Dear Undergraduate Students:

As you are likely aware, the Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO) informed the University on Monday that it would launch a 4-day strike, which began Tuesday, September 8.

I can imagine that this action and its consequences on your classes can be disruptive, confusing, and worrisome. Some of your professors may have reached out to you recently to inform you that your class may not be held, or may be different from what you expected.

I want to acknowledge the extra strain on your start to classes, especially coming at a time that is already incredibly challenging as you navigate the college experience during a global pandemic. Providing a high-quality educational experience in a safe environment for each of our students remains our top priority. We are intent on minimizing the consequences of this strike to the extent possible.

Please know that your classes will continue to be offered, although there may be short-term modifications. Our School, College, and department leaders have been working with the faculty members leading your courses to plan for substitute instructors, alternative assignments, and other means for delivering class content.

Please do not hesitate to reach out for help. Your academic advisors, student support teams, the Office of Student Life, and my team here in the Provost’s Office are all available as resources to answer your questions and help you get what you need.

Some of you may be wondering what the strike is about. GEO’s strike is based on a number of issues, many of which are unrelated to the wages, hours, and working conditions that define their employment as GSIs. Issues that are not related to the employment of its members are not subjects that GEO can negotiate with the University.

However, we recognize that these issues are of significant interest to graduate students, and potentially to many of you. They are also issues that society at large is facing as we grapple with not only a pandemic, but also continuing racial discrimination and great disparities in our society.

I strongly affirm the importance of student perspectives and student activism at the University of Michigan. The University has a long and celebrated history of its community members standing up for what they believe in through acts of freedom of speech and peaceful protest. The strike violates Michigan law; in addition, GEO has agreed by contract not to take actions that interfere with the University’s operations, in this case, your education. Nonetheless, the University’s team will continue to meet with GEO in good faith to resolve remaining issues.

We recognize this is a challenging time for many reasons. Please know that we are doing everything we can to make your educational experience the best possible in the midst of these circumstances. The University remains steadfast in our commitment to our mission to deliver world-class education.

Best,
Susan M. Collins
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs