

position of power, forcing the government to react swiftly and seek compromise. Moreover, teachers' unions are constrained by collective agreements, making significant semester extensions untenable. Instead, what typically transpires after a strike is a minor term extension or adjustments to evaluations, negotiated between universities, teachers, and student unions.

For example, in 2005, student unions clearly conveyed to the government that if any educational institution faced a disruption due to the strike, students would resume their protests. Consequently, despite the strike lasting two months, the academic calendar experienced only a three to four-week extension, with courses being condensed and evaluations renegotiated to minimize disruptions. Similarly, during the nearly seven-month-long strike in 2012, which saw the participation of well over a quarter of a million students at its peak, the government made significant concessions. They even took the extraordinary step of creating legislation to rewrite the academic year to prevent students from failing, highlighting the considerable influence and potency of student mobilization.

Additional Resources

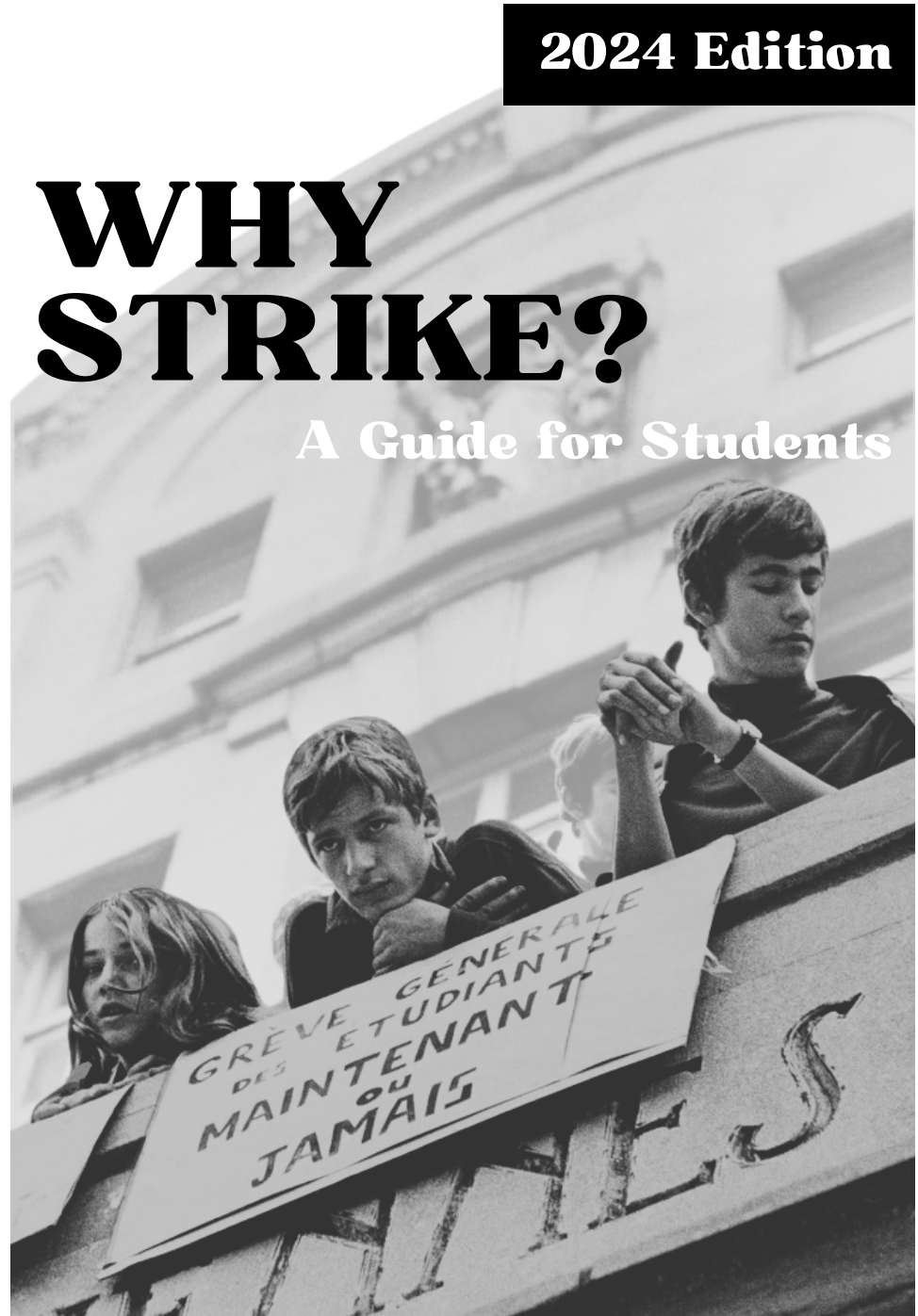
Links to all of which can be found on the SSMU External Affairs website under External Representation and Why Strike - 2024 Edition.

