



December 3, 2018

Dear Fellow Graduate Student Workers,

We are delighted to announce that your bargaining team has reached agreement with American University on a first union contract. We worked diligently for more than a year to produce this agreement and it addresses many of the concerns that caused us to form our union in 2017.

Our contract unites graduate student workers at AU and gives us a voice in our working conditions for the first time. The contract alters the power dynamic between us graduate student employees and our supervisors, providing us a platform to actually augment the graduate student worker-faculty relationship.

At an institutional level it secures us a platform on campus to advocate for our own interests around compensation and working conditions. Having a union on campus and a collective bargaining agreement creates an obligation on the university administration to respond to our community's distinct needs. While as individuals, we have limited ability to make meaningful change, collectively we have the power to do so. The contract provides us a mechanism to partner with decision-makers at AU to improve the quality of research and undergraduate instruction, while strengthening graduate programs themselves.

Our first contract will be a short one – expiring on June 30, 2019. We agreed to this in order to get in synch with the University's budgeting cycle and to allow us to return to the bargaining table in spring 2019 to negotiate further benefits and compensation increases for the following two academic years. A first union contract creates a base from which we return to the bargaining table every two or three years to renegotiate further improvements.

As your bargaining team, we believe that this is the best contract that can be achieved at this time, and strongly recommend a "yes" vote to ratify. We hope you will get involved in our union in the future, including in the negotiations that will be taking place next spring. Our union needs sustained commitment from graduate student workers to build on our current success and continue making progress for all.

You will soon receive an email with a link to cast your vote electronically to your American University email. You will have until December 20, 2018, to have your vote counted.

If you have any questions about the contract, the ratification ballot, or our union, please respond to this email.

Sincerely,

Your Bargaining Team:

Elissa Cohen
Aras Coskuntuncel
Stephan Lefebvre
Noah Rosen
Cherie Saulter
Bethany Zaiman

	Before union contract	After union contract
Clear responsibilities and the right to raise concerns.	<p>Grad student workers regularly learned about appointments just days before the semester started and received requests to teach particular courses on the first week of the semester.</p> <p>Responsibilities were not always clearly defined and there was no process to clarify or address the scope of our responsibilities.</p>	<p>We will receive our appointments in a timely manner and will be given the general scope of our responsibilities at the time of appointment.</p> <p>We can raise concerns about the scope of those responsibilities when we receive our appointment, or at any point during the semester.</p> <p>The work performed must benefit both the grad student worker and our academic unit, and inappropriate duties cannot be assigned.</p> <p>Once appointed, the employment terms in our Award Letter shall be maintained so long as we meet our requirements. This means, we will be renewed from year to year of a multi-year appointment without fear of unjust cancellation.</p>
Flexibility in our assignments.	<p>Many grad student workers were not allowed to give input into which professors they were assigned to work with, and had no mechanism to request reassignment.</p>	<p>We can indicate preferences as to with whom we want to work, and our Departments must take these preferences into consideration when making our assignments.</p> <p>AU may reassign us to another position if we are not meeting expectations, but we may also request a reassignment if an assignment is not benefitting us.</p>
Supplies and Materials	<p>Many TAs reported scrambling to find adequate space to meet with students. Some grad student workers spent their own money making materials for a class.</p>	<p>We will have the supplies and materials necessary to do our jobs, including computer workstations, adequate access to spaces to meet with students, and funding for supplies necessary for producing instructional materials.</p>

<p>Outside employment is permitted</p>	<p>Rules for outside employment were unclear. Many grad student workers reported that faculty discouraged them from working outside AU.</p>	<p>We may hold other employment outside or within AU, so long at that other employment does not interfere with our work as a grad student employee at AU. If we hold another job at AU, the total hours worked cannot exceed 20 hours per week, unless an exception is authorized by the Vice Provost.</p>
<p>Job security</p>	<p>Although terminations were rare, graduate student workers were vulnerable to arbitrary decision-making by their supervisors. Grad student workers facing discipline were on their own without representation.</p>	<p>We cannot be unfairly terminated or disciplined. Discipline and discharge shall be for “good cause” only. That means that the University cannot act in an arbitrary and capricious manner and that discipline must be proportionate to the alleged infraction. A Union representative may be present for any disciplinary meeting.</p>
<p>Evaluations will provide productive feedback to help us in our academic and professional development.</p>	<p>There were few systematic evaluations of our work and we often didn’t receive meaningful feedback needed to develop as teachers and researchers. Graduate students wishing to build a teaching portfolio relied on one-off requests for evaluations.</p>	<p>Each school or program will set up an evaluative process suited to the assignments of grad student employees that is designed to further academic and professional standards, and that promotes a grad student’s academic and professional development. We may respond to our evaluations and request feedback from our supervisors at any point in the semester.</p>
<p>A forum to address further issues.</p>	<p>Grad student workers lacked a formal setting (above and beyond collective bargaining) in which to discuss our issues as a group with the administration.</p>	<p>We will have a Union/Management Collaboration Committee during the life of the contract where grad student workers and the administration can discuss issues of mutual interest that may outside the scope of collective bargaining</p>
<p>A grievance process with binding arbitration.</p>	<p>Grad student workers who had a dispute with AU on an employment issue had no external process through which to resolve that dispute.</p>	<p>Any violations of the terms of our union contract are subject to an external grievance procedure. This gives us due process and an arbitrator, not the University, making the ultimate decision in any dispute that otherwise cannot be resolved between the parties.</p>

<p>Academic judgment remains with the University.</p>	<p>Grad student workers could not challenge the University on the reason positions were terminated</p>	<p>We now have a formal process for challenging a termination the University says is for academic reasons, but we believe is attributed to work performance reasons. A panel of 3 faculty members will be chosen by the Dean to decide if the termination was for academic reasons. If the Panel finds that the reason was not academic, we may file a grievance with the union. We can raise a concern if we perceive there to be a conflict of interest with a faculty member appointed to the panel.</p>
<p>Compensation</p>	<p>Many grad student workers felt that pay rates were below market or did not adequately compensate them for the cost of living in Washington, DC.</p>	<p>The first contract brings modest increases for Law School Dean’s Fellows and Master’s Students, and codifies a 10% increase for PhD students for the 2018-2019 academic year.</p> <p>We will be at the bargaining table again in spring 2019 to push for further increases and economic benefits for all grad student workers for the following two academic years.</p>
<p>Benefits</p>	<p>Benefits were not protected by a union contract.</p>	<p>Grad student workers have access to lactation rooms for pumping or breastfeeding.</p> <p>Existing health benefits are protected by the contract. AU will provide information regarding health benefits, including vision and dental benefits.</p> <p>Graduate student workers will be able to submit written recommendations or ideas on the university budget through the same process used by faculty.</p>
<p>Union Rights</p>	<p>Before unionizing grad student employees were not recognized by the University as a self-advocating group on campus.</p>	<p>Our union has the right under the contract to have a presence on campus, and to designate grad student workers as workplace leaders to represent us.</p>

Union membership	Our unionization efforts and year-long bargaining process was funded by SEIU Local 500 union members – including adjuncts at American University, faculty in other universities and other unionized workers.	Union membership is voluntary and open to all of us, giving us the opportunity to grow our strength as a union and contribute to other unionization efforts. Grad student workers who are covered by the contract post-ratification are obliged to contribute to the cost of representation.
-------------------------	--	--

