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"How Do You Define Yourself?" Mobilizing Leadership in the Graduate Employee Union Movement

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"How Do You Define Yourself?"

Mobilizing Leadership in the Graduate Employee Union Movement

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"How Do You Define Yourself?"

Mobilizing Leadership in the Graduate Employee Union Movement

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Table of Contents

[T]he purpose of these meetings is to develop strategy. So people who come to this room are people who have taken on a large level of responsibility, like [Aaron][1]. Everyone here has taken a level of responsibility that they do exactly what you're taking about. So the experiences we get we bring back here to shape our strategies, so we don't want to invite just anyone, if you're here, we need you to do work.

(Ben, Union Staff Member, author's field notes, 11/21/2014)

And so, like for me… there was a lot of other stuff personally happening with me, like, my advisor was retiring and that put me behind a lot in terms of my studies because I like, had to find a new adviser and like get my adviser to like my new project, and um, and so I feel, I felt, I guess like I came to graduate school feeling as if I was entering some liberal utopia and in the course of a semester that rug was universally pulled out from under me. And I really felt like if I'm gonna get fired for forming a union, fuck you. Like I really have, at this point, nothing to lose. Because I could give less of a fuck about getting a PhD to come work for another place exactly like the fucking place I'm at, which is a shit hole. And treats people like crap. And so, for me, like getting fired was, was there ever a moment at which I felt like I might get fired? People were making me feel like that… You know, but I kinda was just like, you know, at this point, like, my project is going nowhere, I'm, I am, like everything about my employment is shitty, like getting fired would be doing me a favor, you know? And so I really felt like it was the most, it was the most meaningful thing I could be doing with my time.

(Hannah, GA, interview 3/30/2015)

I remember, I was like walking, having an introspective walk on campus, and I was sort of like ok, how do you, like, it essentially was like, how do you define yourself, like do you define yourself as someone who would, who would form a union if it came like if the opportunity came to you? And I had always assumed that my answer was yes. Because I grew up in a really pro-social justice, pro-union house, which was kind of weird growing up in the South. … And this was still before any of the meetings that we came and asked for a union, it was literally going to the second video room meeting, like do I really have time to like go to all of these meetings all of the time, what's the point. And all of that was, and I was like well, like yes. I want to be the type of person that I can say, when I want to make change and the opportunity to make change comes to me, and the opportunity to put in work, to do something that I think is important and is right, I stand up for that. And I do that. So, that was, that was what I decided.

(Olivia, GA, interview 3/29/2015)

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[1] Unless otherwise indicated, participants' names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

INTRODUCTION

Graduate assistants (GAs) occupy a unique position within the academy. Stuck in limbo between student and professor, apprenticing but also clearly laboring for academic institutions, GAs are in a gray space where, although they complete the lion's share of teaching and research at large institutions, their work is often viewed as part of their academic training rather than as legitimate labor (Lafer 2003; Hutchens & Hutchens 2004). Furthermore, unlike traditionally unionized populations such as manufacturers and tradespeople, graduate students are often isolated from each other, working in different offices, departments, and sometimes even different campuses than their fellow employees. Geographic separation represents an obstacle for developing solidarity among union members who may not know what work other graduate employees do, let alone the injustices faced in the course of their labor. Additionally, finding leaders who can represent a wide variety of academic experiences *and* who are willing to dedicate their time and resources to a union movement is especially difficult in this context.

Compounding these geographic challenges is the fact that graduate students' employment is by its very nature temporary and variable; graduate assistantship appointments may be as short as a semester and they are almost never longer than the time it takes a student to complete their degree. These characteristics are a challenge for traditional labor unions whose organizing strategies and leadership development tactics have been developed by and for workers in more centralized and long-term workplaces. However, that has not stopped thousands of GAs at more than 60 campuses across the United States and Canada from unionizing since the mid-1970s (CGEU 2014; Dixon et al. 2008; Lafer 2003; Lee et al 2004; Hutchens & Hutchens 2004; Singh et all 2006). The puzzle here is twofold: how do GAs mobilize and who emerges to lead these mobilizations around an identity that is inherently temporary, and how do the structural changes

from the initial organizing moment to affiliating with a parent union affect leadership mobilization.

Most existing studies of social movement leadership have examined movements in which identities are perceived to be stable or in contexts where social movement actors plan to remain indefinitely [e.g.: the Civil Rights Movement (Robnett 1997); women's movements (Staggenborg 1988, Reger & Staggenborg 2006); gay rights movements (Lichterman 1999, Blee 2013); academic faculty unionizing (Lewis & Ryan 1977) and workers' movements (Ganz 2000, Nepstad & Bob 2006, Veltmeyer & Petras 2002)]. However, as noted by Rhoades & Rhoads (2003:182), "the graduate union social movement is distinct from many new social movements, for it is not centrally embedded in culturally focused, identity- and issue-based politics." This study will build on previous work by exploring how leaders emerge in movements centered on a transient identity. Studying this unique population can help us answer some of the major questions left regarding leadership and social movements, e.g., who becomes a leader in the case of organizing around a transitional identity and "how are leaders developed within movement organizations" (Morris & Staggenborg 2004:191).

Because leaders "inspire commitment, mobilize resources, create and recognize opportunities, devise strategies, frame demands, and influence outcomes" of social movements, understanding who becomes a leader, as well as how and why, is crucial to understanding the life-cycle of social movements (Morris & Staggenborg 2004:171). In this thesis I use ethnography and participant observation to study the formation of a graduate employee union at a large public research university in the Northeastern United States. The focus of this study is not on evaluation of the success or failure of the movement, but rather on the processes through which the movement leadership structure emerges, changes, and who fills the positions in that

structure. I argue that differences in GAs' relationship to the transient "graduate student" identity lead to differential involvement in the unionization movement in general and movement leadership in particular. While most of the focus of research on social movement leadership has been on structure and resources, the contribution I make to the literature is to theorize the interaction of identity and structure as it relates to movement leadership. I focus on how structural moments, i.e., moments in which distinct organizational structures emerge or are imposed over the course of the movement, interact with identity to create different types of leadership and to ultimately transform leadership and the movement. This understanding of how identity affects leadership mobilization clarifies the processes of who has access to leadership and why. In the following section I will provide background information on graduate student unionization and review pertinent literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graduate Student Unionization: Background
Some background information is useful to put graduate student unionization in context before moving into the social movement literature. In the United States, graduate assistants (GAs) began unionizing sporadically in the mid-1970s, but it was not until the 1990s that a national campaign to organize graduate assistants gained momentum. Since then, graduate student unionization has happened in the context of increasing instability and reliance on contingent temporary labor in the academy. Each year there are fewer tenure track positions available and teaching is more often contracted to graduate students, adjuncts, and other temporary staff (Johnson et al 2003; Schuster & Finkelstein 2006). Within this context, graduate students – who are relatively cheap hires as compared to full-time faculty – have borne the brunt of the teaching load, especially at large research institutions (Dixon et al. 2008; Lafer 2003).

Combined with ever increasing expectations for academic work, stagnant wages, and cutbacks on benefits, these conditions have prompted students at a number of institutions across the US to unionize.

To date, scholarship addressing graduate student unionization has mostly been done by higher education and labor studies scholars and has primarily focused on graduate unions as a challenge to the corporatization of higher education (Lafer 2003, Rhoades & Rhoads 2003, Lee et al 2004, Rhoads & Rhoades 2005, Gilbert 2013) and/or the impact of collective bargaining agreements on GA working conditions (Julius & Gumport 2003, Wickens 2008, Whitford 2014). A notable exception to these themes is the 2003 edited volume *Steal This University* which compiles essays written by academic labor movement activists detailing and analyzing their experiences. Broadly, these studies find that graduate student unions improve the material conditions of GAs by winning pay increases, workload protections, health insurance improvements, and grievance procedures**.** Furthermore, although the authors fear the potential for negative impacts on the mentor-mentee relationship (i.e., that it will change to resemble a boss/employee relationship), little to no impact was found during these studies. Despite this, and despite many GA unions' express goals, the authors cited here are somewhat pessimistic about the ability of GA unions to reverse or even slow the corporatization of higher education in the United States. Through this literature we gain a better understanding of the context in which graduate students are organizing as well as the outcomes of unionization. However, these studies leave unrecognized and unanswered the questions of difference between GA unionizing and other social movements. There is also little to no attention paid to movement leadership in GA union campaigns. In the following sections I will describe the theoretical context of this study.

Movement Professionalization

Because of the intense professionalization of the US labor movement over the last seventy-five years or so, there is some debate as to whether the contemporary labor movement as a whole should be considered a social movement. As described by Snow et al (2004:11),

> social movements can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part.

Following this definition, the graduate assistant union (GAU) I observed unquestionably should be considered social movement organizations. However, as noted by Fantasia & Stepan-Norris (2004:556), there is a sector of the labor movement whose "most visible leaders and its most powerful organizations have eschewed ideas, practices, and representations that might appear too social movement-like, at times give the labor movement the appearance of an 'antimovement.'" However, they also recognize that "there have been labor groups and organizations that have demonstrated a progressive and militant unionism throughout this same period" (Fantasia & Stepan-Norris 2004:556). I argue that graduate employee unions represent examples of the latter group.

