



Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation

609 E 13th St Eugene, OR 97401

541.344.0832

To Whom It May Concern,

We, The Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation of the University of Oregon, Local 3544, support the Graduate Employees' Organization in their effort to bargain a fair contract with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Graduate employees at UIUC have been without a contract since August 2017 and have been in negotiations since March 2017. We urge Provost Cangelaris to accept the GEO's proposals for a new collective bargaining agreement which preserves graduate employees' tuition waivers, pays them a living wage, and provides them and their dependents with affordable, accessible healthcare and childcare resources.

Graduate employees perform essential work for the University as Teaching and Graduate Assistants. At some point, every undergraduate student is taught by a graduate instructor, and over 2,500 graduate workers on this campus provide invaluable labor. In fact, [Illinois ranks 6th in the country](#) among universities where graduate employees teach the most classes. Grad employees make Illinois work.

The university administration is attempting to cut the tuition waivers that are an essential part of grad workers' compensation. They insist on removing protections for tuition waivers that GEO won in 2009, and fought to keep in 2012. They want to give themselves "authority to waive tuition" and the "right to determine and modify tuition waivers for each graduate program," enabling them to not only cut tuition waivers, but to replace waiver-generating appointments with hourly graduate positions *not covered by GEO's contract*. They've also recently revealed a plan to legally prevent GEO from striking over tuition waivers.

On top of this, the administration refuses to pay graduate workers a living wage, and refuses to provide health care and child care resources for those with dependents. Teaching and Graduate Assistants making the minimum salary earn about \$6,000 less than [the University's own published cost of living](#) and most have not received a raise in five years. The administration is also refusing to provide healthcare coverage for dependents of graduate workers, or a childcare subsidy for graduate worker parents. Without these important benefits, graduate workers will not have financial stability and graduate school will not be equally accessible to everyone.

For these reasons, the GEO has declared that it will strike on February 26th to protect both tuition waivers and its survival. As an organization that has gone on a successful strike in recent memory, we stand by our cousin union in making a decision about striking that is in the best interest of their membership.

We urge Provost Cangellaris and the University bargaining team to work with GEO to provide graduate employees with a fair contract. If the Graduate Employees' Organization is forced to strike, we understand that this drastic measure signals the University administration's unwillingness to resolve negotiations at the bargaining table. We will support actions deemed necessary by graduate employees to protect themselves, undergraduates, and the integrity and quality of education at the University of Illinois. All graduate employees, students, and workers deserve better living, learning, and working conditions.

In Solidarity,

Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation, Local 3544
University of Oregon