



Georgia's Higher Education Union CWA Organizing Local 3265

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, March 12, 2019

Press Contact: Justin Simpson

United Campus Workers of Georgia

ucwga.contact.us@gmail.com - (706) 431-5386

University System of Georgia agrees to UCWGA Graduate Student Committee health care demands

The United Campus Workers of Georgia (UCWGA) Graduate Student Committee received an official response from University System of Georgia (USG) administrators acknowledging graduate student concerns about insurance plan premiums and coverage, and agreeing to implement the changes recommended by the union's graduate committee.

Last semester, with little prior notification, graduate students were shocked to discover that the health insurance premiums for their spouses and children had increased 345% for the 2018-2019 year. After expressions of outrage at a town hall and a UCWGA-sponsored protest rally, the spouse premium rate increases were reduced somewhat and the premium increase for children was abandoned. However, even after this reduction, married graduate students were still left struggling to afford health insurance premiums, which had jumped from an average rate of \$187/month to \$589/month in 2019. Faculty argued that these prices would make it difficult to recruit highly qualified graduate students to their programs. Graduate students noted many more shortcomings with the insurance offered, such as the lack of a dental care provision, inadequate mental health coverage, and the lack of an employee in Human Resources assigned the task of assisting graduate students in disputes with the insurance company.

On December 10th, the union's Graduate Student Committee wrote to USG on behalf of UGA graduate students, issuing a call to the administration to address these ongoing insurance issues. The letter insisted on the following: (a) UGA announce all insurance rates for 2019-2020 no later than March 1; (b) UGA create a commission made up of faculty, administrators, graduate students, and union representatives; (c) UGA charge that commission with studying and addressing the price and limitations of the current health insurance plan provided by the university; and (d) UGA designate a Human Resources staff person as an advocate for graduate students in disputes over health insurance claims. When USG failed to respond by February 15, UCWGA launched a petition campaign to show the widespread support for these demands.

On March 6th, USG responded to UCWGA with a letter that acknowledges the graduate students' concerns about insurance and agrees to: (a) form an Advisory Committee that includes faculty, staff, and student representatives for making recommendations to USG about student health insurance coverage and premiums; (b) improve communication, both in terms of

clarity and announcing plan and premium information prior to the end of the Spring semester; and (c) appoint a USG staff member to act as a liaison for student questions and concerns regarding health insurance claims.

UGA History professor Cindy Hahamovitch said “This is fantastic! The USG administration agreed wholeheartedly with the justice of the graduate students’ demands. This is a victory for the union and for UGA. We simply can't function without graduate students and we have to make it economically viable for them to come here.” UGA Philosophy graduate student and UCWGA Graduate Committee member Justin Simpson, who had to wait months while suffering from a toothache for UGA's policy to expire so he could buy dental insurance elsewhere, said “this a big first victory for graduate students and all of higher education in Georgia! However, this is only the first step in resolving insurance issues. We have to bring the costs down and we have to offer a better policy.”

For more information, contact Justin Simpson, ucwga.contact.us@gmail.com - (706) 431-5386

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