GRADUATE LABOR ORGANIZING OVER TIME
STATE OF FLORDA | UNITED STATES

SETTING THE STAGE

After the Florida Education Association (FEA) integrated in 1966, there was a surge in organizing in Florida due to anger at persisting segregation and poor wages for teachers. This resulted in the first statewide teachers' strike in the country in 1968.

1960S

BEGINNINGS OF CHANGE

The first Graduate Assistant Union was formed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1969, the Teaching Assistants' Association. Still, no national legal framework existed to allow graduate students to organize or bargain collectively.

1960S

UF PAVES THE WAY

University of Florida graduate students organized the Graduate Student Union (GSU) to address grad worker issues such as rising tuition costs, racial and sexual discrimination, and addressing grievances. In 1975, GSU tried to affiliate with United Faculty of Florida (UFF) but was stymied by the Board of Regents until 1980.

1970S

THE MOVEMENT

In 1974, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that it would not grant graduate students the right to unionize, as it only applied to "employees," not students. Despite this, University of Michigan GAs won a contract in 1975, followed by University of Oregon in 1976, University of Florida and the University of South Florida in 1980.

1970S

GROWING THE MOVEMENT

In 1980, UF and USF were both certified by the Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC) as part of UFF. In 1981, the state legislature passed a bill exempting grad workers from being considered employees, but this was overturned by the Florida District Court of Appeal in 1982, returning the right for grad workers to collectively bargain! In 1986, the Florida legislature waived grad worker tuition.

1980S

TURNING POINT

The amount of unionized graduate student employees nearly tripled from 1990 to 2001, from appx. 14,060 to 38,750. In 2000, the NLRB ruled in favor of NYU Graduate Student Employees, giving GAs "employee" status and collective bargaining rights to private university graduate students. 2001 was declared the "Year of the TA" by journalist Scott Smallwood, following victories at NYU, Temple University, and Michigan State University. In 2004, the NLRB reversed its decision, revoking the ability of private university grad students to collectively bargain in their decision against Brown University GAs.

1990S-2000S

ACHIEVING STABILITY

In 1997, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) established a Graduate Assistants United (GAU). In 2009, Florida State University followed suit.

1990S-2000S

FIGHTING TO REMAIN

After many attempts throughout the 2010s, in 2023 a wide-reaching anti-union law endangered all GAU chapters in the state. Since then, each chapter has secured enough cards to continue fighting for 60%.

2010-PRESENT

PRESENT

In 2014, Graduate Student Unions at Columbia University and the The New School filed petitions to overturn the *Brown* decision, which was successfully overturned in 2016 when the NLRB ruled in favor of the Columbia University Graduate Student Union petition. This led to a resurgence in GA organizing; however, nine universities including Brown University filed amicus briefs challenging the *Columbia* decision arguing that the decision impinges on the academic freedom of the universities. Many universities have taken great measures to oppose GA unionization efforts in their campuses as a result.

2016-2020

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS