

COGNITION



UE 896 COGS

NEWS

The Campaign to Organize Graduate Students (COGS) April 2025
Representing Teaching and Research Assistants at the University of Iowa since 1996

One Day for Iowa COGS

COGS organized a rally and teach-in March 26th, urging people to boycott UI's "One Day for Iowa." Held on the Pentacrest just yards away from where UI personnel begged the public for money, COGS emphasized three demands:

1. Promise to protect grad worker jobs
2. End worker fees
3. Protect civil rights and academic freedom by immediately reinstating living learning communities, adopting AAUP standards on academic freedom, and retaining previous commitments to students rights for equal treatment.

The level of basic support for grad workers is being stripped and made more tenuous, undergraduates are having crucial living supports gutted, and basic safety protections for international and LGBTQ+ students is being abandoned, all while the university sits on an endowment of over \$1 billion. Until the University is able to meet the three basic expectations above, people are encouraged to withhold their donations. Instead, COGS speakers and allies demanded the University invest in its future by supporting its workers and students.



We Need Solidarity

As authoritarians in DC and Des Moines ramp up the scapegoating of immigrants and intellectuals, we increasingly need to protect one another. Looking at some of our peer institutions, we know we cannot count on the university to have in mind the best interest of students. Instead, familiarize yourself with current laws and practices. Become involved in supporting migrant justice. If you're an international student or want to offer support, consider getting involved with the [UI Immigration Law Clinic](#), [Prairielands Freedom Fund](#), the [Center for Worker Justice](#), [Iowa Legal Aid](#), or the [ACLU of Iowa](#). These are dangerous times and they require all of us to look out for one another.

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The Speakers

The March 26th rally featured several undergraduate, graduate, faculty, and emeritus speakers.

Jacob Payne, a member of the COGS negotiating team, spoke on how sustained, collective pressure can win demands, though it takes time. "In 2009, COGS won a 10 year battle for full tuition remission for graduate workers. It took several contracts, years of bargaining, and united voices to stand up together for change," Jacob said to applause. "In 2014, COGS took the U to court for the right to bargain over fees, and won. Fees were cut by 25%." Today, Jacob said, "It's time to clean up this mess and end fees."

Speaking to the demand of academic freedom, undergraduate Daniela Pintor-Mendoza, president of UI's Latino Student Union, decried the loss of Living Learning Communities and other DEI programs.

Various speakers highlighted the increased precarity of graduate worker funding, and the need for collective action to preserve a university that serves the public. Emeritus Professor Bruce Fehn recalled how he and his colleagues worked for years in the late 1960s to pressure the University. Collective action takes time, but due to years of collective efforts, the University eventually opened up African American Studies, Gender, Women, & Sexuality Studies, and the Latino-Native American Cultural Center. The threats to these programs today can be met with similar collective pressure.

One speaker offered an example of how to resist. Marie Krebs, a local activist and graduate worker, recounted how the university



pressured her to be less critical when presenting at conferences. The university threatened expulsion unless she turned over her materials. Calling their bluff and drawing strength from support from COGS and her personal networks, Krebs refused. Instead of expulsion, Krebs received a minor punitive mark in her internal records. "I refused to comply," a poster said, quoting Krebs, "and I will carry that with honor."

The Teach-In

A teach-in followed the rally. It began with a history of student protest at Iowa. Those in attendance found a friend and model from the past in Steve Smith. In 1965, Smith burnt his draft card at the IMU, the first student to do so on a university campus. He was involved with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other peace and justice work on and off campus. This introduction was followed by recounting examples of when students protested on Iowa's campus.

University of Iowa students have fought and won every single decade since 1847. Sometimes they won their immediate demands, like in 1918 when hundreds of UI students pressured a professor to leave campus after he abused his power and students. Sometimes, they won but not fully or immediately, like in the 1970s and 1980s when students demanded an end to sexual assault on campus. Their demands eventually led to RVAP. Sometimes, students won by simply acting with integrity and keeping alive traditions of justice, as in 1935, when students protested divestments from universities carrying signs that read "scholarships not battleships."



Tactics and strategies that have proven successful in the past were highlighted. Petitions, coalition building, sick-outs, legal actions, extra-legal actions, civil disruptions, appealing to values, and other strategies were explored in detail. One lesser known tactic was highlighted by a participant. In May of 1970, just days after the Kent state shooting, UI's armory building mysteriously burnt down – arson being a likely culprit. Today, students are ready to burn down policies that threaten to take us backward. While it will take time, when we fight together, we win.

The Grant Wood Experience

COGS member Jack Taylor led a Grant Wood experience, highlighting the still overlooked contributions by the artist who would today be described as a somewhat closeted gay man. Elizabeth Catlett, the namesake of Catlett Hall and an internationally renowned artist, came to Iowa to study under Grant Wood. Their work today would no doubt be targeted by conservative politicians. Its doubtful whether complicit UI officials, more concerned with their paychecks than with people, would support them today. Students added a rainbow of color to large Grant Wood prints. These images, like the student body, are enriched by adding diversity.



