

April 2018

Bargaining for a First Year Contract for American University Graduate Student Employees

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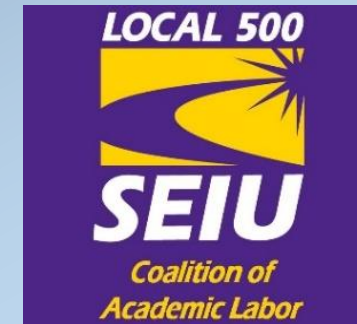
Recommended Citation

McLeer, Ann (2018) "Bargaining for a First Year Contract for American University Graduate Student Employees," *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*. Vol. 0, Article 33.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58188/1941-8043.1776>

Available at: <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/jcba/vol0/iss13/33>

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Bargaining a First Contract for Graduate Student Employees at American University.

Stephan Lefebvre (PhD Student in Economics, American University)

Aras Coskuntuncel (PhD Candidate in Communications, American University)

Dr. Anne McLeer (SEIU Local 500 Director of Higher Education)

From Organizing Campaign to Bargaining

- What prompted grad students to start organizing?
- How did the organizing build?
- When did grad students file for a union?
- What was the University's position?
- The election experience
- Preparing for bargaining



Dear Colleague letter in student paper 9/27/16

- <http://www.theeagleonline.com/article/2016/09/grad-students-union-opinion>

What were the issues?

- Standards around workload and expectations
- Due process
- Pay and benefits
- Having a voice and a seat at the table
- Protection against arbitrary and capricious supervisors and academic bullying
- International students rights
- Protecting diversity and equity among grad students

By a vote of almost 6 – 1 grad students win union election 4/10/17



Key topics in non-economic negotiations using a hybrid approach (not quite interest-based, not quite positional bargaining)

- Job security and due process
- Workload and expectations
- Clarity of responsibilities
- Enhancing the mentorship experience
- Giving grad students a voice
- Evaluations and feedback



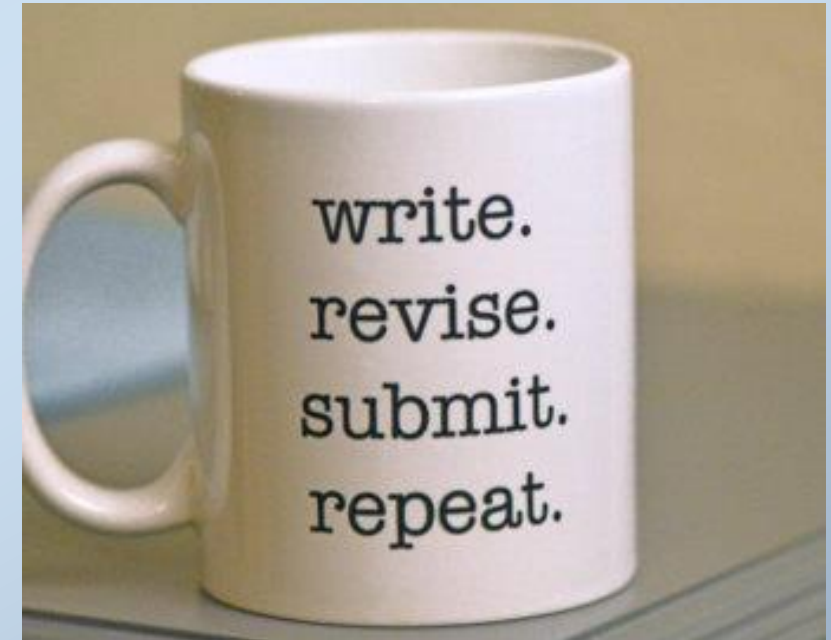
Challenging issue at the bargaining table:

Defining the line between work performance and academic abilities.

- Work performance subject to grievance and arbitration article of the contract
- Academic judgement made solely by University

- Tentative solution:

Contract language that allows the University to terminate a grad student for failure of a work product to meet academic Standards. Right of grad student to request Review of the decision by the Academic Integrity Code Panel which will assess whether the termination decision was based on academic judgment or was arbitrary and capricious and provide that assessment to the Dean. If decision found to be arbitrary and capricious, grad student can file grievance.



Issues to come:

- What happens if the NLRB reverses its decision that graduate student employees have collective bargaining rights?
- Bargaining economic issues

What's happening on campus?

- Maintaining momentum
- Ensuring broad representation
- Communications
- Activities and events
 - Regular working meetings of activists
 - Reaching out to grad students in all schools
 - Social events and tabling



What's happening off campus?



