

GRADUATE EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATION (GEO) NOMINEES FOR FALL 2019

Nominees are listed here in alphabetical order by first name. Where provided, headshots, emails, programs, short bios, and platform statements have been included.

*Voting will occur on the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th of October, and will span most of the day (Mon-Thu from 10am-7pm). Only dues-paying members of the union can vote. Voting *must* be done in person at the GEO office—Quinn-02-081—ballots and dues authorization forms will be provided by the organizers on the ground.*



NAME: Amy Kotthaus

EMAIL: Amy.Kotthaus001@umb.edu

PROGRAM: English Department

BIO: Amy Kotthaus grew up near Boston, MA before moving to Maine to pursue an undergraduate degree at the University of Southern Maine. After graduating with a B.A. in English in 2002, she established an organic micro-farm, offering Community Supported Agriculture memberships to rural Maine. She also worked on the Bridgton Farmer's Market board. She is now an MA

student in the English department at UMass Boston and works as a teaching assistant. Her primary academic interests lie in medieval literature and manifestations of performative identity, and she writes the occasional poem and flash fiction piece. Her work can be found in *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Banshee*, *Coffin Bell*, *Indicia*, and others.

PLATFORM: My intention in running for a spot on the GEO Organizing Committee is to affect positive change for graduate employees. As a graduate employee, you carry the dual charge of excelling as scholars and members of staff. You must navigate the sometimes conflicting space between these two roles on top of various other obligations outside of UMass Boston. The GEO is an essential resource for ensuring fair working conditions and an environment that promotes student employee success. This means bringing people together to fight financially exploitative practices (i.e. rate hikes for parking at a university attended by a significant number of commuter students) and providing graduate staff with the best possible access to affordable health benefits. I would work to utilize the GEO's influence and bargaining power to obtain a substantial parking discount for graduate student employees as well as an increase in healthcare coverage and paid medical leave. No one should have to worry about covering medical expenses or losing their job, and possibly their ability to attend university, because of an illness, change in medical status, or family tragedy. I would also focus on maintaining the gains already achieved by the GEO; considering increasing attempts to roll back union gains across the country, I believe this is an important function of organized labor. Finally, I believe the terms of graduate employment could be more specifically delineated. As a graduate employee myself, I am keenly aware of the challenges we face. Because I have been both a traditional and non-traditional student, I understand the specific issues confronting both groups and would bring that knowledge to bare on my work within the GEO Organizing Committee. I consider collective bargaining to be the most powerful and effective means of addressing the needs of all graduate employees, which is why I hope to be elected to the GEO Organizing Committee and directly represent and work towards your interests.



NAME: Arazeliz "Ara" Reyes

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PROGRAM: Early Childhood Education and Care, PhD

BIO: Arazeliz "Ara" Reyes is a PhD student in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Graduate Program at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. As an undergraduate, Ara attended Northeastern University (NU) where she earned a BS in Electrical Engineering Tech with a Minor in Communications Studies. After graduating from NU, Ara worked as a Union Admin for Local 12 Plumbers Union in Boston for almost 10 years, where she learned the ins-and-outs of what it takes to support unionized organizations.

Her passion for supporting families of children with disabilities eventually led Ara to the field of ECEC, and a subsequent MEd in Early Childhood Education from Boston University. Most recently, she completed a Post-Masters in ECEC, Research, & Practice at UMass, where she is currently pursuing her PhD. Upon completion of her PhD program, Ara aims to use research- and strength-based models, tools, and strategies to increase economic, social, and emotional capital for families in the local communities of Boston. She hopes to continue to promote social justice and improve lives through making high quality early childhood care accessible to families in the Greater Boston area.

PLATFORM: Although I have always been involved in our UMass community in many ways, I never experienced the REAL value of GEO on a personal level so strongly until this past Spring semester when I had some major difficulties within my department. I felt alone, lost, and uninformed and I had no idea how to get the support I needed in order to deal with a high-stakes professional conflict within my department. This is when the VALUE of having access to the GEO became truly REAL for me. Their guidance, coaching, and support not only provided me with the knowledge I needed to get through this high-stakes situation, but also the confidence and support I needed to know I wasn't alone in my fight.

This is why I am running to become a GEO Organizing Committee Member. It is my goal and pledge to devote my time to support our student body not only during bargaining agreement negotiations, demonstrations or union issues, but MOST IMPORTANTLY, supporting our students individually within their departments! It is my commitment to be there for my fellow students and provide them with the guidance, courage, and support that I received; especially when the going gets tough on a personal and professional level. I have personal knowledge and experience with the balancing act that is student life, and this is why I am committed to use my organizing, advocating, and professional skills to work collectively towards a better student life for all

graduate students at UMass Boston. As a GEO Organizing Member, my focus will include individual student grievances, family paid leave, and bringing back childcare options for students and their families among other things.

QUALIFICATIONS: I have been involved with UMass Boston since I was a young teen in the Urban Scholars Program in the late 1990's; not trying to date myself here :) Since then, I have maintained my involvement with UMass Boston in several ways, supporting our community of students and faculty. Most recently, as a PhD student since 2016, my involvement with UMass Boston has come full circle. My time and efforts have been invested in our community through advocating for students' rights such as supporting petitions, activities, and volunteering for the UHS health & wellness program within our campus. As a community member of Boston for the past 30 years, I have served many roles. For example, as a Boston Jamaica Plain Community Rep, a Fellow for the Office of Councilor Lydia Edwards, and a Local 12 Union Admin, I have experience advocating for individual and community rights, systemic city financial cuts, fee increases, and financing of early education programs. It will be my pleasure to put my skills and experience as student, mother, professional, and organizer to good use as a GEO Committee Member to support the GEO efforts to prevent further cuts, fee increases, program cuts, high faculty turnover, improving mental health program, and increasing student debt.



