement," rather than being dictated by the Board's team under their own rules.

When will a Strike Vote Lead to Job Action?

A strike mandate remains valid for 120 days following the date of the vote. During this period, the Association continues to negotiate; however, a decisive strike vote serves as a powerful lever to compel the Board to engage more substantively with the Association's proposals.

If negotiations remain stalled following a successful vote, the Executive Board may establish a strike deadline to maintain timelines and protect the efficacy of any potential job action (i.e. the Association does not want to be in a position where job action occurs over the summer months; so, a strike deadline may be set to protect Members from this possibility). The selection of this date is a strategic decision based on several operational and bargaining factors.

Note: *Setting a deadline does not make a work stoppage inevitable; rather, it serves as a final procedural tool to break the deadlock and reach a fair agreement at the table.*

During the Strike Period

Picket Duty: Locations, Times, and Shifts

Picketing is our primary tool for demonstrating solidarity.

Shift Structure

Standard shifts are 3 hours of picket duty or other duties as assigned by the Job Action Committee.

- Members generally perform one shift per day but may be eligible for up to two.
- Picket shifts will be allocated equitably. Everyone can be guaranteed three shifts per week. After three shifts have been allocated to all interested members, four shifts will be allocated, then five, and so on.
- Members may be invited to sign up for picket shifts during the 72-hour cooling-off period in Stage 7 of the bargaining index. However, this process may be deferred if there is progress at the table (see section on the importance of a strike vote for more information on how bargaining can continue in this stage).

Daily Schedule

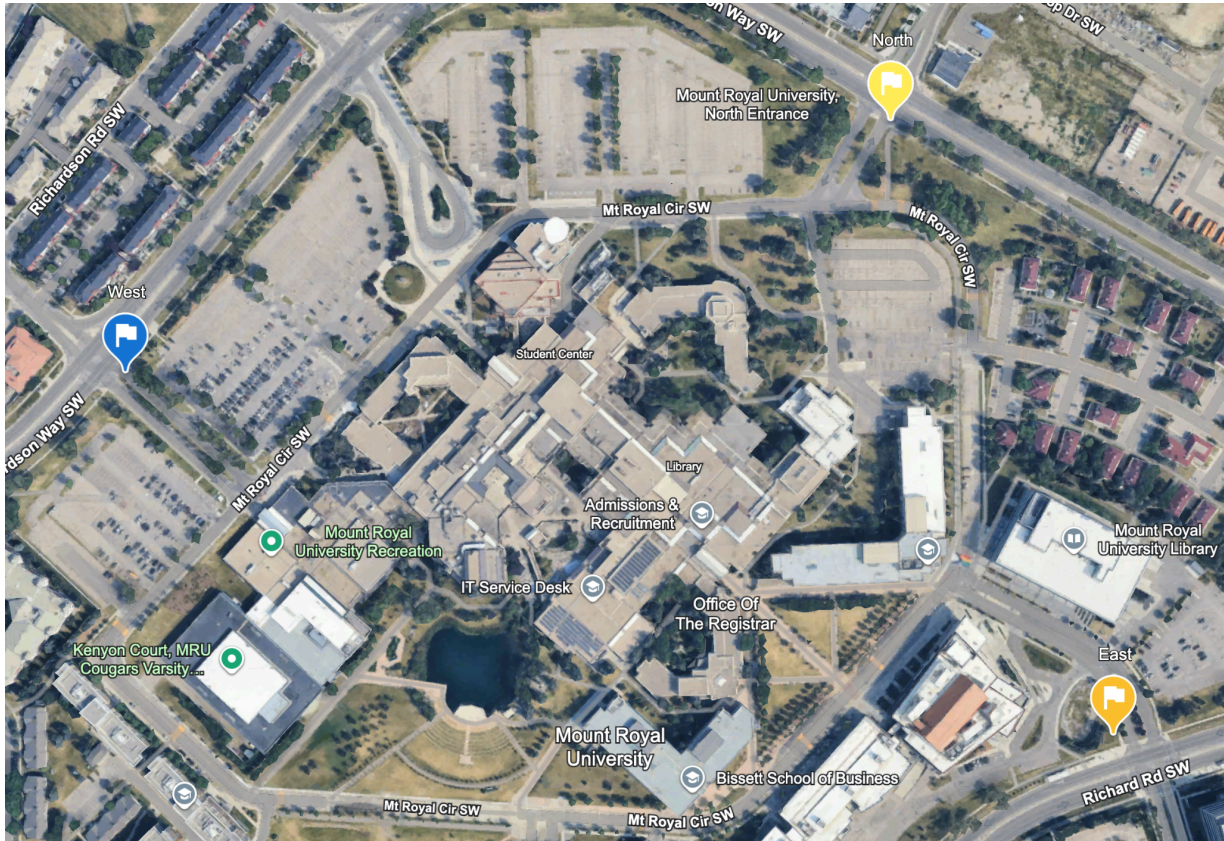
Typical shifts run 8:00 AM–11:00 AM, 11:00 AM–2:00 PM, and 2:00 PM–5:00 PM.

