



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Office of the Dean
100 Clio Hall
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey 08544
t 609.258.3035 f 609.258.6180
gradschool.princeton.edu

November 16, 2016

Dear Graduate Students,

As many of you know, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) decided this past summer that graduate students who serve as research or teaching assistants at private universities may unionize. This has led to discussions at a number of private universities, including Princeton. Last week, the Graduate Student Government held a town hall, where they invited graduate students with varying perspectives to present their views on unionization. Students on both sides of the issue made thoughtful presentations and responded to questions, and a genuine spirit of collegiality and respect was on display throughout. One of the themes that emerged, on both sides, was the need for more information on this issue. Toward that end, I hope you will find it helpful if I share some procedural information and some of my own thoughts on the unionization process.

A group of graduate students known as Princeton Graduate Students United (PGSU), who are in favor of unionization, recently decided to affiliate with a national labor union called American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Based on this affiliation, AFT said it would send its own representatives to our campus in the coming days, weeks or months to begin what is called an organizing drive or card drive. You may be approached by fellow students or AFT representatives and asked to sign a union authorization card. A union authorization card is a legal document, analogous to a Power of Attorney, which says that you authorize the union to be your representative to negotiate about your “terms and conditions of employment.” Authorization cards are used by a union either to demand “recognition” by an employer, or to file a petition for an election with the NLRB if 30% of those in the proposed bargaining unit sign these cards. Before you take the legal step of signing an authorization card, I urge you to find out as much as you can about unionization and about the AFT.

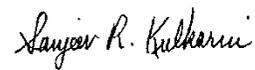
If union recognition were approved through an NLRB election, then a contract would be negotiated between the union and the University. That contract would be binding on all Princeton graduate students in the bargaining unit, whether they signed an authorization card or not and whether they voted for unionization or not. Signing a union authorization card is potentially consequential for all graduate students who may serve as AIs or ARs, those who are here now and those who will come after you.

You may have questions about how unionization would impact you and your relationships with your fellow students, your faculty advisers, and others in our community. How much would you have to pay in union dues each year? Which aspects of your relationships with the University and your advisers would be negotiated by the union and governed by the contract? How would our distinctive culture and climate around graduate education change? Faculty advisers may wonder how their role as mentors might be affected as well.

There is much uncertainty and some concern about how the presence of a union would impact graduate education at Princeton. A decision to unionize likely would be difficult to reverse, so if you are asked to sign a union authorization card, please defer any decision until all of your questions about unionization are answered to your satisfaction.

Because I believe it is important for graduate students to be fully informed before taking any action with respect to unionization, I will be offering updates and thoughts in the coming weeks and additional forums where we can discuss these issues in person. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns about unionization, the history and background of the AFT's representation of graduate students, or about Princeton's current governance structure and graduate student input into decision-making at the University, I encourage you to be in touch with me or with a member of my staff who oversees an area of interest to you: Cole Crittenden (academic and enrollment policies), Mary Bechler (finance), Lisa Schreyer (student life), and Dale Trevino (diversity and inclusion). We meet routinely with students, and we always want to hear from you if you have concerns we can address. Other resources and opportunities for engagement are also available, including many that are cited in the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document on the Graduate School website.

Sincerely,



Sanjeev R. Kulkarni
Dean of the Graduate School