

**University of Quebec in Montreal Criminalizing Interns**

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**University of Quebec in Montreal Criminalizing Interns**

**Education Students Must Not Be Punished for Standing Up for Their Rights! They Teach -- Pay Them!**



**Demonstration by striking education science students, October 16, 2022, shortly after strike begins.**

The Parti marxiste-léniniste du Québec (PMLQ) decries the decision of the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) administration to punish students in education sciences who are fighting for internship and study conditions that allow them to decently and affordably complete their studies.

It is well known that students in Quebec face difficult conditions to complete their studies. They have to study and do unpaid internships while paying high fees in order to be able to complete their degrees so as to make a contribution to society.

At UQAM, students in the Faculty of Education have been organizing themselves to put forward their demands to ensure that all students can study and complete their internships in acceptable conditions.

Various issues require action which favours the interests of the students. Even though the students actually teach, these are unpaid positions, on top of which the students are still expected to pay high fees. They have a difficult relationship with the university which does not respect their rights and their demands are not treated in a democratic manner in program committees. The cases of harassment in the internship environment and the lack of flexibility for teachers who are parents is increasing. These are not recent problems but this session the students said *Enough Is Enough!* and decided to strike to win their case.



On Thursday, November 17, in a general assembly the students decided to end their strike and finish their internships with their heads held high. However on Saturday, November 19, the UQAM administration decided to take revenge. In a vindictive manner it informed the students by email that those who went on strike would not be able to finish their internship, that their report cards would say they abandoned their course and they would have to resume their internship in the fall of 2023.

To use positions of power to punish students for fighting for their rights is unacceptable. For several years students who complete internships as part of their course requirements have been raising their concerns which the administration has not addressed. It is a broken democratic system. Punishing students for fighting for their rights to complete their studies in a manner which is affordable and takes their needs into account is cowardly and contemptible. The students are determined to make the UQAM administration recognize the students' internships and make the necessary arrangements to allow them to continue their studies in acceptable conditions.



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## Response of the Executive Council of the Association of Students and Students of Science of Education





*We are reproducing below the response of the Executive Council of the Association of Students and Students of Science of Education of UQAM issued on November 19 to denounce the decision of the Board of Directors of UQAM to punish, penalize and criminalize Faculty of Science of Education students.*

Yesterday, the Board of Directors of UQAM decided to punish the students of the Faculty of Education for having dared to demand ACCEPTABLE internship conditions. Indeed, by validating the recommendations of the Commission des études, they are ready to make many 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students repeat the semester, also affecting their obtaining teaching certificates. This means approximately 750 students will be penalized in their academic career by having to withdraw from their internship and intensive courses. The Board of Directors is imposing terms of resumption on us that force students to go back to class and keep their mouths shut.

Over the past year, we have tried to advocate improvements to our practicum conditions in the program committees, in our regular meetings with the Dean, by voting for a strike week in the Winter 2021 session and by sending an open letter to the faculty that was signed by over 1,100 students! There was no response. Thus, the strike was proposed as a reaction to UQAM's bad faith on this issue. After having let the conflict marinate for five weeks, UQAM now wants to punish us for having gone on strike when it is responsible for the strike's duration and its existence.



At the November 15 and 18 student commissions, some faculty commissioners stated clearly and directly that the repression of education students will serve as an example to prevent future strikes. In the past, student strikes have not been met with the threat that the students will be deemed to have abandoned their courses. This measure, which breaks the social contract, is a precedent that will have a serious impact on our democratic society.

Let us remember that student strikes are responsible for many social changes that have allowed, among other things, access to higher education for the majority of the Quebec population. They are a tool that must continue to exist to allow us to win important struggles, including for paid internships. Attempting to impede them is a serious attack on our

democratic rights, and we cannot remain inactive in the face of this attack.

Thus, in keeping with the directives of the last general assemblies, the ADEESE will hold an emergency general assembly with the strike being the sole agenda item. The UQAM administration is trying to drive a wedge between the penalized students and the others in a move to divide and rule. The members fought on principles of solidarity; it is important to continue doing so in order to protect the members whose sessions are at stake. Let us remember that it is unimaginable for UQAM to push back the semester of 5,200 students.

We submit the following proposal to the Commission des études de l'UQAM:

- Whereas the conditions for returning after a strike recommended by the Studies Commission for 20 years have established a non-punitive standard for students (see examples in: 2005, 2007, 2009 [faculty strike], 2012 and 2015), 2018;
- That the due date for assignments (including practicum assignments) in the fall 2022 semester be

extended to January 9, 2023, the beginning of the winter 2023 semester;

- That accommodation measures be put in place for intensive courses so that no one receives a withdrawal notice, and that teachers be able to grant an "incomplete" in the student's internship record;
- That, for the other courses, no retake session be imposed in the classroom, neither in synchronous nor in asynchronous mode;
- That the files of students who have gone on strike be analyzed by a committee on which a student sits to determine the success of the internship notwithstanding the number of days missed;
- That UQAM make a commitment so that no student who has gone on strike will receive an incomplete mention for the sole reason of having gone on strike.

