Call started: 9:03 PM

**Attendance:**

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<th>Institution</th>
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**Agenda**

1. Minutes
   a. Previous President’s call minutes [here](#)
VC: Entertain a motion to approve. Michigan, Arizona seconds. Unanimous.
2. Guest Introduction
   a. Jonathan Kissam, the Communications Director for the United Electrical, Radio, and 
      Machine Workers of America
      i. https://www.ueunion.org/stwd_idx.html
   b. Kavitha Iyengar, President of UAW 2865, which represents TAs, readers, and tutors for 
      the UC system, and a JD/PhD student at UC Berkeley
      www.uaw2865.org
      i. https://workersequality.org/
3. Discussion
   . Suggested Questions:
   . What are the benefits and the limitations of unionizing? Partially unionized, such as academic 
     employees only?
   i. Is your school in a right-to-work state? If so, what are the powers of a union without strikes?
     UW: We are unionized. Our union and GPSS often face questions of who does what. Our union 
     covers ⅓ of our 15,000 TAs, RAs - any student employee. This means my job is covered, even 
     though my job is paid for by student fees. Can file grievances and get support from our union. 
     We have a very strong and amicable relationship with our union, though that hasn’t always been 
     the case in the future. Sometimes, issues with respect, since the university can be rather 
     passive-aggressive. Happy to respond.
   Jonathan: UE, national union. Historically, we come out of electrical manufacturing, but like 
   many unions we have diversified. We refer to ourselves as ‘the union for everyone,’ with 
   members across different industries. National office for two years, previously a member for most 
   of my adult life. Joined first in graduate school at University of Iowa. COGS - council of 
   organizing graduate students, back in the 90’s. One of the first 10-15 institutions to get 
   unionized in the legal sense. Iowa is still the only place we formally represent graduate 
   employees, but we have graduate students that are a part of other campuses. I’ve been paying 
   attention to the graduate student organization pathways. Short overview of that? Graduate 
   employees/graduate student workers, however you want to call it, are among the most 
   complicated group of workers in the US, for a complicated legal state for workers as a whole. 
   When we were organizing at Iowa - a union is any group of workers banding together to improve 
   working conditions, so a union is an institution of workers that can take different forms. 
   Collective bargaining is the legal process for bargaining with employers, and is a legal construct 
   that is controlled by laws, and that’s where things get dicey, or can vary widely among different 
   situations for graduate students in different states. There’s a complicated history, that I won’t 
   bore you about, because of federalism. Essentially, there’s one law for most private sector 
   workers, and public sector is up to individual states. Graduate student workers face two 
   complicated questions when thinking about unionization. Since many grad student workers work 
   for public institutions, they’re subject to one or more of 50 different public sector laws, AND 
   public and private sector employees both face the question as to whether or not they’re workers. 
   We don’t have universal rights of workers. In the mid-90s, private graduate student employees 
   were considered not to be employees at all, though that didn’t stop some (Yale) from trying, but 
   they didn’t have the law to back them up. Some states don’t have clear definitions, so graduate 
   students had to fight a legal battle to be considered workers under their laws, which resulted in 
   different definitions of who is a worker. In Iowa, it was every academic position - Teaching or 
   Researching. That was unique, at the time.
   VC: Loving the history, but just another minute.
   Jonathan: Right now, private sector is about to be revoked, and public sector is variable for all 
   states. Right to work is variable, not just about no strikes. There are many difference 
   approaches.
VC: Thank you. Kavitha?
Kavitha: Thank you. Looking at attendance, I’ll talk about both schools that do have unions and those that don’t. You can see from my intro what I’m a part of. I shared a link for how unions can help with representations. Our union recommends 19,000 students, only TAs, readers and graders, in the UC system. We had to fight a long legal battle to get the representation we have, and will have research as well. A point of clarification, there is a rule on the private sector has an open comment period for you to argue that you are doing work. For us, since the 90s, we have had rules for grievances and fighting harassment, such as paying us well, or on time. Universities need to see us as workers who have rights to treating us well. There is title ix for reporting harassment, but not measures for stopping discrimination immediately. We fought to get that in our contracts to get that, instead of having to go to court to have it stop. Used it for lactation stations, paid parental leave, things that are no standards. Paid parental leave is not guaranteed, and that is something we have fought for to have recognized. Recently, in last negotiations, we won for protections against harassment and sicrimination. In title IX cases, we can have the harassment stopped, even before the case is resolved. That’s something I was very interested in getting involved with. I would love to talk about how to form a union. Even if the laws are bad, we can fight to change laws. These laws aren’t static, and don’t necessarily bind the actions if you want to form organizing committees and networked across campus. Political action, like international student visas, are other things.

UA, Marie: This is a topic that we bring up about unionizing, or hear stories of a robust place, like Wisconsin, where unions are acceptable. My question, being in a right-to-work state, is how to require dues, so you can fund a process and make it useful. How do you get the ball rolling, and what’s the critical mass needed to get it rolling? Also, what others have had issues with student insurance for standardization, which is overseen by ABOR.
Kavitha: I’ll talk about the ball-rolling. Universities are context-specific, but it is totally possible. Wages, working conditions, and benefits, are things the university have to bargain for, regardless of who is technically the decision maker. Having organizing committees is for getting the ball going. A good rule of thumb for starting a union is whether the majority of people in the bargaining unit wants to join. Any unit can recognize a unit. NYU for example, majority of people said so, demonstrated so via cards, actions, and university recognized the union and agreed to bargain, because union showed it had majority support. It takes a majority of workers to form a union and have a strong one. The way you can do that is with the reps from the departments you have already, to talk to their coworkers and move their coworkers to action, such as with signing something or going to something. Meet regularly to have a network of people.