Grad students arrested protesting #GOPTaxScam

Eight graduate students were arrested protesting the Republican tax bill outside House Speaker Paul Ryan's office. Community supporters, adjunct professors and graduate students from Missouri, Illinois, North Carolina, New York, Georgia, California and the District of Columbia gathered to protest the GOP tax breaks' impact on working families and higher education.

The proposed \$1.5 trillion cut would devastate higher education by taxing student loan debt, gutting already inadequate college and university funding by taking away important state and local deductions and count waived graduate student tuition as income. With so many people out of work, underemployed or poorly paid, it's already hard enough to make it in America without a tax plan that makes it even harder to earn a college degree. Instead of taxing our tuition and student loan debt, Congress should be fighting to make college free so everyone who works hard has the opportunity to continue their studies.

Grad student movement building - connecting with other grad student groups within and outside of SEIU



As a PhD student whose mother is an adjunct faculty member, the flawed higher ed funding system directly affects my family. I joined the movement to transform higher education so that other Latinxs and people of color working at colleges and universities have a voice in the decisions that affect our daily lives.

**Stephan Lefebvre, Economics
PhD**

Mobilization of grad students increasing as other private universities are refusing to recognize graduate student unions.

- Georgetown University refuses to recognize graduate student union
- Columbia University Refuses To Recognize Graduate Student Union
- Unions at University of Chicago (AFT-AAUP), Yale (Unite Here) and Boston College (UAW) withdraw from NLRB review of successful elections.
 - David Trainor, vice president for human resources at Boston, responded to the petition withdrawal on his campus by [saying](#), “Our position remains that graduate student unionization in any form undermines the collegial, mentoring relationship among students and faculty that is a cornerstone of this academic community. Boston College continues to uphold this fundamentally educational relationship, which we believe is in the mutual best interest of students and faculty.”

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/15/blow-graduate-student-union-movement-private-campuses-three-would-be-unions-withdraw>

GW Grad Students United

SEIU Local 500

Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy, Vol. 0, Iss. 13 [2018], Art. 33



On March 6, Provost Maltzman sent us the following e-mail in response to our request for a meeting to discuss recognition of our union:

Dear Graduate Students United,

As GW's chief academic officer, I am responding at President LeBlanc's request to your February 28, 2018 letter. In that letter, you ask that GW recognize you as the representative of GW's graduate students.

Although I do appreciate that unions have made important contributions in many industries and over time, I view our graduate students as primarily students. Nor do I believe it is appropriate to utilize a collective bargaining process to shape the graduate student experience. As a result, I must decline your request that GW recognize you as the representative of our graduate students.

That said, I view dialogue and discussion with graduate students about graduate education at GW as being critical to enhancing our programs. Currently, student input is received through a variety of means, but ensuring more student feedback and input can make our great programs even stronger. Accordingly, I have asked my academic team, including school deans primarily responsible for graduate education, to discuss and develop mechanisms to better ensure that all graduate students have more meaningful opportunities to share their ideas and concerns.

Forrest

Forrest Maltzman, Provost and Professor of Political Science

George Washington University

To: President LeBlanc, Provost Maltzman

We are disappointed by the administration's refusal to meet with members of GW Graduate Students United. Not only has the university refused to recognize the essential role that we play in the operation of our university, but you have chosen to disengage on serious issues that are affecting the day to day lives of hundreds of graduate workers.

We are forming a union in order to forge a more constructive relationship with the university, one in which we, as GW employees, are treated fairly and have a greater say in our working conditions. Some of our concerns include securing adequate healthcare and sustainable pay, concerns not easily addressed individually or through our departmental advisors. Addressing these concerns will not only enable us to provide higher quality education to our students but will also ensure that GW remains competitive with other institutions of higher education in the recruitment and retention of the most talented graduate students. These goals are not attainable under our current status of employment.

In light of these concerns and in solidarity with labor actions taking place around the country today, our members—along with the undersigned student groups—request that the university immediately take action to move forward with the process of voluntary recognition for our union. This includes scheduling a vote on unionization, overseen by a neutral third party, wherein our members and supporters can demonstrate clearly their desire to form a union.

Regards,

GW Graduate Students United

GW College Democrats, GW Feminist Student Union, GW Progressive Student Union, GW Queer Radicals, GroW Community Garden, Fossil Free GW, YDSA GW, Roosevelt Institute @ GW, Students for Justice in Palestine @ GW

With collective bargaining or without – grad students are on the move.

Research shows that unionization has a positive effect on grad student-faculty relations, raises pay, and does not harm academic freedom.

Rogers, S., Eaton, A. E., & Voos, P. B. (2014). Effects of unionization on graduate student employees: Faculty-student relations, academic freedom, and pay. *ILR Review*, 66(2), 487-510.

