



GPSG Graduate and Professional
Student Government

Duke UNIVERSITY

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF STUDENTS' RIGHT TO UNIONIZE

March 7, 2023

On September 15, 2022, the Duke Graduate Students Union (DGSU - SEIU Local 27), composed of graduate student workers across departments of Duke University, publicly announced a union authorization campaign. This campaign has since achieved a clear and growing majority of graduate student workers who have signed authorization cards, and DGSU has thus filed on March 3, 2023, with the National Labor Relations Board for a secret ballot election, pursuant to Section 9(e)(1) of the National Labor Relations Act.

In response to this union authorization campaign, Duke's Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG), unanimously passed [a resolution](#) on September 20, 2022, calling for "Duke University to maintain a stance of true neutrality, refraining from efforts to dissuade students, and particularly international students, from signing union authorization cards" and for "Duke University to voluntarily recognize the Duke Graduate Students Union if it achieves a majority of signed union authorization cards".

On March 6, 2023, the interim provost of Duke University, Jennifer Francis, sent an [email](#) directed to Ph.D. students included in the proposed bargaining unit. This email states that the "productive channels for shared governance would change for our graduate students if a non-academic third party were to serve as their representative" and "a union would become the sole representative of all current and future Ph.D. students". Currently, graduate workers at Duke University are represented by GPSG in an **advocacy** capacity only — without the ability to **collectively bargain** for a contract pertaining to pay, hours, and conditions of employment. As stated in our resolution, a student government and a union serve distinct and complementary roles. GPSG's actions are not legally binding, and thus current and future gains for pay and fees are not secured. There is room for GPSG's advocacy on climate, DEI, academic affairs, events, external advocacy, affordable housing, and other aspects of university governance, which will not be excluded by a union.

Furthermore, on a Duke-hosted [website](#) linked in this same email, it is suggested that "the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 27 is seeking to represent graduate students on Duke's Campus," despite a majority of graduate student workers at Duke petitioning for an election to be held to authorize a union. The unit seeking representation is made up of our colleagues, not of outsiders. In the email, Interim Provost Francis states, "In 2017, following extensive consideration and debate, Duke's graduate students voted to reject SEIU unionization by an almost two-to-one margin. I believe they were correct in doing so." While ignoring [context](#) on the 2017 election, this statement violates the neutrality requested by the GPSG resolution, and we ask that the administration refrain from making future statements concerning the correctness of graduate student workers' choices to vote for or against unionization.

We urge Duke University administration to remove misleading information from their website on graduate student unionization, to bargain in good faith if graduate student workers should authorize the designation of a union as their representation, and to be neutral and to not interfere with the upcoming union election.

Vote Count: 31 Yes/5 Abstain/0 No

Brittany Forniotis, MA

Chief of Staff

Thomas Crowe-Allbritton

Thomas Crowe-Allbritton

Speaker