



COGNition

Newsletter for UE Local 896 COGS



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University Admin to Grad Workers: You Make \$66,000/Year**

By Natalie McClellan, COGS Press and Publicity Chair

***or you would under different circumstances*

On September 27th, dozens of COGS members and supporters rallied outside the Levitt Center before marching into the Iowa Board of Regents meeting to demand a 25% emergency wage increase. According to the MIT living wage calculator, a University of Iowa graduate worker on an academic year assistantship making the base wage would need a 25% pay increase to make a living wage for a single adult in Johnson County, Iowa.

The rally made its way up the curving staircase of the Levitt Center and entered the meeting chanting our demand. The Board of Regents adjourned the official meeting shortly after the entrance. Our group claimed the space and held a people's meeting where our members, members of other local unions, and people from the community delivered moving speeches. The messages underscored how all of our struggles are connected and underpaying graduate workers impacts our entire community. It was a beautiful display of

solidarity.

The action was a resounding success and received coverage from a number of local media outlets. When asked for comment, university administration misleadingly asserted that as graduate workers we make "what converts to \$66,019 per year at full-time," a preposterous claim considering virtually no graduate worker receives a 100% appointment. We see the amount when checks hit



our accounts, and know that our wages do not "convert" to anything. We know that, as workers, we do vital labor for the university all

while being rent-burdened, food insecure, and going into debt.

We are undeterred by their funny math and have used the momentum from the action to bolster our organizing efforts through Blitz, our annual membership drive, and our campaign to END THE FEES. This campaign officially launched at the general membership meeting on October 30th. You can learn more, sign the petition, and get involved in the campaign at cogs.org/endthefees. If you're a member of COGS but haven't been actively involved in organizing your fellow workers lately, this is an amazing time to plug in to your union.

Everyone who was involved in putting this issue of COG-nition together is very excited to share it with you. It not only highlights some of the amazing work our local has been doing lately, there are also updates from the 78th convention of our national union, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America. Enjoy and hope to see you at a COGS event real soon!

Direct Action at the Board of Regents Gets the Goods! (cont. page 2)

By Nicole Yeger, COGS Political Action Committee Chair

It was an immense honor to stand with you and for our community of scholars, artists, scientists, philosophers, writers, physicists, etc. on our day of action. We stood upon stolen land and inside a building erected from the tuition and fees from its students. We showed the U that our union is building power and that we won't stop until we raise the standard of living for workers. While the Regents may have slipped out, only to pop in for a few snacks from their buffet, it was incredible and sobering to hear students speak to their experiences. Students bravely spoke to their need to work multiple jobs while gaining expertise sorely needed in the state of Iowa. Their words reminded us that not only does the University work because we do, but our work ripples

beyond Johnson County and across the entire state.

On a personal note, my grandparents stood with us, beaming with pride. My grandmother is in large part why I accepted the nomination for this role as Action Committee Chair with your COGS UE Local 896. I witnessed the pain that the barriers to education brought to her life, and I know she deserved the opportunity to be here, too.

When a state chooses to deprioritize education and instead squeeze its students for profit, grad workers and the people of Iowa suffer. Despite \$5.7 billion sitting untapped in our state's fund, the state and UI rely upon its students to keep the lights on, fill the cracks in the sealing, and run its profit-making industry:

research, education, business, and arts through tuition, fees, and cheap labor. The state has decreased its budget for public higher education by 10.4% over the last 20 years. You don't want to know how much tuition and fees have surged in that time.

It is people like my grandmother who suffer — people from my small river community along the Mississippi, people like myself who grew up on public aid from WIC and free lunch programs, international students with families back home that depend on them, first generation students who have to work multiple jobs while navigating an institution that sees them as a financial opportunity, trans and nonbinary students whose experiences are harrowing and deplorable yet they con-

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International Graduate Worker Address to Board of Regents

By University of Iowa International Graduate Student

The following is a print version of an address written by an international student and delivered on their behalf by a COGS member at the Board of Regents action on September 27th

Being an international student is very challenging. Many of us who come from a developing country, are often forced to make a choice between higher education and family because our respective fields do not have the same opportunities for higher education in our home country. Yet, many who make the choice of pursuing particularly a

PhD, come in with a greater purpose of being able to contribute to our field and be able to make a difference in the life of others and our own academic journey. Our rich educational experiences here are protective factors for us to keep going despite facing the challenges of not having some very basic human rights, including rights to be able to afford or live with our family. Thus, there are days when we regret

having the attributes of curiosity and passion for our subjects, because they keep us away

so many things such as taking a leave, ability to change courses or programs also depend on visa statuses and political conditions. So many trainings and opportunities outside of our designated work permit, including required practicums and permissions, a lot of which we have to figure out on our own. And we miss out on a lot of these opportunities due to administrative delays and people not knowing how to get the work done.

These things that seem to look like “small costs” that we pay as international students, their accumulation over a period of the long years of PhD have big impacts on our financial, mental and physical health.

There have been so many instances of students not being able to attend funerals after the death of loved ones, missing out on close family weddings, and for some, even missing out on spending time with their own children and partners for most part of the year. With all of these challenges, living with less than livable wage is significantly adds up to our stressors. It’s not uncommon for many us to be more exposed to risks of accidents because we cannot afford a car and use the bike even when winter begins, or get frost bites while waiting for a long time the middle of the road when a bus does not show up. A large group of grad students live on food pantry and compromise on basic living needs such as owning a car and mental health care. Additionally, we are ineligible for most fellowships and opportunities for making money like other fellow grad students creating a significant financial and lifestyle disparity among our peers. We also need to pay more money as “international student fee.” Most of us do not have support from family members as we live by ourselves. On top of that, some of us are also sole or major earners in our families and have to send at least money back home to support our family and compensate for the lost source of income. Not only do we, but our families pay a huge price for us to be able to pursue our passion, attain higher education, and serve our purpose in life.

Getting a wage raise can mean a lot to us. Some of us can go back home more often, especially as our tickets can be equivalent to or even more than our current monthly stipend, we will be able to take better care of our children and families, some of us might be able to afford some more freedom to eat and do things we enjoy.



Above: COGS members and supporters rally outside of Board of Regents Meeting

from home in a far from comfortable lifestyle. A typical experience of an international student is to live without some very basic freedom and rights—the rights to do what you want, for example, we cannot work when and how much you want, we cannot accept any employment outside of our “designated 20 hours.” It is challenge already to live away from home, family and friends, on top of it,

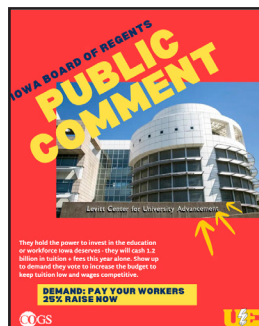
BoR Action Gets the Goods (cont. from page 1)

tinue to do more for this state than any Regent ever has, and people who deserve access to this public institution to gain the opportunity to give back as they dream.

Yet, landlords and student loan company profiteers sit on a Board, perpetuating inaction, in a state that used to be a leader in public education. Check out this quote from Governor Kim Reynolds speaking about the K-12 voucher program: “It isn’t about the money. It’s not even about public schools versus private schools. It is truly about giving every student the best opportunity to find their place in the world and a foundation for success in the future.” Reynolds proceeded to sign the voucher bill, which spent \$144 million on private school vouchers for 19,000 children (i.e., \$45.10 per child/adult in Iowa) within its first year.

