Shawn Kinew is interested in how early modern sculptors pushed the boundaries of what sculpture should be able to do. “Even though they’re carving in hard marble,” explains the assistant professor of the history of art and architecture, “they’re making it look like fur or flesh that’s so soft that it looks like you could poke it and it would spring back….It’s been created to make you stop in your tracks and go, ‘Wow, meraviglia, it’s marvelous.’” Kinew remembers a similar feeling from her days as a child ballet dancer: That was “the first aesthetic experience I had where I was just completely enraptured by what I was seeing.” As a child, she split her time between Winnipeg and her home community, an Anishinaabe reserve in northwestern Ontario. Her father, an “intellectual force,” participated in dialogues between academic scientists and Native American knowledge keepers on physics and cosmology. “That was the milieu that I grew up in,” Kinew says; it helped lay the foundation for her curiosity about ideas and the human experience. In college at the University of Toronto, she was immediately captivated by art history. “The best course I took was a six-person class on Caravaggio where we didn’t read any secondary literature—only biographies from the seventeenth century.” After a Ph.D. from Harvard and postdoc at Stanford, she returned to Cambridge in 2018, in art history and as Shutzer assistant professor at the Radcliffe Institute. In her course “Old Masters in a ‘New’ World,” Kinew challenges students to think about how canonical European artists fit into the new landscape of art history. “Michelangelo has a lot to teach us about gender and sexuality,” she says. “Titian and Van Dyck have a lot to say about race and colonization. We just weren’t asking the right questions before.”

Garber, who is Harvard’s lead negotiator for this contract, said in an email to the campus community. Harvard has notified students that it will make “every effort” to ensure that semester grades and exams are not disrupted, and has sent faculty members guidance on completing grading and instructional work during the strike.

In an email to its members, the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers, which includes workers in the University’s libraries, museums, labs, and elsewhere, said: “One very meaningful way you can show support for striking HGSU-UAW workers is by turning down work you are asked to do that would normally be done by striking graduate students.” Local and state lawmakers, including the Massachusetts congressional delegation, have also expressed support for the student workers.

Harvard has offered HGSU-UAW pay raises of 8 percent over three years for salaried students, and 7 percent over three years for teaching fellows. It has also proposed raising minimum hourly pay for all student workers to $15, and to $17 for instructional workers. Currently, hourly workers may make substantially less: “There are people on this campus who are making minimum wage [$12 per hour],” Yumusak said.

Student workers’ main compensation concern, said bargaining committee member Justin Bloesch, a Ph.D. candidate in economics, is that it keep up with the cost of living. “Two years ago, in response to underperformance of the endowment, stipends were raised 1.5 percent, but Harvard housing was increased by 3 percent,” he pointed out.

Students are also concerned about how “top-up” payments will factor into raises. When Ph.D. students begin teaching, typically in their third year, a portion of their pay comes from that work, but not enough to equal the living stipends they received in their first and second years. The top-up, which amounts to $3,825 per semester this year, makes up the difference. But Yumusak noted that Harvard considers this money financial aid, not pay, so it may not be included in any pay raises in the final contract.

Benefits are at issue, too. Graduate students don’t automatically receive dental insurance, nor are spouses or children covered. It’s $7,000 to insure a spouse, $4,000 to insure a child for healthcare, Bloesch said. The University has offered the union some help...