

# United Grads Produce Union Power



*Fighting fees for University of Iowa graduate workers is a signature, long-standing COGS campaign.*

By **Michael Goldberg**

For nearly two decades, COGS earned victory after victory at the negotiating table. We fought for tuition coverage, for better health care, for policies that protected against overwork, and for clear processes to combat exploitation. We used our contract negotiations to signal to our employers what mattered, fought hard for fair wages and fair employment practices, and we won. Often.

And then the state changed the law. They made it nearly impossible to continue winning in negotiations. As I'm sure many of you know by now, we can't negotiate over many topics. The negotiating table is no longer a powerful tool in our

arsenal.

Because we have had so many successes, and because most of our biggest victories came through this now toothless process, many members have asked me what COGS can do. If we can't negotiate, how can we affect change? If we can't negotiate, does COGS have any power?

**Now more than ever,  
[our] collective voice  
is vital.**

The simple answer is yes, we have a lot of power.

The complete answer is more complicated. We have

power, but a kind of power that looks and behaves much differently. Since the law has changed, COGS has had to rethink our approach. Our power has always been in a collective voice; in the hundreds of graduate employees signaling that COGS speaks for our best interest at the negotiating table. Now, more than ever, that collective voice is vital.

We can't use the negotiating table to deliver the strong message that we shouldn't have to pay to work. Our "No Fees For Employees" campaign must operate differently. We must mobilize hundreds of voices to speak together that this is not right, that employees should not have to pay to work, that we shouldn't have to take out a loan to pay our employer.

COGS speaks the loudest when it speaks through many voices. Add your voice to our efforts. Show up to meetings, join our rally on May 1, and get your colleagues to join too. Through membership and participation our collective voice grows strong and impossible to ignore. ●

*Michael Goldberg is a fourth year Ph.D. student in the College of Education and the President of COGS. Contact Michael at [president@cogs.org](mailto:president@cogs.org).*