You all know the hypocrisy, but also know this: our union is active and run by its members. We fight for a higher standard of living in the “Greatest Small City of the Arts,” and we won’t stop knocking barriers to the ground until this public university is

one accessible to all those brilliant people, we know who deserve to be here, even if this state may not deserve them right now. Each of us has loved ones, family, friends, do-gooders, or barista extraordinaires in our lives who deserve to be here. While you are here at University of Iowa as a grad worker, it’s your chance to fight alongside them for a better community. This union isn’t just about ending fees and raising wages, this is about leaving the door wide open on our way out. Let’s stay stronger together and remember: direct action gets the goods.



Left: Flyer from COGS action at the Board of Regents meeting on September 27th

Graduate Worker Address to the Board of Regents

By Aidan Fischer, COGS Member

The following is a print version of an address delivered by Aidan Fischer at the Board of Regents Action on September 27th

I do not wish to engage in discussions of statistics or monetary values directly, for that I am not equipped and I am sure my comrades can explain in greater depth than I ever could in this publication. However, what I wish to discuss are conditions as they are felt for that is more of my expertise, seeing as I am subject to the same inequities as the rest of the graduate student workers which the University employs.

I have seen nothing less than abjectness leveled against the many who compose this university, saddled into paltry stipends despite most pulling long hours in the interest of said institution, on top of the rigorous course loads in which we are participating. People are forced into substandard housing, into the use of social programs which this government actively assaults and attempts to upend every legislative session, into horrific levels of poverty when attempting to afford necessities such as medical care and food. The inability to save, the inability to work, the inability to eat, the inability to live are all either threats lying in wait for or are already realized by my peers and myself.

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in Genealogy of Morals:

In "punishing" the debtor, the creditor participates in a right of the masters: at last he, too, may experience for once the exalted sensation of being allowed to despise and mistreat someone as "beneath him"-- or at least, if actual power and administration of punishment has already been passed to the "authorities," to see him despised and mistreated. The compensation, then, consists in a warrant for and title to cruelty.

This apparatus (the Board of Regents) is nothing less than cruel. Whether through gross negligence or active malice, they have stripped an entire class and generation of the ability to live for years, if not decades, during and after their graduate programs. They have made us debtors and positioned themselves as creditors, reveling in our suffering. They think we should be grateful, we should grovel at their feet because they supposedly provide an education. They merely corporatize the moment of learning, sully growth with a profit motive. They make me viscerally ill, all of them from their business backgrounds and their bourgeois private practices. They eviscerate us daily, every week we are brought

to the precipice of oblivion in service to their interests because they have monopolized our access to what we desire out of our lives. They have weaponized our passions against us to drain from this student body any profit to be gained, damned be the destitution left in their wake.

I will not beg them to be human, they are far beyond that form of redemption. I am not like my compatriots, I will not beg. I wish to look them in the face and tell them of every last drop of blood they spill, the lengths of their grand cruelty that would make sadists weep in sorrow. They are actors who claim no face. I see through their redirections. They control this and thus they are responsible, those sickening excuses for leaders.

I close by calling to my comrades to not give up this seemingly Sisyphean task, we cannot cower in the face of these dreadful leviathans, these arrogant self-positioned deities. We care not for false gods and it is false gods who are forgotten while we will live on. Fight on not for sake of reforms, but for the day when we will revolt against this system of injustice, of malice, of resentment.

COGS Attends UE 78th National Convention in Pittsburgh

By Hannah Zadeh, COGS President; Jacob Payne, Chief Campus Steward; John Tappen, Labor and Solidarity Chair

In the last two years, 25,000 new graduate workers have organized with our parent union, United Electrical (UE), solidifying that the unionization of higher education is a powerful movement across the country. At the convention, nine organizing reports were given by newly unionized higher education locals, and many graduate worker guests attended. Hannah Zadeh (President, Sociology), Jacob Payne (Chief Campus Steward, Physics and Astronomy), and John Tappen (Labor Solidarity Chair, American Studies) attended the convention as delegates for UE Local 896/COGS.

First contracts at three universities: in New Mexico and Massachusetts from University of New Mexico (UE Local 1466), New Mexico State University (UE Local 1498), and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (UE Local 256).

