



The Graduate Advocate

Mugged by Healthcare

by Chris Whynacht

Recently I had a terrible experience with a mugger assaulting me and causing me to go to the hospital. You may think the mugging was the negative

to \$700! The negative feeling is showing in my bank overdraft as I am now trying to pay off the costs of emergency healthcare.

So who really mugged me?

“UMass needs to negotiate reasonable deductibles for students who are in serious need of emergency medical care! Healthcare should let people feel a sense of security...”

experience. Well, it wasn't exactly positive; however, I was lucky that it wasn't worse. I suffered no serious physical damage. Financially, I only had \$7 in my pocket. By far the most negative experience was with the healthcare. While the doctors and nurses were fantastically talented, caring, and professional people, the negative experience came when I received the bills from my UMass healthcare provider.

Talk about costly! The mugger was after my \$7, but the ride in the ambulance and visits to the emergency room have cost me close

Sure, the guy on the street took advantage of me when I wasn't looking and went for \$7 of my limited student funds (you probably know that research assistants at UMass aren't raking in big money). But our UMass required healthcare certainly cost me a lot more money in the long run! Are they taking care of me or taking advantage of my situation? My feeling is that the insurance company sees me as a bigger financial opportunity than the mugger did.

Am I glad to have healthcare? Of course! I am a Canadian who

expects that this kind of care should be provided free to everyone. I never expected a visit to the emergency room (ER) would hit my wallet this hard. I understand that profit-minded insurance companies want to prevent people from going to the ER with minor issues, and so they create large deductibles for ER visits. But, what about for obviously serious circumstances? We should feel relieved to hear an ambulance arrive when we are injured, not feel that a phone call for help may cost us the ability to pay for tuition, rent or other needed expenses.

UMass needs to negotiate reasonable deductibles for students who are in serious need of emergency medical care! Healthcare should let people feel a sense of security in a time of need. However, our current UMass system makes me worry about more than having a stranger approach me on a dark street and ask for my wallet. Take my \$7, but please don't make me pay an insurance company \$700.

Demanding Justice: Learning from Ferguson

by Mary Jo Connelly

By now, most people around the world know that on Saturday, August 9th in Ferguson, Missouri, 18-year-old Michael Brown, Jr. was shot to death by Darren Wilson, a 28-year-old white police officer. Wilson had stopped Brown and a friend for walking in the street in their own neighborhood. Seeing Mike Brown's body lie dead in the street for the next four and a half hours deeply affected his friends and neighbors: they vowed to fight for justice for him and for an end to police violence that had killed many St. Louis-area Black men. They—and we—soon understood that racist police shootings are a national epidemic, continuing four hundred years of using slavery, bounties, rape, lynching and forms of legalized violence to defend an economy built on the backs of Black people. A Black man is killed by police somewhere in the US every twenty-eight hours, almost once a day.

That night in Ferguson, young African Americans occupied the streets in front of the police department to “turn up for Mike Brown.” The world watched as they held their ground, even in the face of tear-gas, tanks and militarized police. “We are here to demand the justice that our people have died for,” said organizer Montague Simmons of the local group Organization for Black Struggle. “We are here to bring peace, to bring restoration, to lift our banners in the name of those who’ve been sacrificed.”

More than three months later Ferguson youth are still turning up—now also for 18-year-old

Vonderrit Myers, Jr., who on October 8th was shot six times from behind and killed by an off-duty white St. Louis policeman.

The initial pain of Mike Brown's murder has grown into a movement that is as deeply committed to the long-term work of overturning an unjust, racist economy and judicial system as it is to convicting Brown's killer. Outside the St. Louis County courts, thousand called to: “Indict. Convict. Send those killer-cops to jail. The whole damn system is guilty as hell!” We have not seen anything like this level of sustained popular resistance in the US in the past forty years, particularly a movement led by working class people of color. But the Ferguson resistance movement is directly rooted in the work of 1960s militant Black liberation and left movements: St. Louis's Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) grew from the Congress of African Peoples and has educated and supported young movement leaders for forty years under the leadership of journalist and organizer Jamala Rogers. OBS and MORE (Missourians Organized for Reform and Empowerment, formerly ACORN) have been on the frontlines in Ferguson since August 9th and anchor the broader Don't Shoot Coalition.

