

Why is the GEO on strike?

The Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO) is striking in response to the administration's refusal to guarantee current tuition waiver practice. The administration's best proposal only commits to maintaining the policy laid out in the General Rules Concerning University Organization and Procedure. These rules only guarantee base rate tuition, or in-state tuition waivers. When explicitly asked to guarantee the current practice of providing out-of-state tuition waivers to non-Illinois residents who work as teaching or graduate assistants, the administration bargaining team refused, even though they were well aware that a refusal would result in a strike.

Why would administrators rather force a strike than guarantee tuition waivers? The GEO fears that they intend to convert out-of-state to in-state tuition waivers for some or all campus departments. For the majority of graduate employees who are not Illinois residents, this would mean incurring over \$13,000 in additional costs per year. Effectively, most graduate students would be forced to abandon their degree programs. Few students would choose to take on such an enormous debt load unless they are in fields where lucrative careers are probable. Graduate education would become even more inaccessible to working and middle class persons than it already is.

Additionally, the loss of out-of-state tuition waivers would have drastic effects on the University. Departments that can not offer waivers to non-residents would lose their ability to attract the most talented and committed students. Their reputations would suffer, as would the quality of courses and sessions taught by their graduate employees. In some cases, departments could very well disappear altogether. Dr. Catherine Prendergast, Professor and Director of the Undergraduate Rhetoric Program, phrased it this way in her letter to Interim Provost Easter: "If the University were to tinker with tuition waivers, whether in-state, or out-of-state, thus even further downgrading its support to graduate students, you might as well rename this East Central University of Illinois, so shattering would be the consequence to the U of I's R1 status."

Why would the administration even consider taking such a risk? For decades, state funding for public higher education has been diminishing. Instead of advocating on the behalf of students, administrators have responded by raising tuition, cutting costs according to corporate models of management, and seeking outside, often private revenue. Across the nation, these processes of corporatization and privatization have withered the quality of, and restricted access to, public higher education. They have also oriented research programs toward the generation of revenues, as opposed to knowledge and wisdom. University of Illinois administrators have followed this path - the research park and the failed Global Campus program are just two examples. Now, instead of responding to budget restrictions by cutting administrative costs, they are seeking new ways to cut down on costs related to the University's core mission of academic instruction. Last year they tried to strip tuition waivers for all TAs with 25% FTE appointments. This year the Department of Chemistry took back the waivers it had promised to undergraduate TAs. Given this history, we are fearful that the administration will come after our out-of-state tuition waivers next.

The GEO sincerely hopes that you will stand with us in solidarity.