

Special Meeting of the Bloomington Faculty - IGWC-UE Information Sheet

What is the Indiana Graduate Workers Coalition-United Electrical Workers (IGWC-UE)?

Three years ago, a group of graduate workers at IUB initiated a campaign against fees paid by grad employees at Indiana University. At the time, fees amounted to \$2,000-\$2,400 per year. The campaign saw some successes. After an initial meeting in January 2019, IU Administration refused to meet again.

In the spring of 2021, the IGWC initiated a fee strike. Despite repeatedly asking for meetings with the IU Administration, the IGWC never received a response. At the end of the semester, the IGWC leadership voted to form a union as the only reasonable mechanism to establish communication with the Administration. The IGWC affiliated with the United Electrical Workers (UE), an independent union with 30,000 members, which represents graduate employees at several other universities. In December, graduate employees submitted 1,584 signed union cards to the Board of Trustees requesting a union election. The Board refused. IGWC-UE polled members and decided that striking was the final option for communicating with an Administration that refuses to meet.

What does the union want?

IGWC-UE is seeking a relationship with the IU Administration patterned on the relationship the Administration has with other unions on campus, as outlined in [HR 12-20](#). This policy calls for IU to recognize employee organizations that have majority support. Recognition will let the union meet with representatives of the administration, exchange proposals, find agreement, and forward policy recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

IGWC-UE's platform supports a living wage, an end to fees, annual raises, a grievance procedure, and fairness for international graduate workers. It is a broad program: defining a specific set of bargaining proposals will be the task of an elected bargaining committee once there is a bargaining framework in place. HR 12-20 sets up a framework for bargaining over university policies covering wages, benefits, and working conditions.

How common are graduate worker unions?

The first graduate employee union was organized in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1969. Today over 80,000 graduate employees are represented by unions. This includes workers at Harvard, Columbia, NYU, the New School, the University of California system, University of Illinois Chicago, and the University of Oregon. In the Big Ten, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Michigan State, Illinois, and Rutgers are all unionized. The United Electrical Workers represents graduate workers at Iowa, New Mexico, New Mexico State, and M.I.T. as well as Indiana.

Who controls IGWC-UE?

IGWC continues to be run completely by graduate employees at Indiana. IGWC-UE currently functions as a system of 120 volunteer Union Representatives with a Bargaining Committee. The union will adopt bylaws, elect local leadership, and apply to be a chartered local union of UE this summer. UE locals maintain control over their own treasuries and affairs; UE provides expertise in organizing and negotiating.

as well as legal advice. Our affiliation with a national union evens the playing field for graduate workers. The IU Administration, for instance, has extensive legal resources. It is absolutely critical that graduate employees have access to similar resources.

Who funds UE?

UE is funded by its members, which include graduate employees at other universities, service employees, and industrial workers. IGWC-UE will adopt bylaws this summer and ask graduate employees to contribute union dues to support its efforts. IGWC-UE successfully fundraises from its members, alumni, the Bloomington community, and beyond. This semester, the union has raised over \$80,000 in contributions, including over \$60,000 toward a strike fund. Union membership for public employees in the United States is always voluntary and can always be withdrawn.

What has UE accomplished with other graduate employee locals?

UE has represented graduate employees at the University of Iowa for over 20 years. In 1997, graduate employees were charged 50% of tuition costs and thus were required to pay back much of their wages to the university. Over the first 10 years of unionization, graduate employees were able to bargain away all tuition charges. At Iowa, current minimum salaries for graduate employees are \$20,566 for a 50% academic-year appointment and \$25,126 for a 50% fiscal-year appointment. Fees for graduate employees have been reduced by 50%: workers pay less than \$350 per semester.

How will the union affect advisor-advisee relationships?

A recent study on this issue concluded that “there is no reason why union representation of GSEs, professors, or both should damage the professor–PhD student relationship. If anything, it may strengthen the relationship by formalizing the customary ethics of the relationship.”¹ Typically, union-negotiated wage increases are set as minimums, leaving advisors and departments flexibility for additional increases. The union provides support and resources for graduate employees dealing with administrative obstacles. Union representatives can inform employees of their due process rights and the work rules of the university. They serve as witnesses for employees undergoing disciplinary processes.

Will the union result in the loss of funding for best-paid departments?

The purpose of the union is to expand the pay and benefits for all graduate employees. Already most graduate employees at IU, even in the best-paid departments, have only received two raises in ten years. Wages in STEM departments at IU are far below their Big Ten peer departments. The IGWC-UE advocates for yearly raises for all employees as well as a living wage to make IU competitive with other Big Ten schools. There are no reports of other universities of departments losing funding because of unionization.

How will a union affect the shared governance system?

Graduate employee unions and faculty unions operate alongside the shared governance system at many universities. For graduate employees, the current system of shared governance has not functioned as an effective voice for the advocacy for improved wages, benefits, and working conditions.

¹ Rogers, Sean E., Adrienne E. Eaton, and Paula B. Voos. "Effects of unionization on graduate student employees: Faculty-student relations, academic freedom, and pay." *ILR Review* 66, no. 2 (2013): 487-510.