May 31, 2017

To:       All Graduate and Professional Students
From:   Vincent Price, Provost; Beth A. Winkelstein, Vice Provost for Education
Subject:  Update on Petition for Unionization

The University yesterday received a petition to allow eligible graduate students to vote on whether they want to be represented by GET-UP, a union affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers.

The election will be decided by a simple majority of the eligible students who vote. Even the eligible students who don’t vote will be bound by the results. If the vote is to unionize, all students in the bargaining unit will be represented exclusively by the union. Federal labor law does not allow individual students or groups of students to opt out of a bargaining unit.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) will determine the appropriate bargaining unit for the election. There is much at stake for all graduate students in this matter. However, the union has proposed a gerrymandered unit that includes only selected students from the University’s twelve schools. Specifically, the union seeks to include all graduate students who provide instructional services and/or perform research in the Annenberg School for Communication, Biomedical Graduate Studies, School of Design, Graduate School of Education, School of Arts and Sciences, School of Nursing, and School of Social Policy and Practice.

The NLRB also will set the date for the election. We support an open and fair election. However, the union has asked for an election date of June 26, and we understand they are seeking a mail ballot. We believe that both the timing and method of this election proposal will disenfranchise many of our graduate students since the University is not currently in regular session. For that reason we are asking the NRLB to schedule the election for the fall, when a full population of graduate and professional students will be on campus to participate. We feel strongly that an election in the late spring or summer as proposed by the union would be neither open nor fair.

We encourage you to read and learn as much as possible about graduate student unionization, talk about the issues with your peers and mentors and take the time to inform yourselves fully about all aspects of this very important decision. The University has prepared a page of FAQs to help in this process: https://provost.upenn.edu/education/graduate/faq.

Above all, if you are eligible please vote and encourage your peers to do the same. We will continue to update you as events move forward.