

Dear new Graduate Students,

Welcome to Yale. Aside from the usual orientation sessions, information collecting, and receptions, your first week in the Yale graduate school likely included something you didn't expect. Based upon prior years, students involved in a political movement called GESO may have either lead you to believe that there is *already* a graduate student union at Yale, and that you need to send in your dues, or they may have simply cast themselves as the "in crowd," and asked you to sign your name so that you can be included in their files. The particular form of first-year fraud changes from year to year, but it is likely that GESO has in some way misrepresented themselves or otherwise deceived you -- self-aggrandizing accounts of their accomplishments, misleading statistics, flawed conclusions thereof, and anti-Yale phillipics are all standard GESO fare.

[GESO](#) stands for Graduate Employee and Student Organization. The name reflects the ostensible conviction of individuals in the organization -- that they are university employees **and** graduate students. From the late 1980's to 1991, the group called itself TA Solidarity. In 1991 they changed their name to GESO and joined forces with the established labor unions at Yale -- Locals 34, 35 and 217 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE I.U.). These unions represent clerical, technical, service, and maintenance workers at Yale. The nature of the "joint force" to date is that the established unions have contributed [over \\$500,000](#) and [other unionizing resources](#) to GESO. The HERE I.U. Locals' interest in encouraging a graduate student labor union is the prospect of holding graduate students as leverage when conducting their own contract negotiations.

GESO, however, remains a nebulous entity. Because Yale is a private institution, labor matters are governed by the [Nation Labor Relations Board](#). This is a five-membered extension of the federal executive branch which administers the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (i.e. a federal agency which interprets and enforces the NLRA). Numerous cases brought to the NLRB in the 1970s set the precedent that, among other varieties of students, graduate students are principally students in training, not employees, and are therefore not covered as such under the aegis of the NLRB. Precedent against them, GESO's early efforts concentrated on bullying the administration into voluntarily recognizing their manifest right to negotiate the terms for all graduate students. It is important to note that GESO has **never** represented a majority (for years that GESO labor forms LM-2/LM-3 are available) of

all graduate students (appr. 2200 in any given semester), even in 1998 when their dues were "voluntary." It is also important to note that, while other schools ostensibly have "unions", these are at public schools, and are groups organized under their respective state laws only. What these unions represent vary from state to state. It appears that these unions are at least as much a state-legislature lobbying outfit as much as a labor union per se. In many cases these unions do not do not have the right to strike.

GESO's attempts to bully the administration have taken various forms, from [theatrical displays](#), to [demonstrating on President Levin's lawn](#), to [creating a scene](#) at an unrelated reception attended by Dean Hockfield, to marches, to outright attempts at striking. Their largest attempt at striking occurred at the end of the Fall 1995 semester, known as the ["grade strike"](#). This "job action" was voted for by a "strong" majority of the GESO membership (In 1995 GESO reported 550 members to the federal government). Approximately 90 TAs participated, by withholding their students' grades from the faculty, administration, and students. It is not clear why only 90 people participated. It is possible that only 90 of the members voting were actually teaching that semester. This is a reasonable postulate, as only 30% percent of graduate students are teaching at any given point in time. This example demonstrates how GESO's attempt at twisting definitions of graduate student roles to fit labor-management models fail.

GESO's tactics also include inviting students to a one-sided "discussion" over coffee, and/or visits to homes, labs, and offices in attempts to pitch their religion -- even in East Haven, beginning with "we were just in your neighbourhood ...". GESO's over-aggressive recruiting tactics have sparked a number of reactions ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)). From 1993 (the first year GESO filed with the U.S. Dept. of Labor) to 1997, GESO membership steadily dwindled from just over 600 to 378 (graduate students typically number 2100-2400). In 1998, however, they played the credit card introductory offer trick -- they offered membership only for the signing of a union card -- payment of dues was voluntary. It evidently worked, because they boasted higher numbers in 1998, at least 35% of the graduate student population. GESO has not been able to sustain the increase, however, as their most recently reported number is 750. It is difficult to use this number as a gauge for actual GESO sympathy, as we have to assume that the number is still significant when one subtracts from this total those "members" who signed just to stop the harassment.

In spite of the continuing lack of support, particularly financial support,

by a majority of graduate students, GESO's efforts continue unabated, fueled instead by the HERE I.U. and local union support. A majority of this outside money is paid to individual GESO officers and organizers as "salary". At first glance, this expenditure appears questionable. It is, however, justified if one accepts the premise that GESO individuals should be compensated for their efforts, in spite of their attempts to appear as martyrs for "abused" graduate students. Generally the GESO coffee or house-visit features an experienced organizer and an understudy badgering a recalcitrant student to join the fold. It is only by approaching students individually that GESO is able to succeed, as GESO's miserable display at the 1998 [town meeting](#), as well as their refusal to participate in the [planned 2001 town meeting](#) attests. By inviting or visiting only one student at a time, GESO is assured of outnumbering their competition, even though they constitute a minority in the larger picture. This method also prevents marks from hearing opposing arguments from other students during the forum. Also, the GESO rhetoric must be carefully tailored such that independent students are told what they evidently need to hear to forfeit their resistance. Students must be approached individually in order for contradictions to go unnoticed. As with any campaign promise, GESO is free to promise anything that it sees fit without being held accountable to anything but public opinion after it reneges on those promises. It is evidently up to the listener to realize that individuals in GESO can make any promises and assurances they want, as GESO is not currently in the position to fulfill those promises.

There are currently several amorphous collections of students who are concerned about or overtly oppose the unionization proposal. These students write letters to the editor of the Yale Herald and Yale Daily News upon their own volition, lend words of support to <http://www.yale.edu/gaso>, or simply bitch about GESO to others at parties. Attempts to reason with GESO individuals fail owing to the nature of their sponsorship -- the degree of support precludes any rational and free discussion of solutions to alleged graduate student woes.

We would love to simply encourage you to take your time, take other people's take on reality, including ours, under advisement, and eventually make your own conclusions from you own experiences about what form of graduate student representation is appropriate. It is unclear whether you will have the luxury of such time. A similar situation occurred NYU, where the UAW won a vote among graduate students to unionize. A vote to unionize at Yale would be decided by a simple majority of those voting. If this majority favors unionization,

every graduate student will be subject to the terms negotiated by those few graduate students who think they understand administration of higher education better than Yale.

Please, critically review all the information you can so long as your patience lasts, do what ever you can to make an informed decision, and please vote if and when an election is held.