



Know Your Rights  
as a Graduate  
Student



# Graduate Students have RIGHTS

- Students/employees who are undergoing undue stress or hardship are NOT effective workers, learners, researchers, writers, etc.
- It is in the best interest of EVERYONE to reach out and improve your situation
- We are *allowed* to complain about our current situations and to seek changes

# Up the Chain of Command- Who to talk to?

- When in doubt, don't go alone- bring another colleague with you!
- Many issues are easier dealt with when they first arise- don't wait until it's too late
- We have the right to ask our professors, advisers, employers, mentors, etc. to change a situation

# Up the Chain of Command- Who to talk to?

- Talk to your direct supervisor:
  - Work/Life boundaries
  - Communication
  - Mentorship
  - Taking time off for appointments/mental health/etc.
- If your direct supervisor doesn't rectify the problem or you feel as though talking to them will result in a worse situation:
- Go up the chain of command

# Up the Chain of Command- Who to talk to?

- Director of Graduate Studies:
  - These conversations can happen even if you're not ready or unlikely to make an official complaint
  - Ask about anonymity- if you just need extra perspective, these conversations do not have to go on any record
- Bring another student with you! Talk to your department grads as a group!
- GSO Sub-orgs often can coordinate town-hall style meetings if a problem is prevalent among students (particularly in cases of work/life boundaries)

# Up the Chain of Command- Who to talk to?

- Chair of your department or Head of your area of study:
- Typically reserved for situations that haven't been addressed through your DoGS
- Issues that are prevalent in a department: a particular professor is a repeat offender/ an issue with work spaces/ unclear communication or lack of transparency
- Chairs and DoGS have the ability to find new mentors/advisors for students who find themselves in conflict
- The more students who can join together, the better!

# Up the Chain of Command- Who to talk to?

- Particular issues (legality, contract violation, academic honesty) need to be dealt with by the appropriate offices first
- Unaddressed issues can continue to be escalated
- These often are addressed based on what type of issue you are having

# Academics

- Academic progress is one area where you have the least amount of rights as a student- have conversations with mentors and professors before you find yourself facing termination or severance for poor academic performance



# Academics- Degree Progression

- Examples: your mentor/advisor/supervisor is actively taking steps to stop you from reaching your milestones, often with the goal of keeping you around longer
- This is a situation where you can file a grievance with the graduate school
- These are NOT for interpersonal conflict, but rather situations where harm has been caused in your progress and you are seeking resolution
- Grievances always start at the department level- this should be addressed with the DoGS and Chair- inaction on their part means you file w/ the graduate school

# Academics- Degree Progression

- Grievances: Keep records. Keep emails. You will likely need to show these as evidence. As a general tip: always ask for things in writing or reiterate in-person conversations over email for your records.
- Grievances are to be written to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School (Gretchen Mahler: [gmahler@binghamton.edu](mailto:gmahler@binghamton.edu))
- Can be delivered in person: Cooper Admin: room 109
- The appeal must be in writing and no longer than two pages (single-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt font, one inch margins).  
Evidentiary documents may be attached
- [Grievances](#)

# Academics- Types of Temporary Leave

- You have the right to have a temporary leave of absence from your program
- Leave of Absence = you are not registered for classes and are not required to make progress towards your degree. Fees/tuition can also be waived during your period of leave

# Leave of Absence

- For Justified Illness, Hardship or for Military Deployment
- Up to a year- awarded 6 months at a time (more can be offered for military leave)
- Medical Leave *can* be granted after the semester starts, but only with correct documentation
- If possible, submit requests 1 month prior to the start of the semester
- Department must first be notified, and must sign off. Then the graduate school. ISSS must be notified for international students
- A doctor's note may be required to submit to Decker
- [Leave of Absence](#)

# Employment and Labor

- TAs and GAs are employed by NY State, are covered by a contract and are represented by GSEU
- Graduate Students who are adjuncts are covered by UUP
- RAs are not represented by a union at Binghamton University, though they are represented by GSEU at Stony Brook University
- Student Assistants and other Student employees are not covered by a union

# Employment and Labor- Benefits

- ALL GAs and TAs on a state payment line, regardless of 10 hour position or 20 hour position received full benefits from GSEU
- Student Assistants: These positions are not unionized and do not have a contract- these positions leave graduate students vulnerable and without benefits- take note when applying for a Student Assistant position that these are NOT GA/TA lines
- Adjuncts: 4 credit hours- due to NYS laws, benefits are not required to be offered. However, talk to other adjuncts. If enough students are upset, this can be changed
- RAs- most RA contracts offer benefits- always check your contracts before signing!

