

**From:** Leung, Ginny on behalf of Phil He  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 21, 2017 2:02 PM  
**Subject:** Important Message



# Northeastern University

Dear Graduate Students:

Many of you are probably already aware of an effort on campus by the United Autoworkers to organize graduate Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants to form a union.

The Autoworkers are asking Northeastern graduate students to sign Authorization Cards, and to provide student contact information as part of the organizing campaign. It is important to know that an Authorization Card is a legal document, and that signing it indicates you are interested in having the Autoworkers represent you, as your union. Unions submit signed Authorization Cards to the federal government as part of their request to hold a union election on campus.

Before signing anything or providing your contact information to the Autoworkers, I urge you to take the time to become informed about unions and how a union might impact your graduate experience.

Graduate students select Northeastern for many reasons, including access to the university's world-class faculty scholars and unparalleled research and experiential learning opportunities. Your own path depends on your individual graduate program, which a union relationship could profoundly change. The following are just a few examples of the potential impacts you might experience if the Autoworkers were elected as your union:

- **Financial cost to you:** You can expect to pay union dues or an equivalent agency fee to the union, which could be 2% of your stipend. As an example, the Autoworkers charge dues of 2% for NYU graduate students.
- **Limited flexibility:** Many, and possibly all, terms and conditions of your teaching or research assistant work will be subject to negotiation with the union. In practice this can mean that you will have less influence over your teaching or research assignments, which could be subject to a collective bargaining agreement between the union and the university. In addition, during the time that agreement is being negotiated (which can take well over a year), and possibly thereafter, any changes to those assignments could also be

subject to negotiation. For example, if you and your thesis adviser or faculty mentor wanted to make changes, you likely would have to consult the union first. The union would then need to decide if negotiating to address your personal concerns was in the best interests of the rest of the collective bargaining unit (i.e. everyone else in the union, including those in other disciplines and programs).

- **You lose your individual voice in your graduate experience:** The Autoworkers will negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the university, using a team of negotiators who will decide what to prioritize for the larger union group. It is not clear how many students would be in the union, but currently the Autoworkers are trying to represent thousands of graduate students in a single union at Harvard. What is certain is that other members of this large group will likely have varying interests that differ from what is important to you, meaning your specific priorities can easily go unaddressed.
- **One-size-fits-all agreement:** It is important to consider how your particular interests can be represented in an agreement designed to cover a large group. It is possible that any agreement would control important issues that concern you:
  - what types of teaching or research assignments you will have, including priority for assignments;
  - changes in assignments;
  - your work and class schedules;
  - what types of mentoring relationships you will have;
  - what your participation in co-op and other experiential programs will be, if any; and,
  - your stipend level (which could increase, decrease or remain the same, particularly when taking into account the cost of union dues or agency fees).

These and many other issues would be determined for everyone in the larger group.

- **There are no guarantees in collective bargaining:** Unions often promise more money with a union contract, but there is no guarantee that will be the case. In the research world, where funding levels are determined by a variety of factors that are beyond the control of the university and the union, nobody can ensure that research funding will increase. Stipends could also decrease or not change at all as a result of negotiations.
- **You could be called out on strike:** The union may call upon you to take part in a strike. In the event of a strike, your pay stops. Being out on strike can also interrupt your academic and research work. While the university would

never want to see a strike take place, it cannot prevent one if the union demands it.

This is your graduate experience, your degree, your community, and your future career. Please consider learning about how union representation can impact you, and whether it makes sense for you to integrate the Autoworkers in your graduate experience. More information will be forthcoming on these important issues.

I welcome any questions or concerns that you have about these or any other issues.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phil He". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Phil He  
Associate Vice Provost for Graduate Education