



Graduate Assistants United
YOUR UNION, YOUR VOICE

For more information, contact:
Communications Chair
352-575-0366
organizing@ufgau.org
ufgau.org

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Public Employee Relations Commission Reverses Policy, Creates Another Unnecessary Hoop for GAU

GAINESVILLE, FL – Since 1972, GAU has been the certified labor union for graduate (teaching and research) assistants at UF, giving us the right to directly negotiate our employing contract (known as the Collective Bargaining Agreement) with UF. Through this, we have made massive strides in improving the lives of graduate assistants (GAs). We have increased the minimum stipend almost \$10,000 in the last decade, negotiated yearly raises, and save GAs over \$700 in fees every year. GAU is the reason we have a low premium (\$12/month), no deductible healthcare plan, and eight weeks of paid family and medical leave. We have filed hundreds if not thousands of grievances in our lifetime, protecting GAs treated unfairly. We have been the voice for Graduate Family Housing, fighting against closures of affordable, on-campus housing and advocating for expansion of affordable housing options at research and education centers.

We are at risk of losing all of this. Because we are effective, the Florida legislature is attacking us with union-busting legislation passed this Spring, senate bill 256. This bill requires public sector unions in Florida (except for police, fire, and correctional officer unions) to reach 60% membership or be decertified. Additionally, this bill makes payroll dues deduction illegal. This means we need 60% of almost 4400 GAs to join the union as a member, or we will be decertified and everything we have won in our contract will be lost.

Any pretense of these policies being fair is at best misguided. The Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC) is an office of the state of Florida charged with implementing SB 256. This law was passed intentionally without clear guidelines on how union membership would be measured, with PERC essentially making up the rules as they go. At one point, PERC created [a form](#) for union members to fill out, which

essentially informs union members they live in a right to work state, they don't have to join their union, and the names of the five highest paid employees of their union (UF-GAU has no employees). PERC then stated in a federal court appearance this summer that they would not be using this form to measure union membership, and that unions simply had to keep them if they received them. On October 17, 2023, PERC reversed this decision, ruling that unions do in fact need members to fill out this form to be counted as members to help their union meet the 60% requirement.

UF-GAU leadership has been working tirelessly for months to recruit members. Our membership was reset to 0% after July 1, when payroll dues deductions officially became illegal. We have recruited hundreds of members, signing them up on our electronic central membership system. Today our membership numbers were once again (essentially) reset to 0% in the eyes of PERC.

GAs have benefited for years from working in a unionized workplace, and now it is time to come together to save our union, or live with the consequences.

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GAU is the official labor union representing the approximately 4,400 teaching, research, and graduate assistants at the University of Florida. UFF, FEA, NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO. For additional information, please contact GAU's Communication Chair at communications@ufgau.org or 352-575-0366.