# Employment and Labor- GAs and TAs

- Your contract is legally binding:
- Work hours- 10 for half assistantships, 20 for full: if you feel you are required to go over your hours for the work assigned, keep track of your hours.
- Protection Against Discipline: Weingarten Rights
- GSEU will help you handle payroll, employment paperwork and other administrative issues: [GSEU.Bing@gmail.com](mailto:GSEU.Bing@gmail.com)

# WEINGARTEN RIGHTS

*If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated or have any effect on my personal working conditions, I respectfully request my union representative, officer or steward to be present at this meeting. Without union representation, I choose not to participate in this discussion.*



# Employment and Labor- Adjuncts

- Adjunct Professors/graduate students are represented through UUP
- President: Alan Wang- [Awang@uupmail.org](mailto:Awang@uupmail.org) or 607-777-3104
- Benita Roth (academics): [broth@binghamton.edu](mailto:broth@binghamton.edu)
- Contact them for contract violations, cases of discipline or for questions regarding your contract or work assignments

# Employment and Labor- Discipline: Unions

- GAs, TAs and Adjuncts have protection against discipline and termination
- If you are asked into a meeting where you are at all concerned that you will be disciplined or terminated or that any actions in that meeting may lead to such, CONTACT YOUR UNION REP (GSEU: [GSEU.bing@gmail.com](mailto:GSEU.bing@gmail.com), UUP: [Awang@uupmail.org](mailto:Awang@uupmail.org) or [broth@binghamton.edu](mailto:broth@binghamton.edu) ) - you have the right to not go into that meeting until a Union Rep can be present
- Anyone pressuring you to not contact your union representative is a large red flag. You cannot legally face retaliation or threats for asking for a rep.

# Employment and Labor- Discipline: Non-Union

- RAs and other non-unionized employees do not have legal protection against discipline, however:
- It may be very helpful to request that a colleague can join you in such meetings and has lead to resolutions at other job sites that are non-union
- If at all possible, record what is being said, and request that everyone is sent to you in writing
- Even without a union, you are protected against discrimination and retaliation

# Rights of All Graduate Students

- Discrimination and harassment
- As a graduate student, you are protected against discrimination based on a protected category, such as race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, disability, marital status or sexual orientation.
- If you have been discriminated against, you can file a complaint online with the DEI website- if you are a union represented employee, you can get assistance in doing so by your union representative.
- Documentation is very important as are witness accounts.
- <https://www.binghamton.edu/centers/mrc/programs/bias.html>

# Rights of All Graduate Students

- Harassment and sexual assault
- These fall under Title IV violations- a complaint can be made on the DEI and Title IX website. Union Representatives can help!
- Again, Binghamton University does not have a good track record here!
- Getting other students to band together through your department, union, or through GSO can be incredibly helpful for seeking change
- WSU (Women Student Union) can be a helpful resource for those having faced harassment
- Title IX: <https://www.binghamton.edu/services/title-ix/contact.html>
- Sexual Harassment Anonymous Reporting Form: <https://www.binghamton.edu/police/sexual-assault-anonymous-report.html>

# Resources Available for ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS

- GSO- The Graduate Student Organization is available to help graduate students with academic and grad life issues
- EAP (Employee Assistance Program): A referral source open to ALL grad employees- but also will not turn down non employed graduate students-
  - Assessment, consultation and referral
- Office of the Ombudsman: A confidential, independent and impartial service for all students at Binghamton University- talking through your options, conflict resolution, next steps, etc.
  - 607-777-2388 or [ombudsman@binghamton.edu](mailto:ombudsman@binghamton.edu) but due to confidentiality, they ask you leave no identifying information about yourself- only to set up a meeting

# Resources for International Students

- International Student and Scholar Services: Can answer questions about internships, employment, immigration, and health insurance  
<https://www.binghamton.edu/international/student-scholar-services/contact-us.html#L&C>
- ISSS is located in the Old Champlain Building -Floor 1R, Room 142
- ISSS Main Office 607-777-2510
  - Health Insurance: [intl.insure@binghamton.edu](mailto:intl.insure@binghamton.edu)
  - Employment: [intlwork@binghamton.edu](mailto:intlwork@binghamton.edu)
  - Extensions of Stay: [intl.extend@binghamton.edu](mailto:intl.extend@binghamton.edu)
  - All other inquiries: [iss@binghamton.edu](mailto:iss@binghamton.edu)

# Key Take-Away

- Graduate school is difficult, but that doesn't mean we have to be silent about mistreatment
- There are a lot of people who are on your side if you seek them out/ are not afraid to speak up
- If you can do something with another student/colleague, it is almost always preferable to going alone
- HAVE IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WORK AND SCHOOL with your peers. You may be surprised to learn how not alone you are



# Student Questions?

- Stipends and minimum wage:
  - If you are paid a wage, you must be paid at least minimum wage- you also will pay social security and medicare taxes
  - If you are paid a stipend, it's typically upfront rather than weekly/biweekly and can be less than minimum wage- you will not pay social security or medicare taxes
- Going online for classes post-COVID-19 vaccine FDA approval:
  - This is unfortunately not up to us- the University is doing what it can to make sure classes stay in person. If you want this to change, speak with your colleagues as well as your professors- the more people the better!