

GESO
MEMBERSHIP
HANDBOOK

2006 – 2007

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I. Introduction

As chair of GESO, the Graduate Employees and Students Organization, I am proud to present our new Member's Handbook. It is intended for existing and prospective members to learn more about the goals, history, and activities of our organization.

GESO is a powerful force for democracy on campus, and a leader in the national movement of intellectual workers. We have helped to build a national community of academics dedicated to upholding the highest standards in teaching and research, protecting academic freedom and promoting



democracy in institutions of higher learning. This is no easy task: building consensus, persuading skeptics, organizing large numbers, and remaining participatory and democratic as well as unified and powerful is an enormous challenge for a union. I believe that the members and organizers of GESO have consistently met these challenges, and contained within this handbook are various ways that interested members can shape the direction of their union.

In addition to the national academic labor movement, GESO works together with the other recognized and unrecognized unions on campus: Local 34 (clerical and technical employees), Local 35 (maintenance and service employees), and District 1199 (employees at Yale-New Haven Hospital). For graduate students, our organizing efforts have led to a doubling in the last six years of stipends for incoming students, free health care, enhanced teacher training, faculty diversity initiatives, dissertation fellowships, a medical leave policy, and visa reform legislation. We continue to advocate for affordable childcare, pay equity, and the fair treatment of underrepresented students.

I believe that we have a very exciting year ahead of us, and I hope you will join me and the rest of the members of GESO as we work to make Yale University the best possible place for innovative and dedicated scholars and high-quality teaching and research. For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.geso.org>.

In Solidarity,

Melissa Mason

*Chair of the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO)
Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science and African American Studies*

Why do graduate employees need a union?

For over a decade, graduate students and employees at Yale have attempted to secure meaningful representation in the decision-making processes that affect our lives. Several forms of graduate student representation have been proposed and implemented in the past, including the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, the Executive Committee (an advisory body consisting of graduate school associate deans, faculty, and graduate students) and the Graduate Student Assembly.

While all of these groups have at times afforded graduate students the opportunity to articulate concerns to the Yale administration, members of GESO working together as a mobilized union - with petitions, demonstrations, and job actions - have consistently produced significant improvements in the quality of life of graduate students and their families. GESO seeks to secure these positive changes and future improvements in a binding agreement with the administration that would govern such areas of graduate school policy as the teaching fellows program, health care benefits, leave policies, and grievance procedures.

Union recognition and a binding contract would allow graduate employees to sit down with the Yale administration and collectively bargain solutions to the problems that we all face. These solutions would be written down in an enforceable contract to the benefit of everyone in the Yale community.

Mission Statement of GESO

1. To protect, promote and advance the interests of graduate students and employees at Yale University, and to uphold the dignity of our work and scholarship. To ensure that the university provides the resources and services necessary to do our work. To ensure the continued excellence of teaching and research at Yale.
2. To ensure that graduate students have an active role in the university's decision-making processes that affect graduate student life.
3. To maintain the vision, leadership, and organization necessary to be an effective, democratic, and united organization.
4. To form a union in affiliation with the Federation of University and Hospital Employees, affiliated with UNITE HERE International Union.
5. To join with other students, faculty and workers at Yale—and with the greater New Haven community—to promote justice at Yale and to encourage the university to be a good citizen of the community.
6. To fight against racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination at Yale University.

II. Structure

How does GESO work, and where do I fit in?

GESO is a member-driven organization with a variety of avenues for member involvement. Beyond signing an initial membership card, member participation is entirely voluntary. However, GESO is only as strong as its members, and all members are encouraged to be a part of any or all of the following activities and committees:

Organizers

As a union, we rely on the leadership of rank-and-file organizers to help steer the direction of our union campaigns and develop membership solidarity. The organizers are responsible for talking with the other members and non-members in their department. These conversations are intended to increase the union's membership, encourage members' participation in campaigns and decision-making, provide a space to discuss ways to improve the department and the academy, and create strong relationships among graduate employees as part of a mobilized academic community.

Departmental Organizing Committees

GESO also relies on the local leadership of Departmental Organizing Committees (OC), which are comprised of a department's coordinators and organizers, to spearhead departmental initiatives on the ground. These individuals communicate with the members, non-members, faculty, and departmental administrators, devise departmental issue campaigns, and enact union-wide programs in the department. These committees meet weekly.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee (CC) is GESO's main leadership body. The CC consists of department coordinators elected annually by the members in their departments and meets weekly so that the coordinators can discuss strategies for union-wide campaigns, share experiences from their home departments, and participate in organizer training. The coordinators vote on proposals to make to the wider membership, such as semiannual membership meeting agendas, major campaign initiatives, and strike votes.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee (SC) is comprised of coordinators who are responsible for the day-to-day organizing in more than one department. They typically organize a number of coordinators and attend several different departmental OC meetings; they also sit on one or more standing committees. The SC meets twice a week and sets the agenda for the CC.

Staff

Since 2000, GESO's organizing activities have been facilitated by a small staff of longstanding rank-and-file leaders.

Standing Committees

GESO's organizational structure also includes Standing Committees, which are open to rank-and-file members and leaders at all levels. Each committee has a Chair, who is elected annually by the union membership.

The International Students Organizing Committee (ISOC) treats issues of concern to graduate students from outside the United States. These issues have included funding security, pay equity, English language training, free health care for dependents and visa reform. In the fall of 2005, ISOC filed a class-action grievance protesting a pattern of discrimination against Chinese graduate scholars at Yale. The grievance, signed by a majority of Chinese graduate students, resulted in the reinstatement of one Chinese researcher's student status and the creation of a Graduate School committee for international student issues.

Huaping Tang

Molecular and Cellular Developmental Biology



I am a 5th year graduate student in MCDB and I joined the union when I first came to campus, because I found out that GESO was fighting for visa reform to make it easier for me to travel in and out of the country as an international student. I found out that winning a union could mean

a fair grievance procedure, secure funding, and better healthcare. GESO's International Students' Committee has worked hard to fight for the rights of Chinese scholars on this campus, and around the country.

The **Committee on Academic Life and Labor** tackles issues related to academic life, including everything from time-to-degree policies to teaching issues. In the Spring of 2006, this committee began an extensive survey on teaching at Yale to explore the working conditions (e.g. hours, sections size, mentoring) of Yale's teaching assistants.

The **Equal Rights and Access Committee** focuses on issues regarding the recruitment and retention of graduate students from traditionally underrepresented groups. This committee has successfully pushed for measures that have increased the diversity of graduate students and faculty at Yale. Within the last year, members of ERAC have also lead a private prison



divestment campaign that resulted in the sale of over \$70 million in stock from Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) by Yale's primary endowment manager, Farallon Capital Management.

The **Healthcare Committee** seeks to improve graduate employee medical coverage and childcare options. In the last year, this committee inaugurated a Childcare Working Group with colleagues from Locals 34 & 35, the Graduate Student Assembly, the Graduate and Professional Students' Senate, and the Women's Faculty Forum to secure new childcare policies and practices that are beneficial to the least financially secure of Yale's employees.

The **Communications Committee** oversees the internal communications of our union and works to make decision-making processes within the union more transparent and accessible to members.

The **Personnel Committee** writes job descriptions for and hires union staff.

Membership Meetings

According to our bylaws (PDF version available at www.geso.org), GESO holds at least one formal **membership meeting** a semester, which affords members the opportunity to discuss pressing issues, elect union officers and coordinators, and vote on resolutions and major strategic initiatives. Members' participation in these meetings is crucial to the effective and democratic functioning of the organization.

FYI: Membership Meeting Agenda: Membership meeting agendas are e-mailed to the membership one week before a membership meeting. Generally, the Coordinating Committee sets the agenda for mem-

bership meetings. Should a member wish to add an item to that agenda, however, s/he needs only to draft a proposal and collect signatures from 50 GESO members to do so. Proposals for additions to the membership meeting agenda must be submitted at least one week before the meeting in question.

Special Membership Meetings: Should an individual member see the need for a special meeting of the GESO membership to discuss a particular problem or opportunity, s/he may do so by drafting a proposal for such a meeting, and gathering the signatures of 50 GESO members. Petitions for special membership meetings should be submitted to members of the coordinating committee.

Members Meetings: Organizers have also in the past sponsored informal informational meetings that are open to all members, so that members may learn about and discuss anything from pressing university policy changes to topical seminars related to our work and the state of the academy.

How much are union dues?

