

Can I work off-campus if I have an F-1 visa?

It is generally very difficult to receive permission to work off-campus. International graduate employees may receive permission due to emergency financial hardship (e.g. you came to school with enough savings, but due to an unforeseen circumstance, your savings are depleted and you need another job), but this instance is very rare. It's ultimately very important that, as an international employee on campus, you are part of the GEO. Because options for work are more limited for international graduate students, you need a strong contract to guarantee a living wage, medical benefits, and good working conditions. Only your union can achieve that.

How do I get involved?

We are run by graduate employees just like you who volunteer their time to help make GEO a strong organization. You can:

- Become a departmental steward to improve working conditions in your department
- Join an International Student Caucus to address issues that matter to you
- Work on the GEO Organizing Committee to help reach out to your colleagues
- Organize a GEO meeting in your department

And much more! Contact your department steward, or email the GEO at geo@uic-geo.net.

Contact the GEO:

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GEO
GRADUATE
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ORGANIZATION

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GEO AND
INTERNATIONAL
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What is the GEO?

The Graduate Employees Organization (GEO) is the labor union representing 1,400 Graduate Assistants (GAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs) at UIC. We are a member-run, volunteer-run organization that advocates on behalf of its members for fair wages, proper working conditions, tuition waivers, and health, vision, and dental benefits. In order to achieve this, every three years we negotiate a new contract with UIC administration in order to secure our labor rights and working conditions in a legally-binding document.

Are international employees covered by the contract?

Yes, if you are a Teaching Assistant or Graduate Assistant with an appointment between 25% and 67% FTE. Research Assistants (RAs) are not legally covered by the contract. Although the UIC administration has extended many of the same rights and benefits to RAs, those rights are not guaranteed.

Why should I join the GEO?

As a member, you may vote in elections and on important union matters. Because we are a member-run union, we are as strong as our members. That is why it is important to have as many people sign up as possible. By joining, you will have the right to vote on how the union is run: you get to vote for union leaders, run for office, and help set the future direction of our union. At the same time you strengthen your union and show your support for the GEO's mission to improve working conditions for TAs and GAs at UIC.

As an international employee, can I join?

Yes, you can join! If you are a teaching assistant or graduate assistant with an appointment between 25% and 67% FTE, you are covered by our contract. Simply sign a yellow card, including your email and phone number, so that we can keep you informed about issues that the GEO is addressing and how you can get involved.

Don't have a yellow card? Email us at geo@uic-geo.net to get one today.

Does it cost anything to join?

All GAs and TAs pay Fair Share dues, which means 2.25% of your paycheck will be deducted each month. These dues cover the operating costs of the union so we can protect graduate employees' rights and bargain a fair contract. Last time, we bargained for a pay raise in addition to a percentage contribution to health care fees. The union also has two full-time staff members who can answer your questions and ensure that the contract is followed in your workplace.

I am here on an F-1 or J-1 visa; should I be worried about my visa status if I join the union?

No, you should not be worried. It is recognized by international, national, and state law that every person has the right to join a union. As such, there can be no legal ramifications for joining a union, and your visa status cannot be changed because of your union membership.

What are the major issues currently affecting international employees?

A major issue affecting international employees is tuition waiver taxation. As part of your union contract, each GA and TA receives a tuition waiver, which means that they don't have to pay their tuition. However, the IRS taxes GAs' tuition waivers because they are considered "fringe benefits." Because international employees pay a higher rate for out-of-state tuition, their tuition waivers are taxed more. Tuition differentials have also been a major concern. Some departments, many with a high number of international employees, require additional tuition costs that are not covered by the tuition waiver; the university claims that this is due to higher operating costs in these departments.

What are we doing about these issues?

We believe that this taxation is unfair and have requested that the University of Illinois assess GAs' tuition as if they were in-state so that there will be a lower level of taxation. We are continuously looking for new ways to address this issue with the university administration, in addition to bargaining over how the tax is implemented.

Regarding tuition differentials (TDs), we have met with administrators to suggest that TDs be capped at a certain amount and that TDs that are currently waived should continue to be.

As the administration looks into these alternatives, the GEO continues to advocate for changes, both in TD-specific meetings as well as at the bargaining table.