

# GEO Undergrad FAQ

## Wait, what's the GEO?

The Graduate Employees' Organization is the labor union for graduate workers at UIUC, representing Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants whose labor makes this university work. Organized through the GEO, we can exercise our collective power to bargain fair contracts with the University.

## Why is the GEO planning to strike?

GEO's last contract with the administration expired in August, with negotiations for a new contract beginning last March. Negotiations have been stalled for months, as Illinois' administration tries to impose a contract that's *worse* for grad workers than the previous one. Their proposals would make grad school unaffordable and inaccessible for many grad students, forcing us to either leave school or take out student loans. In particular, they want to remove protections for tuition waivers that graduate employees need in order to be here. We've been left with no choice but to go on strike and withhold our labor until the administration is willing to negotiate a *fair* contract that protects tuition waivers.

## What's at stake in the strike?

Graduate workers' tuition waivers, wages and healthcare are the key issues. Currently, graduate employees have their tuition waived as part of their employment, as is standard at universities across the country. Many grad employees need waivers in order to attend grad school at all. The administration wants the power to cut these waivers, making graduate employees pay thousands of dollars in tuition--effectively making us pay to work. Their proposals would also give them the power to replace waiver-generating appointments with hourly graduate positions, which wouldn't be covered by GEO's contract. In other words, they would replace grad workers who are protected by GEO with grad workers who *aren't* protected by GEO, breaking our union. We're going on strike to protect both our waivers and the existence of our union.

The administration is also refusing to guarantee Affordable Care Act (ACA) provisions in our contract, including coverage for prescription drugs and trans inclusive healthcare, hoping to save money at our expense if the ACA is repealed. On top of that, the administration is refusing to provide affordable and accessible childcare resources for grad employee parents. We're fighting to make sure that healthcare is affordable and accessible to all grad employees.

By law, all employers are required to bargain wages with unions like the GEO. But the administration insists on maintaining the power to arbitrarily change our wages under the "Campus Wage Program." Currently, the minimum salary for graduate employees is about \$6,000 less than the cost of living in Urbana-Champaign, *according to the University's own website!* We're not even asking for a pay increase that would match the cost of living, but the wage increases which the administration has proposed don't even keep up with the rate of inflation.

Ultimately, we're fighting to make higher education *affordable and accessible to all*. In protecting the economic stability of graduate workers at UIUC, the outcome of our strike will set a precedent for graduate and undergraduate students across the country.

### **What will happen during the strike?**

During the strike, Teaching and Graduate Assistants will stand together with our colleagues and withhold our labor. We will not teach, grade, do paperwork, or answer work-related emails until the strike is over. We're being forced to take this drastic step to demonstrate that UIUC depends on our labor, and that it must treat us fairly to ensure the University works.

We're committed to our students, and *we want to work with you to ensure that the strike doesn't adversely impact your education*. That's why we're talking to you now to make sure you're informed and prepared.

### **What can I do to support GEO?**

GEO will need undergraduates' support to make the strike as short and successful as possible. There are many ways you can help!

*Talk to your TAs:* One of the biggest concerns GEO members have about the strike is how it could impact our students. Showing your TAs that they have your support will give them the confidence to stand strong during the strike.

*Talk to your professors:* Faculty support is just as important as undergrad support. We're urging faculty to cancel classes during the strike to maximize its impact, and you can help us do that!

*Join us on the picket line:* During the strike, we will be protesting outside many buildings on campus. *This is one of the most important parts of the strike*, so we need as many people as possible to join us! We will have food, warm beverages, hand-warmers, and free hats available. As the strike nears, we will have detailed information about when and where you can join our pickets.

*Call and email Provost Cangelaris:* our negotiations fall under his jurisdiction, and pressure from both undergraduates and undergrads' parents can make a big difference. We have a template you can use to email him: <http://bit.ly/2FTcbZ1>

*Support us on social media:* Follow GEO on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and share our posts to help us get our message out to the public, and add to the pressure on UIUC to work with us for a fair contract!