

# COGNITION

Newsletter for UE Local 896 - COGS

Volume 23

Issue 2

March 2019

## Graduate Students and Board of Regents Reach Contract Agreement

### Message from the President

*Laura Szech, COGS President*

Dear Members,

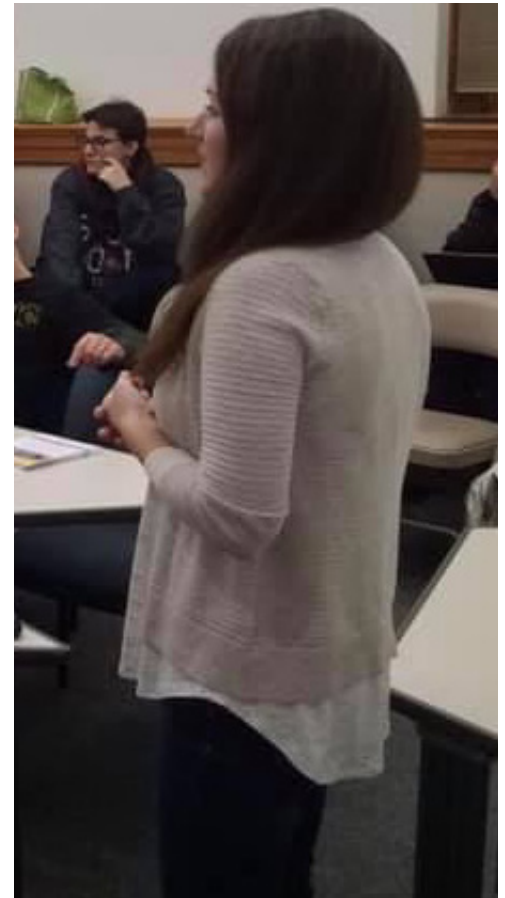
Thank you so much for your enormous support this year. Together, we have truly accomplished a lot. The recertification campaign organized and energized us like no other campaign in our recent history. In those months, we made physical contact with over 1100 graduate students on campus and strengthened our bonds with many community groups and other locals. As the vote began, we waited with bated breath only to see enormous returns on the first day of the election period! We had over 1200 votes by the close of Day 1 and over 1500 by the end of the week. Clearly, graduate students wanted COGS to continue to represent them.

As we transitioned (quickly!) into bargaining our 2019-2021 contract, we knew we had the support of the student body, but the law, on the other hand, was not on our side. Due to the highly restricted nature of bargaining under the “new” Chapter 20 codes, getting any movement from the Board of Regents was going to be difficult. As we negotiated over the winter months, we felt some positive movement from the Board and Administration. In the

end, although we did not get our entire contract back as we wanted, we did get a raise for everyone and a few important permissive pieces around wages. A few of us will be meeting with Dean Keller before the end of the semester to discuss the policies that currently represent our former contract.

Our current focus remains on membership. We need members to maintain our strength and position on campus. Please reach out to your colleagues and ask them to join. One major thing we learned from the recertification is that we cannot do this alone, we needed everyone networking their own groups in order to pass that recertification. This same theory applies to membership, the small group of us on the committees cannot reach out to everyone, we need your support. I think the easiest way is to simply share why you personally have joined cogs and ask them to join you in becoming a member.

As we move forward into the 2019-20 school year, I will be graduating and moving on. I’m sad to leave the COGS family here, however, I feel so optimistic about the years ahead for the organization. We are here, we are strong, and we make a difference in the lives of graduate students now and in



the future! Thank you for allowing me to serve as your president, it has been an honor.

In Solidarity,  
Laura Szech

### Upcoming Officer Elections

Nominations for 2019-2020 elections will occur at the 3/26 GMM and the nomination period will be open for 3 days after that via email. Please consider running for an officer position, no specific experience needed! Position descriptions are in our constitution, available at <https://cogs.org/cogs-constitution> or email Laura with questions at [lszech@gmail.com](mailto:lszech@gmail.com)



## Labor Updates Across Campus

*Caleb Klipowicz, Labor Solidarity Chair*

You may have already seen announcements that the University of Iowa Labor Center has reached an agreement with the College of Law to preserve the center moving forward. This announcement comes after months of worker organizing and lobbying across the state to keep the Labor Center open for the benefit of all working peoples in Iowa. Following this relentless pressure, the Iowa Board of Regents officially voted to overturn the original decision to close the center on February 28th. This makes the Labor Center the only one of six university centers to survive the Republican legislative budget cuts that went into effect this fiscal year. While this is undoubted-

ly a victory worth celebrating, it comes with a cost. The new plan depends on the Labor Center becoming self-sustaining over the next four years and the Center will be subject to increased budget scrutiny until then. This victory shows that we do have the power to stand up to the administration and Board of Regents and be effective. But it also reminds us that we need to remain vigilant in order to protect the gains we make.

