

WPI Resident Assistant Union FAQ

When was the Resident Assistant Union (RAU) formed?

The RAU was certified by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) following a secret ballot election on March 27, 2024. All incumbent RAs at that time were eligible to vote.

How long have the University and RAU been bargaining?

Formal negotiations began on September 4, 2024, and several negotiation sessions were held through early May 2025. Negotiations commenced again in August 2025 and are ongoing. Negotiation sessions are held on average two times per month and generally last for 1.5 to 2 hours. As the RAU bargaining team was not available in the summer, the parties agreed to pause negotiations until the start of the academic year in both summer of 2024 and 2025 (8 of the 18 months). The University remains committed to working respectfully with the RAU bargaining team to agree to the terms of an inaugural collective bargaining agreement.

How does the bargaining process work?

The process, while conceptually straightforward, is more nuanced. Both parties (the University and the RAU) have a selected group of individuals who serve as the 'Bargaining Committees.' These individuals are authorized to negotiate for their respective group. In this case several selected RAs are on the bargaining committee for the RAU and four individuals from Student Affairs, the Housing and Residential Experience Center, and Talent & Inclusion represent WPI.

Each committee has the opportunity to present proposals for articles to be included in the contract. The proposals address topics like health and safety, compensation, evaluations, the hiring process, and discipline and dismissal. These proposals are subject to a series of exchanges, wherein both parties offer counter proposals until agreement is reached on the language and terms of each article.

Once mutual agreement is achieved on an article, it is designated as a tentative agreement (TA). The TA is then signed by representatives from both bargaining committees. These signed TAs will be incorporated into the final contract once agreement is reached on all terms of the contract. The full collective bargaining agreement then becomes in full force once it is approved by members of the bargaining unit, which in this case are 73 Resident Advisors and Graduate Housing Assistants.

How is bargaining going?

At the time of this writing, the parties have TAs on eighteen articles of the contract. The articles that remain under discussion in negotiation sessions pertain to:

- Compensation and room and meal waivers
- Room assignments
- The number of years the contract will be in force before negotiating again.
- Job descriptions
- Leaves of absence
- Work schedules

I have heard that some of the RA jobs are changing. What are the reasons why WPI is changing the student jobs that support the residential experience for all students?

In surveys and listening sessions conducted in recent years, particularly through the listening sessions held by the Mental Health Implementation Team, our RAs have reported challenges in being able to meet the increasing needs of their residents. In response, and before the RAU's formation in 2024, the Housing and Residential Experience Center (HREC) Team began to explore substantial changes to RA duties and assessed those responsibilities. Based on their findings, HREC redefined the RA role effectively moving from one generalist (RA) position that required individuals to have a broad range of skills, experience, and interests, to three specialized roles.

- About half of the positions (approximately 36 student employees) will support health and safety in the residence halls, by conducting duty rounds and supervising the halls in the evenings.
- About 40% of staff (roughly 28 employees) will focus on well-being and academic and social integration. These employees will support students with a focus on routine check-ins with students by apartment/room, follow-ups with individuals as needed in coordination with the CARE team, and conflict resolution.
- And roughly 15% (approximately 12 employees) will focus on planning and hosting building-wide social and educational programming.

In many respects, this restructuring and changes to the roles and responsibilities of student jobs that support the residential hall experience is modernizing the role. And, with these changes, the overall number of student employees who will provide support in our residence halls remains roughly the same.

What benefits does this new student staffing model have?

- In most cases, it increases the number of student employees working within each building.
- Under this new model, each resident will now have three peers available to them for support, as opposed to one.
- Instead of having to be available for residents 24/7, this model creates more predictable schedules for student staff, allowing them to better attend to their own academic, wellness, and other priorities.
- This differentiation also allows RAs to focus their talents on the role that best aligns with their strengths and interests.

What do RAs currently receive as compensation?

Currently, RAs receive credit for their room and half a meal plan for 15-20 hours of work a week during our four academic terms. Given the value of the housing and meal plan waiver, this compensation is equivalent to about \$28-30 an hour.