Given that extra- or non-institutional actions are an important component of social movements (Snow et al. 2004) and the highly institutionalized character of large labor unions in the United States (Fantasia & Stepan-Norris 2004), I certainly think we should question the social movement characterization of the US labor movement broadly. However, graduate student organizing campaigns represent one sector of this "movement" in which I argue clear social movements are rapidly emerging. In these cases, large, wholly institutionalized unions encounter graduate employee organizing committees or informal organizations and have the opportunity to affect how these smaller campaigns play out. What happens to these social movements when

they are aided or absorbed by a larger institution? More specifically, how does the leadership and decision-making structure change in these cases?

Some preliminary insights into these questions can be gained from the literature on social movement professionalization. As McCarthy & Zald (1973) and Staggenborg (1988, 1991) both conceptualize professional social movements as those having a paid, dedicated staff, a resource pool outside of the beneficiaries of the movement, and a more or less inactive membership. Staggenborg suggests that the professionalization of an SMO does not change the social movement character of the organization, but in fact can be essential for maintaining the success of the social movement. In her analysis of the pro-choice movement in the US, she states that

> the movement has been able to maintain itself and grow in strength since the legalization of abortion by acquiring professional leadership and formalized organizational structures…Contrary to some theories of what happens to movements when they become 'institutionalized,' however, these developments actually facilitated, rather than hindered, the growth of grass-roots movement activities… Both grassroots participation and grievances may be important, but they are not always sufficient to generate successful collective action, and they may not always be necessary." (1991:5-6)

Thus, although professionalization and institutionalization has been cited as a reason for the "antimovement" character of the US labor movement, Staggenborg shows that it is in fact that very characteristic that maintains the existence of the social movement. My observations support a similar characterization of the UAW.

Leadership and Social Movements
For the purposes of this thesis, I am drawing on literature that focuses on two facets of social movement leadership: 1) the relationship between leadership and social movement emergence, organization, and outcome; and 2) the factors that facilitate or hinder individuals' access to leadership (see Appendix B, Table 1 for an overview of theoretical foci). I have chosen to engage in conversation with these areas of literature because of my interest in the way that

participation in movement leadership is affected by the transient nature of the GA identity. As mentioned previously, graduate assistants are in a state of transition. The experience of GAs is in many ways fundamentally different than that of participants in many contemporary social movements, especially other unionization movements. Graduate assistants, by virtue of their attending graduate school, do *not* wish to remain in the position of GA and in fact, will be moving on to positions (as faculty or perhaps university administration) in which GA unionization may actually be perceived to be detrimental. I suggest that while existing theory about social movement leadership is useful for understanding traditional union organizing movements, the graduate unionizing movement represents a break from that and requires further theorizing. Specifically, existing theory does not help us understand *how* leaders emerge. It also places too much emphasis on either the agency of leaders to effect change or the power of structure to determine leadership composition.

In the course of addressing the relationship between leadership and social movements, many authors have created typologies of leaders based on their leadership style and the impact they have on movements. Scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s was dominated by structural functional perspectives, which held that leaders played a vital role in organizations, and attempted to classify leaders based on their leadership style and relationship to their organization (Roche & Sachs 1955, Weber 1958, Gusfield 1966). Additionally, leadership was theorized to change in a relatively linear fashion along with the formalization of social movement organizations, i.e., the charismatic or enthusiast leader would eventually give way to the bureaucratic, rational leader as the organization became formalized (Gusfield 1966). Leadership was primarily visualized as a single person or group of persons (white men, generally) placed above the vast majority of participants in any given organization; they assumed a social role that

had defined patterns of behavior (Gusfield 1966). Leaders were thought to possess particular personality traits or capital that caused them to emerge from and lead the masses.

Weber (1958) is foundational for this literature with his characterization of leadership as rooted in access to at least one of three types of authority: legal, traditional, and charismatic. He argued that leadership based on legal authority is supported by the existence of bureaucratic and legal structures and one's privileged location in that structure. As the label suggests, traditional authority was afforded to leaders who gained and/or retained power as a result of custom and tradition. Finally, charismatic authority is commanded by individual leaders who are found to be exceptionally heroic or compelling in one way or another. Weber's theory of authority (leadership) presumes a rather strict separation between structural and individual paths to leadership, which does not adequately account for the complexities of social movement leadership where leaders may be unlikely to have access to any of these types of authority.

Given this, scholars have continued refining leadership categories and their relationship with social movement organizations. Roche & Sachs (1955) and Gusfield (1966) each developed a theory in which two types of leaders dominated social movements. "Bureaucratic" or "task" leaders are concerned with the sustainability and day-to-day functioning of the social movement organization. These types of leaders are associated with "hierarchical decision-making," formalized policies, and "goal orientation" (Roche & Sachs 1955:254; Gusfield 1966:139). The "enthusiast" or "social" leader is more concerned with ideological aspects of the movement and impassioning movement followers. The enthusiast or social leader is concerned with "the ideals and value which nourish the movement" as well as maintaining "the morale of the followers and the harmony of the social group" (Roche & Sachs 1955:249; Gusfield 1966:139). These descriptions of leadership indicate the functional role of leaders and the types of action they

engage in, but like Weber's theories, are too simplistic to explain who has access to social movement leadership today. These theories neither account for differential access to leadership based on identities or structural locations nor allow for analysis of individual background effects beyond categorizing different personalities as "bureaucratic" or "enthusiast."

Lipset, Trow, & Coleman's (1956) work on the International Typographical Union, which had a stable two-party system and a vibrant democratic process, describes a more nuanced theory of leadership access. One of the authors' primary findings is that the existence of both strong incumbent and opposition leadership is key to sustaining a vibrant democracy. The authors argue that in order to maintain oppositional leadership, the rank-and-file membership must be engaged and politicized such that there is consistently a healthy pool of potential leaders. This pool is maintained by providing the opportunity for members of the rank and file to develop political skills and ties to the union. The union positions must also have a relatively high rate of turnover such that democracy can proceed and no individual maintains power indefinitely.

The piece of Lipset, Trow, & Coleman's theory that is most important for my own work is their description of the various paths to leadership that existed within the organization. Men joined the ITU for a variety of reasons – they may have been "born into" the organization, i.e., their fathers were union men; they may be sympathetic to a leftist political ideology; or they were "consciously mobile," i.e., they wanted to gain status by 'moving up the ranks' without actually leaving the profession. In order for these men to be funneled into leadership positions, they needed an opportunity pathway. This pathway was constructed through an abundance of smaller leadership positions within the union, for example chapel leaders or local union committees. Based on this, I would expect organizational structure to play an important role in participants' selection into leadership.

However, potential leaders needed more than just structural opportunity. Lipset, Trow, & Coleman argue that in order for potential leaders to become actual leaders and for democracy to be maintained, the leadership positions must be sufficiently enticing and worth the time lost at their typographical position. Specifically, the leadership positions must provide material and status security so that the individuals elected to those positions do not lose status or economic ground by accepting the position with the union. Furthermore, given the high turnover of union positions, potential leaders must be assured that upon completing their tenure in a given position they will be able to return seamlessly to the rank and file with no harm done to their status; e.g., "Where return to the ranks, either voluntary or upon defeat in an election, involved no great loss in style of life, job rewards, or status, the union officer has very much less of a material and psychological stake in his job" (Lipset, Trow, & Coleman: 215-16). Being a product of its time, the work assumes "equal opportunity" leadership and does not address structural barriers to leadership. This theory suggests that there must be adequate incentives, material or otherwise, to participation in leadership. Similarly, Veltmeyer and Petras (2002:93) find in their study of Rural Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil that "successful leadership seems to coincide with material equality within the organization, social solidarity as an outreach strategy and participatory democracy in the realization of organizational goals." That is, leaders are successful because of a shared and stable identification with the movement rank-and-file. These theories of leadership were developed based on movements mobilizing participants with more-or-less immutable identities and do not necessarily give us a complete understanding of leadership based on temporary identities. Time is a scarce resource for graduate assistants whose livelihood is based on a limited and somewhat precarious economic relationship with the university. Even if union work is materially compensated, as it was in some cases in the campaign I observed, why

would GAs risk their continued academic progress – upon which eligibility for assistantships is based – to engage in potentially time-wasting activism?

Feminist scholars Brodkin Sacks (1988) and Robnett (1997) have contributed significantly to our understanding of social movement organization and leadership through their analyses of women's organizing. Brodkin Sacks' (1988) analysis of primarily black women's organizing and leadership during the campaign to unionize health workers at Duke Medical Center recognizes different leadership forms and practices that were stratified by gender: "Almost all the public speakers and confrontational negotiators were men…[while] women were centers and sustainers of workplace networks – centerwomen or centerpersons – as well as the large majority of the union organizing committee" (Brodkin Sacks 1988:120). She argues that women and men chose to engage in different leadership activities. Additionally, Brodkin Sacks locates leadership not in any given role, but rather in the interaction between individuals performing different roles.

Her conceptualization of leadership as interactional and involving a variety of activities (public speaking, organizing, decision-making) is important for moving theory of leadership toward being more inclusive of different forms and beginning to recognize team leadership, although she does not name it as such. Furthermore, she highlights leaders' different perceptions of the movement and focus on different tactics based on their position within the structure: "The gender division in leadership gave men and women somewhat different perspectives on the union drive…men who were public spokespeople stressed rallies and taking grievances through the hospital's grievance committee structure…Women leaders stressed talking to people with whom they worked, usually one-to-one, signing them up, and asking them to organize others" (Brodkin Sacks 1988:121). Each tactic described in this quote was important for the unionization

campaign, though this illustrates how individual experiences shape ideas about which tactics are appropriate and which structures are useful or necessary. This aspect of leadership is useful for explaining how engaging in different leadership activities (or alternatively, not engaging in those activities) shapes how individuals think about movement organization and strategy.

Writing almost a decade later, Robnett (1997) extends our understanding of leadership by accounting for not only the functional role of leaders and their impact on organizational structure but also the structural barriers to formal leadership in the American Civil Rights Movement. She argues that access to leadership was structured by race, class, gender, and culture such that formal leaders were primarily African American male church leaders and African American women had access to leadership only as *bridge leaders*. Formal leaders are those who hold "titled positions within a primary movement organization" (Robnett 1997: 18). These leaders are often the face of the movement as a result of their access to the press and their perceived control over strategic decision making and goal-setting. In contrast, Robnett (1997:19) describes bridge leaders as those who "utilized frame bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation to foster ties between the social movement and the community [and who] … were able to cross the boundaries between the public life of a movement organization and the private spheres of adherents and potential constituents." Bridge leaders gain their authority not through titles or recognition, but rather by doing the work of attracting adherents to the movement. As a result, Robnett argues, African American women were overwhelmingly bridge leaders because of the barriers they faced to formal leadership. This is important because she not only extends our understanding of who leaders are and what they do, but also highlights the effects of structural exclusion on leadership development.

The preceding works are important for understanding how leadership develops in many different kinds of social movements. I also think they provide helpful insights for the context I present here, especially regarding the structural constraints on access to leadership. However, the case of graduate student unionization offers a case in which to examine the interaction of identity and structure. The findings of this study build on and complicate the structural arguments of these theories by explaining how leadership emerges from a population with a loosely shared and transient identity.

DATA AND METHODS

This project is a qualitative study of the formation of the graduate employee union at a large public research university in the Northeastern United States. I use ethnographic methods, primarily participant observation supplemented with in-depth interviews, to explore my field site. I chose these methods because I am interested in the day-to-day processes of leadership and organizational development within the unionization movement as well as how the participants think about those processes. The use of qualitative data collection methods, particularly participant observation, is the logical choice for this study because, as Emerson (2001:13) notes, it allows the researcher to gain "privileged access to the meanings that infuse the daily lives and activities of those studied." Furthermore, as articulated by Blee (2013:657), "fledgling activist groups provide rich material for ethnographic observation because their members detail the logic and rationale for ideas more extensively than do members of more established activist groups." Surveys or even in-depth interviews alone are not precise enough methods to catch all of the nuance of a newly emerging organization.

The social movement/unionization campaign I will be studying began in earnest in the spring of 2013 at a flagship public research university in the Northeastern United States which I

will refer to as New England University (NEU). There are about 6,000 graduate students at this university, around 2,200 of whom are graduate employees, i.e., students who are offered an assistantship and a tuition waiver in exchange for teaching or research work done for the university. Close to one third of the graduate students who are employed as teaching (TA) or research (RA) assistants are international students. For simplicity, I will refer to this population, both TAs and RAs, as Graduate Assistants or GAs.

There had been a number of efforts to unionize at the University prior to this, but none were successful in getting off the ground. The founders of the campaign I observed were a group of about 25 students representing a variety of disciplines who began meeting to discuss forming a union after a series of changes to their working conditions caused outrage among the graduate student body. The changes included drastic increases in graduate student fees, modifications to the university-provided health insurance plan which made it more expensive and provided less coverage, and, in some departments, significant increases in workload without a corresponding increase in compensation.

In September 2014, I was approached to work as a part-time paid organizer with our budding graduate employee union. Before I was approached, I was involved in organizing in a limited way. I had helped one of the UAW staff organizers sign people on to support cards in Sociology as well as a couple of other academic departments and attended one brief training session, but I had not been a part of organizing committee meetings or decision-making. A fellow sociology graduate student who was involved in the Organizing Committee knew the union was interested in hiring GAs as paid staff and encouraged me to interview for the position. I took an interview and was hired within a week of being encouraged to apply. I was folded into the daily workings of the group almost immediately.

Because of my particular position in the field of study, I have access to a very specific corner of the movement world which includes the informal leadership of the organization as well as rank-and-file membership in the select departments I was assigned to organize. Following Morris & Staggenborg's (2004:171) definition, I consider individuals to be leaders if they are "strategic decision-makers who inspire and organize others to participate." In this field site, this includes approximately thirty individuals serving as UAW staff, GAs being paid as organizing staff, volunteer organizing committee members, or volunteer department-level organizers. Participants represented a variety of departments in the hard sciences, social sciences, and humanities, with nearly equal distribution across these areas of study. However, if compared proportionally to sheer numbers enrolled, hard science disciplines were vastly underrepresented on the organizing committee. Based on my interactions with other UAW GA unions at various events throughout the organizing campaign, this seems to be the norm across other grad unions as well, i.e., campaigns are often dominated by activists from the humanities and social sciences.

In addition to leadership, I was also able to observe the movement as it experienced three distinct structural moments, i.e., moments in which the movement leadership structure changed significantly as a result of association with the parent union. During the initial stages of the movement, none of the participants involved were paid for their time. It was only after the UAW became involved and started to funnel resources to the movement that organizers were paid to be involved and build the union. In the time period covered by this study, there were a total of two former graduate students and ten current NEU GAs paid by the UAW as temporary staff organizers, including myself. The UAW offered a pool of money to pay a fixed number of temporary organizers during our campaign. Individuals were chosen to fill the paid positions through an interview process that varied greatly during the three rounds of interviews I observed.

Up until the fall 2015 semester these positions were paid through the UAW, which meant that international students on F-1 and J-1 visas, who are legally barred from working for pay outside of the University, were denied access to this path to leadership. Given that these interviews were the primary venue for engaging interested international students outside of organizing, i.e., precious few international students were willing to risk involvement with the union or were comfortable doing the volunteer organizing work that was required to be considered for leadership, this effectively barred international students from the most engaged, knowledgeable level of leadership. This exclusion did not likely affect the ultimate outcome of the movement, i.e., the CBA, partially because one-third of the bargaining team was made up of international students. However, it almost certainly affected the ability to communicate with and win support for the movement from international students. A table with participant descriptions can be found in Appendix B, Table 3.

While I can speak to internal decision-making and strategy regarding leadership, there are many aspects of the movement I do not have access to and thus can only "observe" second-hand. I cannot, for example, speak to the workings of state- or organizational-level political maneuvers that will most certainly happen. I also cannot make claims about bargaining strategy beyond what aspects of that strategy are shared with the organizing committee to facilitate organizing in the field. I will nonetheless be able to observe how events in bargaining or the political and organizational realms affect leadership development and decision-making within the movement.

The questions I ask are related to micro- and meso-level processes in a relatively small sample population which are most adequately addressed by direct examination as opposed to surveying or any other quantitative data gathering method. Indeed, in their discussion of the applications of qualitative data, Glaser & Strauss (1999:15) suggest that qualitative data has a

special "sensitivity in picking up everyday facts about social structures and social systems." In addition to observing processes, I am also interested in participants' negotiation of these processes, hence the inclusion of interviews to supplement my own participant observation. Additionally, I was able to gather a history of the unionization campaign prior to my own involvement through in-depth interviews.

Participant Observation. During the data gathering for this project, I worked in the field approximately twenty hours per week as an organizing staff member. My position required attending daily staff meetings and weekly organizing committee meetings as well as doing the organizing work that is required to build the union. I volunteered myself early on to be the minute-taker for these meetings, which facilitated taking field notes. For observations outside of meetings, I will carried a small notebook with me to record short notes and observations. I fleshed-out and transcribed these notes as necessary. In addition to the formal in-depth interviews described below, I also engaged in brief, informal interviews in the field as opportunities to do so presented themselves. I obtained written consent from each person who participated in union meetings and provided each of them with a brief description of the goals of the project, what I would be doing during the data gathering process, and their role as research participants. I was very open about my role as a researcher during the data-gathering stage of this project. In fact, when organizing was at its most intense, references to the project became a common joke among other organizers. While many organizers were sacrificing their personal research to participate in the union, the running joke was that I had found a way to do my own research, participate, and get paid all at the same time! Though in all honesty, my own academic work suffered right along with that of my colleagues, the difference was I was getting paid to neglect my academic work.

Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interviews. Because I am interested in how the leadership of the budding movement develops, I chose interview participants from the pool of individuals participating in both the informal and formal leadership of the organization. This pool includes the paid staff, the elected bargaining committee, and volunteer organizers at the organizing committee and department levels. I conducted formal interviews with seven Organizing Committee members and countless brief, informal interviews with participants at all levels of leadership. I selected formal interview participants from the pool of people involved in any way in organizing. After data analysis, I classified the interview participants into one of the three identity categories that emerged: four with union leaders, one each with an academic activist and a serious academic, and one was with a former graduate student turned UAW staff person. These leadership categories (union leader, academic activist, and serious academic) are my own constructions and are described below. Scheduling formal interviews was a challenging task given the hectic schedules of participants, especially those who were dedicating ten or more hours per week to organizing. Therefore, much of my descriptions of identity deployment are based on my field notes and the transcripts of union meetings. When scheduling formal interviews, I first approached each participant in person to ask if she or he would be comfortable participating in an interview and then followed up with an email to provide details about the interview and the Institutional Review Board interview consent form. I offered to meet the participant wherever she or he felt most comfortable and also offered the option of using my office on-campus if the participant had no preference for the location. All of the interviews were conducted on campus in graduate student offices or academic buildings.