GESO members do not currently pay dues. For several years GESO collected dues of \$45 per academic year from each of its members to pay for organizational expenses, but the GESO membership voted to temporarily suspend the collection of dues in April 1998. Organizational expenses are currently covered by our parent union, UNITE HERE. Membership dues will be reinstated thirty days after signing a binding contract with the university administration.

Who can I contact with questions or concerns?

Members with questions, concerns, or complaints should feel free to speak with their departmental organizers. Members, however, can also contact the following members of the GESO Communications Committee:

Amanda Ciafone, American Studies (amanda.ciafone@yale.edu), Chair,
Communications Committee 2005–2006

Carlos Aramayo, History (caramayo@yahoo.com), GESO Staff Organizer
Rossen Djagalov, Comparative Literature (rossen.djagalov@yale.edu)

Sarah Egan, Sociology (sarah.egan@yale.edu)

Daniel Gilbert, American Studies (daniel.gilbert@yale.edu)

Samuel Nelson, Sociology (samuel.nelson@yale.edu)

Annemarie Strassel, Communications Director, Federation of University
Employees (annemarie@yaleunions.org)

A PDF version of GESO's bylaws, which also outlines the structure and practices of our organization, can be downloaded from our website at <https://www.geso.org>.

III. History, Accomplishments and Goals

GESO History

GESO was formed in 1991 by a pre-existing group called TA Solidarity after the administration refused to engage in meaningful discussion with graduate students about proposals to restructure the Graduate School, which cut TA positions by 30%, placed restrictions on teaching for students in the fifth year and beyond, and imposed a six-year registration cut-off. While never leading to formal negotiations, the activism of 1991-1992 helped bring about changes that the Yale administration had long resisted, including a pay raise for TAs, an end to the six-year rule and the establishment of Yale's first teacher-training program.



In 1995, after the Yale administration refused to recognize the will of a majority of graduate teachers in the humanities and social sciences who had signed cards and voted in an election to endorse GESO as their bargaining agent, graduate teachers embarked on a historic grade strike that would bring national attention to this labor dispute at Yale. Following this period of activism, the Yale administration partially responded to several GESO demands by granting—most notably—all incoming Ph.D. students tuition waivers and a standard nine-month stipend.

In the decade that has followed this historic stand, the campaign for graduate employees organizing rights has escalated dramatically. The fight at Yale sparked graduate organizing drives at universities across the country, which intensified when a Clinton-appointed National Labor Relations Board reversed a longstanding legal decision to make graduate teaching and research assistants employees, rather than students, under the National Labor Relations Act. The reversal spawned a wave of organizing activity and a number of union elections at other universities, resulting in the first union contract at a private university, New York University. Additionally, thousands of teachers and researchers at public universities – including the University of California and California State systems, the University of Washington, the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) – won union recognition and contracts in the past few years.

During this period of time, graduate teachers and researchers at Yale have formed a more active partnership with the existing unions at Yale,

Locals 34 & 35, to collectively pressure Yale to grant union status and fair union contracts to all of Yale's employees.

In 2004, a reversal of the 2001 NLRB decision by a Bush-appointed NLRB, stripped graduate teaching assistants of their employee status and organizing protections in this country. Consequently, the undisclosed results of NLRB union elections at Brown, Columbia, and University of Pennsylvania were tossed out, and NYU refused to negotiate a second contract with its graduate teaching assistants. GESO has spearheaded a national movement of graduate employee unions to combat this assault on worker's rights and ensure a second contract for graduate employees at NYU.

In the past year, organizers and members of Yale have worked to secure everything from the equal treatment of international students at Yale to childcare subsidies for working graduate families. Over the last five years, a majority of graduate teachers at Yale have consistently demonstrated their desire for union representation, which has been officially certified by the Connecticut Secretary of State Susan Byciewicz. While the Bush administration has transformed the legal context for our fight, GESO continues to successfully advocate for protections and higher working standards for graduate employees at Yale and beyond.

What has GESO accomplished?

Full Funding. All incoming Ph.D. students now receive a stipend and a full tuition waiver. (For 2006–2007, the stipend level varies by division: \$19,000 and three summers of funding for the humanities and social sciences, and somewhat higher for the natural sciences.) Pay equity between graduate teaching salaries and the nine-month stipend remains an issue for GESO.

