

Last week, we updated you on Michigan Employment Relation Commission's (MERC) decision to consider revisiting their 1981 ruling that excluded GSRAs from GEO membership. This is a big milestone along the way to getting an election for GSRAs to decide for ourselves whether we want to form a union.

We've had questions from many people about how all of the recent developments we've described fit together. Last week's good news didn't happen overnight; there have been many small steps along the way. This week, we want to recap the history of this campaign.

### **Restoring GSRAs' Collective Bargaining Rights: A Timeline**

- Late 2010: GSRAs seek GEO's support for restoring our collective bargaining rights. GEO members make supporting GSRAs a primary goal.

What this means: Grad employees who had been both GSIs and GSRAs began asking the question: "Why do I have some protections when I'm a GSI, and not when I'm a GSRA?" GSRAs and GEO members came together to begin assessing how GSRAs as a whole felt about unionization.

- Spring 2011: GEO files a petition with MERC to call for a union election for GSRAs, with the support of a strong majority of the 2200 GSRAs on campus.

What this means: This vote is a definitive statement by the Regents that the work of GSRAs is vital to the University--and that it *is* both work and study. Since under Michigan law, all employees have the right to vote on whether they wish to unionize, this recognition provides further support for a GSRA union election.

- 15 September 2011: MERC denies the petition and asks for more information about what makes GSRAs employees now.

What this means: in September, MERC decided not to revisit its 1981 decision that GSRAs were not workers. Because MERC did not recognize GSRAs as employees, it did not order a union election to be held. MERC did, however, state that it would consider evidence of changed working conditions that would trigger a review of its 1981 ruling.

- 3 October 2011: GEO explains to MERC why GSRAs are employees.

What this means: GEO filed a stipulation with MERC documenting the changed status of GSRAs. Evidence for this changed status includes: changes in the University's employment structure that made GSRAs crucial to the University's day-to-day

functioning; the requirement that all GSRAs take an employee loyalty oath; and the fact that GSRAs receive W-2 forms and pay taxes on their income.

- 17 October 2011: UM states that it does not disagree with GEO's statements about why GSRAs are workers.

What this means: The University was offered a chance to respond to the stipulation that GEO filed on October 3 to provide an explanation for why GSRAs are workers. In this response, the University did not deny the accuracy of any of the information GEO provided.

- 8 November 2011: MERC decides that the reasons why GSRAs are employees make sense, and that it will now decide if there is sufficient reason to revisit the 1981 MERC decision.

What this means: MERC seems likely to order a hearing on the merits of GEO's petition when it meets on December 13. This hearing will be a fact-finding mission to determine GSRAs' employment status and will inform MERC's future decision on a GSRA election.

- 30 November 2011: Michigan's Attorney General Bill Schuette files a motion to intervene with MERC with the express intent of preventing an election.

What this means: the Attorney General is asserting that he has the right to participate in the MERC hearing process and present evidence about why he thinks GSRAs should not be allowed to form a union. No third party who does not represent a group of employees has ever been granted standing for such an intervention in the past, and no elected official has ever sought to intervene in the MERC administrative hearing process in this way before now. MERC will have to decide whether the Attorney General's office will be granted standing.

- From now until the hearing and election: GSRAs continue to work with GEO members to spread the word about an upcoming election and answer questions that new GSRAs have about what it means to have a union and why many GSRAs are seeking to form one.

What this means: Reaching out is really important, because there will be many more GSRAs hired before the election, and we need to make sure everyone is informed about what having a union means.

We hope this helps you feel up to speed on everything that is going on! We are always happy to speak with you in person about any questions you have. Please contact us at [gsrcampaign@geo3550.org](mailto:gsrcampaign@geo3550.org). (Also, you can visit us at [www.umgsra.org](http://www.umgsra.org), friend us on Facebook—we're UM GEO—and follow us on Twitter, where we're @geo3550.)

Yours truly,  
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GSRA Campaign Organizing Committee Chair

Samantha Montgomery  
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P.S. We just got new GEO shirts in and we'd be happy to send someone over to your department to drop one off! Send us an email and let us know your size and the best place/time of day to find you.