During the course of the interviews, I asked participants to discuss their history with the graduate employee union, including how and why they got involved and their thoughts about the

leadership structure. These interviews served as a check on my own observations and experience of the field site to corroborate and enrich or complicate and raise questions about my own observations at various points in the process. The interviews were also an important source of data on those people whose entrance into involvement with the union I was not able to observe. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

As data gathering progressed, I utilized a grounded theory-inspired method of analyzing the data to develop more specific foci and eventually the theoretical explanation I present here. I took detailed field notes after each experience in the field and examined them for codes, categories, and themes, loosely following Charmaz's (2001) interpretation of the method. I transcribed my field notes and interviews and used NVivo qualitative coding software to analyze them. The grounded theory approach was particularly suited for this project because I believe the graduate student unionization movement is a unique and interesting site for studying social movement organization and has the potential to enrich our theoretical understanding of social movement leadership. Furthermore, this approach is useful because there are few studies that examine this aspect of student union organizing.

Putting my Body in the Field. I occupy a number of social positions that allowed me to speak from a position of privilege and power within the unionizing movement. I am a young, well-educated, white, heterosexual cis-woman from a lower-middle-class background. The majority of the staff and other organizers are also young white cis-men and -women, so in that sense my presence was unremarkable. Other characteristics that proved to be important and specific to my research site include the fact that I am a US citizen, I was a second-year, pre-MA graduate student in sociology at the time with experience as both a Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant. This set of social locations allowed me to claim an insider status which I

believe made other people involved in the union more comfortable speaking and interacting with me. I was also one of several graduate students who were paid to work as organizing staff for our union. When I interacted with staff and the organizing committee, my social locations generally afford me respect and privilege in conversations and decision-making.

When I was "out in the field" organizing (speaking face-to-face with other graduate students about union-related information or actions), I experienced varying levels of respect and privilege based on my age, gender, and area of study. I generally experienced a constant level of privilege pursuant to my identity as a white hetero-passing US citizen, but this was somewhat tempered by my presentation as a young female in the social sciences. As a paid staff person, I had access to a lot of information about the unionizing process, which afforded me power within the organization. Because of my position as a staff-member, I participated in helping to set organizing priorities and had the responsibility of communicating information about those priorities, bargaining, and strategy to about 250 other graduate students.

When it comes to social movement organizing, I come from a feminist background in which I was taught to value inclusive consensus decision-making and to always err on the side of more transparency rather than less. As a sociologist, I have been trained to see intersectional oppressions and the effects of power, so I often interpreted the actions of those in my field site through that lens. Additionally, I identified openly to those as my site as a socialist and feminist and as someone who is very supportive of radical direct action. Those at my research site with whom I interacted most frequently knew that I was not only involved in the union movement for instrumental or research purposes, but because I support a strong labor movement more broadly. In some cases this gave me more "street cred" and trust at my site while in others this allowed

people to brush off my contributions as those of someone who is obviously more radical than the majority of the bargaining unit.

To my knowledge, my presence as a researcher did not have a significant impact on the individuals at the research site or the processes I observed because the vast majority of the time I was in the field presenting primarily as an organizer, not a researcher. My presence was in fact integral to the functioning of the union during the course of data collection. I was very open and up front about my plans for research during the period of data collection. When I talked about the research, most people were curious and expressed a desire to be as helpful as possible. I think some of this comes from the recognition of our shared status as graduate students and a desire to help others with their research in whatever way possible.

I expected that the in-depth interviews with participants might change our interactions post-interview because of concerns about sharing sensitive information with me in the interview. In order to allay participants' fears, I made sure to reiterate my commitment to upholding the interview participant protections stated in the IRB consent form and I also made clear that any individual quotes or references used in the paper will be identified with pseudonyms and devoid of identifying information as much as possible. Curiously, the participants I interviewed were far from hesitant to share even their most critical opinions about the organization. In fact, I had to limit most of the interviews to two hours because the participants were so eager to share and discuss their stories and thoughts about the organization. This came as a pleasant surprise and I expect that it was the result of having gained the trust of the participants through my own clear commitment to the success of the movement.

FINDINGS
LOCAL MOVEMENT BACKGROUND

When the union movement began in the spring of 2013, it was made up of a small group of graduate assistants (GAs) informally meeting and communicating about the possibility of organizing a union. The stirrings began at a meeting hosted by the university human resources department, which was called in order to explain to graduate students the changes that would be coming to the university-provided health insurance. According to my informants who attended the meeting, it was clear that the new plan would be significantly worse than the existing plan, i.e., it would provide less coverage for more money and would entail a considerable increase in out-of-pocket expenses for graduate students with families or dependents. At that meeting, Hannah – who, along with her colleague Gwen in English, spearheaded the movement – passed around a sheet of notebook paper to record the names and email addresses of those GAs who might be interested in forming a union to combat the changes the university was making. The number of GAs at that meeting was quite small because it was held after classes had finished for the semester, but word of the negative changes in the health insurance spread quickly through the GA population.

Several other changes augmented the frustration of GAs with the university. Graduate fees had been increasing steadily over the preceding years such that full-time graduate students had witnessed an increase in fees from less than $850 per semester to well over $1,000 per semester, with no corresponding increase in the graduate assistant stipend. TAs in some departments, notably including English where Hannah was studying, had been asked to increase their teaching load with no additional compensation. Graduate students had been all but forced out of campus housing by the fall of 2013, but there had seemingly been very little done to afford them access to adequate parking or public transportation. Many GAs were being paid late,

sometimes by as much as two months, due to bureaucratic incompetency. Funding for summer employment through the university was discontinued for many departments. All of this while the university president's annual compensation was boosted to just under $800,000 by the Board of Trustees. As a result of these changes, the general feeling among many graduate students was one of frustration, distrust, and disgust with the university.

The timing of this campaign was even more serendipitous given its proximity to the November 2014 gubernatorial election in which the incumbent Democratic governor, the president of the NEU Board of Trustees, was challenged by a formidable Republican opponent. Thus, the organizing campaign was born of "Goldilocks" organizing conditions: increasing frustration with the NEU administration on behalf of graduate employees coupled with decreasing public trust in the university administration, the willingness of graduate activists to dedicate significant time and effort to the movement, and political opportunity.

GA IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP
    GA Identity. In this section I will discuss the way that graduate students' claiming or rejection of the Graduate Assistant (GA) or academic identity affected who self-selected or was recruited into the union leadership. These identity labels are my own constructions based on the interviews and observations I collected and are defined below; Appendix B, Table 2 provides descriptions of each of the identities. I show that the most involved leaders in the organization were least likely to describe themselves using an academic GA identity and more likely to describe themselves in activist or social justice terms. In contrast, those participants who were less involved or not involved at all in leadership activities tended to adhere to a more academically based identity.

How closely one identified with the academic GA identity played an important role in access to or selection into the various levels of leadership in this context. During the organizing campaign at NEU there were effectively four different levels of involvement in the organization: Organizing Committee (OC) Leadership/Paid Staff, Department Leaders, Action Participants, and non-involvement. I will discuss only the first three here since I do not have data that speaks to those who did not get involved. I find that there are three categories of leaders based on their relationship to the transient GA identity: Union Leaders, Activist Academics, and Serious Academics. These different identity articulations and their influence on access to leadership are described below.

Before going further, I would like to note that the GA identity was not by any means the only salient identity used for mobilization during this campaign. Claims to a worker identity ("we are workers"/"the university works because we do") was certainly deployed to mobilize bargaining unit members and to win relevant agreements in the contract. This was especially the case once the bargaining team received pushback from the university about whether GAs were students or workers, which is a very common argument for universities to make in rejecting grad union organizing. The UAW staff organizers and the GA organizers on the Organizing Committee were intentional about casting GAs as workers when organizing in the field or participating in direct action like marches and sit-ins. The worker identity did get taken up during OC meetings, though it was used less as a recruiting tool and more as a way to commiserate and build solidarity among the meeting participants.

Though the UAW organizers were deliberate about highlighting GAs as workers, that identity was claimed long before the campaign affiliated with the UAW. Frustration over workload issues was one of the catalysts of the movement – the members of the Interdisciplinary

Task Force wanted to be recognized for the work that they did and the fact that the work they did brings both money and students to NEU. However, this identity was not used to grant or deny people access to leadership, this was an identity that was articulated by GAs of all different levels of participation and leadership. I discuss this identity to highlight the different ways identity was used in this movement and to note that the worker identity was salient, but was distinct from and deployed in a different way than the GA identity.

Union Leaders

I use the label Union Leaders to refer to people who are more identified with achieving social justice and being an activist than an academic and who are heavily involved in the strategic decision-making and organizing of the union. In my interviews with them and observations of meeting discourse, the people who were in these leadership positions did not usually articulate the GA identity. Beyond commiserating over their frustrations with the University, and despite the "we are workers" rhetoric used in union actions, these individuals almost never talked about their own experiences or situation as GAs. These people are overwhelmingly white and citizens, with the exception of Maya and Raj who were international students.

Union Work over Academic Work. These participants articulated identities that are extra-academic or outside of being a GA, their identity is not necessarily strongly tied to academia. This allowed them to justify spending many hours per week on union work, sometimes upwards of 20, often at the expense of their academic work. These participants attended OC meetings regularly and constituted the decision-making body of the organization. This category includes those GAs who accepted part-time paid staff positions with the union.