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Clarifying Funding Cuts

Offering clarity around budget cuts COGS members Miranda Schene and Regina Napolitano reviewed how research funding works. Publicly funded research is responsible for vaccines, the internet, and a myriad of medical treatments and technological advances. Yet, the current administration is disrupting and cutting research funding. State and University officials so far have refused to guarantee funding for vital research. In an exercise somewhere between tragedy and absurdity, attendees read some of the long [list of words](#) that federal agencies are currently using to flag and deny grants. These included words like bias, belong, female, Black, sex, and Gulf of Mexico.

COGS Band!

Those who were able to stay until the end of the three hour rally joined in song for the debut of the COGS band. Sounds of a bagpipe, fiddle, keyboard, and guitar provided an accompaniment as many voices echoed throughout the Pentacrest singing rewritten labor songs. Singing a song written by SDS students at UI over 50 years ago, the chorus rang out, "We're through with pouring water it's the fire next time."

New Coordinating Committee

Congratulations to those who were nominated and voted on for positions in the 2025-2026 Coordinating Committee! Election results will be announced at **our next GMM, April 22nd at the Wesley Center**. It's safe to say we have members and leaders ready to light a fire.

University Poem

by Scout Faller

On the second floor of the library
an annual report
with the prison's contracts.

A chair a student could sit in.
For the Franciscans, pews.
A governor's red oak table.

A woman. More precisely,
her awards. Carving truth
from hearsay like a statue its marble.

Zionist teaching a master class.
Linked chain leading no particular place.

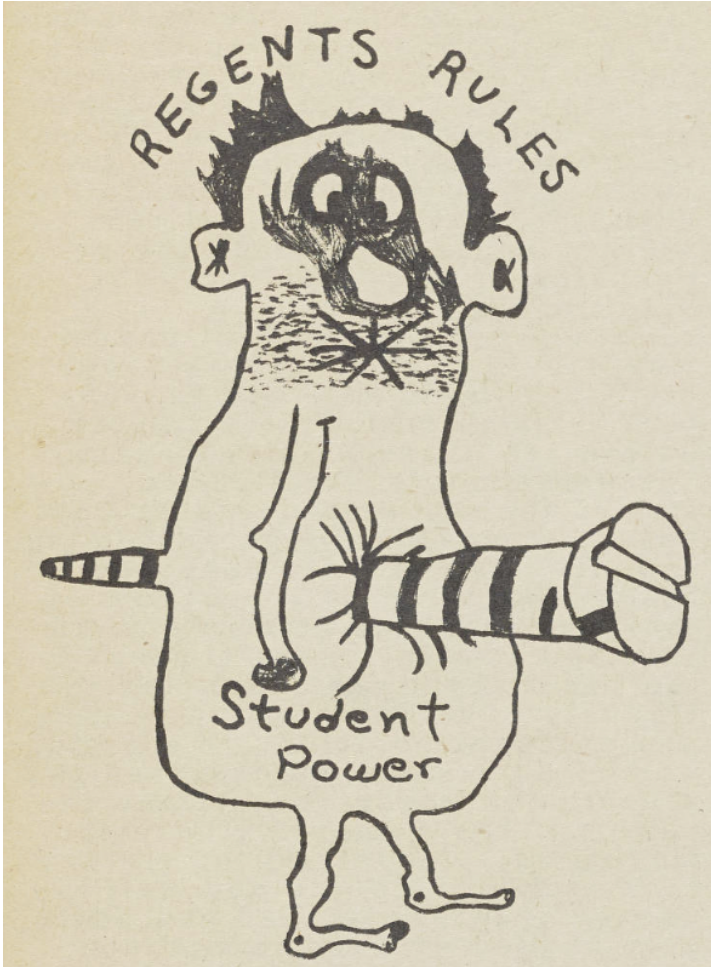
In a hysteric's account, dirt interrupts the snow.
Grass interrupts that.
Tarpaulin flap in the exacting air.

The not quite job
paid out at two dollars an hour.
Unfair-wage-end-scare-quote.

I show my students a picture
of a Hellfire missile.
I am trying to say
this is your backyard.

Window reflects what's inside while opening
out.
Whirrs and clicks from the expanse.

The field
like the riot
makes thinking operable.
Makes the doing of thinking possible.

