

21 April 2022

To: President Killeen, Board of Trustees, Chancellor Amiridis, Provost Reyes, Dean Colley, and Vice Provost of Diversity and Associate Chancellor Pallares,

### Solidarity Statement with the Graduate Employees Organization of UIC

We, the undersigned faculty and researchers of the School of Art & Art History's three academic units, Art, Art History and Museum and Exhibition Studies, stand in solidarity with the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO). We support their principled decision to withhold their labor until the UIC administration negotiates in good faith on their collective bargaining agreement. As you know, over 75% of union membership voted to authorize a strike, with 97% of voters approving. We are particularly concerned about the history of aggressively rising fees that significantly reduce the stated salary. We urge the administration to resolve this labor crisis immediately by addressing GEO's demands, including fair wages, reduced fees, and protections from harassment.

As instructors who rely on the labor of graduate workers to offer the best education to our undergraduate students, we understand the disruption to our work the strike will cause. Disruption is the point of this (and any) strike—to highlight how essential graduate employee labor is to achieving UIC's mission, "to provide a wide range of students with the educational opportunity only a leading research university can offer." We know that our graduate workers' working conditions are our students' learning conditions. The GEO strike seeks to also benefit our undergraduate students' education. Supporting the strike, therefore, advances our shared commitment to all our students.

We recognize the uncertainty the strike is raising across campus and on undergraduate students, particularly graduating seniors. We remain as committed as ever to guiding our students through these uncertainties at the end of the academic year.

Our unqualified commitment to our undergraduate students and graduate student-employees guides our principles in moving through this crisis.

We commit to:

- Supporting the picket lines. We refuse to break the pickets and will move class meetings to alternative locations or to online formats. We will join the picket lines collectively as academic units and individually.
- Contributing to the GEO strike fund to ensure our graduate workers have the resources they need while on strike.
- Refusing to hire replacement workers or perform the duties of our graduate workers. We will not circumvent the strike and thereby work against our students' interests.

Observing negotiations thus far, we see that the university carries the onus of responsibility for ending the strike. Our graduate employees earn poverty wages of \$20,615 annually, which is \$5,000 less than graduate workers at other research universities in Chicago. With an inflation rate of 8.5 percent, the university's "offer" of 8% in wage increases in the first year of the contract, and 2% in each of the following two years, amounts to a significant cut in income for graduate student workers. In addition, their first paycheck is often paid back to the university to cover fees—up to \$2000 (10% of their earnings), which some identify as wage theft. We agree with GEO that a living wage is a minimum requirement in exchange for their committed, dedicated labor to the university.

We urge the administration to resolve this labor crisis as soon as possible by paying our graduate workers a living wage and resolving other workplace demands (parental leave, policies about workplace harassment, and more), so they can live, work, and study with dignity.

With respect,

Elise Archias, Associate Professor and DGS, Department of Art History

Catherine Becker, Associate Professor, Department of Art History

Nina Dubin, Associate Professor, Department of Art History

Andrew Finegold, Assistant Professor, Department of Art History

Ömür Harmanşah, Associate Professor, Department of Art History

Hannah B Higgins, Professor of Art and Program Coordinator, IDEAS

Dianna Frid, Professor and DGS, Department of Art

Tiffany Funk, Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Art and IDEAS

Lisa Yun Lee, Associate Professor of Public Culture and Museum Studies, Department of Art History

María E. López-García, Bridge to the Faculty Postdoctoral Research Associate, Program in Museum and Exhibition Studies

Faheem Majeed, Assistant Professor, Department of Art

Silvia A. Malagrino, Professor, Department of Art

Lucy Mensah, Assistant Professor, Program in Museum and Exhibition Studies

Emmanuel Ortega, Assistant Professor, Department of Art History

Therese Quinn, Professor and Director, Program in Museum and Exhibition Studies

Sabrina Raaf, Chair of Art and Associate Professor, Department of Art

Laurie Jo Reynolds, Associate Professor, Department of Art

Karyn Sandlos, Associate Professor, Department of Art and Program Head, BFA in Art Education

Blake Stimson, Professor and Chair, Department of Art History

Deborah Stratman, Professor and DUS, Department of Art

Nate Young, Assistant Professor, Department of Art