

October 19th

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Leaves crunch and scrunch as we strike on the 19th.

But maybe, we already felt like, it was struck? Or out of luck?

Because carpal tunnel hands, high blood pressure hearts, and

running out of sand

in our hourglass, isn't enough to prove to society that intellectualism

is still relevant...

Rather fingers had to get infected with splinters from every sign we

carried.

As strangers hold thumbs in downward spiraling directions that

resemble where they want us to go.

And men with mouths the size of their egos yell out windows:

“Get back to work!”

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Instead of protecting “high quality education” we should be
“grateful for what we have.”

But amidst tantrum throwing turmoil are compassionate college
students who hand out Dunkin Donuts on McDonald midnight shift
salaries.

Because they know we never wanted to leave classrooms
where these same students grow faster than their ideas that could
save the world
despite brick building burdens that told them they were test scores.

Journaling the Strike

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There was no assurance as to how IUP students would react to their professors going on strike. As to whether they would be supportive, or lash out in anger, taking to heart the emails that had villainized their professors and instructors, was uncertain. The morning of October 19th was refreshingly sunny. There was a light breeze, but the sky was blue and the Indian summer that had lingered into late fall made conditions for picketing tolerable. Large crowds of professors, tenure and part-time, gathered in their assigned locations, heralding the news that if they had a say: they and their student's welfare would no longer be treated in a subpar manner. As I paced in front of the Oak-Grove, holding my sign that read "Negotiate a Fair Contract," I noticed the students. They were everywhere. Although they couldn't protest with us, they stood behind bushes that separated us from the campus, holding their own signs. They gathered in the Oak-Grove to hold their own protests, performed music, and brought food, water, and coffee to help the faculty maintain our energy. Seeing them was the motivation we needed to remain vigilant and stand strong in moments of unknowingness.

Three days of picketing brought us a new contract. A deal was being negotiated, and when classes resumed I entered, ready to thank them for their willingness and patience. Still,

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I was unsure as to how the class time would proceed. How could the same classroom they had entered in September possibly resume in the same way now? Although we prefer not to admit it, the space had changed. The Composition I classroom, where my students expect to discuss thesis statements, logos and ethos, evaluative and informative writing had suddenly awoken with a new charge that illuminated the inconsistencies and injustices in higher education.

As the classroom space evolved, so had my student's journaling space. Over the course of the semester, they were required to submit four journal "turn-ins" consisting of at least four entries each. Journal guidelines required my students to write about something they had read for class or something we had discussed in class. I was surprised that several students had devoted one of their entries to their initial reactions and overall feelings about the strike. They demonstrated the same energy, yet frustration that I had also felt picketing. Some expressed anxiety as to not knowing when their classes would resume or if the strike would interfere with their path for graduating on time. Some reflected on their surprise at seeing images from their school in newspapers and on the evening news, while others openly admitted to feeling stress over not knowing how or when the strike would end. Not surprisingly, the same sense of uncertainty faculty had felt over whether there would be student support affected the students in how they were privy to only certain bits and pieces of information. Several reported having felt threatened to attend their classes even though they knew their class would likely not take place.

While their journals acted as a space to complain about the frustrations associated with the strike, it also became a space for voicing the activism they could not openly participate in side-by-side with their professors on the picket line. Many students discussed their disappointment with the PASSHE system treating the university as a business and their educations as profit. There was discussion in many entries about temporary faculty being treated fairly, and that

lowering their wages significantly more than the tenure-track faculty was not the solution to providing students with fulfilling educational opportunities. Some even suggested that it was hard to attend a school where the professors were not being treated fairly. Some thought that if faculty had worked, or are working, to attain a doctoral degree, the very least they should be offered are fair wages and affordable health care.

Throughout that week, and the weeks following, we learned as they learned. Thus, the teacher/student dynamic took place simultaneously inside and outside the classroom. We often found out updates about the strike at, or near, the same time and the information available to them was usually the information available to us. No longer were they just learning from me about writing, and no longer was I just learning about what makes popular reading and writing assignments from them. Their written reactions made it clear that the course had become more than just a liberal arts requirement. Rather, it was now a unified effort where learning, listening, and especially writing ensured that the respectability of higher education would not falter under classist injustices in a society where the humanities are too often swept aside.

Post-Strike