And so, like for me… there was a lot of other stuff personally happening with me, like, my advisor was retiring and that put me behind a lot in terms of my studies because I like, had to find a new adviser and like get my adviser to like my new project…I guess like I came to graduate school feeling as if I was entering some liberal utopia and in the course of a semester that rug was universally pulled out from under me. And I really felt like if I'm gonna get fired for forming a union, fuck you. Like I really have, at this point, nothing to lose. Because I could give less of a fuck about getting a PhD to come work for another place exactly like the fucking place I'm at, which is a shit hole. And treats people like crap. And so, for me, like getting fired was, was there ever a moment at which I felt like I might get fired? People were making me feel like that… You know, but I kinda was just like… my project is going nowhere… everything about my employment is shitty, like getting fired would be doing me a favor, you know? And so I really felt like it was the most…meaningful thing I could be doing with my time. (Hannah, GA, interview 3/30/2015)

We are sacrificing a lot [and] we resent it when other people do not. (Emily, GA)

Social Justice/Labor Movement. In interviews, Union Leaders described their motivation for participation as external to their own experiences, i.e., they participated because of a desire to be involved in a movement or to enact their politics rather than to gain improvements in their own working conditions (though this was certainly a desired outcome).

I remember, I was like walking, having an introspective walk on campus, and I was sort of like ok, how do you, like, it essentially was like, how do you define yourself, like do you define yourself as someone who would, who would form a union if it came like if the opportunity came to you? And I had always assumed that my answer was yes. Because I grew up in a really pro-social justice, pro-union house, which was kind of weird growing up in the South. … And this was still before any of the meetings that we came and asked for a union, it was literally going to the second video room meeting, like do I really have time to like go to all of these meetings all of the time, what's the point. And all of that was, and I was like well, like yes. I want to be the type of person that I can say, when I want to make change and the opportunity to make change comes to me, and the opportunity to put in work, to do something that I think is important and is right, I stand up for that. And I do that. So, that was, that was what I decided. (Olivia, GA, interview 3/29/2015)

Social activism background. In addition to having a view toward the bigger picture of

social justice and/or labor organizing, all of the Union Leaders reported having some previous

experience with social activism.

> I'm just totally into unions in any way possible. Prior to this...I was part of a kind
> of smaller less intensive attempt to organize, let's say. And ...it was kind of like
> all the like anarchists and socialists found each other and say we should organize
> a union!
> ...
> the Iraq war started and that's when I got really very committed to activism. I was
> part of the anti-war activism leading up to the war, like before the war even
> started there was huge protests in New York which was amazing, empowering to
> be out there with like 400,000 people, protesting a war that hasn't even started
> yet! (Bob, GA)

Some of the previous arenas of involvement included national political protests, other labor

movements, and local social justice activities at their undergraduate institutions. Additionally,

several of the Union Leaders had held formal leadership positions in other organizations at NEU

including the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) and their respective departmental Graduate Student

Associations. These previous experiences had provided Union Leaders with the collective skills

required to manage both people and resources in the movement.

Self-selection into involvement. For the most part, the people I describe as Union Leaders

were involved of their own accord from the very beginning of the movement, as demonstrated by

the previous quotes. They were some of the very first people to add their names to Hannah's

informal list of interested parties and some had been involved in previous attempts to unionize at

NEU.

> Prior to this back in 2010, 2011, I was part of a kind of smaller less intensive
> attempt to organize, let's say. And that effort was really spearheaded mostly by
> sociology folks, but also collective of people from political science and a few
> other places, but really really lefty people, it was kind of like all the like
> anarchists and socialists found each other and say we should organize a union! but
> um, everybody was really big into the prefigurative politics and really lefty

consensus building action, you know like, real participatory leadership, um, it was at the time that occupy was happening too, so it really wasn't able to make the kind of efforts that we needed to be successful… (Bob, GA)

Activist Academics

The participants in this category were supportive of the union movement and often participated, even in the OC, but generally prioritized their academic work and identity over any union work or social movement identity. While these participants sometimes had input on decision-making, there was most often a tension between these activists and the Union Leaders because of the unwillingness of Activist Academics to [compromise] their academic work by dedicating more time to organizing. However, some of these activists still wanted to attend OC meetings to participate in decision-making and have access to candid information about bargaining and the union's next steps. This frustrated Union Leaders who thought of the OC meetings as a safe and privileged space to openly discuss strategy.

The participation on the part of Activist Academics, who generally only organized in one department, was seen as undemocratic and even potentially a threat to the safety and efficiency of the decision-making process. As a result, Union Leaders adopted two informal practices designed to get Activist Academics out of OC meetings. First, they attempted soft public shaming. During several OC meetings in the spring 2015, Olivia, Hannah or Ben would reiterate that in order to attend and participate in OC meetings, people needed to do the required organizing work, i.e., a few hours each week in more than one department, and have the numbers to show it during the organizing recap portion of the meeting. When this did not have the desired effect, the Union Leaders on the OC decided to create a second leadership meeting for Department Leaders only. This meeting was designed to allow Department Leaders to give their

input on and receive updates about decision-making without disrupting the efficiency of OC meetings.

Balance Union and Academic Work. People in this category were those that wanted access to leadership, wanted to attend OC meetings and be in the loop, but also wanted to preserve their academic trajectory and thus worked hard to protect their own time and resources from encroachment by union work.

> And so I mean from the very beginning, I was always trying to develop leaders, more so than some people I think. Because I was like, I don't have time to do all this work, so I need people to do it for me, delegate. So I always had lots of leaders and it just always seemed to me that if they weren't in the loop they weren't going to be happy. (Aaron, GA)

These people prioritized their identity as an academic over their identity as a union supporter and thus were not willing to dedicate the same number of hours to organizing as the Leaders. Additionally, one of the Activist Academics I spoke with insisted that through work with the NEU and local municipal transportation services she was involved in, she had gained the appropriate scope of knowledge and should have access to decision-making. However, the Union Leaders were unwilling to recognize any work other than on-the-ground organizing as legitimate claim to decision-making. This led to a somewhat confrontational relationship between Union Leaders and Activist Academics because of the nature of the structure of the organization and the organizing requirement for participation in OC meetings. Union Leaders were often unwilling to allow Activist Academics to participate in strategic decision-making because they felt they did not spend enough time organizing in order to have the knowledge to make strategic decisions.

Improvements for GAs. These individuals expressed a desire to win local and personal improvements through the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), but also were attuned to the

larger graduate unionization movement. Unlike Union Leaders, Activist Academics were not

necessarily always pro-labor unions across the board, but they were all pro-academic labor

unions.

> Well it all started when they changed our health insurance. And that would have
> been April, April of 2013, I think? And when that went down, I remember I talked
> to [name] a lot, [name] was on GSS at the time...and ah so we were talking about
> this and I remember saying you know we oughta think about unionizing or
> something. And I know she brought it up at GSS and it wasn't very popular and
> ah, so that was kind of the end of it, but [name] and I were very very mad about
> the health insurance thing. And I think part of the reason I was mad was because
> this was just after [my partner] had been sick so I'd actually seen what happens if
> your health insurance is crappy, or what could happen and how important that
> might be. (Aaron, GA)

Social activism background. Activist Academics generally had some experience with

social activism before becoming involved with the GA union, though they were less likely than

the Union Leaders to have held leadership positions in those movements or in NEU campus

organizations. As a result, they were less invested in a totally activist identity than Union

Leaders which gave Union Leaders. This is illustrated by another quote from Aaron describing

why he and his partner attended the first union informational session hosted by Hanna and

Gwen:

> And I brought [my partner] because [she] had served as a shop steward at
> [previous grad program]. And I'd kinda gone to a lot of the meetings with her
> because there was free food. And so we kind of knew how this worked, and she'd
> been a shop steward at the time when they were negotiating a new contract and so
> we'd really kinda seen how this works, and I was kind of like well gee, I should
> probably go because we have some experience with this. (Aaron, GA)

Involvement through Organizing. Unlike Union Leaders, Activist Academics were less

likely to have been involved in the early stages of the movement and were more likely to have

gotten involved by being organized by a Union Leader after the organization affiliated with the

UAW. Although I do not have concrete data to support this hypothesis, I expect that this is

because these people are were somewhat less likely to be plugged-in to activist networks on campus than Union Leaders.

Serious Academics

Little to no time for union work. This group of people seemed to identify foremost as academics which led them to strictly protect their time and limit union work. Although they would get involved in the union enough to participate in actions and potentially even to talk to their department about the union, they were generally not in any way interested or included in leadership activities (strategic decision-making, organizing, etc.). Conrad describes his perception of serious academics:

> Then you have people that are just not um, they just don't give a shit, they're like I'm here to be, you know to just like get my degree and get out. I mean I remember, I had to organize Kinesiology and those people are like 'we're supposed to be miserable, we're grad students,' I mean it's hard to break that mentality if you come in with that. (Conrad, GA)

Although I expect some Serious Academics would have been happy to participate in low-time-commitment organizing, like designing print materials for example, those activities were not available to GAs because they were taken care of by Ben, the UAW representative sent to manage the NEU campaign.

