

An Introduction to Graduate Student Unionization

by Stand Up for Graduate Student Employees



What's a union?

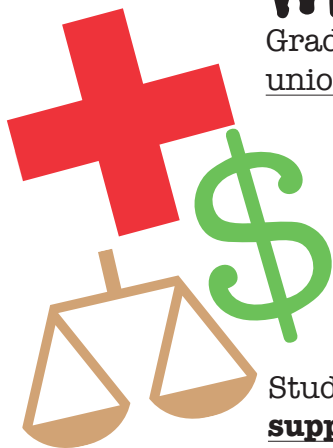
A union is an organized group of employees that makes decisions about their working conditions. Unionized workers often negotiate a **legally binding contract** with their employer to guarantee livable wages, adequate benefits, clear workload expectations, and fair employment policies. **A union's strength comes from its members supporting one another!**

What can grads do with a union?

Grads have been unionizing at public universities since 1969, so we know how unions can improve grad life. For example, many contracts include:

- Guaranteed wage increases without funding cuts.
- Fair and effective grievance procedures for TAs and RAs.
- Procedures and programs for grads experiencing workplace harassment, hostility, and discrimination based on gender, race, sexuality, or nationality.
- Paid vacation, personal leave, and sick leave.
- Extended and protected health care benefits.

Studies show that unionized grads report **more personal and professional support from advisors** as well as **higher and fairer wages** [1].



What's the "student-employee" debate?

Many grads say they are **both** students **and** employees. At Brown, **81% of RAs** and **83% of TAs** say they engage in "paid employment" [2]. In contrast, admin says we are **only** students and **not** employees, and Brown paid lawyers to argue this in court [3,4]. A former dean even testified to Congress that we aren't employees! [5]

What's the big deal? What's the law say?

This matters because **employees have more legal rights than students**.

Fortunately, in August 2016, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that **graduate RAs and TAs are legally considered employees** and thus entitled to unionize and exercise those rights!



Are Brown grads unionized?

Not yet! But if we do, we'll join **NYU, Cornell, Columbia, Princeton, Yale, and over 30 public universities** that have or are forming graduate student unions!

Do international grads also have the right to unionize?

100% YES! The ruling applies to all grad RAs and TAs, regardless of citizenship. International students have been key leaders and beneficiaries of unions at campuses across the country.



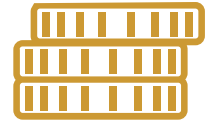
What's a union affiliation?

Grads often affiliate with an existing local, national, or international union that can provide resources. And by being part of a larger organization, we build solidarity with grads and workers in other workplaces. **SUGSE's affiliation vote is open to all grads who register before the vote.**



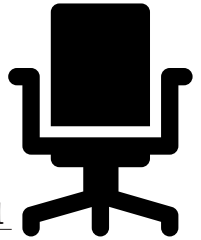
What are union dues?

Dues fund the union, including paying for staff and lawyers. Newly unionized grads often win contracts that include an initial wage bump to offset the cost of dues. A portion of our dues will go to our affiliate, but **we only pay dues after we get the contract we want.**



What does administration think?

Although we are paid and do much of the teaching and research work at Brown, **admin has said we are not employees** [3,4,5]. By law, admin cannot interfere in the unionization process, and they have said they will support whatever decision grads come to. It's worth noting, though, that at other schools, administrators sometimes post misleading information to obscure the conversation or grant conveniently-timed benefits to influence grads' opinions. But in the end, what matters is that **graduate students** decide, **not** administrators.



How does this affect faculty?

Unionized grads report better support from their advisors [1]. At Brown, there will be faculty who may or may not support unionization, but either way **the faculty-grad relationship benefits when our rights as employees are recognized.**



How do we get to a contract?

(1) We vote on an affiliate. (2) A majority of grads sign union cards. (3) We file an election with the NLRB, who will then organize an election at Brown. (4) A majority votes for the union. (5) We vote on our contract and negotiate it with the university.

This process can stretch for months and depends on grads working together.

But if we succeed, Brown will be a better place for everyone.



What is Stand Up for Graduate Student Employees?

SUGSE is a coalition of grads from nearly every department at Brown who volunteer to improve our community. We hold anti-racist, feminist principles and advocate for grad worker rights. **SUGSE is open to all, and new folks are always joining!**



What have grads in SUGSE done?

Since 2014, SUGSE grads have fought for (and in some cases won):

- Improved health benefits, such as dental insurance.
- Restored funding for 6th and 7th year grads.
- Guaranteed summer funding.
- Protections against harassment and discrimination.
- Diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- Transparency around funding for grad programs.
- Support for international students.



Wait! I still have questions and/or want to get involved!



This pamphlet only has basic information, so we imagine you still have questions. If you support unionization, want to learn more, or have concerns, we want to hear from you! Email **standupforgrads@gmail.com** or check out **www.brownsugse.com!**