

Fellow workers,

We have a big year ahead of us. Our working conditions are at stake as we approach the 2017 Contract negotiation year. GEO Staff and Leadership will have to spend the summer and fall actively listening, organizing, mobilizing and energizing grad workers to lay the foundations for a strong bargaining campaign. We are in a solid position to improve our working and living conditions as long as we sustain the organizing power we have built and grow our Union in the spaces where we still lack representation and participation.

As we begin the long process of preparing for and negotiating our Collective Bargaining Agreement, I strongly believe we can position ourselves to win pay increases, improvements to our health plans, strengthen our work protections, regulate our overwork, increase our overall Membership and reduce the Administration's purposeful erosion of our bargaining unit. We must remain vigilant to ensure we have sufficient people power to reject concessionary bargaining, push for genuine social justice-oriented contract language and ensure we operate from a place of demonstrable strength.

Our Union is strong because we have put together a capable, efficient and hard working Staff and Leadership team. As a team, we have been able to support the formation of new caucuses, promote Union engagement within programs and departments that had previously been isolated and increase the participation of rank and file members in leadership positions. I have been part of a sustained push to develop our Stewards network and empower members to defend their rights as workers. As Co-Chair this past year, I have learned that our strength is in our collective organizing, our power is in our solidarity with one another and the way forward is in our ability to build and sustain coalitions.

My aim in seeking re-election is in using what I have learned this past year and channeling it into a clear and precise organizing plan that will center the most disenfranchised, support the most marginalized and protect the dignity of all workers on campus. I am running for Co-Chair because I can help GEO build upon its tradition of social justice activism, strong contract enforcement and community coalition building.

As a PhD student of Latin American Literature I know the challenges and the rewards of being a teacher. As an organizer, I have had the chance to see the hard work that our people do in the laboratories and dormitories. Our labor is what makes UMass run and because of this reason, GEO members deserve a Union that will fight for their dignity and respect in the classrooms, in the labs in the dorms and at the bargaining table.

I will not waver from my commitment to our Union and our need for social justice. Along with a passionate team and your support, I know we can grow and sustain an organization that protects workers, grants us necessary benefits and builds upon our long legacy of graduate student worker power.

Peace and solidarity,
Santiago Vidales