Perhaps less visible than the Labor Center struggle, the UIHC nurses' union SEIU Local 199 has settled on a contract agreement with the Board of Regents. This was the first bargaining process they had undergone since the Chapter 20 changes went into effect. SEIU Local 199 used a number of social and public media campaign

strategies, including delivering a Valentine's Day card to the hospital CEO asking him to "have a heart" for the workers. In the end, the union and the Board reached a compromise similar to our own – a 2.1% raise in wages for each of the next two years. Members of the union vote to ratify the decision on March 7th. However, union members are working hard to pressure the hospital administration to increase pay about this minimum and they have on-going plans for collective action to do so.

These ongoing labor struggles across campus point towards the need for strong, coordinated efforts from coalitions of working people from both sides of the river. Standing united is the only way we can fight back against this anti-worker administration and their anti-union policies.



## Solidarity in Action: Standing with Faculty Forward

*Kezia Cecil-Walker, Blue Area Steward*

### *Problems with Sick Leave*

Recently, a non-tenure track faculty member was diagnosed with cancer and needed to take an extended leave of absence. Since the amount of sick leave that a single faculty member has per year is insufficient for the amount of time off typically needed for such a diagnosis and since paid disability leave requires a much longer absence from work before applying, other faculty members wanted to donate their sick leave to their coworker in order to mitigate the loss of pay that would inevitably result from the diagnosis. However, the University of Iowa said that faculty could not donate sick leave in this way and that the University's catastrophic leave policy only functions as a pool of vacation days and is only available to faculty that are able to accrue vacation days. Many non-tenure track faculty do not accrue vacation days as part of their contracts, so the catastrophic leave policy is entirely unavailable to them.

### *A Possible Solution*

Faculty Forward, the union representing non-tenure track faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Iowa, is fighting against this ruling by asking that the University of Iowa adopt a system of pooling sick leave for all faculty so that all university employees can be protected against catastrophic occurrences, not just employees with vacation days built into their contracts. The proposed system would include 800 days of sick leave per year in addition to the accrued sick leave days per individual. This is modeled after a similar system for all teaching faculty at the University of

Northern Iowa, so there should not be an issue with a Regent university in the state of Iowa to have such a system for their employees.

Faculty Forward has been working to create a better work environment and fair wages for non-tenure track faculty in CLAS over the last several years. Recently, they won full benefits for all visiting faculty members with a 50% or greater appointment of at least a year. They are continuing to fight for full benefits for all adjunct faculty, visiting faculty, lecturers, clinical professors, and all other non-tenure track faculty. Their current top priority is to get a sick leave bank for all employees without access to



the current catastrophic leave policy based on vacation days. Faculty Forward also aims to standardize course loads for non-tenure track faculty, increase job security, and fight for yearly pay raises.

### *How can you help?*

According to Daniel Davis, an organizer for Faculty Forward, a petition is currently circulating "asking the University to put 800 sick days each year in a pool for faculty to use in addition to the ability of faculty to pool their sick days if the bank is exhausted." You can support your fellow laborers by signing this petition and distributing it to your friends, coworkers, and oth-

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## Organizing Update: Call for Representatives

*Kenneth Elliott, Vice President*

As the end of the school year draws near, we're making some major changes to the way we approach organizing. COGS was formed over two decades ago, but our methods haven't really changed since then, even as technology and grad student culture at the university have shifted drastically. Furthermore, the challenges in organizing we have experienced since the 2017 law changes have forced us to reconsider how we operate.

First of all, the stewards' network has not functioned as intended for quite some time. As outlined in the COGS constitution, stewards are responsible for organizing within their departments, attending general membership meetings (GMMs), regularly convening departmental meetings, handling grievances, attending monthly Stewards Council meetings, and gathering information from other workers in their departments. This is a huge amount of work to add on top of being a graduate student, and as a result, we have far fewer stewards than we should, and several of those duties have dropped off entirely. Furthermore, several of these duties are now either impractical (e.g. holding regular departmental meetings in any of the more spread-out departments) or unnecessary (e.g. grievances, which have always been relatively rare, and are generally handled by Area Stewards anyhow).

