On Campus

Student Employees, Columbia Agree to Historic Contract

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Len Small / Columbia Magazine

A union representing some three thousand graduate and undergraduate student employees — Student Workers of Columbia–United Auto Workers (SWC-UAW) — signed a four-year contract with Columbia University this past semester, following a ten-week strike by the students who serve as instructors, teaching assistants, and research assistants.

The contract, the first ever attained by student employees at Columbia, includes a 6 percent raise for PhD students; an increase in minimum hourly wages from $15 to $21; expanded dental benefits; and the ability for student employees and their eligible dependents to tap into emergency funds for out-of-pocket medical expenses. In addition, the agreement allows student employees to seek third-party arbitration in cases involving allegations of discrimination or harassment after the University

investigates.

“The agreement between the University and SWC-UAW represents one of the most comprehensive and generous contracts between a private university and students who assume significant pedagogical and research responsibilities as part of their academic training,” wrote Provost Mary C. Boyce in an email to the University community upon the contract’s ratification in January. “All of us at the University will be beneficiaries of the concrete enhancements to the overall student experience.”



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