

GEO Statement following Work Stoppage Ballot Results: Membership Authorizes Walk-Out over Pandemic and Policing Demands

September 7, 2020 -- This past weekend, members of GEO's bargaining unit - currently employed Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs) and Graduate Student Staff Assistants (GSSAs) - voted overwhelmingly to authorize GEO leadership to call a strike. **79 percent** of voters voted **yes** on our work stoppage. GEO members will withhold their labor effective Tuesday, September 8th, 2020 at 12:00 am, encouraging our allies to do the same in solidarity and to join us on in-person and remote picket lines. This is an historic moment; GEO membership has voted to strike in the middle of a pandemic at the beginning of the academic year, and is prepared to withhold our labor in pursuit of a safe and just campus for all.

GEO has been organizing through the summer around a [set of demands](#) that reflected the concerns of our members and the wider community. The demands were presented in an [open letter](#) to University of Michigan administrators, which was signed by over 1,800 graduate workers and community members. Administration issued an [insubstantial reply](#) in response. Through the summer, we have continued to hold multiple rallies, meetings, and [impact bargaining](#) sessions in an attempt to ensure the University of Michigan takes the necessary, crucial steps to protecting this community. Even as news has emerged from various [reopening campuses](#) in the last weeks, and even as U-M's own Ethics and Privacy Committee issued [multiple warnings](#) about the risks posed by campus reopening, our demands have gone unaddressed.

GEO membership is now taking a stand. Leadership will announce a four-day work stoppage today, with potential for reauthorization, until the university issues an offer that adequately addresses our concerns about:

- transparent and robust testing, contact tracing, and safety plans for campus;
- support for GSIs working remotely and an option to switch to remote from hybrid/in-person;
- flexible subsidies for parents and caregivers including those with school-aged children or care obligations for adults;
- better International Center support for international students and the repealing of the discriminatory, termly international student fee;
- unconditional support for all graduate students in the form of timeline and funding extensions, an emergency grant, and flexible leases and rent freezes at U-M housing.
- a demilitarized workplace
- diversion of funds from campus police (involving a cut of 50% to [DPSS](#)' annual budget)
- and ending any and all ties to local law enforcement (AAPD) and other agencies (ICE).

In GEO's last contract campaign this spring, we demanded disarming and demilitarizing campus police, which the university refused to bargain over. We highlight that GEO views our anti-policing demands as inseparable from our COVID demands. They are linked explicitly, through the University's decision to expand the policing of our community in a perverse effort to

enforce social distancing, and implicitly, through the ways the crises of the pandemic and racist policing both disproportionately affect the most vulnerable among us. Policing and surveillance are not “public health-informed”; they are harmful to physical and mental health. Increased police presence on campus and in the wider community will further jeopardize the safety of Black and brown graduate workers, students, faculty, staff, and community members in the midst of a pandemic that is already disproportionately ravaging Black and brown communities.

The University has again refused to bargain over these policing-related demands in our current impact bargaining negotiations, claiming that they are not relevant to University COVID-19 policies. GEO membership’s commitment to including anti-policing demands in our current stoppage platform demonstrates how urgent and linked our membership’s priorities are. The university administration has run roughshod over the lives of the community’s most vulnerable. The GEO strike coincides and stands in solidarity with [#ScholarStrike](#) for Black Lives announced by Prof. Anthea Butler of the University of Pennsylvania. GEO has also called on faculty to cancel regular classes for the duration of both strikes; we support the continued scheduling of teach-ins as part of the Scholar Strike.

GEO will hold an emergency general membership meeting this evening to discuss next steps and any new offers from the university.

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The Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO) is a labor union that represents over 2,000 Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs) and Graduate Student Staff Assistants (GSSAs) at the University of Michigan. Founded in 1974, it is one of the oldest and longest-running graduate student unions in the United States.

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