

Grad-student employees win a round at UCSC

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The fledgling Graduate Student Employees Union on the UC-Santa Cruz campus has been certified by the state Public Employment Relations Board, the union has announced.

The certification means that the union has proved to PERB that it has the support of the majority of the 535 graduate student employees on the campus, according to Rick Zinman, a spokesman for the union. GSEA officers hope the certification will add pressure to campus administration to formally recognize them as employees — rather than just students — and begin a collective bargaining process.

A similar dispute at UC-Berkeley, however, is tied up in court, and Zinman acknowledged that UCSC graduate students may have a long wait ahead for the matter to be resolved.

In the meantime at UC-Berkeley, the administration has begun making some informal concessions, Zinman said.

"We here at Santa Cruz may also be happy — given the legal uncertainties — with certain intermediate agreements," Zinman said.

While there are no specific numbers on how much of the undergraduate instruction on campus is done by graduate students, Zinman said, it is clear that they do a great deal of it — serving as teaching assistants in small discussion sections of larger classes, as writing instructors, or as readers or research assistants.

"The T.A.s (teaching assistants) tend to get to know students' names, evaluate their work, meet with them on more personal basis than professors — that no one disputes," Zinman said.

Still, so far, campus administrators have been "just sort of hearing our concerns, but they never use the word 'negotiations,'" Zinman said.

Teaching assistants earn about \$1,250 a month during the school year before taxes, Zinman said. They also pay about \$200 a month in tuition fees. But the main issue for many of the GSEA is not wages but improved health insurance benefits, he said.

Health insurance was offered to graduate student employees of the UC system for the first time this year, but currently there is no coverage plan for dependents, Zinman said.