UW: One of the pieces of information I don’t have is for buy-in from admin or graduate school, or outside entities to champion unions as you reach critical mass. Is that important?
Kavitha: Yes, it’s important to have as much broad support as possible. It starts with the majority of people voting. In UC, we just have to sign cards, and have a majority do that. That’s our legal requirement, not voluntary recognition. In other cases, it might be better to have broad support, but other schools like NYU, the university recognized the union because of the graduate students said they wanted one.

Jonathan: When you start the process of organizing, the union is like a widget. Do you want one, most people are like ‘what’s it going to do for me?’ Majority support needs to be built. Having a strong, representative organizing committee that reaches across different departments and demographics to reflect the population is very important. Also one of the things, particularly, for graduate students, the people who are important are the committee being willing to do the work for those who are coming after them, because the turn over is so fast. There’s a level of commitment that’s important. In my experience, there’s also needs for strong relationship with each other.

Maryland: http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2019RS/fnotes/bil_0000/hb0270.pdf In 2001, it became illegal for TAs and adjunct professors that is became illegal to collective bargain, or even talk
about collective bargaining. It’s been super rigorous to going through the legal channels trying to fix that wording. There was a “compromise” in 2011-2012, with the 13 different institutions in our system, and there were issues with the smaller schools being frightened of the flagship doing it’s own thing. We have a ‘Meet and Confer body’ that has a listserve of all employees. All that it holds the institution to is a 60-90 minute meeting with the administration once a year. The agendas don’t change. We have no leverage to change anything, because of legally not being allowed to discuss collective bargaining. We’re still lobbying for support, but it feels like an uphill battle. We’re rolling the ball like sisyphus, up the hill and right back down. Any advice would be appreciated.

Jonathan: One of things with Iowa - technically meaning for right-to-work is preventing contracts about having to pay into union - like Arizona mentioned.

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES - NEW LINK https://zoom.us/j/441043867

Jonathan: Republicans got control of all three houses and governor, changed iowa, so only bargain over wages and limited things. So locals there have a one pager, but they have been able to use that meet and confer process to talk about other things, like healthcare program. Collective actions short of strikes. There are also UE members at UNC system who have dealt with north carolina laws - though they got their ‘not allowed to talk about it’ issue as a rule on free speech. You might try that. They make the meet and confer issue work because they do have pickets outside. If you don’t have access to formal collective bargaining rights, it’s still possible to build an organization of people to do things, use an issue that’s widely felt, that we’re going to raise some hell and put people in motion and people will talk.

VC: Follow up, Annie?

Maryland: I’d love to know how to make the meet and confer effectively. The Provost comes late, leaves early, and texts the whole time. We have had people picket, maybe small wins, but even with law changes it’ll take years.

VC: Do you have other administrators support? Graduate deans, President meetings, or social media shaming or school newspaper?

Maryland: We’ve gone through three grad deans, our current is opposed. President is also opposed, but he’s on his way out this summer. Chancellor and other system levels are also opposed. There’s a lot of fears stirred up. That’s where I feel ignorant. They put the fear in the smaller schools, that there are nothing but negative repercussions as classification from student to employee. If you make us do this, it’ll cost money and we’ll cut appointment. We do not have a friend in higher administration.

KAvitha: I think it’s really exciting that you’re running a bill, and that’s necessary for winning legal argument. I think there are ways to make meet and confer more effective, by showing greater support. More people being there, petitions being signed is traditional, other options are everyone on campus wearing buttons or a certain color, show people want to have these changes. I’ve never really heard of an administration that is pro-unionization, not because they want graduate students to suffer, but because it transforms power dynamics and gives power to the voice of graduate students on an evening footing with administration. One talking point we use, if ‘you do this, it’s going to be worse for you.’ We have a contract, that people vote on. That if it really as bad for us, it wouldn’t be voted on. Union is not a third party, union is the workers. Finding ways to pressure decision makers in the legislature is a key way to get laws past.

Maryland: We do have two orgs, the meet and confer, and a more activist body.

Jonathan: And I can put you in touch

UCSD: I came out of UMaryland system, you have a beautiful amount of diverse people and professors. You might try to find young professors to get their buy-in to start softening the administration. There were no happy graduate students when I was there...

Maryland: I know, it’s so sad! I’m one of the happy ones and I try to advocate a lot. One thing that we do, and we do well is collecting testimonies in support of the bills, from our multiple schools in the system to show support across the board, in solidarity.
VC: Last question from me. Texas is odd because we have a union that puts all texas state employees together, so graduate student workers next to child protective services, prison workers, teachers. How to get students motivated, especially with turnover. Kavitha: Focus on short, medium, long-term goals. There’s always something immediate that’s a concern that can at least prompt discussion, even if change isn’t immediate. And use that to build momentum for future.

**Old Business**
1. None.

**New Business**
1. Date/time for next President’s Call
   a. Mid/late February
2. Topic for next President’s Call
   a. Other?
   b. Expert Guest?
VC: Will be scheduling a future time for the next presidents call. Will focus on mental health. Any other suggestions?

**Announcements**
1. Next Coalition call will be December 9th, 9pm EST

**Open Forum**
UT Austin: I want to thank our guests. I am sorry for leaving my camera on in my pocket. I was a fly on the wall, but I heard good things.

VC: Motion to adjourn
Arizona, motions, Maryland seconds.

Adjourn: 10:02pm.