As noted above, compensation is one of the articles about which WPI and the RAU continue to negotiate. The University has offered compensation proposals which reflect these new job

descriptions, roles, and responsibilities. However, to date, the RAU has declined to discuss compensation related to the modernized positions.

What is the primary issue holding up agreement?

The University maintains that it has the right to define the operational needs of its workforce and remains committed to modernizing the RA role. This reflects a principle under the NLRB rules that articulates which matters are “mandatory” subjects of bargaining – meaning that the union and the employer are required to collectively bargain or negotiate over these matters or terms of employment. For example, wages, hours and working conditions are generally used to describe “mandatory” subjects of bargaining.

Other matters related to employment are generally reserved as “management rights” which means the employer (in this case, the University) has discretion to “manage” these matters related to employment as they deem in the best interest of the employer. These other matters remain under University discretion unless the employer chooses to negotiate about them and add specific terms into the collective bargaining agreement.

The determination of staffing, including the number and types of positions the employer deems important to run the organization are rights that the University maintains. This includes, in the matter involving the RAU, the right of the University to make changes to the job descriptions related to the duties and responsibilities of student residence hall staffing.

This plan was introduced in our first negotiation sessions and has been discussed many times with the bargaining committee. WPI has also met with all RAs on two occasions to discuss the changes and hear feedback. The RAU has maintained a firm position regarding the preservation of the current RA role and its associated responsibilities.

WPI has offered the opportunity for incumbent RAs to continue to serve as an RA in its current configuration through the duration of their employment, which will allow for a gradual phasing in of the modernized roles and result in no change in duties and responsibilities for incumbent RAs. This would result in a smaller subset of student employees starting in the new role. WPI has also committed to working with a union-management committee to discuss important topics and gather feedback as the new roles are implemented.

Importantly, the University is not seeking to reduce the number of bargaining unit members, but rather to realign roles in a way that better serves both students and institutional goals. The University welcomes negotiations with the Union on the impact of the decision to modernize the workforce on subjects such as hours or working conditions.

When was the University notified that the RAU decided to strike, and what has the University been told about why the RAU decided to strike?

At a regularly scheduled negotiation session on Tuesday, October 28th, the RAU told the WPI bargaining committee that it intended to strike if the University did not accept the full set of proposals that they presented to the University at that session. These proposals included articles that would retain the RA role in his current configuration and related articles on

compensation, work schedules, and job descriptions. Specifically, the RAU told the University that it would strike if the University did not respond to these proposals favorably by noon on Friday, October 31.

The University provided a comprehensive set of counter proposals to the RAU by noon on Friday but did not accept all proposals in full. The UAW representative of the RAU notified the University, by e-mail, at 1:02 pm on Friday, October 31, that their strike would commence at 3:00 PM.

What is the current status of negotiations between WPI and the RAU?

WPI is continuing to meet with the RAU to discuss the remaining unresolved articles. The University remains committed to establishing a contract with the RAU.

Can RAs get in trouble or lose their jobs for striking?

No. As unionized employees under the National Labor Relations Act, RAs have the right to strike—as well as the right not to strike. As of now, more than 60% of RAs remain working.

How are on-campus residents being supported during the strike?

As noted above, a majority of RAs are still working and are continuing to do their work that supports residents.

Additionally, our Community Directors (CDs), who are full-time professional staff who live on campus and oversee our residential communities, continue to maintain a strong and active presence in the halls.

RAs and CDs will continue to conduct monitoring of the residence halls consistent with prior practice. The Community Directors are dedicated to fostering safe, inclusive, and supportive environments and are available to students if they need any support. After hours, students can also call the HREC staff member on duty (contact information is prominently posted on every residence hall floor), or Campus Police at 508-831-5555.

What is expected of picket line participants?

All WPI community members are expected to adhere to event policy expectations that apply to all campus events, including demonstrations, such as [Events Office Policies](#), the [Campus Events Policy](#), and [Advertising Policy](#)..