As part of their bid to avoid participation in time-consuming union activities, Serious Academics often made the claim that they were much too busy to spare any time. While nearly all graduate students that I interacted with articulated the claim to busyness at one time or another, there were important differences between Union Leaders' claims and the other GAs claims. Union Leaders often discussed claims of busyness with each other during meetings as a form of moral support and solidarity building. These were not empty commiserations – most of

the Union Leaders had put their own degree progress on hold or at the very least on the back burner in order to participate in building the union and so were often swamped with work. For example: [quote from field notes from yelling]In contrast, Activist Academics and Serious Academics used claims of busyness to decrease or escape organizing commitments, ostensibly to preserve their time for academic work. The following is an illustrative quote from Gwen, a serious academic and one of the women who actually helped do the legwork to get the union off the ground:

> I know that I really didn't want to be a leader. That was a lot of responsibility um, and I feel like that sort of structure especially early on can misrepresent people's needs. I came into the union for very personal motivations like please God, leave me alone, and that's not representative… I don't know that I backed out necessarily so much as sort of slunk quietly away. Um, I'm still happy with everything that the union is doing and it's so exciting every time we see one of those tentative agreements in the bargaining updates, um, I just feel um, more connected with my own hermitness and my own research work now I think than I did then. I was in coursework at the time and so now it's easier for like oh um no actually in lieu of being useful I actually could just read this book today. And yeah, so I think I'm, I'm much less active now than I was. (Gwen, GA)

Focus on Winning Local Improvements. In order to get these GAs to participate in union activity, it was generally necessary to convince them that it was in their best interest, even for the short time they will be here, to support the union because a CBA would likely represent improvements for everyone beginning the semester after it is ratified. Serious Academics generally did not seem to have much knowledge or interest in either the larger U.S. labor movement or the GA union movement.

Fear of impact on relationship with advisor/department. Something notable about GAs who performed the Serious Academic identity was the frequent reiteration of the fear that getting involved in union organizing would damage their relationship with their advisor or advising committee, those who acted as gatekeepers to academia after GAs graduate and move on.

Curiously, I did not observe Union Leaders or Activist Academics engage in this discourse. I attribute this to Serious Academics' apparently greater concern for getting a job in academia post-graduate school. It is possible that it may also reflect misunderstanding or mistrust of the laws protecting union involvement in the United States.

STRUCTURE

During the time that I participated in and observed the union organizing movement at NEU, there were three distinct structural moments, each of which was associated with distinct leadership forms and composition. Below, I describe each structure and leadership combination as well as their interaction. Initially, the leadership structure of the budding union was informal and open to any GA who was interested in participating in helping to build the union (i.e., attend meetings to choose a parent union, talk about the union with their friends or colleagues). In fact, the small group of founding leaders was eager to expand the informal leadership team as widely as possible in order to increase the likelihood of success and to appeal to potential parent unions. After the organization affiliated with a parent union, the UAW, and moved toward formalization, access to leadership was constrained during the period of highest organizing activity by the parent union's imposition of a new organizing structure. The mechanism of this exclusion was the constant comparison of potential leaders to the "good organizer" construct, as described below. Access to leadership expanded again once the collective bargaining agreement was reached and the existing leaders were able to adapt the formal leadership structure of the UAW to the local context.

Interdisciplinary Task Force (ITF)

The initial moment was one in which an informal structure emerged from Hannah and the other graduate students who were involved in the early days of organizing. At this point (spring

and summer 2013), it is not really fair to speak about a social movement organization, but rather a loose coalition of grads who were mostly connected via pre-existing social networks and/or the desire to form a union. While Hannah did much of the administrative and research work for the group, there were no formal leadership positions and, aside from Hannah, most of the GAs involved did the same kind of work for the movement, i.e., talking to other GAs in their departments or classes about unionizing to gauge interest and garner support. The group met regularly at meetings called and facilitated by Hannah and Gwen - though because many of the people involved knew each other from other milieus (departments, GSS, etc.), "union talk" was not necessarily restricted to these meetings. In fact, some participants mentioned to me that they felt "out of the loop" sometimes when attending meetings because it was clear there had been an exchange of information at some point outside of the meeting that they were not privy to. This was particularly true for GAs who did not have social ties to the others on the task force. After the first few meetings, the same group of GAs kept returning and the first step toward formalization was taken: this group decided to call themselves the Interdisciplinary Task Force (ITF). The following are excerpts from an interviews with Aaron, Conrad and Gwen, several of the GAs involved early in the campaign, describing the ITF:

> Well, it was ah, much less sort of hierarchical at that point. Like, you know, there was an organizing committee, and if you wanted to be involved, you came to the organizing committee. And we pretty much had everybody come who was willing to come, you know, the more help the better...And that really kind of changed over time, I think. So much later it was a little different. And ah, certainly [Hannah] was kind of the leader in terms of getting things done, but I don't really feel like it was strongly like let's do what [Hannah] says, it was very democratic. And we had a lot of long meetings as a result, so you know, back and forth and stuff. (Aaron, GA)

> ...and yeah so the meetings weren't that structured, they were just kind of like you could bring people in like I brought people from that only came to one meeting and then never came again, you know, um, it was just because at the time we were trying to spread out as much as possible. So I brought in my roommate who was a mechanical engineer, I brought a friend of mine from economics who wasn't even

a GA, he wasn't funded but he was a Socialist so he's like yeah, let's get organized! And then um, and then there was um, there was ah [a GA] in political science... (Conrad, GA)

so when we were hashing out the merits of different unions, um, it was, you know we all sat in a circle, everyone weighed in, it was a very open conversation, no one lead, eventually it became, as we great more and more, I think a structure needed to happen. Um, people, there was just no order to the meetings, like who sets an agenda, um, and it also created conflict when for instance the president of GSS [Graduate Student Senate] at the time…wanted to talk to the "leader" of the organizers and it was nice to be able to say actually we don't have a leader, like if you have something to say you can say it to all of us. (Gwen, GA)

As you can see from this description, although the ITF was comprised of a handful of dedicated union leaders, they were actively recruiting and open to increasing the size of the group regardless of the amount of work potential leaders were willing to do. If you were willing to represent your department at meetings and perhaps recruit one or two other people, you were eligible to participate in leadership and strategic decision-making.

Organizing Committee

After meeting with the Communication Workers of America (CWA), the United Auto Workers (UAW), and the American Federation of Teachers – Connecticut (AFT-CT), the Interdisciplinary Task Force, with the input of the rank-and-file via an emailed survey, chose to align themselves with the CWA "due to their experience with graduate student unionization, as well as their open and transparent campaign style and their emphasis on self-governance" (ITF email, 2013). However, shortly after the ITF communicated its decision to the CWA, the CWA representative informed them that they would like to withdraw their bid to represent the NEU GAs and instead recommended the UAW as the better option:

…the UAW has a well thought out strategic plan to organize thousands of graduate employees throughout the country. In addition to representing graduate employees at the UMass campus – and thousands more throughout the country – the UAW just won an impressive eight year struggle to represent grad employees at the NYU campus. In higher education, UAW is on the move. Coupled with their

political clout in [state], it seems clear to the CWA that UAW is a perfect fit for [NEU's] graduate workers…they are well positioned to use their influence with elected officials to both win union recognition and to negotiate a strong first contract. (CWA Statement in Support of the UAW at [NEU], January 2014)

The UAW began to formalize the organizational structure almost immediately upon affiliating with the graduate students at NEU. One of the first changes was in the naming of the group that had been organizing the union campaign. The UAW organizers who were sent to work on the GAU campaign suggested that they begin calling themselves the organizing committee and regulate access to committee meetings, and thus the decision-making process, based on what kind and how much "work" participants were willing/able to do. That is, access was regulated based on how closely participants were able to emulate the "good organizer" construct during this structural moment. The "good organizer" is described below.

The Good Organizer. As bargaining with the University stymied and the campaign for a strong first contract intensified, access to leadership and strategic decision-making was more highly regulated based on one's ability to be a "good organizer." There were two possible ways to be a "good organizer" and thus be granted voice in the decision-making process: (1) dedicate significant amounts of time to organizing fellow graduate students or (2) dedicate slightly less time to organize one's own department as well as serve as a point of contact for said department. Because of the time commitment, it was nearly impossible to be considered a good organizer, and thus participate in decision-making, if one had any plans to prioritize academic work over union work. Hence, the disparate access to leadership based on identity articulation.