OBS and MORE have built the Ferguson movement with an awe-inspiring level of discipline, inclusion, self-determination and commitment to developing its young leaders. Coalition members have knocked doors, called neighborhood meetings and church services to organize community support and involvement. They

have cooked food, arranged rides and raised bail; have lined up lawyers and led civil disobedience training. They use social media to keep on message, organize actions and to broaden the effort. The call for a ‘Weekend of Resistance’ on October 10-13 brought me and thousands of other allies to Ferguson. The Coalition's goal was to turn up the pressure: to assure that ‘business as usual’ could not continue while a grand jury deliberated on whether to indict Mike Brown's killer. Thirty thousand people came together in two large marches and rallies led by local youth, clergy, union and community leaders, as well as families of other young men who had also been murdered by local police. We held vigils at Mike Brown's and Vonderrit Myers' murder sites; marched in the rain to the St. Louis County prosecutor; and delivered a mirrored coffin to the St. Louis Police Department.

Most importantly, we helped local youth to hold the ground in front of the Ferguson police stations, as they had every night for the previous two months and have every night since, going on one hundred days as I write. Marchers blocked major intersections all weekend, each time for four and a half minutes, to symbolize the four and a half hours that Mike Brown's dead body lay in the street. Direct actions disrupted major league baseball and football games, and shut down three Wal-Mart stores in the name of John Crawford III, a 22-year-old Black man murdered by police in August inside an Ohio Wal-Mart store. Behind the scenes, local organizers

kept building through fifty-four more house meeting, dozens more church services, talks and workshops and a jam-packed hip hop concert.

By the time you read this, more chapters will have been written in the Ferguson story. I urge you to follow what happens in Ferguson and to amplify its message in your community: to make 'Black Lives Matter,' we must stop police violence, mass incarceration, the school-to-prison pipeline, the criminalization of Black life. Let's celebrate and learn

from the Ferguson resisters to 'turn up' our own organizing. Let's build a movement for justice and liberation as disciplined, deep and loving as the one they launched.

It is our duty to fight for our freedom.

It is our duty to win.

We must love each other and support each other.

We have nothing to lose but our chains.

—Assatu Shakur

Editor's note: At the time of press, demonstrations are increasing nation-wide in response to both the failure to indict the police officer responsible for fatally shooting Michael Brown and the lack of indictment following the similar killing of Eric Garner by an NYPD officer. UMass Boston students, faculty and staff continue to organize and participate in these mass protests.

Bargaining Sparks Protests

by Alyssa Mazzarella

GEO members joined representatives from the Classified Staff Union (CSU), Faculty Staff Union (FSU), and Professional Staff Union (PSU) to protest at the university's grand opening of the Integrated Sciences Complex (right) and the 50th Birthday Celebration on the Boston Commons (pages 4-5) during the fall semester. Members representing the GEO specifically campaigned for higher wages and increased health insurance premium coverage in response to a long, derisive bargaining process for the union's 2014-2017 contract.

To review the benefits that graduate employees receive through the GEO contract, visit geoumb.org.



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No Union Without Representation

by Joy Winkler

This academic year, there are over 800 graduate employees working at UMass Boston as teaching assistants, research assistants and administrative assistants. While the Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) represents all of these graduate employees, only six members currently serve on the Organizing Committee. The GEO is intended to be a democratic union, but the structure of graduate employment presents a constant challenge to diverse representation.

Unions, in particular, are held to a high standard of utilizing democratic processes to represent their members. The Association for Union Democracy warns “there is no effective substitute for strong, democratic unions to defend the

workers’ standard of living, their safety on the job, their working conditions and their dignity as employees. Unions were created to serve the interests of all their members. Only democratic unions can be depended upon to fulfill this purpose effectively.” In order for the GEO to better represent the hundreds of graduate employees on campus, there must be an increased capacity for member representation through the creation of a robust Steward’s Assembly.

Organizing graduate employees is no easy task. Most of us are only graduate employees for a few years before graduating and obtaining employment somewhere else. In addition to our paid work in our assistantships and outside jobs, we do countless hours of unpaid

work through our studies and scholarship. Getting involved in employee or campus organizations may seem like an additional burden. However, in the case of

“the structure of graduate employment presents a constant challenge to diverse representation”

the GEO, member involvement is crucial for fighting for and preserving the quality of life for graduate employees—especially for PhD candidates, who are employed by the university for longer than the typical Master’s candidate.

Why does member involvement
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UMass Amherst MFA Incident Points to Larger Issues

by August Smith

This past semester, an incident occurred during an MFA fiction writing workshop at UMass Amherst that points to several pertinent social justice issues in the academic sphere.

