

March 20, 2017

To: All Graduate and Professional Students
From: Amy Gutmann, President; Vincent Price, Provost
Subject: A Message to Penn Graduate and Professional Students on Unionization

We write to you today to address the issue of graduate student unionization. A group of Penn graduate students has announced the opening of a campaign to form a union affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers. As graduate and professional students across Penn are called upon to consider the merits of such a proposal, we thought it important to provide the University's perspective, along with background on our commitment to supporting graduate students at Penn.

It would be impossible to overstate how extremely proud and strongly supportive we are of our graduate students and their essential contributions to research and education at Penn. We well remember our own years as graduate students and are ever conscious that our students are our future colleagues. We are absolutely committed to supporting not only their current endeavors but also their future successes, which will benefit teaching and learning at innumerable institutions around the world.

Of a piece with this strong commitment is our understanding that Penn's relationship with its graduate students is quite different from that of employer to employee. The relationship between faculty and graduate students at Penn has succeeded so well, and our commitment to preparing Penn students for their future careers is so strong, in no small part because Penn faculty serve as mentors, not managers. That clearly changes when the interaction--which would be governed by an external third party--is no longer collegial, but instead the subject of union rules. We believe that the best way for Penn to support its graduate students and to enable their future professional success is through continued investment in the dynamic, valuable, and collaborative arrangements that currently exist on campus. In seeking to become the exclusive representative for graduate students, a union would replace those arrangements, including existing student groups, with a third party. Moreover, the costs and constraints that accompany unionization could readily detract from and diminish the collegial capacity of Penn students and faculty members to advance their scholarship and achieve their valuable educational and professional goals. Such changes would adversely affect both current students and faculty members, and future students for years to come.

Penn has an exceptional record in providing support for graduate students, and an ongoing commitment to doing so. Working with existing student groups, including GAPSA and the graduate student governments in the Schools, we have continuously advanced graduate student funding, mentorship, and community support. Since 2005, the University has increased the minimum stipend for funded Ph.D. candidates by nearly 60%, with annual increases averaging 3.7% per year over that period. In the School of Arts and Sciences, stipends have risen nearly 75% over the same period. Penn also provides a suite of benefits, including health insurance, to funded students – and our benefits program has grown steadily in response to what we have learned about our students' changing needs.

Penn's commitment is significant and ever growing. A typical incoming PhD student in the School of Arts and Sciences, which is home to the majority of our PhD students, receives a five-year graduate aid package that includes tuition, general fees, health insurance premiums, and an academic year stipend, plus three years of summer support, worth a total of approximately \$69,400 in the first year and \$350,000 over five years (in constant FY17 dollars).

As this process unfolds, we encourage each of you to inform yourself about the issues; to talk with other students, as well as faculty and staff; and to review the literature to determine if unionization would serve your best interests. Our webpage of Frequently Asked Questions, available at <https://provost.upenn.edu/education/graduate/faq>, offers additional perspective on the issues, with the aim of fostering an open and informed discussion. Please also visit <http://www.upenn.edu/pages/valuing-grad-students> for more information on how Penn supports its students, along with descriptions of our newest initiatives, which include dental coverage, need-based grants, and library and recreation access.