



# UCWGA



UCWGA MEMBERS FROM VARIOUS CHAPTERS IN ATLANTA ON LOBBY DAY, FEBRUARY 5.

## From Your Steering Committee

The past month has brought major changes to our lives. No one has been unaffected by the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. Even if we haven't been infected, it has turned our jobs and social lives upside down. But that hasn't stopped our members from coming together to advocate for their rights on the campuses where they work for equitable pay and safe working conditions. On the contrary, the level of membership activity these past few weeks has been inspiring! After all, that is precisely the purpose of having a union—to stand together when times are tough and demand that our voices and needs be heard.

By mid-March, USG campuses were suspending face-to-face instruction, and

by March 16, Governor Kemp had declared a public health state of emergency and ordered all public schools and colleges to close. UCWGA acted swiftly, issuing a press release and statement of support for our members on March 13 and 14, followed by a memorandum to the Board of Regents on March 16, calling for equity and solidarity in USG's COVID-19 response.

Our message was clear: if our campuses are unsafe for students and faculty, then they are unsafe for all employees. While we recognized the important steps USG was taking to contain the spread of the virus, it wasn't doing enough to make sure everyone was protected. Many of the most medically and economically vulnerable among us were

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# Graduate Students Fight Fees

BY BRYANT BARNES,  
GRADUATE COMMITTEE, UGA

APRIL IS A BIG MONTH FOR UCWGA GRADUATE STUDENTS. IT MARKS THE CULMINATION OF YEAR-LONG, STATEWIDE EFFORTS CALLING FOR THE REPEAL OF THE SPECIAL INSTITUTIONAL FEE (SIF), WHICH WAS INSTITUTED AS A TEMPORARY FEE AFTER THE 2008 FINANCIAL CRISIS.

Since removing the sunset clause that would have let the SIF die a natural death in 2012, the Board of Regents (BoR) has voted to keep the SIF every April. The SIF is the largest individual fee and partially funds graduate teaching and research assistantships. In short, graduate students who teach or work in labs at USG are paying to work. Regents will meet April 14–15 to determine fees for the 2020–2021 academic year. Graduate students plan to attend the virtual session and insist on the repeal of the SIF.

Last fall, graduate students sent letters and petitions to the Board of Regents and university administrators and organized a rally during the October BoR meeting in Athens. Members of the UCWGA Graduate Student Committee at UGA subsequently met with representatives of the BoR and corresponded with UGA's Interim Dean of the Graduate School about repealing the fee. In response to these efforts, the Chancellor of the Board of Regents organized a special committee to study student fees and consider changes.

At the start of this year, graduate students joined other University System of Georgia employees at the Georgia Capitol to lobby for fair wages, cost of living adjustments, and the repeal of the SIF. Our grad fee bill was scheduled for a Senate Higher Education Committee hearing in early March, but the hearing was delayed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, graduate students have not relented. UGA graduate workers sent personalized letters

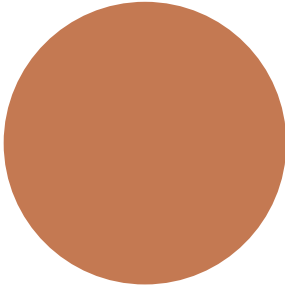
detailing the SIF's impact on their financial wellbeing to individual members of the Board, and UCWGA Graduate Student Committees at UGA and Georgia Tech sent general letters to the Chancellor detailing our demands. We have also aided in securing resolutions of support from other graduate student organizations, faculty, and administrators across the university system. These efforts and successes will surely precede us at the Board of Regents meeting.

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.



>> UNION MEMBERS ON THE CAPITOL STEPS IN ATLANTA ON MARCH 3 PREPARING TO LOBBY AGAINST THE SPECIAL INSTITUTION FEE.

