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## GRADUATE STUDENT UNIONIZATION FACULTY BRIEF—POST ELECTION UPDATE

JAN. 27, 2023

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The purpose of this post-election Faculty Brief is to help faculty understand the outcome of the recent graduate student unionization election, the next steps in the process and their duties and obligations when discussing unionization with graduate students.

### ELECTION OUTCOME

By way of a [secret-ballot election](#) held on Jan. 10 and 11, 2023, a majority of eligible graduate students voted in favor of representation by the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE). This means that, subject to limited exceptions, graduate assistants, teaching assistants, graduate research assistants and graduate fellows are now represented by the union when they are enrolled in Northwestern degree programs and providing instructional or research services for the University.

As certified by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the “bargaining unit” (a group of individuals collectively represented by a union) is defined as:

**Graduate students enrolled in Northwestern University degree programs who are providing instructional and research services for the University, including graduate assistants, teaching assistants, research assistants and fellows.**

The bargaining unit definition explicitly excludes:

**All other employees; graduate students who are not providing instructional or research services for the University; undergraduate students; graduate students not seeking Northwestern degrees, including visiting students; graduate student graders, tutors and proctors who are not otherwise providing instructional or research services for the University; assistant chairs in residential colleges; residential assistants; students enrolled in the Pritzker School of Law; M.D. seeking students in the Feinberg School of Medicine (including M.D./Ph.D. students in Feinberg who are in their M.D. phase of studies); students enrolled in the Medill School of Journalism; office clericals; managers; guards and supervisors as defined in the Act.**

Consistent with the exclusions above, non-graduate students such as postdoctoral fellows, research associates and other employees hired directly by Human Resources and who are not enrolled in a degree program are not part of the bargaining unit.

### NEXT STEPS

Because graduate students have now unionized, the University and the union are required to engage in collective bargaining over pay, benefits and other working conditions for graduate students in the bargaining unit.

# Northwestern

During this interim period between the union election and the ratification of a collective bargaining agreement, the University must **maintain the status quo** with respect to graduate student “terms and conditions of employment.” Generally speaking, this means that the University cannot unilaterally change aspects of graduate students’ appointments (including pay and benefits) without prior discussion with the union.

Collective bargaining typically is conducted in a series of meetings at which representatives of the union and Northwestern will exchange written proposals for a collective bargaining agreement (also called a “union contract” or a “labor contract”). The negotiations for an initial contract can take months and oftentimes a year or longer.

## INTERACTING WITH GRADUATE STUDENTS

During this status quo period, faculty members have the same right to speak freely and express opinions about unions and unionization, as long as they avoid threats, coercion or promises of benefits (see below).

<b>No Threats</b>	<b>No Promises</b>
Don't make explicit or implied threats or treat students differently because they support or oppose a union. Don't threaten adverse consequences as a result of graduate student unionization.	Don't make explicit or implied promises of good things to come if students withdraw support from the union.
<b>No Interrogation</b>	<b>No Surveillance</b>
You can listen if students want to talk to you about unionization, and you are free to express your opinions (subject to the TIPS rules), but don't question students about whether or not they support the union.	Don't eavesdrop when students discuss the union/unionization.

Faculty members also should not engage in “direct dealing” with students about pay, benefits or other working conditions, nor should they discourage or prohibit students from discussing terms and conditions of their appointments.

Faculty can and should continue to engage with their graduate students as they have in the past and hold them to the same academic and performance expectations as before. This includes assigning duties, setting work schedules, evaluating performance and providing feedback, and addressing misconduct.

## QUESTIONS?

[Frequently asked questions](#) are posted on the University’s graduate student unionization website. Faculty who have additional questions are encouraged to use this website [form](#). Please include your contact information if you request an individual response.