Healthcare. In a major victory for graduate students, Yale announced this year that it would not only subsidize the cost of hospitalization for individual Ph.D. students but also 50% of the cost of dependent coverage (a savings of between \$1300 and \$2000, depending on the size of the family). Master's students, and all doctoral students outside of the Graduate School, unfortunately still lack coverage. This year, the Yale Health Plan has substantially upgraded out-of-town health coverage to include all "urgent care"—a key provision for many graduate students with research out of state

Teacher Training. GESO was the original sponsor of Working at Teaching (WAT), the Graduate School's first comprehensive training program.

Fairer Loan Rates for Foreign Nationals. In 2005, Yale retroactively lowered the rate of its International Student Loan program—a loan of last resort, usually (but not exclusively) taken out by foreign nationals. The rate was dropped from 12% to 9%.

Federal Visa Reform. Members of GESO’s International Students Organizing Committee led a national campaign to reform the federal visa policies for international scholars. After travelling to Washington D.C. and spearheading a national petition signed by thousands of scholars and many major American research institutions and organizations, their lobbying efforts resulted in major policy changes for international scholars to lengthen terms and streamline the student visa renewal process.

Fairer Teaching Policies. In response to concerted graduate student requests, most departments in the humanities and social sciences now have instituted open and impartial TA hiring procedures

Childcare Initiatives. Months after GESO published “Baby Blue: Parents and Families in Yale Graduate School” in 2003, the Provost announced that Yale would hire a consultant to look at childcare issues. In November 2005, the administration announced a number of initiatives intended to address childcare needs at Yale, including the development of a childcare center and emergency daycare options.

Student and Faculty Diversity. In March 2001, after four years of GESO lobbying, the University announced the establishment of an Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO). GESO has also produced a number of reports on faculty diversity at Yale and in the Ivy League more broadly and its impact on research priorities and student mentoring. In 2005, the University announced a multi-million dollar initiative to increase the numbers of women and scholars of color in faculty positions at Yale.

	1996	2006
COMPENSATION		
Tuition	\$19,000 paid by 25% of all PhDs	\$0
9-Month Stipend	2 years at \$0 - \$10,000	4 years at \$19,000
Summer Funding	\$0	3 years at \$3,500
Dissertation Fellowship	\$9,250	\$19,000
12-Month Research Salary	\$16,000	\$27,000+
“Typical” Teaching Pay	\$4,970/semester	\$8,280/semester
HEALTHCARE COSTS		
Hospitalization	\$696	\$0
Prescription	\$90	\$420
Single Dependent	Approx. \$1,000	\$1,674*
Children	Approx. \$1,000	\$0

*If a graduate parent pays for the healthcare costs of a spouse or partner, the graduate parent is not required to pay the costs for dependent children.

GESO's Alliances

Local Alliances

As a union, GESO is nationally affiliated with UNITE HERE, and in New Haven, with two other UNITE HERE locals: 34 & 35, the University's clerical, technical, dining hall, and maintenance employees. GESO, Local 34, and Local 35 are autonomous organizations with their own decision-making and leadership structure. The three unions on campus work separately to advocate for their respective memberships while sharing techniques, resources, and other kinds of support. Together with SEIU Local 1199 of hospital workers at Yale-New Haven Hospital, we form a Federation of University and Hospital Employees.

Through the Federation, GESO members can and do take an active role in New Haven affairs. On various issues such as the comprehensive Community Benefits Agreement between Yale-New Haven Hospital and the surrounding Hill neighborhood signed in 2006, GESO has joined CORD (Community Organized for Responsible Development) and CCNE

Gahodery Rodriguez

Ph.D. Candidate, Political Science



Organizer, Connecticut Center for a New Economy (CCNE) and Community Organized for Responsible Development (CORD)

I am a GESO member and organizer, and over the last few summer months I have been a community organizer with CORD (Community Organized for Responsible Development) in New Haven. My community work has progressed naturally from my involvement with the union. GESO has an understanding of "community" that includes not just graduate students, but also other employees at Yale and residents of New Haven. As a GESO member, I have been closely involved with a local fight for a Community Benefits Agreement with Yale-New Haven Hospital. Like many other GESO members, I went to rallies and public hearings to make sure that Yale considered the input and interests of New Haven residents when the hospital looked to expand its facilities in the Hill neighborhood. Now I am working to make sure that Yale follows through on its promise to bring good jobs and opportunities to local residents. New Haven has long been crippled by poverty and joblessness, which has disproportionately affected communities of color in New Haven. My work with CORD will play a critical role in ensuring that people who live and work in New Haven can live with dignity.