# Meet Your Steering Committee



**LAURIE MCDOWELL:** I am on the coordinating committee of the Kennesaw State Chapter and on the statewide Steering Committee. I've been staff at KSU for the last five years. I joined UCW at the time that the USG began the comprehensive administrative review, after participating in a UCW town hall call. I attribute my motivation to join to the fact that justice has always been an important value to me, especially in the workplace. My own personal experiences in the work force only affirmed that employers will only attend to workers' interests if they are compelled to do so. I've moved beyond my minimum wage, fast food days and gradually over the years gained a position of relative comfort. But I can't be complacent and coast on that. Too many people are struggling. Wage inequality is at an obscene level. I'm in this union because no one should be barely surviving while their labor buys comfort and security for the people at the top.



**BEKAH WARD:** I teach biology at Georgia Gwinnett College. I always wanted a union because I believe in democracy; a union is democracy in the workplace. But there's a special importance to unions in higher education. Administrators and the Board of Regents don't know our students, don't care about them the way we do. And consequently, they don't make decisions in the best interest of actual education. Also, because UCW has members from all job categories, every campus worker can contribute to that project. When campus all workers have a say and are treated well, we can do a really amazing job by our students.



**JENNIFER LEYTING:** I joined the union in March 2018 and was elected to the Steering Committee in October 2018. When I started my career as an administrative professional staff member at UGA, it was with the promise of a pension, good healthcare benefits, and a monthly income. However, over my 7.5 years as an employee, I have seen these promises eroded away by university administration, the Board of Regents, and state & federal politicians. I stand in solidarity with my fellow campus workers to create a just and fair workplace. I am proud to be part of the resurgence of unions and the fight for workers' rights across the nation.



**DAREN FOWLER (they/them):** I'm a graduate student and instructor at Georgia State University. I joined the union because workers in the South deserve institutions that value and listen to workers, not exploit and ignore them. It is only through the coalition of workers that corporations, institutions, and governments protect and properly pay laborers.

# Why I Joined

BY ROBYN WASERMAN (UGA CHAPTER CO-CHAIR)



Gaining employment with the University of Georgia is a coveted gig in Athens. As a longtime Athens resident, I had been trying to get hired with the university for years. When I finally landed a job as an admin associate this past August, rather than being excited, I was immediately filled with intense feelings of financial insecurity that, up to this point in my life, I'd only experienced as a graduate student. In my current role at UGA, I make less than \$30,000/ year, and there is no way I can pay all my monthly expenses (including three student loans) if I do not have a second job. I work 40 hours a week and then tend bar on the weekends just to make ends meet. The Economic Policy Index's Family Budget Calculator estimates a living wage for a single adult with no children in this county to be \$35,000. UGA is the largest employer

**The Economic Policy Index's Family Budget Calculator estimates a living wage for a single adult with no children in [Clarke] county to be \$35,000.**

and sets the standard for wages in Athens, but many of its employees make well under this. With the steep cost-of-living increases over the last few years, rising health insurance premiums and deductibles, paying for parking, and having to be vested for ten years in order to receive any employer match for retirement, there's a lot of room for the university to pay and treat its employees better. As a UGA employee, I am working more and making less money than ever before in my life—and I know that hundreds if not thousands of UGA workers are in the same position as me. I joined the union in my first week at UGA and urge everyone to join us because we're the only ones looking out for our best interests—and we're stronger together.

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## FROM YOUR STEERING COMMITTEE // CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

already paid. Working with individuals with specific grievances in their departments has led to some campuses instituting staggered scheduling for facilities staff to lessen exposure, and provision of personal protective equipment. These are major victories that were made possible because of your commitment, solidarity, and willingness to fight together as a union. And yet the fight continues on other fronts.

Our first ever Regional Day of Action took place on Tuesday, March 31, together with UCW locals across the Southeast. As the coronavirus forced us to adapt our plans, the event became a social media blitz, with members across the state and region posting to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter their demands for equity and fairness on our campuses. We connected with campus workers from other states, significantly increased our visibility, and gained several new

members! Check out the website for some of the photos our members shared: [www.UCWGA.com](http://www.UCWGA.com).

Speaking of the website, a team of members have been hard at work updating it with separate tabs for each chapter. Be sure to check back regularly for news and events.

In May, we'll be hosting a statewide (virtual) meeting. This will be an important opportunity to strategize for the coming year and make plans for the transition to full-fledged local status later this year, when there will be an election for statewide leadership positions. We sincerely hope you can participate and look forward to seeing you then (on Zoom, of course). Keep an eye out for more details.

