

Fall 2018 Issue

Grad Advocate

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF UMASS BOSTON'S
GRADUATE EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATION

We've reached an agreement but there is more to be done

UMB GEO BARGAINING TEAM

Since the winter of 2016, GEO has engaged in the collective bargaining process with UMass Boston and we are thrilled to report that we reached an agreement in June 2018.

Yes, for over two years a team of only five students has been meeting with university officials to fight for the pay and benefits of over 600 fellow student-workers while also attending classes, conducting research, writing papers, and holding a variety of jobs on campus.

For those of you who worked on campus last year, you may have noticed the two percent retroactive bonus pay we fought for arrived on the July 27 payroll date. If you weren't sure why you got paid extra, now you know. And if you did work last year and were not paid a bonus, let us know: geoumassboston@gmail.com

For new students, you can be glad the pay you receive is 2% higher than what you were promised when you were offered a position at UMass Boston last spring. We at GEO think this is something to celebrate!

Bargaining took over two years partly due to UMass Boston suffering from a multi-million dollar deficit but also due to changes in the positions of Chancellor and Provost.

Considering the situation, we at GEO were surprised that we secured such a better contract. We had higher hopes but lower expectations. Please check your email for full details information about a series of workshops GEO will host explaining the new contract.

We will soon have the final contract available on our website and can provide a copy to members should they request one.

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If you have questions about changes to our new contract, please let us know at geoumassboston@gmail.com

HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR NEW CONTRACT

- 2% raise for all GEO unit members paid by the university in 2018-19 and 2019-20
- Partial (50%) vision and dental insurance support for GEO members
- Increased protections for marginalized student workers, international students, etc.
- We fought off the administrator's request to remove Sexual Harassment and Discrimination clauses and reductions to tuition waivers
- Our first progressive discipline process: You will receive warnings before they fire you!
- An increase in our Scholarly Support Fund (SSF) of more than 30% and many more wins.

However, just because we signed a better contract does not mean we are done with the fight for student rights and benefits. We need your help to build momentum as we start to plan the next round of bargaining at the end of this year.

We are still fighting for family and medical leaves, childcare support, and a host of other benefits. For example, at UMass Amherst grad workers make more money and have more support but live in a part of Massachusetts which has lower costs than Boston does.

At UMass Amherst grad workers make more money and have more support but live in a part of Massachusetts with a lower cost of living.

Do you think that is fair?

At UMass Amherst grad workers make more money and have more support but live in a part of Massachusetts with a lower cost of living.

If you are not participating as a member, running for upcoming elections of our Organizing Committee, and applying for our semestral funding then you are not taking advantage of what we have already achieved by working together.

Join the fight for your right to fair compensation for your hard work because, after all, this is your union! ♦

The Mt. Ida purchase How the UMass system sabotages the public good

CHARLA BURNETT, PhD CANDIDATE

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN SECURITY

JUAN PABLO BLANCO, MS CANDIDATE

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY STUDIES



Holbrook Hall, Mount Ida College (Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

The news broke that the University of Massachusetts' Amherst Campus confirmed the nearly 70 million-dollar debt purchase of Mount Ida College, a small upscale private college in Newton, Mass., hours after a public UMass Board of Trustees (BoT) meeting downtown. The deal was kept secret from anyone who might raise a question. There was no public debate. There was no input, neither from the other UMass campuses, nor the Boston community.

The purchase of the Mount Ida campus by UMass Amherst was a low blow to our campus which has faced over three years of austerity measures, budget cuts, and faculty and staff layoffs. Although Boston is home to the UMass President's Office, the Amherst campus has always been seen as UMass' star attraction. The UMass system, which at face value should operate as a cohesive system, often takes the form of a handful of institutions competing against each other.

The UMass Boston campus has suffered from what the BoT and former Chancellor Mills openly call corruption so horrible that it "profoundly maimed the campus construction process."

However, instead of distributing the cost of institutional corruption across the campuses, the UMB Administration decided to place the responsibility of the \$30 million dollar deficit and the \$90 million needed to reconstruct the, literally, crumbling foundations of the school to UMass Boston students, faculty, and staff.

In short, UMB is treated as a second-class campus by UMass President Marty Meehan's Office and the BoT. These differences are also plainly evident in the myriad of imbalances of compensation and benefits between UMass

Amherst graduate students and our own at UMass Boston. For example, UMA graduate students receive paid family leave and time off, more extensive health and dental care subsidies and a higher wage.