(Connecticut Center for New Economy) to ensure that proposed developments in the city maximally benefit its population. GESO is often joined in these campaigns by the Undergraduate Organizing Committee (UOC), an organization of Yale College students.

GESO believes that all workers at Yale have a right to union representation, and we also believe that Yale has a responsibility to the community in which we live and work. Therefore many GESO members have actively supported attempts by workers at the Yale-New Haven hospital to unionize.

In March 2006, an agreement was reached which allows SEIU to begin a union organizing drive without hospital administration interference. Moreover, YNH signed a Community Benefits Agreement, with provisions for local employment and housing. Yale-New Haven Hospital is now proceeding with plans for the development of a Cancer Center, with due regard for the rights of workers, the needs of area residents, and environmental concerns.

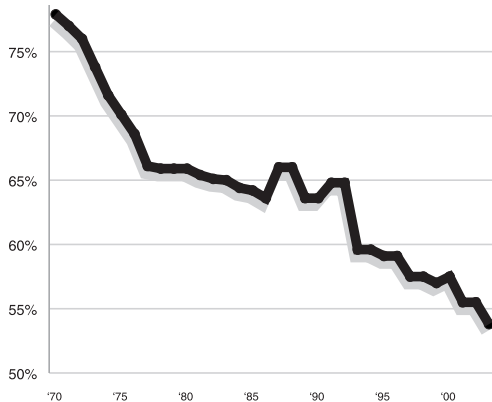
GESO has a key role to play in the larger community. As scholars with a conscience, we can use our position within the university to benefit not just ourselves, but the entire New Haven community. For incoming students, you have entered at a very exciting moment. People who want to have an impact in society beyond the university walls have an opportunity right here in New Haven to be part of a powerful movement for social and economic justice.

The National Academic Labor Movement

Besides its engagement with local, New Haven affairs, GESO also works with a variety of academic and labor organizations nationwide. In the recent past, we have formed particularly strong ties with the graduate employee unions at private universities such as Columbia University and New York University, where we have synchronized labor actions. Through the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions (CGEU), GESO also maintains active relationships with labor unions throughout the national and international systems of higher education.

Most recently, this national movement has

Declining Full-Time Faculty Jobs, 1970-2003
(as percentage of total)



focused its energies on winning a second contract for graduate teachers at New York University. In 2002, The Graduate and Students Organizing Committee (GSOC-UAW Local 2110) at NYU was the first graduate employees union at a private university to win a recognition agreement and a contract. A three-year contract provided NYU graduate employees with a legally binding agreement, a 40% pay increase, and a grievance procedure. However, in 2005, the NYU administration – backed by a Bush-appointed National Labor Relations Board – refused to negotiate a second contract. GSOC members voted to go on strike, and hundreds of GESO members have traveled to New York in the past year to support them at rallies and walk the picket line. GESO has also lent organizational and strategic support to GSOC. Our alliances with other unions at private and public universities across the country are an important part of our larger vision to build a powerful academic labor movement at Yale and beyond.

Dan Gilbert, GESO Co-Chair
American Studies



Underlying GESO's advocacy for graduate employee rights and benefits is the issue of academic governance. The graduate student labor movement continues to grow and evolve because the erosion of tenure and the increasing reliance on part-time and non-tenured faculty in the academy demands an organized response that is national in scope. We are working with a coalition of graduate students across the country to reverse this recent trend even as it has severely reduced the ability of academics at all levels to assert and realize their visions of the university. As we look ahead to the fall, we plan to continue working with the growing coalition of graduate students to achieve our vision of the academy.

**Declaration of Principles For
Collective Bargaining in Higher Education**

We are higher education workers, joined by community members and elected officials, who believe that quality higher education and the right to collective bargaining are essential to building a more just, democratic and equal society.

We are particularly alarmed that access to affordable, quality higher education has diminished and that the right of workers in higher education to unionize and bargain collectively for a living wage has eroded.

We believe that

- All workers at institutions of higher education must have the right to organize and the right to bargain collectively.
- All higher education employers must remain neutral in unionization efforts and be prohibited from using tuition, tax dollars or research funds to fight unionization. Employees should be allowed to form unions through a simple and democratic majority verification card check process.
- Contracting and procurement by higher education institutions, both public and private, must adhere to human rights, prevailing wage and responsible contractor standards.
- Steady employment in higher education is a precondition to providing quality education and services and to guaranteeing a reasonable quality of life to academic employees.