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!

# It could happen here

BY JOE FU

***Red State Revolt*, by Eric Blanc.  
Verso, London, 2019**

It's been budget season again at the State House in Atlanta, and mostly it's business as usual: shortfalls in state revenues due to the 2018 state tax cuts are forcing cuts in fundamental services, and some GOP legislators have proposed still more tax cuts for the wealthy. But there is at least one surprise: Governor Kemp is proposing a \$2K raise for public school teachers, following up on the \$3K raise of FY 2019.

Governor Kemp didn't say it, but these raises are the direct result of the Great Red State Teacher Strikes of 2018.

In *Red State Revolt* (Verso, London, 2019), author Eric Blanc tells the story of this crashing wave of righteous political upheaval. In state after state across the USA in 2018, teachers joined with other school workers against years of neglect and underfunding of their public school systems. It happened mostly in "red" states, where anti-labor Republicans have dominated government for years.

The people of West Virginia possess a rich and heroic history of labor struggles. Today, over 70% of teachers in the state belong to a union. So it was fitting that West Virginia took action first. Rank and file teachers in every one of the state's 55 counties donned the red t-shirts that became the symbol of the movement. Defying the law and risking their livelihoods, teachers walked off the job—and stayed off—for almost two weeks. They stayed off until they won: the legislature approved a 5% raise not only for teachers but for all school employees. Many other state employees

were also covered, and funding was increased for the broader school system as well.

The West Virginia action ignited a nationwide powder keg. Teachers everywhere faced similar conditions—large class sizes, low wages, underfunding for supplies—and were itching to act. It was on them to protect both their own profession and the wider public school system from politicians' neglect. Oklahoma and Arizona teachers donned the "Red for Ed" colors around the beginning of March 2018, just as the West Virginia strikes were being won.

Blanc's book gives a detailed account of the events in these three pivotal states, based on interviews with the teachers/leaders who made it all happen. Their success or failure turned on a few key elements. Although the discussions started out on social media, in the end it was more important to organize in personal, face to face conversations. West Virginia's success was based on group discussions and strike votes in every county. Teachers there understood the importance of organizing all school workers, from the teachers to the custodians to the cafeteria workers to the bus drivers. They also organized in the community, winning the support of parents, which made them invulnerable to attacks from politicians and the media.

Arizona's mobilization followed a similar pattern, despite a much less favorable labor climate. Although the teacher unionization rate was only about 25%, teachers came together to challenge their elected officials, and to win. By contrast, teacher mobilization in Oklahoma was conducted almost

exclusively through social media. When push came to shove, the movement didn't have the fortitude to forge a more complete victory.

The element of leadership was key in all three states. Many of the most active teachers had cut their teeth in the Bernie Sanders campaign of 2016, and in the Chicago teacher strikes of 2012. In the "red state" political climate, this exposed the movement to red-baiting attacks from politicians and conservative media who tried to demonize it as a "leftist revolution." The issue was not really one of left against right—it was about the needs of the vast public ignored by the privileged few. The movement was based on cooperation among people with different belief systems. As one striker put it, "I'm conservative, Christian, republican, and I support Red for Ed....If you want to say you are for protecting families, you have to fund education accordingly." In the words of another, "anything that benefits people who aren't rich is always labeled as 'socialism.'"

Citizens and public employees have caught on to the brutal cynicism of the game of cutting services, then claiming that they don't work as an excuse to cut further. The 2018 school strike wave showed that ordinary people can successfully oppose the so-called "conservative" politicians who have been chipping away at public education for decades. The courageous teachers of West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona accepted their responsibilities as witnesses to the hollowing out of these essential services. They stood up and won.

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# UGA Union Members Push Back

BY VALERIE MCLAURIN AND MIKAELA WARNER, PHD STUDENTS AND GRADUATE WORKERS

On March 12th, 2020, the University of Georgia responded to COVID-19 by suspending face-to-face instruction for two weeks as workers implemented “business continuity plans” and prepared for the shift to online learning. Following Governor Brian Kemp’s order that all state employees work from home, UGA faculty—including graduate teaching assistants—temporarily suspended instruction and some staff began to work from home but many others were told to stay on the job.



