

Faculty Join Graduate Students in Rally for Better Conditions

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On Wednesday, August 26, a massive group of graduate students and supporters rallied for improved graduate student working conditions at the University of Missouri. A large group of students, graduate teaching assistants, and faculty gathered and chanted in T-shirts adorned with supportive slogans in response to stagnant wages and declining working conditions.

Specific grievances included the drop off in childcare services for student parents and inadequate housing options. In an [interview](#) with *The Chronicle*, Lois Honeycutt, outspoken faculty member and graduate student studies director, revealed that, “We have allowed our infrastructure to crumble. Our graduate-student housing was declared unsafe after a firefighter was killed in a collapse. [The firefighter was evacuating students from the building, where a second-story walkway had collapsed.] It was torn down and not replaced.”

The catalyst for the demonstrations was an email received by the university’s grad students informing them only hours before the policy went into effect that their health insurance would no longer be covered. A walkout was planned; when public pressure forced the university to take responsibility for the extremely short notice and declare a year moratorium on health insurance changes. The walkout was subsequently changed to a rally for a comprehensive array of better working conditions.

This story of graduate student protest is far from unprecedented. The unique aspect of the University of Missouri demonstration– and why it represents a potential turning point in the fight against the casualization of academic labor– is that full time faculty and graduate student directors such as Ms. Honeycutt actively supported the graduate students in large numbers. Entire departments (*The Chronicle* reports about [half](#)) sent letters pledging their support for the school’s graduate student teachers and many gave them permission to walk out of or cancel their classes to attend the rally.

Administrations may not be phased by graduate student disruptions in the name of better working conditions, but mass demonstrations of this nature with formal public support from tenured faculty could be another matter entirely.