



# UCWGA



## We're All We Have and We Have to Act

BY MIKAELA WARNER, GRADUATE WORKER, EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR, UGA

Across the country and in my own department, workers are discussing our futures. Our livelihoods and lives are at stake. In hushed tones on Zoom calls, in Twitter replies, in private emails, employees are concerned. Everyone is looking for answers, for clarity, for some humanity to emerge from Higher Education. We are waiting for someone to fix these problems. I'm here to tell you that's not coming.

We are the only ones who will save us.

We've watched year after year of chronic issues: underfunding, structural racism, privatization, upper administrative bloat, and exploited labor. We've read the books and the think-pieces. We've complained over the lunchroom table and while carpooling. The problems have been identified over and over. We've served on committees, taken climate surveys, and sat in placating town halls offering little meaningful change. Still, these issues persist. Still, these issues demoralize us at every turn.

These problems in our workplace are overwhelming, I feel their enormity and deep-rootedness as I list them. They are quite literally impossible to solve alone. Our workplace isolates us from each other.

**I wonder as a graduate worker how I can possibly make my classroom safe as I write my lesson plans alone this summer.**

I wonder as a graduate worker how I can possibly make my classroom safe as I write my lesson plans alone this summer. The building I work in only has one person on janitorial staff. He alone will bear the weight of cleaning our workplace to protect us from

a pandemic without proper support, and for far less in wages than he deserves.

How much more of this can we take? How many coworkers and students will we allow to die before we act?

Only we can protect each other. We can only survive this if we come

together as workers and take back our shared governance. Any other option makes frontline workers collateral damage in the continual malicious negligence of university leadership.

The work ahead of us won't be easy. We must be loud and inconvenient. We must be as intolerable as our working conditions are. We have to work together across job titles and disciplines, move out of our comfort zones and expertise. We need everyone on board, every single worker.

Compliance will not protect you. OSHA will not protect you. Letting others do the work will not protect you. Focusing on only your scholarship or grant or promotion

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# Kennesaw State University Petitions President: “No Layoffs”

BY ARIELLE ROBINSON, FROM COBB COUNTY COURIER WITH PERMISSION

Kennesaw State University’s chapter of the United Campus Workers of Georgia delivered a petition to KSU President Dr. Pamela Whitten’s office Tuesday afternoon calling on her to not fire any workers.

Union members and KSU professors Dr. Heather Pincock and Dr. Sara Giordano delivered a printout of the petition to Whitten’s mailbox near her office inside Kennesaw Hall since Whitten was not there.

Members also laid signs on the KSU sign on the Campus Green, asking Whitten to promise to not lay off campus workers. Union members had hoped Whitten would be in her office to deliver the petition in-person. UCWGA KSU started the petition Tuesday, June 16. It has over 250 signatures from KSU workers and community supporters, asking Whitten for transparency and to not fire any KSU staff in light of smaller budget cuts.

We’ve done the math and the amount that was going to be saved through layoffs is no longer needed because the cuts are lower.”

UCWGA KSU said the union has sent multiple documents to Whitten within the last couple of months asking for transparency from her administration. Giordano said that Whitten had not responded to any of the union’s memorandums or emails and that she hopes today’s event changes that “... one of the reasons why we’re out here today is to make sure she really gets it,” Giordano said. “That’s what we asked when we went up to her office was, ‘how do we get this message to her, she hasn’t been responding to us, so we don’t know how to communicate with her.’”

Giordano said the department she works in, University College, has essentially been dissolved since the initial budget cuts were announced and many staff do not know if they will have a job for the rest of 2020.

Staff includes deans, custodians, advisors and more who are not instructors. “We want Whitten to also commit to not laying off student workers as well,” Giordano said. “That’s another category of workers who often get cut out of these decisions and conversations.”

“ [As] I’m going to hand this petition to Whitten it’s hard to not think about that she makes about 10 times the salary I make,” Giordano said. “And 10 times the salary of the people whose jobs have been threatened right now. So it seems unconscionable to us that she wouldn’t personally take a major salary cut that would still leave her in a very high-income bracket — to save a few jobs.”

Similarly, COVID-19 has not hindered graduate student efforts and actions surrounding the USG response. Graduate students joined other UCWGA members in calling for greater equity and compassion for all employees and students during the crisis, and for clearer, more reassuring communication with students regarding campus housing. We have also condemned workplace abuses related to the transition to online learning, initiating reconciliatory conversations between graduate students and offending parties and administrators.



