

# Graduate Student Union Constitution

## Preamble

We, the members of the Graduate Student Union at Central Michigan University, having been authorized in a democratic election validated by the State of Michigan as the legal representative of our constituency for the purposes of collective bargaining, hereby commit ourselves to organizing graduate student employees at Central Michigan University for the purpose of:

- Fostering participatory democracy in our university and community
- Upholding principles of equality, fairness, justice, mutual respect, and a commitment to quality education
- Helping to shape the university community
- Protecting and promoting the rights of all graduate students at Central Michigan University
- Negotiating on behalf of graduate student employees at Central Michigan University
- Working with organized labor toward common goals

We recognize that the power of the union fundamentally rests in its membership, and it is through our collective action that we are all empowered. Our union derives its strength from the great diversity of talents and skills that our members possess, and from this great diversity we draw the strength to improve our living conditions, our working conditions, our university, and our community.

It is in pursuit of these goals that we establish this Constitution.

## Article I: Name

The name of this union shall be the Graduate Student Union.

## Article II: Affiliation

This organization shall be affiliated with AFT Michigan, American Federation of Teachers, and the AFL-CIO.

## Article III: Anti-Discrimination

No member shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, creed, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, ancestry, marital or parental status, age, gender, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, veteran status, height, weight, disability (including HIV status), political affiliation or belief, and membership in any social or political organization. The union shall encourage at all levels the participation of women, people of color, international students, and representatives of all major colleges.

## Article IV: Membership

### 1. Definitions

**Regular Members** Those graduate students of Central Michigan University who are included in the collective bargaining unit and pay regular dues.

**Associate Members** Those graduate students at Central Michigan University who are not part of the collective bargaining unit but who choose to pay associate membership dues.

**Representation Fee Payers** All those who are part of the Collective Bargaining Unit but choose not to be members shall be assessed a representation fee as set by the union.

**General Membership** shall be defined as both regular and associate members in good standing.

**Good standing** Members who pay all dues approved by the organization.

### 2. Rights and Responsibilities

#### (a) General Members

- i. Attend general membership meetings
- ii. Hold office as a steward and hold any office open to stewards as defined below unless otherwise prohibited
- iii. Attend and speak before the Stewards Council
- iv. Serve on committees
- v. Propose policies or changes to policies at either the Stewards Council or general membership meetings
- vi. Vote on ratification of this constitution, amendments to this constitution, employment contracts, work actions, and major issues as determined by the Stewards Council or Executive Committee
- vii. Bring grievances
- viii. Receive periodic reports providing a full and clear accounting of all funds, including periodic reports to the membership by the appropriate fiscal officers and an annual financial review as required by law or affiliation.

- (b) Associate Members shall have all the same rights as regular members except they shall be barred from voting on contracts and work actions.
- (c) Representation Fee Payers shall have the rights as required by law and the right to become regular members in accordance with Article IV, section A.

## **Article V: Convention of General Membership Meetings**

1. A general membership meeting must be called at least once in the Fall and Spring semesters, at a time and place to be determined by the Stewards Council or Executive Committee, and an announcement together with a proposed agenda shall be distributed to all members at least one week in advance.
2. A general membership meeting must also be convened if any petition by 5% of the general membership demanding such a meeting and naming a time and place is presented to the President or any member of the Executive Committee at least one week in advance of the proposed time.

## **Article VI. Decision by General Membership**

Certain decisions must be reserved for the general membership:

1. Approval of bargaining platform before bargaining begins
2. Contract ratification
3. Authorization for the Stewards Council to call a strike
4. Any change in the level of dues assessment, except in the case of an increase necessary to cover an increase in per capita fees as ratified by delegates to an AFT or AFT-Michigan convention
5. Approval of an annual budget
6. Amendments to this constitution
7. By-laws pursuant to this constitution
8. Any major decision regarding the unions policies or priorities.

## **Article VII. Stewards Council**

1. Designation of Stewards: Each employing unit may designate at least one steward; if more than 10 members are employed within a single unit, an additional steward may be designated for each additional 10 members or fraction thereof.
2. Duties of Stewards:

- (a) To communicate with the members of their departments.
- (b) To empower members to take ownership of the Union.
- (c) To solicit the views of the membership on bargaining positions.
- (d) To bring any grievances which members may have to the attention of the Grievance Committee.
- (e) To determine its own procedural rules except as specified in this constitution.
- (f) To establish committees, their number and membership, and duration, except for standing committees.
- (g) To submit the budget and dues for membership approval.
- (h) To vote on proposed policies.