Sign-Up Process

Signups are done online one week in advance via an online signup tool. A call for signups will be sent to members when the date of job action commences (*aka the strike deadline*) is determined.

Primary Picket Locations

REFERENCE MAP:



- **West:** Recreation Entrance/Richardson Way
- **East:** Main Entrance/Richard Road
- **North:** Residence/Library access points

Picket Captains

These members manage the line, track attendance, and report incidents.

Captains are appointed by the Executive Board and must complete First Aid and specialized leadership/picket training in advance of Job Action commencement.

Crossing the Line & Picket Passes

Crossing the line undermines our bargaining leverage, and unauthorized crossing of the picket line can result in the loss of access to picket duty/strike pay.

What constitutes crossing?

- Physically accessing the campus without a pass
- Teaching classes (including online) or providing course materials
- Marking, grading, or corresponding with students about MRU programs

Does research count?

Grant applications and scholarship activities required for research continuity are not normally considered crossing. However, you must apply for a Research Continuity Picket Pass to access campus lab spaces to continue your research, where applicable.

Who are “authorized passes” issued for?

- **Essential Services:**
 - For duties mandated by provincial legislation and as outlined in the MRFA/MRU Essential Services Agreement
- **Exceptional Needs:**
 - Such as accessing health services on campus or for research continuity

How to apply for a picket pass?

Email office@mrfa.net with the rationale for your request for a picket pass; you will receive a response within three (3) business days.

Accommodations & Non-Picket Duties

The Association provides alternative duties for members who cannot picket due to disability, family care, or other accommodation needs.

Alternative duties may include, but are not limited to:

Strike HQ Support:	Answering phones, light cleaning, and general office work
Logistics:	Assisting the Faculty Centre Coordinator with refreshment delivery
Communications:	Monitoring media, social media engagement, or making buttons
Outreach:	Coordinating phone trees and email distribution lists

Informing Students

Our Message:

Students are often concerned about their exams and academic year.

"Our working conditions are *your* learning conditions."

Explain that we are fighting for fair compensation, job security, and protections for workloads to ensure long-term educational quality. While we do not want to cause unnecessary stress for students, we will communicate transparently with students as job action approaches. Students who want to stay informed can sign up for updates [here](#).

What Ceases?

Inform students that during a strike, classes will cease, office hours will be cancelled, and faculty will not be available via email or D2L.

Student Support:

Encourage them to share their support on social media and contact SAMRU representatives.

Who to Contact:

General Inquiries:	MRFA Office – office@mrfa.net
Negotiations Status:	Negotiations Officer – negotiations@mrfa.net
Strike Shifts/Duties:	Senior Administrative and Faculty Relations Officer (SAFRO)
Financial/Payroll:	Administrative Specialist
Media Inquiries:	MRFA President
