

Date: Pre-1996

The steward's council is what makes the difference between GEO being a steering committee of 10 people sitting in an office waving a contract about and shouting, "But it's legally enforceable!" and GEO being a strong, representative, democratic, responsive mass organization which allows graduate student employees to exercise some control over the conditions of their everyday lives whether in their day-to-day interactions with their departments or in determining the contracts which govern the conditions of their employment.

What do stewards do?

Stewards convey information. They inform the steward's council and the steering committee about what is going on in their departments and about the concerns and priorities and opinions of members in their department. They help to ensure that members in their departments participate in shaping GEO's agenda. They also convey information to members in their departments about what is going on elsewhere in the university and about what GEO is doing at the moment.

A steward is not simply a neutral information conduit, however. The steward is the union leader in the department, and their role involves some advocacy and persuasion. The steward is responsible for persuading people to join the union and for getting members to participate more actively in the union.

The department steward is also the first point of contact for anyone who is experiencing work-related problems and participates in the handling and resolution of grievances. The steward needs to be familiar with the GEO contract and with what is going on in the department in order to ensure that contract violations are dealt with promptly and that TAs are receiving their contractual rights.

More concretely, stewards attend a stewards' council meeting every two weeks. The meetings are on Mondays from 7.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. These meetings allow stewards to keep track of what is going on across the campus and are also where decisions get made about GEO's program.

Being a good steward takes about three hours a week, and most of that time is spent talking to members in your department about the union.

Right now, GEO is trying to involve as many members as possible in thinking about what our bargaining priorities should be when we negotiate our next contract. Stewards are conducting informal interviews with TAs in their departments about GEO and various issues it might bring to the bargaining table.