“Included in those cuts were layoffs that would have saved KSU up to \$3.1 million dollars,” UCWGA KSU’s petition said. “Luckily, we will need to cut \$4.8 million less from KSU’s budget because of the decrease to 11%. This means that without a doubt, none of these proposed layoffs are necessary!”

Pincock said the smaller cut means that Whitten has no reason to layoff any KSU employees. “So there’s a couple reasons why we think this is a very reasonable request we’re making of the president,” Pincock said. “... the state legislature’s passed the budget and everything has been finalized and we know the cuts are going to be 10.8 percent.

# Why I Joined the Union

## ARIEL ACKERLY

STAFF, UGA SCIENCE LIBRARY

I joined the union because we need higher wages everywhere, and unionization raises wages sector-wide, both for union and non-union workers.” ([www.epi.org/publication/briefingpapers\\_bp143](http://www.epi.org/publication/briefingpapers_bp143)). Plus, workers should have a place to collectively organize for better working conditions outside of the sanctioned staff councils and committees. Finally, I believe that workers should be able to talk about the change they want to see in their workplaces in the off-hours, and they should have the legal and financial backing to demand those changes.

## PABLO LAPEGNA

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, SOCIOLOGY & LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES, UGA

*I joined the Union because, in spite of all their imperfections, unions are the most effective way of defending our rights. At a moment in this country when economic and racial inequality reaches unprecedented levels, I like to believe that unions are poised to lead the struggle to make sure democracy does not become a farce.*

## WENDY DUSTMAN

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY,  
GEORGIA GWINNETT COLLEGE

*I joined the UCW because I wanted to be a part of a larger group with a louder voice than just myself. I believe that with the union’s combined effort, we can work together to achieve fair wages for fair pay and ensure that each person has an equal value that is independent of gender, color, and sexual orientation. Together we are a stronger voice to elicit the changes we want to see.*

## GENEVIEVE GUZMÁN

ENGLISH PHD  
STUDENT, UGA

I joined the union to financially support advocates of graduate students as employees, in hopes of achieving better working conditions for this large, underpaid sector of USG’s teaching force.

## MELODY HERRINGTON

FORMER UGA STAFF

I worked on the staff of The University of Georgia for 15 years. While the professional caste system was immediately evident, my early years there brought sufficient health coverage, regular raises, and a comfortable working environment, so I was personally comfortable for years. However, healthcare premiums skyrocketed, raises disappeared, and staff were left feeling expendable. Furthermore, the more I learned about the egregious working conditions of the Facilities Maintenance Division staff, the more disgusted I became. I joined the union in 2019, right before leaving UGA, and I am proud to support it financially from outside.

## Meet Some of Our Organizers



**KATHLEEN FALKE** is the Administrative Assistant for UCWGA. Prior to joining UCWGA staff in 2018, she worked at UGA undergraduate admissions, UGA OVPR, and as a homemaker for several years. In her free time Kathleen serves on the PTO board of Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary School and enjoys road trips, flea markets, and spending time with her husband (also a proud UCWGA member) and three children.



**DONTAY WIMBERLY** is Statewide Organizer for UCWGA. He's an Atlanta native and a young but veteran organizer. A masters student in Political Science, Dontay graduated from Georgia State University and continues to organize with the Metro Atlanta Chapters.

“Labor Struggle really resonated with me throughout my political journey. I believe an organized working class has the ability to transform, not only this country but the entire world. If history is a result of class struggle, then labor organizers help move history forward. Knowing that keeps me going when the work gets tough and I'm reminded of the need to fight for a better world.”

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### WE'RE ALL WE HAVE AND WE HAVE TO ACT // CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

while people die will not protect you. No one is coming to save us. We'll have to stand up to the Board of Regents, Presidents, Chancellors, Deans, and Department Heads. We cannot make real change without real risk, but we can protect each other as a collective.

We can win fair pay. We can win protections for all workers. We can win healthcare. We can make the high ideal of Higher Education a reality. But

we have to fight for it. We can only do this if we go into our workplaces and organize every single worker. Only together can we survive the bleak future of Higher Education. Only we can make this university work for all of us.

**If you need anything, don't hesitate to reach out: [UCWGA.contact.us@gmail.com](mailto:UCWGA.contact.us@gmail.com). Remember, we're stronger together!**

# Legislative Committee Report

BY JILL PENN, GEORGIA GWINNETT COLLEGE

One of the main tasks of the state-wide legislative committee this year was to help organize the ucwga's Second Annual Lobby Day and Rally which was held on February 5th, downtown at the State Capitol.

