



U.E. Local 896 Campaign to Organize Graduate Students



For immediate release
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RESPONSE TO UI ATTEMPTS AT CHARGING GRADUATE WORKERS TUITION

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In May, 2025, the University of Iowa changed its policies for graduate student workers specifying that assistantships would only cover tuition at the rate of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (\$6,000 per semester). For the roughly two dozen graduate workers enrolled in other colleges—specifically the College of Education—who are employed by the College of Liberal Arts and Science this has resulted in unexpected and unprecedented tuition charges of ~\$1,500 for students who are already [paid less than a living wage](#).

Full tuition remission, won for graduate workers at the University of Iowa by COGS in 2003, has been the minimum expectation for all graduate students attending and working at UI and this change is a threat to the security of that benefit for all workers. Prior to 2017, the full remission of tuition—regardless of rate charged by an individual college—was guaranteed in the collectively bargained contract. [Changes to Iowa's labor laws](#) in 2017 stripped the contract of this guarantee and placed it instead in the graduate student employment standards, which the UI may change at will. This recent change represents the first time since at least 2003 that UI has required graduate workers in either the College of Education or College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to pay tuition. **This reflects a degradation of a core component of the terms of our employment—full tuition remission.** For affected graduate workers there was no notice of this change, only a minor tweak to the standard language of offer letters. **Many workers did not realize they were being assessed tuition costs until the university began charging additional late fees for these charges they had not been explicitly warned about.**

For these students, an extra \$1,500 along with anticipated charges for student fees meant that more than 75% of their first paychecks went right back to the university.¹ In conversations with COGS, the UI has cited financial burdens as the excuse for the change to tuition guarantees but

¹ Minimum stipends for graduate workers are ~\$2,263/month. Workers are also charged ~\$380 each semester in student fees.

this is hard to believe from a University [currently spending roughly \\$4.25 million to buy out its former basketball coach](#), or [\\$75,000 per spot in new parking ramps](#). For a university with a \$3.3 billion endowment and nearly \$5 billion in expenditures each year, the roughly \$20,000 that the university is saving with this change represents excessive penny pinching whereas for graduate workers it poses a significant financial burden.

This change, affecting roughly 20 students at this moment, represents a greater threat to all graduate workers at UI. **If the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is allowed to charge tuition to graduate workers, other colleges and departments may soon follow suit.** We must draw the line right away. These changes have ripple effects through the entire university as they impact the instructors who do the educational labor at the heart of the institution. Graduate students and workers at the University of Iowa will not stop fighting this change and for the protections that previous generations of graduate workers have won.

On behalf of the affected students, COGS has filed a formal grievance with UI and is attempting to overturn these changes. We call upon the UI to rescind this change to the Graduate Employment Standards and fully fund every graduate worker's tuition. Higher education is undergoing a period of significant nationwide stress, and the UI needs to support the graduate students who make it function to protect and improve the institution we all call home.

COGS (the Campaign to Organize Graduate Students) is the labor union for graduate student workers at the University of Iowa.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call or email:
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