During a workshop in mid-October, several students critiqued the black female narrator of a particular story as unnecessarily aggressive, claiming her hostility was not substantiated in the text.

The writer of the story, Rana Zoe Mungin, questioned the critiques and their potentially racist undertones, citing the demeaning yet common trope of the “angry black woman,” the policing of black womanhood and the unwillingness of those who are not people of color to engage with her craft in meaningful ways. According to

Mungin, she was shouted at, “shot down,” and told she was wrong, so she left the class.

Afterward, Mungin made the events of the class public in a Facebook post, garnering solidarity and support. As a result, the creative writing department at UMass Amherst has distributed updated syllabi in workshop classes, with a “no blogging, no social media” addendum, according to MFA student Caroline Crew.

This is a flagrant violation of the right to free speech, and, as a reactionary maneuver, speaks volumes to the way the department is addressing the situation. The workshop incident with Mungin could and should have been a chance to open up important dialogues about race representation

in MFA programs and race in the field of contemporary writing. Instead, the department has tried to sweep the incident under the rug, with the added insult of silencing any possibility of discussion and action through social media.

It is necessary that workshops exist as a safe space for people of color and women. It is necessary that these artists feel comfortable exploring complex issues like race and gender within their work, and that their colleagues be open to these sensitive discussions without hostility and overreaction. And it is necessary that social media be an available and egalitarian tool for broadcasting problematic actions.

To support Rana Zoe Mungin and those campaigning on her behalf, visit <http://bit.ly/1uHtswe>.

in a Steward's Assembly matter so much? One of the striking realities of the UMass system is the disparity between how graduate employees are treated on each campus. The GEO at UMass Amherst, which boasts a robust Steward's Program, has won higher wages and better health care benefits than graduate employees in the GEOs at UMass Boston and UMass Lowell. While UMass Boston effectively pays approximately 81% of health insurance premiums for full-time graduate employees, UMass Amherst pays 95% and includes basic dental and vision coverage. The only way that graduate employees at UMass Boston will be able to reach the levels of compensation at UMass Amherst is by consciously increasing communication and representation of members by convening an Assembly of Stewards.

Beginning in February 2015, the GEO will formally initialize an Assembly of Stewards, which will consist of representatives from all of the departments at UMass Boston that have graduate assistants. Stewards act as liaisons between the GEO and the department and have the power to represent their department by voting on union issues in the Assembly. The Assembly will meet monthly through the end of the term. The GEO is currently accepting nominations for Stewards in all departments through January 31, 2015.

For more information or to nominate yourself or someone else in your department to serve as a steward, please email geo@umb.edu.

Recap: GEO Strategy Session

by Lewis Feuer & Joy Winkler

Thank you to all the members who came to the Graduate Employee Organization's August and September Strategy Sessions! We had great conversations about the future of the GEO and laid plans to begin efforts on a number of projects aimed at improving benefits for graduate employees and ways to empower graduate employees to have a louder voice in organizing efforts. The group was able to determine two primary goals for the coming year:

- the start of a long-term campaign to secure dental and vision insurance subsidy to be included in our employee benefits
- a formalized Steward Program.

Both of these issues correspond to our increased focus on engaging members in our organizing efforts.

After splitting into two break-out groups to discuss the agreed upon projects, each group worked through a series of questions designed to define the scope and goals for both the Steward Program as well as the dental and vision campaign. Part of the workshop session was also focused on identifying what motivates us to take on these projects, identifying our allies within and outside of the union, and anticipating potential problems, "targets," and action tactics going forward.

Take-aways from the Dental & Vision group

The current high cost of dental & vision insurance for all graduate employees places an especially large financial burden on international graduate employees and graduate employees supporting families.

GEO needs to be represented on the committee that decides on the health insurance options for graduate employees.

We need to increase the visibility of this highly important issue and lack of appropriate coverage through: ads on campus TVs, social media, one-to-one conversations, at department Meet & Greets, and through the advocacy of our Stewards.

Take-aways from the Steward group

Stewards will increase the GEO's visibility on campus.

Stewards will offer vital links between departments and the GEO Organizing Committee.

Stewards will help generate participation in campaigns (such as dental & vision) within departments.

Stewards will aid in mapping membership and leading actions.

To join our work on either of these projects, please email the GEO at geo@umb.edu.

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