NAME: Jonathan Vega Martinez

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PROGRAM: Applied Sociology, MA

BIO: Jonathan is a second-year graduate student in the Sociology department. He returned to Massachusetts after studying advertising in Puerto Rico to pursue a degree in sociology after finding little opportunity for economic stability in the dwindling Puerto Rican economy. After completing a BA in Sociology at UMass Boston, he decided to continue into the MA program with sights on getting into the PhD program. Like many other students at UMass Boston he has juggled getting good grades and paying rent during his time at UMass Boston. A researcher at heart, Jonathan is interested in the identity formation process of

marginalized community members and the ways in which social inequality is expressed in food systems. He is interested in becoming a Professor and is eager to join the GEO to help ensure the well-being and success of future graduate students.

PLATFORM: For a member of the GEO organizing committee, their first and most important responsibility is representing their members. This is a responsibility I do not take lightly. We are a community of working-class students who must juggle a myriad of responsibilities, school, work, and even family, as we strive for a better life. This means that as your representatives we must make sure to present ourselves in a professional manner that honors your struggles and aspirations. This is especially important as we will be interacting with a much larger institution, the university administration, on your behalf. The power differential means understanding that we must use every tool at our disposal in order to successfully negotiate, and professionalism is one of the tools we must harness.

However, as important as professionalism is, by itself it will yield little results. What I am most interested in is data. With data we can better understand the needs of the graduate population to better serve it. Recently the GEO has begun creating an internal database to better understand its members, it is my goal to make sure that this database is used responsibly and effectively. UMass Boston may have a very diverse student body, but that does not mean there are no shared, collective needs. Additionally, data can be especially useful for negotiations with the administration, demonstrating a concrete reasoning for demands. In tandem with member involvement and support this can help lead the way to success.



NAME: Julie LaBagnara

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PROGRAM: Sociology, PhD

BIO: Julie is a PhD student in the Sociology Department at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. She is originally from New Jersey and currently lives on the North Shore. Her research interests include mass incarceration, women's re-entry after incarceration, and human-animal studies. She graduated from Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, PA in 2002 with a major in Biological Foundations of Behavior with a concentration in Neuroscience and a minor in Sociology. She completed a Master of Science degree at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in 2009.

She has been working in clinical research/biotechnology since 2003, managing clinical trials of experimental drugs in various therapeutic areas, including Central Nervous System, Oncology, and Rare Disease. She currently works part-time at Dicerna Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge while pursuing her PhD at UMass Boston.

PLATFORM: I started the PhD program at UMB in Fall 2018. Returning to school full-time after years as a working professional was financially difficult and intimidating. Supporting a family, a mortgage, and general life obligations is nearly impossible on the current graduate student stipends. Parking fees and other school-related costs compound the financial strain. Therefore, I understand the challenges induced by balancing work, home life, school and myriad other challenges and responsibilities graduate students face. I am committed to making education attainable for individuals in all stages and circumstances of life. Being a part of the Graduate Employee Organization will allow me to represent the UMB graduate community, joining others in seeking to decrease student costs, increase graduate student stipends, and work towards an educational institution more accessible to all. Women are underrepresented on the GEO committee and as a gay female, I would provide representation for both women and the LGBTQIA+ student population on campus.

I formerly volunteered at New Beginnings Reentry Services, Inc in South Boston, where I currently serve on the board of directors. New Beginnings is a grassroots organization providing reentry services for formerly incarcerated women. New Beginnings joins other national social justice organizations fighting to end mass incarceration and seeking to improve the conditions inside correctional institutions. In addition to my commitment to social justice, as vice president of the GSSA, I am invested in being a leader within the UMB community for my remaining years at UMass Boston. I hope to have the privilege of representing the rights and needs of graduate students as a member of the GEO.



NAME: Linda Seminario

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PROGRAM: Historical Archaeology, MA

BIO: Linda Seminario is a first-year graduate student in the Historical Archaeology MA program. She did her undergraduate at Boston University, earning a BA in both Archaeology and Anthropology. During her time at Boston University, Linda was a prominent member of Shakespeare society, Stage Troupe, and the Archaeology Society. Her

hobbies include baking, reading, dancing, singing, and acting. She is looking forward to her time at UMass Boston, working in the Flotation Lab for the Anthropology department and working towards a better future.

PLATFORM: My parents have always impressed upon me the importance of Unions, especially with a grandfather who served as a union president for over a decade. However, it was not until I became a graduate student that I truly understood the significance and impact that unions can have. If I am elected, I will focus on negotiating the transparency between the GEO and the university, the increase in cost of health insurance, and an increase in funds, and thus efficiency, in the Wellness Center. I will also make as much time as possible to speak to any graduate student that needs help with anything. If I am elected, I will do my utmost to make myself available to consultation from any graduate student with a concern about something. I think that being on the GEO Organizing committee is the best way to make change in the lives of graduate students as a whole and individually.



NAME: Nicholas Densley

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PROGRAM: Historical Archeology

PLATFORM: My name is Nicholas Densley and I am nominating myself to represent the Historical Archeology graduate program as well as other graduate programs within the framework of GEO. I feel I would be a great asset and interface for graduate students and our union. I have much experience working as management within retail settings and as a social scientist I am highly aware of the ways in which hierarchies can fail to see all the voices within the system. My studies have informed my

ideals, I am a firm believer in the need for advocacy, open-discourse and commitment to equality. I am committed to furthering the agenda of bringing equality, representation and discussion to the needs of all members and potential members of our union.