

To the members of the Senate Council of the University Senate:

On November 29, 2016, the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Graduate Student Organization (GSO) voted by private ballot to support the efforts of the Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC) and the formation of a graduate student worker union. Out of 26 departments represented, 18 voted in support; 6 no; 1 abstained; 1 ballot was invalid for not following directions. As of February 11, 2017 the union drive led by the GSOC and the United Steelworkers has proceeded to the card authorization stage; once at least 30% of the graduate student body signs the authorization cards, then the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board may authorize an election on whether the graduate students approve the formation of a union.

As a recognized student body that represents the graduate students of the Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences, we see that it is appropriate for us to state our position at this time on the advisability of a graduate student worker union. We write this letter to detail our support for the GSOC:

- Whereas graduate student workers serve as teaching assistants and fellows, providing critical instruction and academic mentoring to thousands of undergraduate students, and whereas graduate students, in their capacities as research assistants, laboratory technicians, and editorial assistants, contribute to the high level of excellence of teaching and research at the University of Pittsburgh;
- Whereas this indispensable role of the graduate workers should be recognized;
- Whereas a union would give graduate workers a meaningful voice in how the university operates, and help to ensure more democratic and transparent relations between the workers and the Administration;
- Whereas collective bargaining would allow graduate workers to negotiate with the University administration as equals, thereby ensuring proper compensation and respect for their contribution to the University;
- Whereas a union contract would ensure that any changes to the benefits and working conditions of graduate workers are bilaterally agreed upon by the workers and the Administration;
- Whereas no other graduate student organization has the power to negotiate a binding contract on behalf of student workers, and therefore the power to obtain the above benefits;
- Whereas a union would help build a more unified community of graduate workers by forging relationships across departments and disciplines, thereby contributing to the quality of graduate student life at Pitt;
- Whereas a democratically accountable union would ensure that all graduate workers benefit from contracts negotiated by it;
- Whereas a union could provide clearly outlined grievance procedures for alleged contract violations and for alleged violations of students' labor rights and civil rights;
- Whereas a union could be a powerful advocate for a diverse graduate workforce; and could serve as an additional way to protect and support our colleagues from other countries;
- Whereas we of the GSO believe in a democratic workplace, fair working conditions and compensation for hours worked, transparent policies, a diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace climate;
- And whereas we are honored to be a part of the University of Pittsburgh because of its outstanding reputation and academic excellence, and see that we have a vested interest in maintaining its distinction, and believe that the creation of a graduate student worker union is the best way to ensure that all stakeholders are full participants in Pitt's well-being;
- Therefore, we deem that the formation of a graduate student worker union at Pitt is advisable and fully support such a measure, and collegially invite the Senate Council to do the same.

Sincerely,

Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Graduate Student Organization