- [Organize to strike, fight to win! Quebec Student Strike of 2012 Booklet](#)
- [23 Reasons to Strike Booklet | Free Education Montreal 2011](#)
- [How to Hold a General Assembly | Toronto 2012 Workshop](#)
- [Brochure "Guess What! We've Got Rights!?" | Collective Opposed to Police Brutality](#)
- [Fuck Austerity Guide to Strikes \(2015\)](#)

2024 Edition

WHY STRIKE?

A Guide for Students



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What is a Student Strike?

A student strike is a disruption of university activities: no classes, exams, or evaluations are to take place during a strike. Strikes are enforced through picket lines. Picket lines can either take a “**symbolic**” approach (wherein they serve to communicate information, apprise faculty and students of your cause, or demonstrate solidarity with others on strike) or a “**hard-picket**” (physically blocking the classroom door so that students and faculty are unable to enter). Students can vote for a definite strike, where classes are blocked for a specific length of time, or for an **unlimited strike**, where classes are indefinitely blocked until a demand is met.

unthinkable, especially concerning employee salaries and the crucial role of the education system in the economy. The potential chaos generated by a large cohort of students not graduating would be a significant institutional challenge, making the Unlimited General Strike a potent weapon, forcing the government to take the demands seriously and pushing for a resolution to avoid severe consequences in the education system and the economy at large. 10

The effectiveness of any strike, particularly an Unlimited General Strike, depends heavily on two crucial elements: collective participation and rigorous enforcement. It cannot be underscored enough, the decision to strike must be a collective one, with full engagement from all members of the student association, as solidarity and unity are essential for maximizing impact and leverage. Secondly, enforcement is key, requiring thorough preparation to ensure all members are willing and able to picket and actively participate. This entails organizing training, providing resources, and fostering a supportive environment to empower members. Clear communication channels and coordination mechanisms are also vital for maintaining discipline and resolving any issues that may arise during the strike.

Might I Lose My Semester in the Event of an Unlimited General Strike?

Let's set the record straight. In the history of Quebec's student strikes—dating back to 1968, including notable years like 1974, 1978, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1996, 2005, 2012 and 2015—never has a semester been canceled when the strike has reached widespread participation. It's true that the government often brandishes the threat of semester cancellation to coerce students back into classrooms and downplay the impact of the strike. However, this threat paradoxically serves as the greatest strength of the student movement. It puts students in a

Towards the Unlimited General Strike

The strategic progression from shorter strikes to a general unlimited strike is grounded in building capacity, visibility, and leverage for the student movement advocating for accessible education. Initially, short strikes serve to showcase the seriousness of the cause, creating momentum and setting the stage for more significant actions or negotiations, aiming to build potential and power within the movement.

The process begins with 1 to 3 to 5 day strikes, demonstrating commitment and resolve, sending a message to the government about the students' dedication and capturing media attention, informing the public about the cause and amplifying the impact of their demands.

However, the ultimate threat lies in the prospect of a general unlimited strike. This strategy involves striking until the demands are met, escalating the severity of the fight. The catch here is that the government stands to lose a substantial amount of money invested in subsidies if a semester is canceled due to the strike, giving students maximum leverage in negotiations.

