Cornell Graduate Students United (CGSU)
Faculty Senate Meeting, April 13, 2016

We invite you to visit CGSU’s website, cornellgusu.org, to learn more about our efforts to improve labor conditions for graduate students at Cornell University. Below, we provide a few helpful sources on grad unionization, and unionization more broadly.

**Examples of collective bargaining agreements with graduate unions:**
OSU (Oregon State): [http://hr.oregonstate.edu/sites/hr.oregonstate.edu/files/ercc/2012cge-cba.pdf](http://hr.oregonstate.edu/sites/hr.oregonstate.edu/files/ercc/2012cge-cba.pdf)
UW (U of Washington): [https://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/laborel/contracts/uaw/contract/](https://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/laborel/contracts/uaw/contract/)

**Selected references (annotated)**
American Assoc. of University Professors (AAUP) Amicus Brief, Columbia Univ. NLRB case (2016)
The AAUP’s brief affirms their longtime support for graduate unionizing efforts. It argues that the labor graduate workers do for the university as TAs and RAs is indistinguishable in kind from that which faculty and other teaching and research staff perform, and therefore ought to be recognized as employment. Citing evidence that graduate unionization improves the relationships between faculty mentors and their advisees, the AAUP advocates for the NLRB to “return to its well-reasoned NYU decision, which found collective bargaining by graduate assistants compatible with academic freedom.”

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Amicus Brief, Columbia Univ. NLRB case (2016)
AFT argues that the NLRB should restore the employee status of private university graduate students, in light of the economic and labor realities attendant to being a TA or RA in those institutions. Further, AFT cites ample evidence that collective bargaining tends to improve the material and academic lives of graduate workers, including their relationships with advisors and supervisors.

Rogers et al. (2013) explore the effects of a single independent variable, graduate student unionization, on academic freedom, student-teacher relationships, and pay. The study directly compared four sets of matched pairs, a unionized and nonunionized institution, at eight universities for each geographic region of the United States (West, Midwest, Northeast, and South). The authors show that graduate student unionization does not harm academic freedom, has a positive impact on faculty-student relationships, and improves annual stipends as well as student perceptions of pay fairness and adequacy.

The author surveys the relationship between graduate student unions, and lecturers, clerical workers, academic student employees, and other campus workers throughout the University of California (UC) system. Gross (p. 337) highlights the structural separation of education and
management in universities as a prominent characteristic of corporate restructuring. The author argues that graduate student unionization encourages robust inclusion of faculty members in institutional decision-making procedures by embedding the relationship between campus stakeholders within a proper labor-management framework (p. 345).

The authors address two main questions: where and why have graduate students organized for collective bargaining purposes, and how, if at all, has it affected the student-mentor relationship? Through interviews, archival research, and a review of existing literature, the authors observe “no conclusive evidence that collective bargaining in and of itself has compromised the student-faculty relationship” (201). They furthermore suggest that “the clarification of roles and employment policies can enhance mentoring relationships” (Ibid.). While the authors determine that no evidence indicates a change in pedagogical relationships between faculty and graduate students who collective bargain, their study led them to identify a more urgent concern regarding “the explicit conceptualization of graduate students as resources for the university to use as they see fit. … These concerns are only heightened by campus contexts in which shared governance has deteriorated” (209).

Hewitt (2000) investigates the opinions and experiences of faculty members who teach and advise graduate students represented by a union. The author conducted a survey of faculty members in the liberal arts and sciences at five doctoral-granting public universities with long histories of collective bargaining between administration, faculty, and graduate student unions. The results show that student bargaining does not inhibit the ability of faculty members to advise graduate students (90.4%); does not inhibit the ability of faculty to instruct graduate students (91.5%); and does not inhibit the faculty’s mentor relationship with graduate students (87.9%).

**Employer/Union Rights and Obligations (National Labor Relations Board)**
https://www.nlrb.gov/rights-we-protect/employerunion-rights-and-obligations
“The National Labor Relations Act forbids employers from interfering with, restraining, or coercing employees in the exercise of rights relating to organizing, forming, joining or assisting a labor organization for collective bargaining purposes, or from working together to improve terms and conditions of employment, or refraining from any such activity.”

Examples of employer conduct that violates the NLRA:
- Threatening employees with loss of jobs or benefits if they join or vote for a union or engage in protected concerted activity.
- Questioning employees about their union sympathies or activities in circumstances that tend to interfere with, restrain or coerce employees in the exercise of these rights.
- Transferring, laying off, terminating, assigning employees more difficult work, or otherwise punishing employees for engaging in union or protected concerted activity.
- Transferring, laying off, terminating, assigning employees more difficult work tasks, or otherwise punishing employees for making official complaint or filing an unfair labor practice charge, or for participating in an investigation regarding such charges.