UCWGA MEMBERS FROM VARIOUS CHAPTERS IN ATLANTA ON LOBBY DAY, FEBRUARY 5.

The United Campus Workers of Georgia UGA Chapter responded swiftly to UGA’s decision and called for more equity and solidarity for university employees. On March 13th, we published a press release supporting the suspension as an effective social distancing protocol to

protect workers. However, we demanded further steps to protect UGA staff, many of whom could not work from home and were still at high-risk. We were concerned about childcare needs due to school closures, immunocompromised workers who might lack leave time, and many staff members who require additional jobs because they don’t earn a living wage at the University. These vulnerabilities would potentially increase the exposure rate and put our community at risk. Our union rallied together because workers should never have to choose between their livelihood and their safety.

In our initial press release, UCWGA-UGA called on UGA administration to implement:

- 1 Emergency paid leave at current wages for all staff regardless of classification and/or EFT status during suspended instruction;
- 2 Guaranteed pay for all UGA employees, hourly and salaried, at current wages in the event of complete campus closure;
- 3 Double wages for all essential personnel with the option to use emergency paid leave;
- 4 Free campus parking for staff during suspended instruction;
- 5 Cleaning supplies for all campus units during suspended instruction; and
- 6 Reduction in building hours (library, MLC, etc.) during suspended instruction.

On March 16th, our demands were published in an Op-Ed in *The Red & Black*, UGA’s campus paper. Four days later, UGA Transportation & Parking Services announced a policy meeting our demands for free parking for faculty and staff for the duration of the semester and refunded those that already paid. We then organized a day of collective action on March 23rd asking employees to call and email UGA President Morehead, Chancellor Wrigley, and our local representatives to meet our demands. That same day, President Morehead granted emergency paid leave for all nonessential employees who cannot telework. These wins show the power of our ongoing pressure and organizing efforts.

UCWGA-UGA is also a proud member of Athens Mutual Aid Network (AMAN), a coalition of Athens organizations whose goals are to “connect people with ongoing relief efforts, collect and distribute accurate information to our community, and advocate for critical policy actions to address unmet needs.” Our chapter has shown that working together results in tangible change benefitting workers. UCWGA-UGA will persist in collaborating with local organizing efforts and fighting for our ongoing demands during this public health crisis.

## WANT TO DONATE TO PEOPLE IN CRISIS?

FOR UNDOCUMENTED ATHENIANS (WHO CAN'T ACCESS GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE):  
[www.athensimmigrantrights.org/community-support](http://www.athensimmigrantrights.org/community-support)  
VENMO: @SIFIC

FOR ATHENIANS IN NEED DUE TO COVID-19:  
VENMO: @mutualaidathens

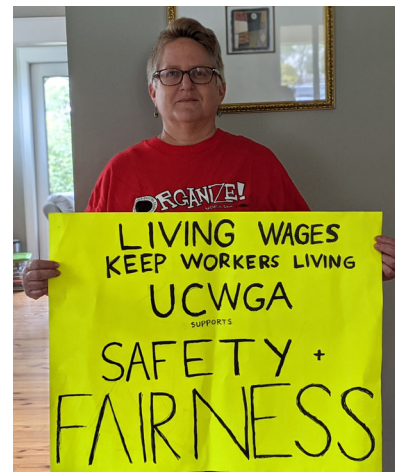
IN ATLANTA:  
[atlantamutualaid.org/make-a-donation](http://atlantamutualaid.org/make-a-donation)