The impact of an Unlimited General Strike is multifaceted. Firstly, it ensures maximum visibility for the student movement, both in the media and among the population, facilitating debates and letting their demands be known widely. Secondly, by collectively deciding not to attend school during the strike, participating students avoid academic penalization for their protest actions.

Most significantly, the government is under immense pressure to resolve the conflict quickly during an Unlimited General Strike. The possibility of canceling a term is economically and logistically

Why is a Student Strike Effective?

Given that universities and CÉGEPs in Québec receive substantial state funding, any disruption to their regular activities, leading to delays or cancellations of semesters, directly imposes financial burdens on the government. Importantly, the Quebec government plays a pivotal role by heavily subsidizing tuition, providing a significant amount of \$11,000 per student annually. Furthermore, prolonged strikes not only impact graduation rates but also result in a decreased influx of students into the workforce. This, in turn, can give rise to a labor shortage felt across the economy.

How Does a Strike Start?

At the centre of the strike is **The General Assembly**, a meeting open to a student association's entire membership. At an assembly, the association's executives or general members can bring forward a motion about a strike. Then, all attendees are able to discuss the motion, amend it, and vote on it.

Critically, in order for votes to take place, the assembly must reach **quorum**, meaning that a certain number of members must be present. Quorum ranges from association to association and is usually between 10-20% of the total membership, which can range from a few dozen students to hundreds. Quorum is defined in an association's constitution.

During a strike, holding frequent general assemblies is important for keeping the strike democratic and keeping students informed. Strikes are usually called by **departmental and faculty associations** since those smaller associations have smaller quorums and have fewer classes to picket. A campus-wide strike is hard to enforce since it would include hundreds of classes to picket.

So, if you are:

- A STUDENT ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE
 - a. Find your association's constitution. Find out what the quorum for your general assemblies are and identify any other articles about general assemblies or strike motions.
 - b. Call a general assembly and publicise it widely among your membership: listservs, social media, posters, class announcements, etc. Serve food if you have the budget!
 - c. Prepare the logistical procedures for your assembly: How are motions submitted and discussed? How is the chair selected? Who is eligible to speak or vote? How are votes collected? Where will the assembly be?
 - i. See more notes in "How to Hold a General Assembly" (Toronto 2012 Workshop)
 - d. Prepare the strike motion (see section on page 4).

- A MEMBER OF A STUDENT ASSOCIATION
 - a. Reach out to your association's executive and express your interest in a general assembly on the issue.
 - b. Share these resources with them. Be prepared to argue in favour of the urgency of this issue. If they are resistant to the idea, use the association's constitution to argue that they are responsible to host the general assembly, in which the membership will make up its own mind, regardless of the executives' positions. You can also reach out to CSU at csucampaignscoordinator@gmail.com or SSMU at external@ssmu.ca for support or guidance.
 - i. In the event that your association is currently inactive, understand that there are mechanisms in place to petition for a general assembly, and we can assist you in navigating how to hold a strike general assembly.

demonstration of the day. Following this, the situation escalated 8 when 11,000 students from various associations across McGill and Concordia Universities declared a three-day strike from January 31st to February 2nd. In the wake of mounting pressure from student protests, the Quebec government made a concession by lowering the proposed fee increase to 33%. However, the situation has taken a new turn as advisory committees to the government are now urging Quebec to rescind the out-of-province tuition hike. Despite this adjustment, the student movement remains resolutely opposed. The fight continues!



Members of FASA hold up a red card to signify their votes in favour of the strike motion during FASA's Special General Meeting held on January 24th (Lily Cowper)

In October 2023, the Québec government announced a plan to nearly double tuition fees for out-of-province students in fall 2024, raising the minimum cost from \$8,992 to \$17,000. The Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), the current majority government, has framed the tuition hike as a way to protect the French language, including funnelling the increased tuition revenue towards Québec's French-language universities. However, students have protested that the tuition hike's greatest effects will instead be to price out poor students, increase student debt, and exacerbate elitism within post-secondary education.