We spoke directly to our Senators and Legislators to push three issues: 1) Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) for all USG employees, 2) Increasing the minimum wage 3) Ending Graduate Student fees. Afterwards we held a rally which turned into an impromptu march and Eric Stirgus covered us in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. It was a great day! However, shortly after Lobby Day we found ourselves sheltering in place due to COVID-19 and our elected officials began a three-month recess. Nobody knew exactly how this was going to affect our work on Lobby Day and the future of education in Georgia. Then in May we learned that Governor Kemp was asking for 14% cuts to the overall state budget. It was then that the legislative committee answered the call to protect Higher Education in Georgia.

We had a timeline of a little over a month until legislators were expected to return to the capitol to vote on a budget for FY 2021. We decided to create weekly actions for USG members and supporters, to protect Higher Ed.

Our first action was a letter writing campaign via action network asking our Senators and Legislators to oppose HB 949, a bill

**Budget cuts for Higher Ed were reduced from 14% to 10% at the BOR meeting at the end of June.**

that would give a second round of tax cuts to benefit those making six figure salaries and higher. With no cost of living adjustments to USG employees in over 30 years and a pandemic on our hands, this was no time for a tax cut for the rich! Although the bill passed the House in March and had a decent chance of being passed in the Senate, UCWGA helped defeat this bill, which meant more money for the State budget. Next we specifically targeted the Higher Ed committee in the House and the Senate, pushing for much needed funds for Higher Ed. We heard back from several legislators who were supportive of our efforts and told us they were looking for imaginative ways to reduce the budget cuts. They understood the dire situation we were in. We also partnered with the

Georgia Budget and Policy Institute in their campaign to demand that Governor Kemp and Legislators in the House raise more revenue for the State. Then, right before our

elected officials were to reconvene at the Capitol, we had a call-in campaign in a last ditch effort to convince the Higher Ed committee to fight for all campus workers. Our efforts paid off! Budget cuts for Higher Ed were reduced from 14% to 10% at the BOR meeting at the end of June, USG

Chancellor Steve Wrigley thanked members of the State Legislature for finding funds to "eliminate the need for furloughs". While Mr. Wrigley did not directly thank UCWGA, we know that the legislators were responding to our demands and our campaigns made a difference in a short period of time.

While we are happy that budget cuts were reduced, 10% budget cuts are still devastating

and we know that our work is not done. In addition to campaigning at the State level, UCWGA members also volunteered for a phone banking campaign to persuade US Senators to pass the HEROES act. We will continue volunteering in this capacity over the summer and we are already making plans for next year's legislative session.

**We spoke directly to our Senators and Legislators to push three issues:**

- 1. Cost of Living Adjustments for all USG employees,**
- 2. Increasing the minimum wage**
- 3. Ending Graduate Student fees**

# AMONG THE MISSING MASSES: Board of Regents Betrays Graduate Workers Again

BY JUSTIN SIMPSON, 5TH YEAR GRADUATE STUDENT IN PHILOSOPHY, UGA

Graduate workers have to square a circle: low stipends, high student fees, and an increasing cost of living. A UGA graduate worker can pay \$3,168/year in fees. At \$450 per semester, the special institutional fee (SIF) is not only the most onerous but the most egregious fee.

In addition to not paying for a service in kind, it subsidizes UGA graduate health insurance and funds stipends. Graduate workers are therefore subsidizing their own insurance, or other's insurance, and having to pay to work. This is not the way to express appreciation for workers that add value to higher education. Graduate workers are essential to academic standards of excellence, contributing to groundbreaking research and providing personalized education and mentorship for undergraduates. They also teach over 800 classes!

For over a year, graduate workers from across the University of Georgia (UG) have expressed these concerns to the Board of Regents (BOR), calling for the SIF's elimination. Petitions were signed and submitted. Personal letters mailed. A UGA's Graduate Student Association (GSA) passed a resolution. We rallied outside a BOR meeting. We met with the Executive Vice Chancellor for Strategy and Fiscal Affairs.

During the April meeting, within a span of twenty-five minutes, the BOR betrayed the best interest of graduate students and reinstated the SIF for the 2020–21 academic year. As a response to COVID-19, the BOR did graciously vote to waive other summer student fees, which amounted to a whopping \$22. UG leadership clearly fails to understand the problem. COVID-19 did not create, but only exacerbated the financial precarity of graduate workers.

While the BOR's decision might have been motivated by the expected financial losses due to

COVID-19, they ignored the potential increased workload for graduate students due to COVID-19. For instance, UGA's proposed hybrid instructional plan involves teaching a portion of the class in-person and the other portion online. For graduate students who are already unfairly compensated for their work, doubling their workload is unacceptable.