In order to increase the levels of communication between COGS and our underrepresented departments, we are adding the position of Representative. The duties of a representative are significantly lighter than that of a steward. Representatives would be asked to attend as many GMMs as possible,

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ers throughout the University of Iowa community. The more people that participate and sign the petition give stronger voice to the faculty who need this kind of protection against terrible and unexpected life events. The petition can be found here: <https://www.gopetition.com/petitions/support-ui-faculty-demanding-decent-medical-leave.html>.

If the University does not act on this petition, Faculty Forward plans to organize protests to fight for a better sick leave system. Keep an eye out for any announcements via COGS social media and fight with our colleagues on campus for a better university.

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and to talk with members of their department, both to provide information about COGS and to gather information about any potential issues. If you are interested in becoming a representative for your department, please attend the GMM on March 26th or email Kenneth Elliott at [ximane@gmail.com](mailto:ximane@gmail.com).

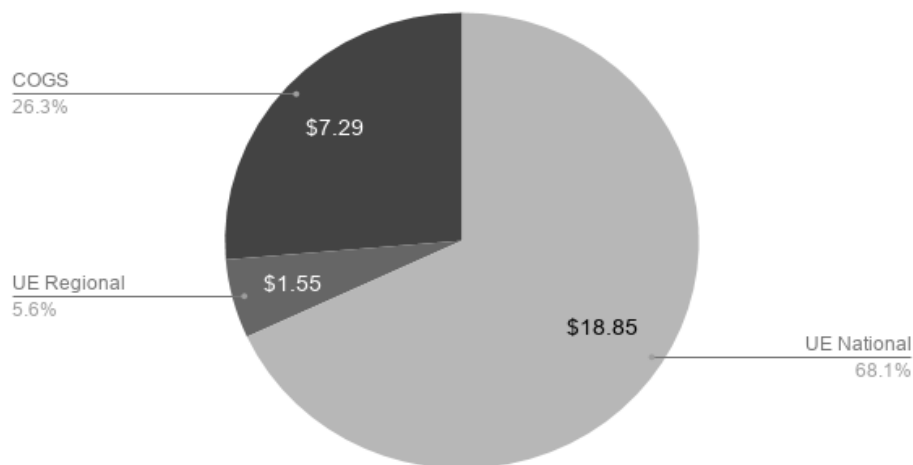
The other shift that we're making is in our organizing drives. While we need to be doing major membership drives in the fall semester in order to find and talk to new graduate workers, our spring semester membership drives have had much worse results. In addition, we are concerned about the

image we present when we repeatedly contact the same people, and when all of our contact with many graduate students is in conversations about paying dues. In the spring semester, therefore, we will be focusing on listening to graduate workers around campus and increasing the visibility of COGS rather than holding any more membership drives. We hope that this change helps create a more positive image of COGS amongst graduate students.

As always, we encourage everyone, stewards, representatives, and members to attend GMMs whenever possible and to reach out to friends and colleagues. Always remember that the university works because we do!

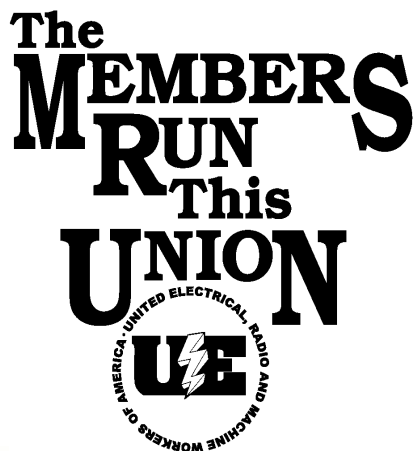
## Where does my dues money go?

Monthly Dues Breakdown



At COGS, we believe in transparency. As such, we believe all our members should know where the \$27.69 you pay every month goes.

The majority of it goes to the UE National, where it is used for staff salaries, the strike fund, legal fees, and funding for different conferences and meetings. Much of this money returns to COGS when the national helps pay for our staff and legal fees. A small chunk of dues goes to the UE Regional, where it also pays staff salaries and funds regional conferences and meetings. \$7.29 each month goes directly to the COGS budget. Most of this is spent on paying our staff members, covering rent, and paying recurring legal fees. As a dues paying member, you are entitled to inspect COGS financial records at any time.



### Upcoming General Membership Meetings:

March 26 (Tue) April 15 (Mon) May 9 (Thur)  
5:30 - 6:30 P.M.

### COGS Movie Night:

Free screening of *Harlan County, USA* (1976)  
March 14, 6-8pm, with discussion to follow

### COGS Office Location:

120 N. Dubuque Street #210  
Iowa City, IA 52245  
(319)337-5074

