

# ***The facts about graduate unions***

Since 2015, a large majority of Harvard's graduate employees have signed cards to join Harvard Graduate Students Union-UAW. The administration has announced its opposition to graduate unionization and begun an anti-union campaign of misinformation designed to create uncertainty. Harvard is one of the world's premier universities. Its faculty should look at the empirical facts.

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## ***1. Will a graduate student union adversely affect teaching or harm academic freedom?***

**No.** Graduate unions exist at over 60 universities across the United States, and in many cases have for decades. Studies of these institutions show that graduate unionization **has no impact on academic freedom**. A 2000 survey of five large public universities found “overwhelming evidence that faculty members did not perceive collective bargaining to be deleterious to educational processes. Ninety-five percent of respondents felt that collective bargaining did not inhibit the free exchange of ideas (which may well be thought of as a key element of academic freedom).”<sup>1</sup> During Columbia's recent hearings before the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), an expert called by the administration admitted that there was **no empirical evidence** for unions harming student-advisor relationships or academic freedom. In addition, the NLRB decisively ruled that there is “no support” for the contentions that graduate student unionization “would diminish academic freedom,” and “there is little, if any, basis here to conclude that treating employed graduate students as employees under the Act would raise serious constitutional questions, much less violate the First Amendment.”<sup>2</sup>

## ***2. Will a graduate student union change my relationship with my students?***

**No.** There is **no evidence** that the faculty-student relationship is negatively affected when graduate students unionize. In fact, peer-reviewed research has found that this relationship is **either not affected, or improved, by unionization**.<sup>3</sup> A 2013 study, based on surveys of 3219 Ph.D. students in eight public research-intensive universities, found that students at unionized institutions on average gave their advisers higher ratings for “accepting them as competent professionals, serving as a role model to them, and being effective in his or her role” than did their counterparts on nonunion campuses. The authors of the study suggested that “**unions strengthen the relationship between students and faculty advisors by pushing potential employment-related conflicts up to the university bureaucracy**.”<sup>4</sup> The NLRB held in *Columbia* that there is no basis of support for the contentions that graduate unionization “would harm the faculty-student relationship.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hewitt, G., “Graduate Student Employee Collective Bargaining and the Educational Relationship between Faculty and Graduate Students” *Journal of Collective Negotiations* 29:2, (2000): 153-166; see also Rogers, S., Eaton, A. E., & Voos, P. B. “Effects of unionization on graduate student employees: Faculty student relations, academic freedom, and pay” *ILR Review* 66:2 (2014): 487-510.

<sup>2</sup> *The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York and Graduate Workers of Columbia-GWC, UAW, Case 02-RC-143012* (August 23, 2016), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Julius, D. J. & Gumpert, P. J. “Graduate Student Unionization: Catalysts and Consequences” *The Review of Higher Education*, 26:2 (2003): 187-216; Hewitt, G., “Graduate Student Employee Collective Bargaining.”

<sup>4</sup> Rogers, S., et al, “Effects of unionization on graduate student employees.”

<sup>5</sup> *Columbia University and GWC-UAW*, 9.

### 3. Is Harvard's administration really promoting an "open conversation" about graduate unionization?

No. Unlike at NYU, Harvard's administrators have **refused to consider a neutrality agreement**. Instead, the university has hired Fisher Phillips, a top anti-union law firm, for its expertise in union busting. In October, 2015, Dean Aloise sent an email advising faculty to stress the "downsides" of unionization and providing the "No 'TIPS'" (No Threats, No Interrogation, No Promises, No Surveillance) "rule" for employee unionization. Coincidentally, this is the **same guideline provided by Wal-Mart to its managers** to subvert union organizing.<sup>6</sup>

<p><b>TIPS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>T = THREATEN</b> It is unlawful to make threats about protected/union activity</li><li>• <b>I = INTERROGATE</b> It is unlawful to ask questions about protected/union activity</li><li>• <b>P = PROMISE</b> It is unlawful to make promises to influence protected/union activity</li><li>• <b>S = SPY</b> It is unlawful to spy on protected/union activity</li></ul> <p>16 Walmart Confidential Walmart</p>
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### 4. Who decides whether grads unionize?

Grads decide. As graduate students, we value and appreciate our faculty, advisors, and PIs for their expertise and guidance. However, we also acknowledge that a power dynamic exists between faculty and graduate employees. While attempting to appear even-handed, the administration is using their authority to skew the conversation. The decision to unionize is one that should be left to Harvard's graduate employees to decide for themselves, without pressure or misinformation.

**Please consider telling the administrators today that unionization is a decision that should be made by graduate students, without pressure one way or the other from those in positions of power and authority.** You can also sign a pledge of faculty neutrality, declaring that graduate workers should decide on the merits of collective bargaining on their own, and call on the administration to respect their right to do so:

[harvardgradunion.org/faculty-call-for-harvard-neutrality/](http://harvardgradunion.org/faculty-call-for-harvard-neutrality/)



For more information, visit us on the web or email us anytime:  
[hgsuuaw.org](http://hgsuuaw.org) | [facebook.com/hgsuuaw](https://facebook.com/hgsuuaw) | [hgsu.general@gmail.com](mailto:hgsu.general@gmail.com)

<sup>6</sup> "Wal-Mart: A Manager's Toolbox to Remaining Union-Free," 39. <<http://www.ufcw.ca/Theme/UFCW/files/ManagersToolbox.pdf>>.