Access to Organizing Committee (OC) meetings was based on how much "work" one was able to do. The ideal Organizing Committee member was willing to dedicate five to ten hours per week to the union effort. This time must be spent doing work in multiple departments,

or in at least one department outside one's home department. This prescription was framed as a gateway to rather than a restriction of leadership access:

> Anyone can come to meetings and be involved as long as they're willing to do the work. You have to be willing to do the work. (Hannah, author's field notes 2/28/2015)

> OC members tend, like ideally OC members would be like what they can do but like 5-10 [hours], as long as they like are getting their shit done with the departments. And so the point about the OC is that it is democratic and it is open to anyone who actually wants to do the work. As long as like, anyone can join, as long as you agree to have more than one department and put in the work. And that's what makes us democratic. There is absolutely no keeping anyone out of it except for your own volunteering. And I do not think that asking people for a time commitment is undemocratic [laughter]. I, that's not what undemocratic means. Undemocratic would be like oh, you can't join because we have too many people from your department or you can't join because you're not the type of person that we want or you can't join, you know, no, if you want to do the work and you want to have a say in it, come, join, do whatever, there is absolutely no, you don't even have to fill out a piece of paper, you just start showin' up. Like that's totally democratic. (Interview with Olivia, founding member, 3/29/2015)

These organizers were expected to come to meetings and give their input on strategy as well as discuss their experiences in the field in order to give the UAW staff as well as the other graduate organizers a sense of how organizing was going and what kinds of actions could reasonably be planned for the future. Individuals on the OC were generally expected to be self-regulating and to complete organizing tasks without much supervision from the UAW staff or other OC members. In fact, the opposite was true; OC members were responsible for coordinating with department leaders and rank-and-file members to ensure that organizing happened and that information about the campaign and bargaining was disseminated. A quote from Ben, one of the UAW International Organizers assigned to our campaign, illustrates the regulation of access to meetings and strategic decision-making:

> …I do want to kind of, the purpose of these meetings it to develop strategy. So people who come to this room are people who have taken on a large level of responsibility, like [Aaron, another GA]…So the experiences we get we bring back

here to shape our strategies, so we don't want to invite just anyone, if you're here, we need you to do work. (author's field notes, 11/21/2014)

I recorded Hannah expressing similar thoughts at an organizing committee meeting the following semester:

Hannah has two main concerns about dept leaders coming to OC meetings: dept leaders who occasionally do work in their dept, all depts. are different, it's very hard for those people to have scope, know what is going on. Two, people who are making strategy that don't do the work - that is the definition of top down leadership. (author's field notes, 3/19/2015)

The second way to be a "good organizer" was to be a useful and reliable department leader. Department leaders, in contrast with OC members, were expected to do just a couple of hours of organizing per week. They were only expected to organize in their home department and were not expected to attend OC meetings. They were however, encouraged to pass their experiences and suggestions for strategic decision-making on to the OC member assigned to them. While these individuals were expected to give limited input on strategy and discouraged from attending strategy meetings, they were also expected to be the first point of contact for the rank-and-file members. As described by John, a former NEU graduate student turned UAW staff member, the ideal department leader was

…willing to go around [organizing], um, they know everyone in their department, which, in some departments that doesn't exist, um, so they know people, they're willing to talk to people, they listen to you um, when you first tell them about something but then they do all the talking um when you go around, and then yeah they're happy with that. You can like, if they have ideas on major like, like theory and how we're supposed to be running things, they can tell you or they can tell their team leader, and then that can be like, 'well we had this idea that this guy had in like,' like that's the way it should work. (Interview with John, 3/29/2015)

In further contrast with OC members, department leaders were often recruited, sometimes at random, as opposed to volunteering to help. The following quotes from John and Hannah illustrate the helter-skelter process of finding department leaders:

And yeah, no, anyone you could convince to go around with you for any amount of time was a department leader, basically. (Interview with John, 3/29/2015)

Just fuckin walked into the building and knocked on a door! I mean I remember my very first organizing conversation, I was with [Ben] who was my staff person, um, and we fucking, I was assigned to ECE, we Googled ECE, we found out part of it was in the ITE building, we walked over to the ITE building, looked at a directory, looked like, oh, seems like it's mostly on the third floor, went up the elevator, and knocked on the first door on the third floor that looked like it contained graduate students. Um, and the first two people we talked to put their names on the card and still organize for me. So like it's, it's, that's the kind of shit we were doing, [laughter] it was just like, well first it was like, does anybody know anybody in ECE? Crickets. Ok, I guess we're goin over there [laughter] You know, we're just knockin on doors! (Interview with Hannah, 3/30/2015)

During this phase of the organizing process, despite nearly constant discussion of democracy and the need for transparency and information sharing with the rank-and-file, access to OC meetings – the primary site of strategic decision-making and information about the actions of the emergent union – was heavily regulated and restricted to those GAs who were willing and able to dedicate significant amounts of time and energy to a very particular style of activism. In addition to the effects of the requirement of organizing for leadership status, administrative tasks and the development of various types of media promoting the organizing and contract campaigns (social media pages, website, op-eds, print materials, etc.) were centralized and handled exclusively by the UAW staff. This meant that there were no paths to leadership for any GAs who did not possess the time, skills, or inclination to participate in face-to-face organizing.

The UAW's constitution and its organizing template are both designed for workplaces where workers' identities are more or less stable and deeply connected to their occupation (which they expect to be stable and long-term). When applying this structure to the academic setting, where GA's identities are by definition transitory and they do not expect to be in that position for long, this style of organizing, which only recognizes and rewards a very particular type of organizing that requires significant time commitment and particular social skills, excludes those

GAs who primarily identify as academics from leadership and decision-making because they are unwilling to dedicate the required amount of time to union work at the expense of their academic work.

Other Leadership Constraints

In addition to intra-organizational constraints, the pathway to leadership, particularly paid leadership, was blocked by larger social structures including U.S. visa laws and language discrimination (partially related to the desire for paid leaders to be "good organizers"). Leadership in the local UAW union is important not only because it affords individuals a voice in the decision-making process of the union, but also because it provides access to financial and political resources. There are potentially financial rewards, including access to the GAships established in the contract, as well as the opportunity to make connections in the political realm with other labor leaders and state legislators. Constraints on leadership are important because they not only regulate access to strategic decision-making within the union, but also access to potentially valuable financial and political resources. As mentioned previously, this path was blocked to international students, many of whom are on visas that do not allow them to accept employment outside of the university. This meant that international students could not be considered for leadership positions paid for by the UAW during the organizing campaign or in the future of the union, so long as visa law remains unchanged.

As mentioned above, visa law was not the only obstacle to leadership for international GAs. Lamenting the "language barrier" for otherwise qualified candidates was a common refrain during the hiring process for new paid staff. Although for Chinese GAs their multi-lingual status was often cited as a positive characteristic – because it would allow them to communicate more effectively with the large population of Chinese GAs – ultimately fears about their ability to

organize GAs in multiple departments (coupled with visa limitations) led to their exclusion from leadership positions, paid and unpaid.

Executive Board

The discursive fiction of "democracy" becomes democracy in practice once the organization is finally formalized and democratic provisions like bylaws, elections, and membership-wide meetings are in place. While some union leaders chaffed at the imposition of what seemed like inane bureaucratic rules, the CBA and formalization actually opened paths to leadership to GAs who would not have had access during the organizing campaign whether because of identity expression or international status. Although the structure imposed by the UAW constitution is rigid and arcane in many ways, when the day-to-day running of the union was finally handed over to NEU GAs, they were able to massage and skirt the structure in ways that made it work in the local context. Bob, one of the early members of the ITF and OC, discusses his frustration with the imposed structure of the UAW:

> …having to go through the president's office is an example of again how they're controlling from the top down, from the highest of peaks, like Mount Olympus is already telling you, Zeus is up there with this lightning rods like, you cannot, this is what your bylaws have to be, you cannot even create, you can't even change your leadership structure in a way to be more bottom up, it has to have three year terms, it has to have a president and a vice president, you know, cause as I had mentioned to you, I was really fond of the idea of having co-chairs, which the UMass folks have, but I found out it's because, I guess a benefit of an amalgamated, that's just their unit within the amalgamated local. The local still has to have the president, vice president, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, … Throwing lightning rods in his toga [laughter] I mean it's obviously not that bad, but there is that bureaucratic like, you're locked in to make the bylaws be a certain way so you have to have this presidential, vice presidential structure, which is just classic hierarchy and you know, kind of problem if you're into having a more democratic union it prevents you from doing that in many ways. (Interview with Bob, 6/25/2015)

Although these sentiments of frustration were expressed by several union leaders, my observations actually show that the organizational leadership became much more

representative of the bargaining unit after formalization through the UAW structure. In addition to requiring a much larger number of elected officers than had ever participated in the informal moments of organizing – nine executive board members, twenty-nine stewards, and five bargaining committee members – the CBA included provisions for three graduate assistantships to be provided by the university for the purposes of administering the union. These assistantships, which were to be allocated to the president, vice president, and financial secretary, made it possible for international students to be eligible to be considered for paid leadership positions within the organization. Given these changes, my findings support Staggenborg's (1988:604) assertion that SMOs do not necessarily become oligarchical after formalization, "In fact, many seem more democratic than informal SMOs because they follow routinized procedures that make it more difficult for individual leaders to attain disproportionate power."

DISCUSSION

I have described the process of building a movement leadership around a transient identity and through several significant structural changes. What we learn from this, and what previous theory has not addressed, is that

1) Identity affiliation matters for leadership mobilization as much as structural opportunity, because identity mediates who has access to those opportunities, and

2) In contrast to Fantasia & Stepan-Norris (2004) and in support of Staggenborg (1988, 1991), I find that professionalization of the movement did not change the social movement character of the organization, and in fact opened spaces in the leadership structure for new voices to expand social movement activity beyond fighting for a collective bargaining agreement.

The movement to organize a union at NEU was based on the GA identity which is temporary and precarious. The leaders who emerged from this population were individuals who, to varying degrees, privileged an activist identity over their identity as a GA, whether because of disillusionment with academia or because of adherence to a leftist or socialist ideology.