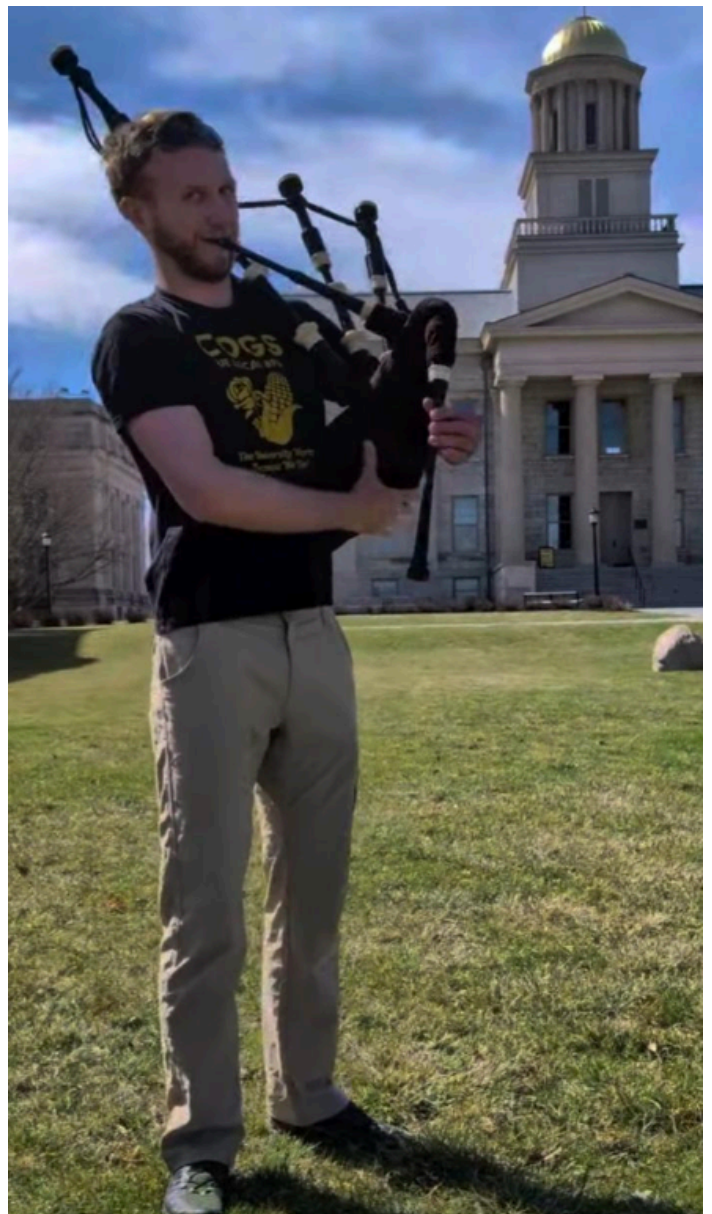


Teaching Beyond Fear

Along with other organizations, COGS organized a webinar with leading civil rights attorneys to clarify what new anti-DEI laws mean for higher education in Iowa. The short of it is that laws that are poorly written need not be capitulated to in advance, despite the fear driving many University officials. When asked about what it meant to follow the “spirit of the law,” as the Board of Regents urged regarding anti-DEI laws, attorney Henry Hamilton III said, “that’s not a very patriotic statement to make. The spirit of the law depends on who you talk to. If you ask one set of citizens, the spirit of the law is to dismantle 60 years of civil rights progress.”

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Graduate student Marie Krebs joined the discussion, along with Courtland Cox, an organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. Cox echoed the notion that Iowa’s anti-DEI laws are cut from the same cloth as the Jim Crow laws he fought against. “They want to revisit what was happening 60 years ago. It failed then,” Cox noted, because of collective action, and it will fail today. Cox urged University of Iowa students and workers to continue the fight, “Even though you think it’s darkest now, you cannot be paralyzed.”



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Hands Off Students!

COGS members recently stood in solidarity at the University of Minnesota with detained student Doğukan Günaydın. Günaydın's student status was challenged by federal officials and he is now suing for immediate release. This is unlike the reports of two UI students who have had their visas revoked. A revocation or challenge of a student *visa* does not mean students must self-deport as their student *status* likely remains valid. COGS stands in solidarity with all international students. To get involved in these efforts, please contact COGS or the UI Immigration Law Clinic.



Photo credits: Nicole Yeager, Cary Stough, Ashley Maempa, greg wickenkamp

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Hands Off Palestine!

COGS members continue to join in organizing efforts demanding a free Palestine. Thanks to FilmScene and those who spoke recently at a screening of *The Encampments*, a film focused on Columbia University's Gaza Solidarity Encampment.

Hands Off Our Democracy!

By Ashley Maempa

When I first heard of the Hands Off Day of Action, I didn't think much of it. The past few years of online-dominated organizing have been fairly desensitizing to calls for collective action, i.e., the national economic black outs that are announced every other week. But, I think I can speak for anyone who participated in Hands Off actions anywhere that it was a powerful experience.

I had lost a lot of faith in the ability of people to come together on a grand scale and show up, but we did! Even though it was miserably cold, windy, and rainy in my native St. Louis, over four thousand people showed up in protests across the metropolitan area - even in MAGA territory suburbs. COGS members participated in a Hands Off action in Iowa City, with well over a thousand people showing up. So much for the sleepy Midwest!

It was an honor to march in solidarity with millions of Americans against fascism and oligarchy. Sustaining that momentum and continuing to show up at the polls, in our representative's offices, and in the streets will be the test to determine our future as a nation.

See you at the next GMM

Wesley Center

April 22nd

6pm

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