

Congress of Graduate Students Florida State University

A207 Oglesby Union Tallahassee, FL 32306-4027 Phone: (850) 644-6950

The 26th Congress of Graduate Students

Resolution 3

Sponsored by Vice Chair Burns and the Student Advocacy Committee

Opposition to Legislation Endorsing Union Decertification if Dues-Paying Membership Falls Below 50%

WHEREAS: The Congress of Graduate Students (COGS) is the official representative body of graduate students at Florida State University; COGS represents over 8,500 (as of spring 2018) graduate, law, and medical students' interests to the university and community and is empowered to issue resolutions expressing the views of graduate students and calling attention to important issues; and

WHEREAS: The Congress of Graduate Students believes that freedom of association in the form of labor unions is fundamental to the development of a democratic society and is protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and

WHEREAS: The Florida constitution states: "The right of employees by and through a labor organization, to bargain collectively shall not be denied or abridged;" and

WHEREAS: The National Labor Relations Board ruled in August 2016 that graduate students working as teaching or research assistants are employees with the right to collective bargaining; and

WHEREAS: Universities have shifted over to funding graduate students through fellowships to circumvent the union process because fellows are not employed and therefore do not receive the benefits of the National Labor Relations Board's ruling; at Florida State University, only a handful of fellowships can receive the graduate assistants' subsidy to purchase health insurance; all students are required to have insurance and the university's plan which can cost approximately \$207 a month; this is a great financial cost for a graduate student who may receive a stipend total of \$1,000 a month; and

WHEREAS: Graduate research and teaching assistants are in a precarious position because they work closely with academics but do not share the same power status, which means graduate students sometimes feel compelled to maintain higher workloads or allow uncomfortable work conditions to continue in an effort to maintain their positions; graduate students have reported concerns of harassment by advisors, dissatisfaction in graduate salary, and inappropriately rigorous work demands; graduate research and teaching assistants are generally not entitled to sick leave, maternity leave, or vacation time; and

WHEREAS: The purpose of a graduate student union on university campuses is to ensure graduate assistants have the ability to collectively bargain for changes in their work conditions, such as access to health insurance, a guaranteed minimum stipend, and a guaranteed maximum work expectation; some universities without graduate unions do not allow graduate students to engage in outside employment and expect students to work at least 20 hours a week; and

WHEREAS: Graduate students at private universities across the United States filed petitions for union representation; University of Chicago students filed a petition for a graduate student union in May 2017; approximately two-thirds of the graduate student employees voted in favor of a union; Columbia University students filed a petition for a graduate student union; Yale University students filed a petition for a graduate student union in August 2016; eight out of nine graduate departments voted in favor of the union; and

WHEREAS: FL HB25 was introduced in October 2017 and passed by the House of Representatives on January 25, 2018. The bill was introduced to the Senate in January 2018 and withdrawn from consideration on March 10, 2018. The bill would have forced unions to recertify if the total dues-paying membership falls below 50% of those employees who are eligible to participate in the union; and

WHEREAS: The typical timeframe for graduate studies of two to four years results in a highly transient population of graduate assistants, generating a significant barrier in achieving and maintaining membership of 50%; and

WHEREAS: The Congress of Graduate Students believes it is necessary to provide graduate students with an organization that can address issues graduates have with working conditions; a union of graduate students serves to protect the rights of graduate assistants on campus; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: The Congress of Graduate Students does not support any measure taken to prevent graduate research and teaching assistants from forming or participating in a union; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT: Copies of this resolution be sent to the following U.S. Representatives for Florida:

Abruzzo, Joseph
Ahern, Larry
Albritton, Ben
Beshears, Halsey
Bileca, Michael
Brodeur, Jason T.
Burgess, Jr., Daniel Wright "Danny"
Burton, Colleen
Byrd, Cord
Caldwell, Matt
Clemons, Sr., Charles Wesley "Chuck"
Corcoran, Richard
Cortes, Robert "Bob"
Cummings, W. Travis
Diaz, Jr., Manny
Donalds, Byron
Drake, Brad
Eagle, Dane
Fant, Jay
Fine, Randy
Fischer, Jason
Fitzenhagen, Heather
Gonzalez, Julio
Grall, Erin
Grant, James "J.W."
Grant, Michael
Gruters, Joe
Harrell, Gayle B.
Harrison, Shawn
Henry, Patrick
Ingoglia, Blaise
Ingram, Clay
Jacobs, Kristin Diane
Killebrew, Sam H.
La Rosa, Mike
Latvala, Chris
Leek, Thomas J. "Tom"
Magar, MaryLynn "ML"
Mariano, Amber
Massullo, MD, Ralph E.
McClain, Stan
McClure, Lawrence
Metz, Larry
Miller, Mike
Moraitis, Jr., George R.
Newton, Wengay "Newt"
Nuñez, Jeannette M.

Oliva, Jose R.
Olszewski, Robert "Bobby O"
Payne, Bobby
Perez, Daniel
Peters, Kathleen M.
Pigman, Cary
Plakon, Scott
Plasencia, Rene "Coach P"
Ponder, Mel
Raschein, Holly
Renner, Paul
Rommel, Bob
Roth, Rick
Santiago, David
Smith, Carlos Guillermo
Spano, Ross
Spowls, Chris
Stevenson, Cyndi
Stone, Charlie
Sullivan, Jennifer Mae
Trumbull, Jay
Watson, Barbara
Watson, Jr., Clovis
White, Frank
Willhite, Matt
Williamson, Jayer
Yarborough, Clay; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT: Copies of this resolution be sent to the following other individuals:

John E. Thrasher, President of Florida State University
Amy Hecht, Vice President for Student Affairs
Adela Ghadimi, President of Graduate Assistants United

Joshua Scriven
Speaker



Matthew Uttermark
Deputy Speaker for Finance

May 21, 2018