The structure of the organization experienced three significant changes during the first two years of organizing. During the two less formalized moments, access to leadership was regulated ostensibly based on willingness to "do work." However, the kind and level of work required actually vetted people based on identity expression, i.e., those who aspired to leadership and for whom the GA identity was salient (such that they were unwilling to commit the time required or they felt they would be bad at the work based on their discipline) were actively excluded from leadership by those for whom the GA identity was not salient. Thus the perspectives of these individuals were absent from the meetings where strategic decision-making happened. This ultimately meant that there was initially less representation in leadership from disciplines with less flexible schedules (e.g., lab sciences like engineering, chemistry, or pharmacy) and less representation of graduate assistants, regardless of discipline, for whom succeeding in academia was already a more than full-time commitment (e.g., international students). Thus we can see how identity affiliation affects the priorities of potential movement leaders, which affects their likelihood of accessing leadership positions in the early stages of a movement when critical decisions are made about movement goals and tactics. In contrast to the cases presented by Brodkin Sacks (1988) and Robnett (1997), in which affiliation with the stable primary movement identity (Duke healthcare worker or Black/African American, respectively) was necessary for access to leadership – both formal and informal – leadership in a movement organized around a temporary identity emerged because of their articulation of a more stable

identity directed *outside* of the movement, i.e., the union leader identity that privileged action and an orientation toward social justice. Thus, in populations with similarly transient identities – whether occupational or otherwise – these finding suggest that movement leadership will emerge from those who may not necessarily feel the transient identity is salient (if such a population exists).

Formalization and professionalization of the movement, somewhat unexpectedly, opened up the range of leadership opportunities and un-did some of the closing of ranks that happened during the more informal stages. Access to leadership was granted through election by the membership rather than by ability to commit time or appointment by existing leadership which greatly expanded access. As mentioned above, this supports Staggenborg's (1988, 1991) earlier work that suggests that movement professionalization does not negate the social movement character of the organization.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this paper that social movement structure interacts with identity to create different types of leadership and to ultimately transform leadership and the movement. This understanding of how identity affects leadership mobilization clarifies the processes of who has access to leadership and why. In the case of the graduate employee union campaign that I observed, identity expression both helped attract leaders and became the mechanism through which leadership was foreclosed to some people. Specifically, the temporary and transitory GA identity was not salient for the leaders that emerged in this movement. Instead, they were more likely to draw on their more stable and long-term identity as activists when describing why and how they became involved in the movement.

These findings extend previous understandings of access and ascension to leadership by illuminating how and why leaders emerge from a movement around a temporary identity. Furthermore, this deepens our understanding of the structural influences on leadership including how the imposed formalization of SMOs can have positive consequences for movement leadership.

Appendix A. Interview Schedule

During the course of our conversation I'm interested in learning more about your experiences as a part of GEU-UAW. Specifically, I am interested in hearing about the early days of the Graduate Employee Union, including how the idea of unionizing caught on and how the organization was established, your role in the organization, how you came to be involved, and other experiences that may have prepared you for involvement in the GEU-UAW. I would also like to hear your thoughts about leadership and organizational structure. You are welcome to talk about any other experiences related to the union you think are important. So, why don't you start by telling me about, as far back as you can remember, how the union got started and how you got involved?

This interview will be semi-structured and will cover the following topics:

I.   Formation of the union

     a. What were some of the reasons people formed a union?
     b. How did you end up involved in this thing?
     c. Who else was involved at that time? Did you have friends involved?
     d. Can you describe one of these early meetings for me? How were meetings run? Who organized them/facilitated them?
     e. How was outreach to other groups on campus?
     f. Did you feel like there was a clear leader? Tell me about that leader?

II.   Participant's role in the organization

     a. (if not answered already) How did you get involved?
     b. How are you involved in the union? When you are doing union stuff, what does that entail?
     c. How has your role changed over time? – is there a difference in the activities you do now as compared with the activities in the beginning?
     d. How much input into organizational structure did you have?
     e. What were you doing before UConn, how did end up here? Had you had any experience with unions before? Social activism?

III.   Leadership

     a. Can you describe a typical OC meeting for me? Who attends? Who speaks? What kinds of things go on at these meetings?
     b. How would you describe the leadership structure? Who would you classify as a leader?
     c. How would you describe the ideal leader for this context?

Appendix B. Descriptive Tables

Table 1. Theoretical Foci of Social Movement Leadership Literature

Focus	Description	Authors
Leadership → Structure	Individual leadership style affects the organizational structure of a movement, particularly new movements. Bureaucratic or task oriented leaders tend to beget hierarchical and rigidly structured organizations while enthusiastic or socially oriented leaders tend to neglect structural development in favor of animating and impassioning followers.	Weber (1958); Roche & Sachs (1955); Gusfield (1966)
Structure → Leadership	Broad social structures constrain and shape the pathways to formal and informal leadership via access to economic, social, and cultural resources. Within movements, organizational structure further constrains access.	Robnett (1997); Lipset, Trow & Coleman (1956)
Leadership → Outcomes	Leadership has an impact on movement outcomes. Diverse leadership teams that are open to creative debate and critique seem to be the most effective in terms of goal achievement. Hierarchical leadership has also been shown to have a positive impact on goal achievement via clear distribution of labor.	Ganz (2000); Andrews et al. (2010); Simpson et al. (2012)
Leadership + Structure → Outcomes	Leadership, social structure, and organizational structure in combination impact movements' effectiveness.	Veltmeyer & Petras (2002); Reger & Staggenborg (2006)
Biography → Leadership	Leaders come to be as a result of the intersection of social structures and experiences unique to their biography. This approach asserts that we cannot understand leaders' existence without taking into account their individual experiences.	Hart (2009)

Table 2. Description of Findings

Identity	Characteristics	Leadership Level	Participation
Union Leaders	Prioritize union work over academic work Concerned with social justice or the labor movement broadly Self-selection into involvement Social activism background	ITF/OC/Paid Staff	5+ organizing hours/week Organize in ≤2 departments Attend OC meetings Actively involved in strategic decision-making
Academic Activists	Desire to balance union and academic work Involved through social network ties or organizing Focus on local improvements and/or improvements for GAs broadly Social activism background	OC/Department Leader	≤5 organizing hours/week Organize in home department and up to 1-2 other departments Sporadic OC meeting attendance Limited or no participation in strategic decision-making
Serious Academics	Little to no time for union work If involved, focused on winning local improvements only Fear of impact on relationship with advisor/department "we're supposed to be miserable"	Department Leader/ Rank-and-File	≤1 organizing hour/week Low to no organizing responsibilities Did not attend OC Meetings Mediated or no input in strategic decision-making

*This analysis includes only those GAs who participated in the union in some way. Non-participants are not included in any category.

Table 3. Study Participants

Study Participants	Affiliation	Department	Identity	Leadership Level	Paid	First Involvement	Formal Interview
Emily	NEU	Hard Science	Union Leader	BC/OC	Summer term 2015	Fall 2013/ITF	
Myra*	NEU	Hard Science	Union Leader	BC/OC		Spring 2014/BC	
Jen	NEU	Humanities	Union Leader	BC/OC		Fall 2013/ITF	
Evan	NEU	Hard Science	Union Leader	OC		Spring 2013/ITF	Yes
Conrad	NEU	Social Science	Union Leader	OC	Fall 2014 - Fall 2015	Fall 2013/ITF	Yes
Bob	NEU	Social Science	Union Leader	OC	Fall 2015	Spring 2013/ITF	Yes
Hannah	NEU	Humanities	Union Leader	OC/Founder	Spring 2013 - Spring 2014	Spring 2013/ITF	
Meg	NEU/Undergraduate	Social Science	Union Leader	Staff/OC	Spring 2015	Fall 2014/Staff	Yes
Olivia	NEU	Social Science	Union Leader	Staff/OC	Spring 2015	Spring 2013/ITF	
Annie	NEU	Social Science	Union Leader	Staff/OC	Fall 2014 - Spring 2015	Fall 2013/Staff	
Raj*	NEU	Hard Science	Activist Academic	BC		Spring 2014/BC	
Isaac	NEU	Social Science	Activist Academic	BC		Spring 2013/ITF	
Jack	NEU	Social Science	Activist Academic	BC		Fall 2013/BC	
Aaron	NEU	Hard Science	Activist Academic	Dept Leader		Spring 2013/ITF	Yes
Maggie	NEU	Humanities	Activist Academic	OC		Spring 2013/ITF	
Andrew	NEU	Social Science	Activist Academic	Political Organizer	Fall 2014	Fall 2014/GOTV	
Rob	NEU	Humanities	Activist Academic	Staff/OC	Spring 2015	Fall 2014/Staff	
Sarah	NEU	Social Science	Activist Academic	Staff/OC	Spring 2015	Fall 2014/Staff	
Sydney	NEU	Humanities	Activist Academic	OC		Fall 2013/ITF	
Jordan*	NEU	Hard Science	Activist Academic	OC		Fall 2014/OC	
Angela	NEU	Hard Science	Serious Academic	Dept Leader		Fall 2014/OC	
Nick	NEU	Hard Science	Serious Academic	Dept Leader		Fall 2014/OC	
Gwen	NEU	Humanities	Serious Academic	Founder		Spring 2013/ITF	Yes
Ben	UAW	--	--	Staff		January 2014/OC	
Tom	UAW	--	--	Staff		January 2014/OC	
John	Former grad/UAW	--	--	Staff	Spring 2013 - fall 2014	Fall 2013/OC	Yes
Ashley	Former grad/UAW	--	--	Staff	Fall 2014 - Summer term 2015	Fall 2013/OC	

Note: BC = Bargaining Committee; OC = Organizing Committee; ITF = Interdisciplinary Task Force; GOTV = Get Out The Vote; * = International Student

49

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