

Is what's to gain worth what will be lost

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In case you haven't heard, four of this university's unions might go on strike Nov. 3.

One can hardly go through a day without hearing about it. It's featured on television news and printed in newspapers around the area. Students can't help but wonder what this will mean for them.

Chancellor Rita Cheng has said it would be "business as usual" if faculty and staff decided to strike, but it is hard to see how. Students whose instructors would strike would not only learn from replacement teachers, but they would also be involuntary witnesses to all the animosity and unrest a strike would cause.

"Students are expected to attend class as usual," Cheng said on SIUC's website. "Consequences to not attending class are the same as if no strike was in effect."

So, students are expected to overlook the pickets, along with everything they stand for, and act as though nothing is happening on the campus they once found comfort in attending. While this is a practical approach to ensuring that grades and diplomas are distributed at the appropriate time in a school year, the expectation that students will simply bite their tongues, bow their heads and carry on with whatever their chancellor tells them is quite insensitive.

A strike presents students with the choice to either honor the staff and faculty's right to stand up for what they believe and stay away from those battlegrounds or demand the services they paid for before the semester started. It is fair to insist on claiming what is rightfully ours, but is also right to respect those picket lines once they are officially set up and wait for this calamity to be settled.

Students shouldn't be scared into going against what they may believe to be ethically right for the sake of a completed semester.

"The university is working to ensure that students are comfortable entering or exiting the campus and in attending classes," Cheng said on her website.

What student will be comfortable attending class out of pure fear of being failed? What student will be OK with feeling like he or she doesn't have a choice in this matter, either? Even though it's the students who are placed in the middle of this situation, it seems like neither side of the bargaining table is stopping to consider their "pawns," as Cheng once referred to us.

The chancellor said there would be replacements for those instructors who decided to walk, and that's fine, but what does that mean for the quality of our education? To take these substitutes and toss them into a classroom they have no ready clue how to instruct, simply for the sake of finishing a semester and passing out grades, is to assume that simply anyone can provide the cultivation a student would need to enter the working world from here.

How would graduates feel about their diploma knowing it was just handed to them in the end? How much would they feel they mattered to the university?

We don't want replacements that know next to nothing about our progress in a course's curriculum. We don't want to have to teach these placeholders what we should otherwise be learning. We want our teachers — the ones we've come to know and get accustomed to — and all of the instruction they yearn to provide us with a sound and stable contract. We want peace and cooperation back at our university.

We want this to be over.

Some teachers have addressed the issue and said they would still attend class to teach. Some have said they will be on those picket lines if that's what it comes to, and at least one has already stopped grading assignments in preparation for, or protection from, what is beginning to appear inevitable. Others haven't broadened the subject at all.

If this university's teachers are as dedicated to their students as they say they are, then they owe their students, at least, a nod toward the elephant in the room no matter what their take on the situation may be.

If "the university's primary focus is to provide students with a quality education," like it says right there in the FAQs, then how about everyone starts acting like it and stops all of this bickering.