While the decision to not eliminate the SIF was disappointing, the way the decision was made was equally upsetting. The BOR held an irregular meeting at the beginning of April. During the April 14th meeting, several graduate student organizations requested to speak to share their first-hand perspective. Not one group was called upon.

This protocol foreshadowed the decision-making procedure to come. UGA never solicited input of graduate workers while planning for the fall reopening. The GSA conducted a survey on its own initiative, but only after UGA's plans had been released. So far, administrators have failed to respond to countless calls for better communication and a semblance of concern for the health and safety of university communities. This is not the way to show respect and concern for workers on the frontlines when classes resume.

Graduate workers thus find themselves among the missing masses—the ones that the UG and BOR neglect despite helping the university move and operate. The UGA graduate committee will continue to fight to make graduate worker interests heard in the process of creating a safe and equitable workplace.

**The fee subsidizes UGA graduate health insurance and funds their stipends.**

# Organizers' Report

BY KYKY KNIGHT

In May, the local continued to build up momentum around fighting against state budget cuts, as well as began developing demands for a safe return to campus at many chapters. The legislative committee worked on developing a call-in campaign to legislators to demand funding for higher education amidst the governor's planned 14% budget cuts for all state agencies in response to the covid-19 pandemic, as well as began coordinating with the PHEW office on a call in campaign around the federal HEROES Act legislation, which could provide fiscal relief to states in the coming months. The statewide Steering committee continued to move forward on statewide election planning for the E-Board, and navigated challenges around holding the election with distancing guidelines in place. Many members across the state participated in May Day events, with members working in coalition with adjacent groups to plan car caravans in both the Atlanta and Athens areas. Chapters also began to respond to increased visibility of police brutality against black folks, with many members

participating in protests across the state. These actions were followed by conversations among union members about defunding campus police, shifting state funding from law enforcement to higher education, and more generally, about equity and anti-racism within the union. Members of the communications committee continued to meet in order to find out ways to strengthen and streamline both internal and external communications. The union also saw new members that will form brand new chapters in the state, including at Georgia Coastal College and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. Members across the state also participated in both a May 12th regional and May 16th statewide call, where members coordinated around priorities for fighting against austerity budgets and developing safe return to campus plans in light of the covid crisis. Pandemic or no pandemic, we're making gains. At the printing of the last newsletter three months ago we had 537 members across the state. Now we have 648 as of July 9th.

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## Meet Your Steering Committee, part II

*(Your editor accidentally left longtime steering committee member Jacob Weger off the list in the last edition of the newsletter. Here he is!)*



**JACOB WEGER** is a graduate worker and PHD candidate in anthropology at UGA. He has been active in the union since 2018 and joined the Steering Committee in the fall of that year.

“I joined the union out of frustration with the level of exploitation and powerlessness graduate students often face, and because I believe we all deserve to have more power and voice in our workplaces. Workers across campus face many of the same difficulties, but collectively we can help create a more just, equitable, and safe environment in which to work and live.”

# UCWGA Statement on Protests Against Police Violence and Systemic Racism

Like millions around the nation and around the globe, our union was sickened by the footage of the murder of George Floyd by officer Derek Chauvin.

And like those same millions, we know that this is not an isolated incident; it has become routine. Rekia Boyd, Laquan McDonald, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Kayla Moore, Eric Garner, Ayianna Jones, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and the names continue. This isn't happening somewhere remote from our state: Alexia Christian, Kathryn Johnson, Anthony Hill, Oscar Cain, Ahmaud Arbery, and Mahlon Summerour were killed by police right here in Georgia. The United Campus Workers of Georgia stands in solidarity with the protests against police violence.

A glance at the names above, knowing their stories and seeing the lack of accountability that the police faced in those cases also helps frame the profound emotion with which protesters have taken to the streets. This is only amplified by the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, again suggesting that institutions of power think black lives do not matter. The labor movement must support the basic right to stand up against racial injustice, free from tear gas and rubber bullets.

As a union for every employee of the University System of Georgia,

we aim to represent the needs of our entire workforce, on campus and in our larger lives. The freedom to get to and from work without fearing police violence must go hand in hand with the fight for a living wage and safe working conditions. Only through uniting can we win the justice that every single one of us deserves: the right to a long, good life without fear.

WANT TO HELP? THERE'S A LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT ON OUR WEBSITE HERE: [WWW.UCWGA.COM/NEWS/UCWGA-STATEMENT-PROTESTS-AGAINST-POLICE-VIOLENCE-AND](http://WWW.UCWGA.COM/NEWS/UCWGA-STATEMENT-PROTESTS-AGAINST-POLICE-VIOLENCE-AND)

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