These inequalities are highly problematic as rising costs of living in Boston make living near our campus inaccessible to our minority-majority campus. While UMass Amherst continues to expand their campus through numerous construction projects despite UMB's austerity measures, UMB graduate students are unfairly expected to maintain the same level of research and public engagement as UMA but in unhealthy, and physically decrepit environments.

The imbalanced distribution of resources between these public institutions is inherently political. The state of Massachusetts has a long history of defunding public education and opting for tax breaks and incentives for private universities. We rank 45th in the country in allocating state funding for public education.

These values about public higher education in Massachusetts have led to the creation of a public university system that is politically and geographically fragmented amongst its campuses, all of which are forced to compete for dwindling attention and funding. Plainly stated, the purchase of Mount Ida was a land grab that further redistributes resources across the UMass system in favor specific students in spite of an institution for the public good. Even the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education confessed to only learning about this purchase from the newspapers — just like the rest of us.

The Mount Ida faculty and staff were let go and told that all salaried positions ended by June 2018. Mount Ida's students were given scant notice before being told by UMass's Administration that they will have the option relocate to UMass Dartmouth to finish out their degrees, averting much needed new revenue away from the UMass Boston campus, located 44 miles closer to the Mount Ida Campus than the Dartmouth campus.

These values about public higher education in Massachusetts have led to the creation of a public university system that is politically and geographically fragmented amongst its campuses, all of which are forced to compete for dwindling attention and funding.

In addition, many of those students were enrolled in programs only offered by Mt Ida and thus are facing the possibility of not being able to graduate from the programs that many have worked for over three years to complete. In short, UMass President Marty Meehan and the BoT continue to undermine UMB's urban mission, leaving us

to fend for ourselves while they make decisions that are harmful to the Boston campus.

This problem is not only about the devious purchase of an Amherst satellite campus, but about the continued lack of transparency exercised by the UMass top administration while our UMass Boston community continues to suffer in the process. ♦

People to People in Cuba **A framework for understanding the 'Other'**

GRACE FURTADO, MS CANDIDATE

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY STUDIES

Language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality

- Lev Vygotsky, 1968

Urban higher education institutions such as UMass Boston are not only unique but necessary for the comprehensive supports that encourage social, emotional, and professional development of students. Through the multitude of connections that faculty have cultivated via community initiatives, research endeavors, and personal relationships with active leaders, students have opportunities to learn from perspectives that might be inaccessible in other educational settings.

A tangible example of the importance behind real-life and hands-on experiences as an intentional method of learning about cultures that UMass Boston provides is the ongoing initiative that the Africana Studies Department has maintained over the last 25 years: People-to-People.

With Professor Tony Van Der Meer at the helm, People-to-People provides undergraduate and graduate students with the opportunity to participate in the cultural study about life in Cuba. Through Prof. Van Der Meer's long-standing relationships with an innumerable number of Cubans from all walks of life on the island, students are encouraged to immerse themselves in culture outside of the touristic beaches of Havana in order to learn not from dusty books or theory that have been constructed with little practical experience but instead from individuals experiencing socialism in their daily lives.

Like in previous years, Prof. Van Der Meer gathered a cohort of enthusiastic students from varying cultures and disciplines who were excited to explore Cuba this past spring break. From the outset, students encountered Cubans active in their community in many ways.

Some were artists creating safe spaces for the community to come together; others were top-level faculty in higher

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Students from the most recent People to People exchange trip with Professor Van Der Meer of African Studies (image credit: Grace Furtado)

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education institutions. We even met many older adults enthusiastic to keep musical traditions of the Cuban culture alive through weekly dance groups.

Many Cubans simply wanted to talk: A number of citizens were open to sharing their personal life stories and political opinions. Many also wanted to learn about the life experiences in everyday U.S. culture.

Through the community organizing and relationship-building that Prof. Van Der Meer has led over the last two decades, the time is ripe for the university to be at the forefront of transnational community-building with Cuba as the country rapidly transitions to opening itself up to the United States.

Quite clearly, a concrete institutional connection between UMass Boston with Cuba could facilitate a number of respectful philanthropic opportunities, enabling true transnational educational opportunities. For instance, an exchange program supporting students in the medical and educational professions on campus would be invaluable.

This type of program would provide students the opportunity to study with some of the most-knowledgeable doctors and educators of the world residing just a three-hour flight away from Boston. ♦

A parking ticket we can't afford

JUAN PABLO BLANCO, MS CANDIDATE

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY STUDIES

What does it mean for an institution to be accessible for its students, faculty, and staff? While people might define accessibility in different ways, it would be quite difficult to argue that one of these definitions wouldn't be as simple as being able to get to and from the university.