Six universities joined UE between January and July in 2023: Northwestern (UE Local 1122), Johns-Hopkins (UE Local 197), University of Chicago (UE Local 1103), Dartmouth (UE Local 261), University of

Minnesota (UE Local 1105), Stanford (UE Local 1043)

Members of every newly unionized grad local expressed the importance of a national strategy to improve working conditions in our industry. In their first contracts, every new UE grad local is fighting for 1) union shop, 2) anti-discrimination clauses, 3) protections against discipline, and 4) defense of international graduate workers. It is imperative we support these locals in their fight to dramatically raise the standards across our industry.

Important lessons:

We all benefit from holding each other to a high standard and pushing our union forward. It can be uncomfortable to show up, pay dues, write letters, fight the boss, or speak at a rally; and even harder to ask each other to show up when we assign these jobs, because we are asking for more work. But union work is different when it empowers us and brings results we want. When we push each other to act collectively to remedy issues that are deeply felt and widely felt, everyone benefits. For this to work, we need to be sure to listen to each

other sincerely to know what is deeply and widely felt. Otherwise we will push people away. But when we make time for each other, we call everyone in to participate in making our campus better.

For stewardship, this looks like increasing participation at all levels of the grievance process. Area and department stewards will shine for our members when they school the boss on how to participate in our grievance system. We get there by collectively exercising confidence in our rights and responsibilities. Members will have an amplified impact when they speak about their issues and outcomes at General Membership Meetings. Bringing every member into the process lets us collectively celebrate wins, and organize to fight when the university puts up barriers against us.



Blitz Membership Drive 2023 Recap

By Jenny Singer, COGS Vice President

During the first two weeks of October, COGS members volunteered our time, marshalled our favorite union facts, and courageously approached our colleagues to ask them to join us in organizing for a better, safer, more just workplace.

Our annual membership drive, Blitz, was a success: 31 volunteers spent 10 days, reaching 150 graduate students in 20 buildings. We heard from our coworkers: all across campus, grad students are scraping by to teach, research, write, and study on low pay. And we are sick of paying fees to work. Since the start of Blitz, we have signed up 30 new members, and our numbers continue to grow.

We have a goal of 95 new members by the end of the academic year. We need to work together as a union to reach this goal. That means talking about the union with our coworkers, inviting them to union events, and asking them directly to join the union.

Want to help organize our union? COGS Organizing Committee meetings are every other Thursday at 4pm. Email COGS VP jennyleahsinger@gmail.com to get the details. Want to organize but can't make the Thursday meeting? Email Jenny anyways and she'll find a time that works.

Right: COGS coordinating committee members, Hannah Zadeh and Mingcen Wei get ready for a Blitz shift



Above: Members of the 2023-2024 COGS coordinating committee (from left to right: Solomon Fenton-Miller, John Tappen, Jacob Payne, and Emma Croushore) representing COGS at the graduate student fair at the Iowa Memorial Union

ANNOUNCEMENT: COGS Launches END THE FEES Campaign

Learn more, sign the petition, and get involved at: cogs.org/endthe-fees



COGS AY23-24 Coordinating Committee!

Hannah Zadeh President	Kenton Greene Red Area Steward	Natalie McClellan Press and Publicity Chair
Jenny Singer VP for Organizing	Emma Croushore Green Area Steward	Solomon Fenton Miller Financial Officer
Jacob Payne Chief Campus Steward	Osamamen Oba Eduviere International Student Representative	Nicole Yeager Political Action Chair
Flannery Currin Recording Officer	Cary Stough Social Chair	John Tappen Labor Solidarity Chair
Rebecca Weaver Blue Area Steward	Mingcen Wei Unity Chair	Trustees Andrea Smith Chad Rhym Caleb Pennington
Amanda Kozar Yellow Area Steward		

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And find all our other links at linktr.ee/cogs