### 3. Meetings of the Stewards Council:

- (a) The stewards shall meet bi-weekly to plan and initiate action on membership decisions, to discuss any concerns or members' grievances that any steward wishes to bring to the attention of the council, or decisions/issues for which the Executive Committee seeks broader input.
- (b) The Stewards Council shall be governed by Robert's Rules of Order in all instances in which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with this Constitution.
- (c) The Stewards Council shall be responsible for setting the agenda of the general membership meetings and for communicating with the members in advance of meetings and elections.
- (d) Twenty (20) percent of Stewards Council members, including at least one officer, shall constitute a quorum for holding a binding vote.
- (e) The minutes of Stewards Council meetings shall be made available to members upon request.
- (f) Stewards are encouraged to call a meeting of their departments at least once per semester to discuss matters of common concern and, if necessary, to recruit new stewards.
- (g) Any steward may be subject to recall in either of two ways:
  - Upon receipt of a petition of twenty (20) percent of the members in the stewards department, an election shall be held within fourteen (14) days of receipt of the said petition. A two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members in the stewards department shall be required to recall the steward. The Stewards Council, excluding members up for recall, shall determine the validity of the signatures appearing on any recall petition. The recalled steward shall be ineligible to serve subsequently as a steward.
  - Upon receipt of a petition of two-thirds (2/3) of the Stewards Council, an election shall be held at a Stewards Council meeting within fourteen (14) days of receipt of the said petition. All stewards must be notified in

writing of the date and time of the election. A three-fourths (3/4) vote of the stewards present and voting, excluding the steward being recalled, shall be required to recall the steward. The recalled steward shall be ineligible to serve subsequently as a steward.

## Article VIII: The Executive Committee

### 1. Composition and Purpose

The Executive Committee shall consist of four officers: the President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Communications Officer. The Executive Committee shall meet bi-weekly during the fall and spring semesters, except for such breaks as agreed upon by the Committee, to direct the actions of the union. The Executive Committee shall act upon votes taken by the Stewards Council, bring union business before the Stewards Council for discussion and action, and manage the day-to-day operations of the Union. The Executive Committee shall be responsible for hiring and overseeing any staff employed by the Union. All officers shall be voting members of the Stewards Council.

### 2. Elections

- (a) The officers shall be elected from the general membership in a secret ballot election at a general membership meeting. A majority of votes cast at the membership meeting shall be required.
- (b) The term of office shall be one year. Officers shall take office on May 1 of the year in which they are elected and shall serve until April 30 of the following calendar year.
- (c) Any officer of GSU may be removed by a two-thirds vote of the Stewards Council, which meets requirements of Article VII, section C, paragraph 3.
- (d) In the event of vacancy in office, except the office of President, the Stewards Council shall name an interim officer to serve until an election is held at the next membership meeting. In the event of vacancy in the office of President, the Vice President shall fill out the unexpired term.

### 3. Officer Duties

**President** The President shall serve as the chief spokesperson for the Union and shall be responsible for member recruitment, education and cultivating new leaders.

Other duties include:

- Chairing Executive Committee meetings
- Serving as chief spokesperson for the Union
- Maintaining contact with the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, and state affiliates

- Representing the Union to Employer and community
- Maintaining close contact with treasurer regarding budget administration
- Establishing and maintaining external relations with other groups
- Attending monthly Board of Trustees meetings
- Attending monthly Joint Council meetings
- Participating in monthly AGEL call and on AGEL and CGEU lists
- Attending Stewards Council meetings

**Vice-President** The Vice-President shall be responsible for contract administration and for member recruitment, education and cultivating new leaders.

Other duties include:

- Chairing (or appointing a chair) of Grievance Committee
- Recruiting and training Grievance Committee members
- Chairing (or appointing a chair) of Organizing Committee
- Organizing GSU members and leaders
- Assuming the role of the President in case of absence
- Coordinating member drives and related events
- Coordinating phone banking and visits
- Recruiting and training Organizing Committee members
- Attending Stewards Council meetings

**Communications Officer** The Communications Officer shall be responsible for record keeping, publicity, and the internal/external communications of the Union.

Other duties include:

- Taking and disseminating meeting minutes for Executive Committee, Stewards Council, and general membership meetings
- Maintaining records
- Preparing agenda for meetings of Executive Committee, Stewards Council, and general membership meetings
- Maintaining office key holder list
- Responsible for content and distribution of monthly electronic newsletters
- Assisting in website maintenance
- Responsible for maintaining archives
- Coordinating publicity campaigns
- Updating and maintaining database
- Attending Stewards Council meetings

**Treasurer** The Treasurer shall be responsible for maintaining all financial operations and records.

Other duties include:

- Paying bills and reimbursements and tracking payments
- Making regular reports on budget to the Executive Committee, Stewards Council, and membership
- Performing annual reconciliation for affiliates
- Performing monthly dues reconciliation and reporting discrepancies to Employer
- Preparing records for annual audit/review
- Coordinating tax preparation
- Preparing annual budget for membership approval
- Paying dues to affiliates
- Attending Stewards Council meetings

