

a bylaws primer, version 1.1



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Bylaws aren't the most exciting part of a labor union for most people. At the same time, they are responsible for establishing the guiding principles and governing structures that will affect the long-term future of our organization more than any other decisions. We the GSOC Bylaws Committee have written this cheat sheet to give you the low-down on the Bylaws Proposal we've drawn up over the past six months so you can navigate the document for yourself and decide if it's earned your vote.

A quick note: these Bylaws would govern our Unit (GSOC, graduate workers at NYU). We are part of and have votes in Local 2110, an amalgamated Local which includes hundreds of other workers at over 25 other shops. The Local is in turn a part of the International Union of Auto-Workers, the IUAW. Our Bylaws work in concert with the Local 2110 Bylaws and the IUAW Constitution.

Got questions or thoughts? Send them over to us at gsoc.bylaws@gmail.com.

Social Justice Unionism – a more democratic way of running things (esp. Preamble, Art. 2, 3, 8F.5)

First things first, we lay out our vision for enacting a social justice unionism where democracy is both “guiding principle and daily practice.” We spent a lot of time crafting anti-discrimination provisions to ensure that *all* members feel welcome and represented in our Union, especially those who have traditionally been marginalized in academia and society at large.

Since 1998, GSOC has been affiliated with the UAW, a union known for its big strike fund, for the glory days of the US auto industry, and, more recently, for embracing a pervasive internal conservatism as union power has waned nationally. The philosophy of *business unionism* espoused by UAW leadership over the past sixty years emphasizes centralized management of dues collection, card signing, and voting as the main mechanisms for enacting union democracy, and establishes a hierarchical relationship between UAW reps as knowledge-bearing decision-makers and unit members as service-receiving clients. Conversely, the majority of our unit's stewards and active members support an emergent approach nationally known as *social justice unionism* that draws strength from *both* an informed, mobilized membership empowered through transparent democratic processes to make decisions for itself and coalition-building participation in broader struggles for socioeconomic equity. These values pervade our proposed Draft Bylaws.

Membership eligibility – the blue cards are coming! (Art. 4)

Student employment comes and goes in ways that differ from autoworkers'. The UAW and broader US organized labor still have not effectively dealt with the problems of contingent, seasonal, adjunct, migrant, freelance, and/or part-time workers. Historically, trade unions' failure to recognize contingent workers as *legitimate workers* encouraged a deep, structural, often race-based divide between union workers (who were paid better wages and were usually citizens) and new immigrants (who worked from time to time doing whatever jobs they could, including strike-breaking). Our UAW Local, 2110, has demonstrated an admirable commitment to unionizing contingent academic workers over the past 15+ years. But they want to create additional barriers to membership in our Unit based on more traditional conceptions of who counts as a worker. The opposition we face from the Local 2110 leadership to our definition of Unit membership carries on the tradition of ignoring a problem that won't go away: what to do with us contingent workers.

Our broad membership definition is based in large part on the structural and ethical importance of recognizing everyone who wants or needs to work as potential workers, even when they can't get or take a work assignment covered by our contract. It also makes sense both practically, in terms of the clarity and enforceability of membership rights (especially voting rights!) in our unit thus defined, and in principle, as recognition of the multiple forms of uncontracted work we engage in throughout our studies that keep this university running and continually enhance its reputation—and thus its profits—both at home and abroad.

Organizational structure – the lingo you need to know (Art. 4–10)

- **Membership** | the highest rulers in all the land. Period.
- **Assembly of Stewards** | 30 elected reps from 4 districts serving two-year terms in the baddest, raddest grad organization at NYU
- **Unit Reps** | 3 stewards taking on weekly meetings with NYU about ongoing grievances and more, coordinating day-to-day operations of the Unit, and working extra hard to hold it all together so everything runs smoothly. Paid for their work out of NYU coffers (we like paying workers!)
- **Committees** | 8 standing committees to tackle everything from revenue to rallies, plus pop-up working groups for big problems in small time-frames
- **Joint Council Reps** | ~24 elected folks who pile onto the A/C/E line six times a year for get-togethers with our comrades in other Local 2110 shops at UAW HQ in 256 W 38th St

Organizational Chart – Tag Team! (Art. 6, 10, 13)

After collecting a lot of feedback, we have proposed a framework that keeps the question of unit governance flexible and open to member participation. We've written in an Organizational Chart that specifies the responsibilities, authorities, and priorities of committees, stewards, unit officers, and the general membership. It can be changed rapidly when needed to respond to the needs of our young unit.

The bylaws builds a general framework and the Organizational Chart gives us tailored direction. These two documents work in tandem to give us freedom going forward to chart the most transparent, democratic, and adaptive structures for our unit.

We hope that this and other features of our proposed Bylaws will encourage all members to get involved in our growing Union and make their voices heard. We are GSOC!