

Graduate Student Senate

Resolution 9.10.2026.2

In Support of Graduate Student Workers and a Contract with the Graduate Student Union

Sponsor(s): Collin Coil, President of the GSS

Date Introduced: September 17, 2026

WHEREAS, Graduate students at the University of Vermont teach undergraduate courses, staff laboratories, mentor students, and produce the scholarship on which UVM's standing as an R1 research university depends, and, as one respondent to the 2026 GSS Survey put it, "Graduate student labor makes this university run"; and

WHEREAS, in October 2023, graduate workers filed a majority petition for union representation with the Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB), and the University responded on November 8, 2023, with a letter to the Vermont Labor Relations Board contesting whether graduate workers are employees at all under the State Employees Labor Relations Act; and

WHEREAS, following hearings in early 2024, the VLRB determined that graduate workers are employees and eligible to organize; and

WHEREAS, the University then moved for reconsideration of the inclusion of pre-doctoral fellows and trainees in the bargaining unit, a motion the Board denied, and the resulting proceedings delayed the representation election until March 2024; and

WHEREAS, in that election graduate workers voted to unionize by a margin of approximately 98 percent, and the unit was certified; and

WHEREAS, in May 2024 the University appealed to the Vermont Supreme Court in a further effort to remove pre-doctoral fellows and trainees from the certified unit; and

WHEREAS, in February 2025 the Vermont Supreme Court remanded the matter to the VLRB, and in September 2025 the Board issued a decision confirming that the appropriate bargaining unit includes all full-time and regular part-time graduate teaching assistants, graduate research assistants, graduate assistants, pre-doctoral trainees and fellows, and all other graduate students employed in academic positions, affecting more than sixty graduate workers each semester; and

WHEREAS, the University has therefore contested the status or composition of the bargaining unit on multiple occasions over years while the underlying question of compensation and working conditions has remained unresolved throughout; and

WHEREAS, records obtained through Vermont public records requests indicate that the University had expended \$989,466.96 through June 2026 on legal or consulting services in connection with these proceedings and its contract negotiations with the graduate union, a sum that could instead have funded meaningful improvements to graduate stipends, health coverage, or housing support; and

WHEREAS, bargaining opened on August 27, 2024, and, after forty-two (42) bargaining sessions and more than two years at the table, graduate workers remain without a first contract; and

WHEREAS, the GSU filed an unfair labor practice charge against the University in September 2025, alleging bad-faith bargaining and delay tactics; and

WHEREAS, thirty-nine (39) members of the Vermont Legislature signed a letter in 2026 calling on the University to reach a fair contract with its graduate workers, an increase from twenty-three (23) signatories in 2025, reflecting growing public concern about the University's conduct in these negotiations; and

WHEREAS, the 2026 GSS Survey of 192 graduate students found that 66.8 percent agree an unexpected expense would cause them serious financial hardship, 64.2 percent worry about their finances regularly, and only 29.7 percent agree that their health insurance is affordable, against 43.8 percent who disagree; and

WHEREAS, that same survey found a median reported housing cost of \$1,132 per month, that cost was named by 88.1 percent of respondents reporting any housing challenge, and that 13.2 percent of respondents cannot reliably afford three nutritious meals throughout the month; and

WHEREAS, housing affordability and financial stress were the two most frequently raised themes in open-ended survey comments, and students wrote plainly about their circumstances, including one who reported working an additional thirty hours per week to meet basic expenses; and

WHEREAS, the unresolved contract is itself a source of harm that students named directly, with one respondent writing that "Prioritizing a GSU contract is my top priority for my and others' well-being"; and

WHEREAS, international graduate students, who constitute 17.7 percent of survey respondents, face additional visa-related costs and uncertainty during a period of federal instability, and a contract offers durable protections that discretionary practice does not; and

WHEREAS, UVM's strategic plan, *Green, Gold, and Bold*, commits under Pillar 4 to "fully support

the university's most crucial asset: its people," and to "Champion Our Campus Community" by strengthening collaboration, shared governance, and "a sense of belonging and mattering across the university"; and

WHEREAS, Pillar 3 of that plan commits the University to improving affordability and to increasing student access to resources related to food, housing, emergency aid, and health, and Pillar 1 commits it to prioritizing student well-being, with the plan expressly defining "student" to include graduate students; and

WHEREAS, the plan further commits the University to "invest strategically and transparently in people," and the sums directed toward litigation over whether graduate workers are workers are difficult to reconcile with that commitment; and

WHEREAS, the University's Our Common Ground values of respect, integrity, openness, justice, and responsibility apply to its conduct as an employer of graduate students as much as to its conduct as their institution of learning; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Graduate Student Senate affirms that graduate teaching assistants, research assistants, graduate assistants, and pre-doctoral fellows and trainees are workers whose labor is essential to UVM's teaching and research mission, and stands in support of the Graduate Student Union in its effort to secure a first contract; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the GSS calls upon the University to finalize negotiations and execute a first contract without further delay, and to commit publicly to a good-faith timeline for doing so; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the GSS urges the parties to reach terms that address the conditions documented in the 2026 GSS Survey, including compensation aligned with the cost of living in the Burlington area, the addition of vision and dental coverage, protections against harassment and discrimination, and support for international graduate students; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the GSS requests that the University disclose, on a regular basis, its cumulative expenditures on outside counsel and consultants engaged in connection with graduate labor relations, consistent with its stated commitment to transparent resource stewardship; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this resolution be transmitted to the President of the University, the Provost, the Board of Trustees, the Dean of the Graduate College, and that it be published to the graduate student body through the GSS newsletter.

Collin Coil

Adopted by the Graduate Student Senate on: October 15, 2026
President, Graduate Student Senate