## Article IX: Committees

1. Committees, both standing and ad hoc, shall be created either by action of the general membership at a membership meeting or by action of the Stewards Council or Executive Committee. The quorum for committees shall be a majority of its members including the chair. With the exception of the Organizing Committee and the Grievance Committee, all committees shall appoint their own chairs. Any union member in good standing may serve on any committee.
2. Standing Committees: The following shall be standing committees of the Union: the Organizing Committee and the Grievance Committee.
  - (a) Organizing Committee: The Organizing Committee shall be responsible for recruiting members and developing leaders. The Organizing Committee shall meet once weekly during the fall and spring semesters, except for such breaks as agreed upon by the Committee. The Vice President (or his/her appointee) shall serve as the chair of the Organizing Committee and shall act as liaison between the committee and the Executive Committee and Stewards Council.
  - (b) Grievance Committee: The Grievance Committee shall be responsible for protecting, enforcing, and clarifying the Unions contract with the administration, including organizing and mobilizing, in concert with the Stewards Council and Organizing Committee, the membership and grievants, filing and prosecuting grievances, identifying and rectifying violations of the contract and or labor law. The Grievance Committee may recommend cases for arbitration to the Stewards Council for a vote. The Vice President (or his/her appointee) shall serve as chair of the Grievance Committee and shall act as liaison between the committee and the Executive Committee and Stewards Council.
3. Ad Hoc Committees: The following shall be ad hoc committees of the Union:

- (a) The Bargaining Team shall be responsible for contract negotiations with the administration, including contract research and the drafting of contract proposals. Any union member in good standing shall be able to serve on the Bargaining Team. The general membership shall approve the team at a general membership meeting.

## **Article X: Dues**

1. Dues shall be proposed by the Executive Committee to the Stewards' Council for approval. Dues approved by the Stewards' Council shall be proposed for to the General Membership at a General Membership Meeting. A majority vote of the membership present shall approve any increase in dues over the current level, except in the following situation:
2. Dues may be increased without membership approval only to cover an increase in per capita fees to our affiliated organizations as ratified by delegates at state or national affiliate conventions.

In this event, the membership must be notified of the increase before the first pay period in which the higher rate shall be deducted from members' paychecks.

3. The representation fee paid by non-union members of the Collective Bargaining Unit shall be determined using the same procedure as that for dues.

## **Article XI: Finances**

### **1. ACCOUNTING OF FUNDS**

Members shall have the right to a full and clear accounting of GSU funds at all levels. Such accounting shall include, but shall not be limited to,

- (a) Periodic reports to the membership by appropriate fiscal officers, and
- (b) Annual audits or reviews of all financial records by independent auditors not otherwise connected with the Union upon petition of twenty (20) percent of the membership or in order to satisfy the requirements of law or when required by labor federations with which the Union is affiliated.

### **2. SPENDING OF FUNDS**

In an effort to provide greater financial transparency to its members, all monies that the Union spends that are in the categories of Operational, Member Benefits, Events, and Education & Training, plus any monies that are unspecified by any budget section are subject to approval as follows:

- Spending of \$0.01 to \$250.00 shall require approval of the Executive Committee.

- Spending of amounts greater than \$250.00 shall require approval of the Stewards Council.

### 3. SELECTION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Should it become necessary to move Union funds to a different financial institution, the Treasurer shall review local banks and credit unions. The Treasurer shall then present a proposal that includes at least two different financial institutions to the Stewards Council. The Stewards Council shall select, by a majority vote, the new financial institution from the options presented. Any new financial institution must conform to AFT Michigan and AFT National regulations.

## **Article XII: Amendments**

- Any member seeking to amend this constitution shall present the proposed amendment in writing to the Communications Officer.
- The Communications Officer shall place the proposed amendment on the next Stewards Council agenda for consideration.
- The proposed amendment must be approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the Stewards Council before being placed before the General Membership for approval.

## **Article XIII: Ratification of this Constitution**

This Constitution must be ratified by a simple majority of the general membership voting in a well-publicized election.

## **Article XIV: Voting Procedures**

- Unless otherwise indicated, all votes shall be determined by a majority of members present and voting.
- The ratification of any collective bargaining agreement shall be by a majority of votes cast by at least 10% of the General Membership. All such ratification ballots will be sent out via postal or electronic means. The timetable for executing such votes shall be determined by the Executive Committee.
- An affirmative vote of two-thirds of all Regular Members shall be required to authorize a work stoppage. All such authorization ballots will be sent out via postal or electronic means. The timetable for executing such votes shall be determined by the Executive Committee.