This task, however, has become increasingly difficult for our UMB community as a whole given the skyrocketing prices of both the T and Commuter Rail systems, the increased unaffordability of living close to campus, and now the proposed hikes to parking fees coming from the administration.

The university's plan to increase daily parking fees to up to \$15 a day will create yet another barrier for our students. While lower rates have been discussed for the Bayside lot, this concession does not account for the more than insignificant fact that Bayside is already in the market and will be sold in the near future. Nobody discounts the fact that we need the new parking garage built on campus.

However, if our urban mission is more than mere rhetoric, how could a \$15/day rate seem like something that would benefit our campus community?



UMass Boston's new parking facility (image credit: Myles Green)

The administration claims, "The rates [they] are establishing flow directly from financial realities of needing to pay the debt service on the \$69.75 million garage and operate the facility." What is missing from that statement is that the need to build a new parking structure comes directly from the Commonwealth and UMass President's Office approval of shoddy construction and illegal practices in the building of UMB's substructure in the 1970s. Even though two state senators were sent to jail for cash payoffs connected to this corrupt building project, nobody in the UMass President's Office was ever held accountable for these practices.

Now, almost 50 years later, instead of demanding that



Protestors gather at the NYC Working People's Day of Action in protest against the Janus vs AFSCME case in February 2018. (Image credit: Flickr "New York State AFL-CIO").

the legislature step up to fix their mistakes, the UMB administration wants our campus community to foot the bill. These parking hikes cannot be separated from the narrative of privatization, financialization, and structural racism that has been attacking our institution through tuition and fee hikes, staff and faculty layoffs, attacks on our institutes and centers, and threats to our academic programs.

The GEO has joined a coalition composed of members of the PSU, CSU and undergraduate students to bring the needs of the UMB community to the parking bargaining table. We have been thinking of ways to create an equitable structure that will not only be affordable and accessible for those of us who drive to campus but will also be beneficial for those that take public transportation. We want to find alternative ways to fund the new parking structure so that we do not disenfranchise our very campus community.

Now, almost 50 years later, instead of demanding that the legislature step up to fix their mistakes, the UMB administration wants our campus community to foot the bill.

A petition against the hikes has already had over 2,500 signatures — demonstrating openly that our community is opposed to the continuation of austerity on our campus. Even if you don't drive to campus, it is important to think of this proposed rate increase as yet another tuition hike and austerity measure.

While our GEO contract forces us to settle for student rates, we are still present in the coalition that continues to fight over these rates. At this point, the administration has continuously failed to respond to our latest proposals with anything more than a direct refusal and ultimatums.

We are now at a point where our organizing will need to escalate if we are to stop this affront unto our mission. The ball is on our court. ♦

The Janus decision A spit in the face from a legacy of hate

WARREN HINCKLE, MFA '18

On June 27, 2018, the US Supreme Court as part of the Janus vs AFSCME decision ruled that it is not constitutional for membership dues to be mandatory for employees working under a collective bargaining agreement. This decision is not only a blatant and unapologetic attack against the American working class but it is also a decision that will especially impact people of color, women, LGBTQ+, Latinx, and other marginalized groups in the workplace.

With the Janus decision, the Supreme Court has elected to enable the internalized systems of oppression and white supremacy that exist in the very bones of the American economic and political structure.

Let's break this down. Membership dues — a deduction taken from your paycheck that amounts to less than 3% — are what fund unions and allow them to organize en masse, hire lawyers for disputes or contract agreements, provide strike pay, and generally exert power.

Why is it good for a union to be able to exert its power?

Beyond the support unions offer workers, it is the power of the union, through its organizing, that makes a collective bargaining agreement possible. A collective bargaining agreement simply means that we, for example, as graduate workers at UMass Boston, more or less bargain with the university as a single entity. We stand together and strong, in short.

Without this solidarity, bargaining would occur with one person at a time on the employee's side of the table — and an entire team of lawyers and administrators on the employer's side. The power imbalances in this type of situation are vast and greatly favor the employer.

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However unlikely, the employee might be able to get a better deal than their previous contract without the power of collective bargaining. The employee may receive an offer that increases their salary or benefits — even if it means not as working with a living wage. Or health insurance. Or vision and dental subsidies. Or tuition remission. Or paid-time off. Or a weekend. Or documentation.

On the other side of the table, the employer, sometimes, simply does not know. They do not always understand how racism, sexism, and discrimination live in the bones of this country's institutions. They do not understand how one person may lead a harder life than another. They do not understand how they — as we — carry around biases of which we are unaware.