We resolve to work together to achieve these principles to ensure quality higher education and the right to collective bargaining.

GESO/UNITE HERE! Yale University Graduate Employees	GSEU/UAW Columbia University Graduate Employees	Rutgers Council of AAUP Chapters Rutgers University Faculty and Graduate Employees
GET-UP/AFT University of Pennsylvania Graduate Employees	GEU/AFT Michigan State University Graduate Employees	GLU/CWA University of Virginia Graduate Employees
GEO/UAW Local 2322 University of Massachusetts Graduate Employees	UAW Local 4121 University of Washington Academic Student Employees	Bruce Raynor John Wilhelm Co-Presidents, UNITE HERE!
UAW Local 1596 UMass-Boston & Lowell Graduate Employees	Teaching Assistants Association/AFT Local 3220 University of Wisconsin	Ron Gettelfinger President, United Auto Workers
UAW Local 2865 University of California Graduate Employees	CWA Local 1104 SUNY Graduate Employees	Edward McElroy President, American Federation of Teachers
Graduate Assistants United/ United Faculty of Florida University of Florida	TUGSA/AFT Local 6290 Temple University Graduate Employees	Morton Bahr President, Communications Workers of America
MGAA/AFT Local 2169 Univ. of Wisconsin— Milwaukee Graduate Employees	PSC/AFT Local 2334 CUNY Faculty and Staff	John Sweeney President, AFL-CIO
GEO/AFT Local 3550 University of Michigan Graduate Employees	Graduate & Professional Students' Committee of the AAUP	
	UAW Local 2110 New York University Graduate Employees	

IV. Additional Resources

Suggestions for Further Reading

GESO Publications

Full-text copies of GESO's reports can be downloaded from our website at: www.geso.org

"Endowing Injustice: Yale University's Endowment Investment in Corrections Corporation of America." GESO, October 2005.

"The (Un)Changing Face of the Ivy League," GESO, March 1, 2005.

"If you believe Ivy League universities are havens of equity and fairness in a world of expanding inequality, then you must read this report. Thoroughly researched and carefully argued, "The (Un)Changing Face of the Ivy League" makes a devastating case against a university corporate culture that reproduces all the hierarchies of race and gender and generates a growing class of grossly underpaid adjunct faculty. And yet, this is not just another indictment; the authors offer a path to a more equitable and productive educational culture. It is up to us to make this vision of the university a reality."

—Robin D. G. Kelley, Professor of Anthropology and African American Studies, Columbia University

"The Few, the Proud: The State of Diversity at Yale," GESO, December 4, 2003.

"Baby Blue: Parents and Families in Yale Graduate School," GESO, October 23, 2003.

"2 Casual 2 Blue: The Status of Science Research at Yale," GESO, October 17, 2003.

"Blackboard Blues: Yale Teachers on Yale Teaching," GESO, October 10, 2003.

"The Need for Academic Visa Reform and Labor Rights at American Universities," GESO September 23, 2003.

"The (Un)usual Suspects: Yale's Anti-union Campaign Against Graduate Teachers and Researchers," GESO, September 20, 2003.

"The New Face of Science," GESO, February 2003.

"The Postdoc Crisis." GESO, Fall 2001.

"Casual Nation: A report on the academic casualization crisis by the CGEU." Coalition of Graduate Employees Unions, December 2000.

"Casual in Blue: Yale and the Academic Labor Market," GESO, Spring 1999.

Other Resources

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Web Resources

- GESO: <http://www.geso.org>
- Locals 34 & 35: <http://www.yaleunions.org>
- Connecticut Center for a New Economy: <http://www.ctneweconomy.org>
- UNITE HERE: <http://www.unitehere.org>
- Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions: <http://www.cgeu.org>

Contact Information

For more information, you can visit our website at: www.geso.org, or visit the Federation of University Employees' offices at 425 College St. (second and third floors). For questions or comments by e-mail, you can write geso@yaleunions.org.

To join GESO's membership e-mail list, contact annemarie@yaleunions.org. This list is used exclusively to send out the union newsletter and announce major actions and membership meetings.



Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO)

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