



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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Dear Graduate Students,

I write to offer updates on the topic of [graduate student unionization](#). My staff and I have been meeting with graduate students and faculty in various settings to answer questions, clarify some misapprehensions, and offer insights. One question that is regularly posed by graduate students is whether, when, and how an election on unionization might be held at Princeton. To be clear, at this point there is no union election scheduled at Princeton.

A group of students in favor of unionizing (Princeton Graduate Students United, or PGSU) has been working with a national union called American Federation of Teachers (AFT). We understand this group is interested in unionizing all students who serve as Assistants in Instruction (AIs) and Assistants in Research (ARs) into one union “bargaining unit.”

In the coming weeks or months, this group may begin a union card drive on our campus, seeking to collect students’ signatures. If the group gets 30 percent or more of eligible students to sign union authorization cards, then it can petition the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) for an election in which individuals would have the opportunity to vote for or against unionization. If such an election is called, then the majority of votes cast would determine whether or not to unionize. If the vote is to unionize, then all eligible students would fall under union representation, including students who voted against unionization or did not vote, along with future students who serve as AIs and ARs.

Unionization of graduate students who serve as teaching or research assistants at private universities is now permitted because of an NLRB decision last summer. This does not mean that such students *will* unionize – only that they have that option to consider. There have been varying degrees of unionization activity on private university campuses since this ruling:

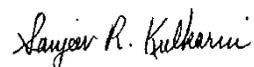
- Duke graduate students voted to reject unionization, and Harvard students – who continue to await final election results – appear to have rejected unionization.
- Graduate students at Columbia voted to unionize under the United Auto Workers (UAW).
- At Yale, a union selected nine out of 50 departments and focused on unionizing those nine departments. Reported election results at Yale indicate that six of the nine departments approved the union, one department rejected the union, and two other departments continue to await final election results. The 41 remaining departments are not affected and won’t be unionized.
- At some private universities, such as Stanford and M.I.T., no unionization activity has been reported.

Each university has its own particular character and culture, and my own view continues to be that unionization is not a good fit for graduate education at Princeton. Shared input, collaboration, and responsiveness are important characteristics of Princeton. We are a close-knit and intimate academic community, one that strives to be responsive both to each individual and to the student body as a

whole. We do our best not to rely on one-size-fits-all solutions, while at the same time we are able to quickly and nimbly make changes that improve benefits and resources for all of our students. If a union were to be approved at Princeton, any resulting contract would be binding on all AIs and ARs, as well as on all faculty who interact with students in their roles as AIs and ARs. The existence of a union would change the nature of the collegial and individualized relationship that exists here between faculty and their students, and it would change the nature of the relationship between graduate students and the University. With a union, our relationship would be based on a negotiated contract that would last up to five years. For the duration of the contract, there would be significantly limited opportunity for individual solutions or for responsive improvements to policies or benefits covered by the contract. As I said in my earlier letter, unionization would impose costs on students. There would be financial costs, but the costs may not only be financial; they may be academic and interpersonal as well.

If a union is approved, it can be difficult to remove, even if students later change their minds about its impact on them and the campus climate. For that reason, I again encourage you to defer any decision to sign a union authorization card until all of your questions about unionization are answered to your satisfaction. Your faculty advisers may have valuable perspectives on this issue, and I encourage you to ask them about their views. My colleagues in the Graduate School office and I also remain ready to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Sanjeev R. Kulkarni  
Dean of the Graduate School