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In a space where power is skewed — as in an interview room — it is the employers who, more often than not, exhibit this internalized bias towards their employees. These are the people who do not know they are putting an offer on the table that is weaker to a woman of color than a white male; these are the people who don't realize that they pick a less qualified employee who identifies as LGBTQ, gender-fluid, a person of color, and/or other marginalized identities. It is these employers that we must watch out for.

We employees are not exempt from these biases. The same biases live in many of our hearts, minds, and bodies. We must hold ourselves as accountable as we hold any other; and we must, where we can, educate those who do not yet understand this responsibility. If we cannot, we must trust that our colleagues will. It is our duty, to our peers, our friends and families, our employees and our employers, to educate. It is through conviction and truth we can speak so that these biases can be recognized and fought — and our ability to speak this is especially true to those that have always acted on their biases, but never been able to recognize, or had the privilege of holding themselves accountable.

But the thing is — we're going to be educating the ignorant forever. We're going to be educating them — and ourselves! — until the sun burns out and the pale blue dot on which everyone lives and loves has turned into a quiet ball of mud and stone.

In the meantime, we've got to cover our asses. We have to protect ourselves and everyone in our community who have historically been oppressed and marginalized and subject to vast violations of basic human dignities by a government and an internalized culture of patriarchal white supremacy.

So let's bring it back: How do unions — and a union's ability to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement — fight internalized norms of white supremacy and other forms of discrimination? By treating every worker, together, as a single entity.

When we bargain together, we bargain as one — and an employer cannot discriminate quite so easily. Should a transgression still happen, the collective contract ensures that we have ways to fight back, to fight together, against not only the internalized biases some employers have, but also to fight those employers who actively bolster and build the toxic cultural movements embedded within this country.

We stand together not only because a collective bargaining agreement makes it easier for us to have rights like a fairer wage and healthcare and tuition remission. Our solidarity is not just a business contract: It is a common good for the community.

Without these basic rights ensured, this common good cannot thrive; we each become that single blade of grass on the sidewalk, struggling to push past the slab of concrete preventing our growth and development.

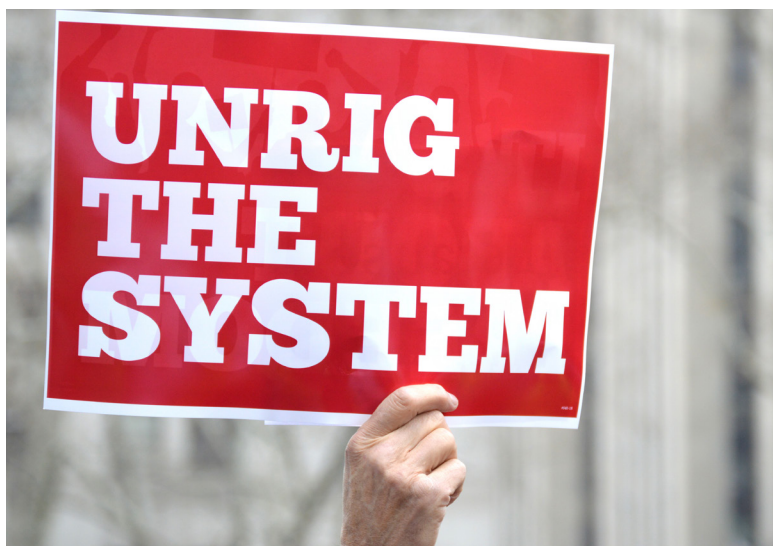
The Janus decision wants to be that slab of concrete. The Janus decision hurts our ability as workers to organize and collectively bargain. The Janus decision promotes systems, internalized and otherwise, of patriarchy, white supremacy, and other systems of discrimination.

We must come together, now, more than ever before, so that those victories won by the generations before us — those victories won in sweat and blood and tears, won in sleepless nights, in rallies, won on the front lines of social justice and labor — will not fade away and will not be forgotten.

When we stand together, arm in arm, we are unstoppable. We are the union; we are unified. Unified, as one body — together with all of our resources, our intelligence, and our brilliance.

When we are unified, we are not just creating a better future. We are that better future. ♦

Below: A protest sign held by a demonstrator at this rally. (Image credit: Flickr "New York State AFL-CIO")





Artist Dorothy Iannone's I Lift My Lamp Beside the Golden Door, a mural on The Highline in New York City (image credit: Myles Green)

Solidarity in the streets of NYC

JUAN PABLO BLANCO, MS CANDIDATE

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY STUDIES

This August, members of the GEO Organizing Committee attended CGEU, the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions, in New York City. This convention brought together graduate student unions from across North America together to share ideas, campaigns, and strategies in our fight for better higher education.