# Organizers' Report

BY KYKY KNIGHT

March brought unprecedented changes to the lives and livelihoods of many UCWGA members and staff with the impact of covid-19 on many communities. With gradual and staggered announcements about University closures and community shelter-in-place mandates, day-to-day plans became increasingly uncertain. Still, members kicked into rapid response gear and organized for major institutional wins, held a digital day of action, and welcomed new members into the union. At UGA, GSU, KSU, and GA Tech, members organized for and won emergency paid leave! This was fought through call in campaigns and raising social media awareness. On Equal Pay Day, members turned what would have been a day of chapters gathering on their campuses to pressure targets around fair pay into a digital campaign demanding fair and safe responses to the pandemic. This action garnered over 250 new followers on the new regional twitter account in just a few days and saw the public activation of many members from all across the state. Chapters also transitioned to meeting online, and many leveraged campaigns to make demands for universities to put workers first in just a matter of days. In addition to developing rapid responses to covid-19, many chapters also began tightening and improving internal and external communication methodologies in response to new

remote organizing needs. The spirit shown and continued organizing that the local put forth in March exemplifies the members' dedication to building a powerful union. The union is just shy of 600 members and continues to grow despite difficulties and challenges presented to organizing while distancing.



## DON'T FORGET TO REGISTER TO VOTE

(new deadline is May 11) Mail in the Absentee Ballot Application the state sent you.

### DIDN'T RECEIVE ONE IN THE MAIL?

Georgia may not consider you an "active voter." Go to [sos.ga.gov/index.php/Elections/absentee\\_voting\\_in\\_georgia](https://sos.ga.gov/index.php/Elections/absentee_voting_in_georgia) to get the form or locate your County Board of Registrar's Office.

UGA UNION MEMBER CINDY HAHAMOVITCH, ONE OF MANY WHO MADE SIGNS FOR THE MARCH 31 DAY OF ACTION.

## IT COULD HAPPEN HERE // CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Meanwhile, in the University System of Georgia the ground continues to shift beneath employees' feet. Ever increasing consolidation of administration in Atlanta (through the OneSource initiative), foisted on the entire workforce with no worker input, dehumanizes and removes accountability from local campuses. Large segments of the staff continue to endure punishing poverty wages and working conditions undercut by chronic understaffing. The instructional workforce is an increasingly chaotic patchwork of tenured and instructional faculty, resting on a foundation of precariously employed adjunct and graduate instructors, threatening the tenure system without a clue about how to replace it.

There was a glimmer of strike activity in schools here in Georgia. School bus drivers in Dekalb county took up the Red for Ed banner in April 2018 to protest low wages and

meager benefits. Tragically, their strike was broken, and several workers were fired. Nevertheless, the message was sent: locked in a tight race for governor that year, Kemp promised raises for teachers. Now—amazingly—he is following through.

Could the Red State Revolt spread to Georgia? Governor Kemp seems to think so.

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: I wrote this review way back in the pre-Coronavirus Era, but, if anything, it's more relevant now than ever. When the public health crisis passes, will the financial elites once again rig the recovery to hang the working class out to dry, and to put cash in their own pockets? In the end, the answer will depend on how far workers will go to protect their own interests, and the interests of our coworkers.*

# Kennesaw State's Chapter Demands Action from the University President

**The Kennesaw State University Chapter of the UCWGA has been busy.** On March 29, it sent a letter to Pamela Whitten, Kennesaw's President, asking Whitten to clearly define "essential" workers and make sure students, faculty, and staff had a voice in future decisions, such as when it would be safe to return to normal operations. The letter urged Whitten to use her authority to continue to pay people their livelihoods even if they can't work; to mandate telework for all employees who can do it; to provide personal protective equipment gear

for people who have to come in to work; to allow donations of leave time outside of open enrollment; to guarantee free telehealth visits for all who need them; to refund parking fees; and more.

The letter applauded Whitten for implementing USG's Non-Closure Emergency Leave Procedures (as did the presidents of UGA, Georgia Tech, and Georgia State) but warned her that the policy has not been communicated clearly and has not been trickling down to all staff and supervisors. Some KSU workers have had their hours cut and some supervisors are ignoring health recommendations. To maximize

awareness and broaden input, the chapter demanded that Whitten organize three virtual, interactive, and recorded town hall meetings for staff, faculty, and students. The Kennesaw chapter followed the letter with a press release the next day.

Although the letter circulated quickly across the campus, Whitten has not responded. The chapter's website is now counting the days without a response (11 as of 4/11) and without a Coronavirus update (25). The KSU chapter continues to collect information from employees about how they've been affected.

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