Since the announcement, student associations at McGill, Concordia, and UQAM, among other universities and CÉGEPs, have organised town halls, educational workshops, demonstrations, and a one-day strike to oppose the tuition hike and mobilise a united front of students. Administrators at the three major English-language universities, Bishop's, McGill, and Concordia, have also publicly opposed the tuition hike, describing the threat it poses to their enrolment and funding given that 30%, 20%, and 9% of their student bodies are out-of-province Canadians, respectively. Finally, Liberal MNAs put forward a formal petition opposing the tuition hike in the Assemblée nationale, which received over 33,000 signatures in its month-long signing period.

Amidst the unfolding events, tensions rose as several student associations at Concordia initiated strikes in response to the proposed tuition increase. On November 30, over 1,000 students from the Geography Undergraduate Student Society, The School of Community and Public Affairs Students' Association, the Geography, Planning and Environment Graduate Students Association, and the Urban Planning Association organized a one-day strike, picketing classes, and actively participating in the inter-university

A motion has two components: the "whereas" clauses, which provide reasoning and context for the motion, and the "be it resolved" clauses, where the actionable items are outlined. For example,

WHEREAS *higher tuition fees will burden lower-income out-of-province students attending university in Quebec with increased debt and greater pressure to work during their studies;*

WHEREAS *this tuition increase has been imposed without the consent or consultation of student associations;*

WHEREAS *the introduction of students from outside Quebec represents a tremendous cultural and intellectual asset for the province, one that addresses the pressing labour shortage;*

WHEREAS *this increase in tuition fees will perpetuate elitist and classist barriers in post-secondary education;*

WHEREAS *accessible post-secondary education for all is critical to the economic and intellectual flourishing of individuals and society at large;*

WHEREAS *higher tuition fees will burden lower-income out-of-province students attending university in Quebec with increased debt and greater pressure to work during their studies;*

BE IT RESOLVED THAT *the [XX] Student association declare a [X]-day strike from [DATE], to [DATE];*

OR

BE IT RESOLVED THAT *the [XX] Student association declare a 1-day strike on [DATE];*

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the [XX] student association adopt a [symbolic or hard] picket tactic;

If the association wants to simultaneously adopt positions related to the subject:

- ***BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT*** the [XX] student association adopt a position stating that [X]

If the association wants to go on a general strike:

- ***BE IT RESOLVED THAT*** the [XX] Student Association shall declare a general strike of indefinite duration, to be initiated [DATE].

If you want the unlimited strike to be renewed regularly:

- ***BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT*** the strike must be renewed every five academic days. [XX] Student Association shall hold a special Strike Assembly every week which will vote by simple majority on whether to continue or terminate strike action, with a quorum of [XX]% of the association's membership.

More samples can be found in "Fuck Austerity Guide to Strikes" (2015)

Get ambitious in your initial motion! More radical motions will motivate students to attend the assembly in order to debate it, which helps you reach quorum! Motions can always be amended on the strike floor to be less ambitious.

If members are hesitant, setting a strike floor in your motion (meaning a WHEREAS clause that states a certain # of other associations that must also vote to strike in order for your motion to take effect) can help the strike mandate feel safer and more legitimate. You can also outline within your strike motion how often the strike must be renewed and how striking procedures and picketing will be organised.

What's the History of Student Strike in Quebec?

Since the 1960s, students in Québec have organized around demands concerning access to education, tuition fees, loans and grants, and free education. Striking has proved to be one of the student movement's most effective pressure tactics. Major strikes have occurred in 1968, 1974, 1978, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1996, 2005, 2012, and 2015. The largest student strike in Québec and Canada's history took place over six months in 2012, which included over 300,000 students in its peak, about 75% of all CÉGEP and university students in the province. Students today have access to an incredible wealth of knowledge from their predecessors, in the forms of zines, books, films, reports, and more. Check out page 10 for direction to some of these resources.



General Assembly at the Université du Québec à Montréal, 1972 (Pierre Côté)