The convention was a powerful exchange. Workshops and sessions included topics on advocating for immigrant rights, preventing and addressing sexual harassment in the university, organizing methods and strategies, responding to the recent Janus decision, and many other subjects.

Members of UMass Boston's Graduate Employee Organization served on panels ranging from "Sanctuary Universities" to "#MeToo in Higher Ed."

Especially since we are graduate employees at UMass Boston, developing our abilities to address these topics is imperative since we are often so bogged down with our own obstacles at the school. And in the course of our local struggles, many of us forget that folks from all over the U.S. and Canada are facing very similar situations.

More importantly though, these spaces remind us that our unions are about more than just a fair contract but also about the power we can build in our communities and the importance for our institutions to remain a public good in an era of increasing privatization.

Hearing about the organizing work that folks are doing across North America, many without even having formal union recognition, brought a real sense of empowerment and inspiration to our team.

We will be starting this new academic year with an organizing blitz that we hope will make our union even more powerful and transformative. After all, we are not the union, you are. ♦

At the expense of whom?

How attacks on our centers and institutes are attacks on our urban mission

KARYN AIELLO, MS '18

EXERCISE AND HEALTH SCIENCES

UMass Boston, as so proudly displayed on the university's website, was founded in direct response to "growing political turmoil, civil-rights activism, and urban unrest" while simultaneously addressing the increasing demand for higher education — and the opportunities it afforded — for Massachusetts' urban population.

However, there was — and still is — a clear racial and socio-economic divide in access to higher education in the state: Most private colleges and universities are prohibitively expensive for diverse and working-class residents of Massachusetts and there are very few affordable public higher education options available to urban residents. UMass Boston was the first urban public university which defied this socio-economic divide, providing somewhat-equitable access to a higher education in the Greater Boston area.

To provide an excellent education to an urban population that has historically and systemically been underserved, it is necessary to first address the many social and structural barriers that prevent access to higher education. To this end, UMass Boston developed many ways to serve the communities from which our students came from, not the least of which has been the establishment of many of our centers and institutes.

To provide an excellent education to an urban population that has historically and systemically been underserved, it is necessary to first address the many social and structural barriers that prevent access to higher education.

These centers and institutes — such as the The William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture, The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community, The William Joiner Institute for the Study of War and Social Consequences, and The Institute for New England Native American Studies, among others — are critical ways in which we have upheld our promise to "serve the public good of our city, our commonwealth, our nation and our world." The research, community organizing, and on-campus and public programming of these centers and institutes directly serves our students of color, immigrant,

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working-class, indigenous, first-generation, and veteran students and the communities from which they come.

How can we adequately serve our urban student population if we disengage from addressing the very social inequities and systems of structural oppression which prohibit underserved populations from pursuing higher education, and sometimes even a K-12 education, at all?

While some — as former Chancellor Mills did in his 26 March 2018 email announcement of major cuts to most centers and institutes — might argue that our commitment to social justice comes at the expense of our students' education and affordability, those of us who understand how systemic racism and oppression work, and the complexity with which it is woven into every aspect of our society, understand that this is anything but reality.

The services these centers and institutes provide are not simply “a waste of funds which could otherwise be used to serve UMB students,” but are actually a necessity in serving UMass Boston's unique urban student population.

Thus, when former Chancellor Mills says, “not at the expense of our students,” he, and other administrators like him, indicate their gross misunderstanding — or worse, disregard — of students' unique and varied experiences, the barriers that our students have experienced in simply getting to UMass Boston, and what it looks like to genuinely meet the needs of a majority-minority university.

How can we adequately serve our urban student population if we disengage from addressing the very social inequities and systems of structural oppression which prohibit underserved populations from pursuing higher education...?

The services these centers and institutes provide are actually a necessity in adequately serving UMass Boston's unique urban student population.

When former Chancellor Mills sought to disinvest UMass Boston from our centers and institutes which serve our marginalized communities, he is in fact disinvesting from our urban mission, leaving us to wonder:

Which student population is UMass Boston positioning itself to serve and which student population is it being forced to turn its back on? ♦



Bloom with the Advocate Call for Articles

We are taking submissions for our next edition of *The Grad Advocate*. If you would like to write an article that you think might interest us and the larger campus community, please send your submission to geoumassboston@gmail.com.

We look forward to hearing from you!

The Grad Advocate Fall 2018 Issue

A semestral publication of the Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) of the UMass Boston.

The GEO-UAW Local 1596 represents all graduate assistantship employees, including Graduate Assistants, Research Assistants, and Teaching Assistants and Fellows.

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