The ADEESE executive continues to work actively. We are counting on student solidarity to work together to complete our session. Let's not let UQAM create a climate of fear and put an end to student democracy!

*With rage and love, thank you,  
The ADEESE executive*

Interns united will never be defeated.

*(Translated from the original french by Renewal Update)*



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## **I Didn't Quit My Internship, I Was on Strike** – *Open Letter, Frédéric Brunelle, intern in Science of Education at UQAM* –



**October 16, 2022**

November 19, 2022

Hello,

You may have heard that students in the Faculty of Education at UQAM were on strike from October 19 to November 20. I am a member of this student community, the Association des étudiantes et étudiants des sciences de l'éducation de l'UQAM (ADEESE), and we had voted for a strike on several issues including the non-remuneration of our internships, the difficult relations with UQAM, the lack of respect for democracy in program committees, the cases of harassment in the internship environment, and the lack of flexibility for teachers who are also parents.

Following the semblance of an agreement being reached with the Faculty of Education, ADEESE members voted to end the strike on November 20th and return to our courses and internships, motivated and with a sense that we lived in a democracy. However, my colleagues and I woke up on Saturday, November 19th to an email from the UQAM administration stating, among other things, that interns who could not respect the terms of their internship (40 days of support) would be considered to have abandoned their internship. Our participation in the strike for better internship conditions ended up exposing the treatment we are fighting against.

It is important to understand that a teacher candidate must complete four practicums that can only be pursued at specific times during the four-year undergraduate degree. So this fall's internship that we studied for, paid \$834.48 for, and were fighting not to have to perform as volunteers for the state of Quebec has been postponed until the fall of 2023. One more year to wait before having a certificate while schools are crying out for help because of lack of personnel. You will understand that there was not much difference between this news and a cold shower in November, only inconsistency.

Still, I was far from giving up on this internship. I refined my plans, borrowed books from the library on the French and American Revolutions, on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, designed multimedia presentations, and completed the numerous assignments required by UQAM to participate. This stage of my training was well and truly in my mind and I was participating in this very strike FOR this internship -- to make sure that my colleagues would not be treated unfairly during this session and the following ones. I also participated in this strike thinking about the interns I would welcome in my classroom during my career and hoping that they would have better conditions than I did. I was far from giving up on this internship because, in fact, everything I was doing was precisely about this internship.

The choice to consider participation in the strike as abandoning the internship is absurd and punitive. Absurd because it is a gross misunderstanding of what a strike is to consider it as a simple break in the semester and not as leverage in a negotiation between students and their university. Absurd because the schools are ready and eager to welcome us considering the crisis prevailing there and that many students without a certificate have already been offered official positions. The UQAM administration is acting in a selfish and vindictive manner by wanting to send a clear message that it is more urgent to show students that the strike was wrong than to cooperate in finding solutions to facilitate the sending of new forces to the schools, a practice all educational institutions should encourage. Operating on the basis of cooperation, solidarity, informed decisions, and without misplaced feelings. It is a practice the candidate for president of the University of Quebec in Montreal, Jean-Christian Pleau, should also adopt.

This measure is therefore a punitive choice because there were many other possible solutions. Spreading out the days of the internship, additional written work or simply validating the internship despite the conditions not being respected. Moreover, in the context of COVID-19, the University has validated internships that have been much more disrupted than five weeks of strike. Furthermore, the UQAM press release indicates that they have data showing that the majority of internships will be completed correctly and that this internship cancellation measure only concerns those who respected the strike mandate. This decision is explicitly dedicated to sanctioning students who participate in student democratic life. It is also designed to frighten and undermine the trust between the members of the associations and the university.

Finally, UQAM is also in crisis, as we are seeing a drop in admissions, particularly in the humanities. The administration would like to blame it on the many student struggles that characterize our university. It is still inconsistent and shows the disconnect between the administration and the student community. Struggles characterize UQAM and it is its engaged character that serves as an attraction. However, it is the intransigence and disrespect for democracy that the administration has displayed for years that sends the message that civic and student

engagement is invalidated in our university. The world of tomorrow wants more than a university that rejects change and negates the effort of its members to exercise their civic responsibility to society. We need a university that does more than ridicule and patronize its students for doing nothing more than using their learning and experiences to enforce their rights. With the selection of a new president, it is time for our university to show that it is proud of its culture of advocacy and the willingness of its student community to revolutionize a society and institutions that are working hard to undermine the living conditions of students and workers.

The UQAM Board of Directors, Vice-President Jean-Christian Pleau and the Commission des études must reconsider this vengeful measure, which is completely disconnected from the crying needs of the school and student community.

*Frédéric Brunelle*  
Intern

*(Letter sent to Le Devoir newspaper, to the UQAM studies office, to the UQAM vice-rector, to the program director, to the director of communications and to my deputy Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois. Translated from the original french by Renewal Update.)*



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**Website: [www.cpcml.ca](http://www.cpcml.ca) Email: [editor@cpcml.ca](mailto:editor@cpcml.ca)**