

# Northeastern University

## Office of the Provost

Dear Graduate Students:

You may have heard from United Autoworkers Union organizers that getting a contract and a stipend increase is quick and easy once you sign an Authorization Card and vote for the union. The truth, however, is that the process is complicated and can take years. In fact, if a union is elected your stipend could be frozen because in most cases the status quo for unionized employees must be maintained until an agreement is reached. Even then, a union contract does not guarantee more money, because everything is subject to negotiation.

### The truth about the union contract process

- **It may take months to have an election once a request is filed:** It took six months for an election to take place at Boston College after the Autoworkers filed its request with the National Labor Relations Board.
- **If the union is elected your stipend (and other issues important to you) could be frozen.** With limited exceptions, once an election is held the status quo must be maintained until an agreement is negotiated with the union, which typically does not happen until there is a final contract. This could mean that your stipend and other issues that may be important to you such as travel funding would not increase during this period, and could mean a delayed introduction of any new benefits.
- **Post-election legal challenges may then delay negotiations a year or more:** Unions and employers often file legal challenges that can delay the start of negotiations for many months (or longer) following an election. This happened at Harvard after the election a year ago in November 2016. As of today, there is no resolution of the legal challenges and no bargaining over an agreement has taken place.
- **When negotiations finally happen, it could take years to get an agreement:** It is not unusual for bargaining to take months or even years. Negotiating a collective bargaining agreement for hundreds or thousands of graduate students in different disciplines, with different majors in different colleges would be complex. The first contract New York University negotiated with its graduate union took 18 months to bargain.

### The union cannot offer you any guarantees

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.

The only guarantee for graduate students is that the unionization process is complex, and not as simple and easy as the union would like you to believe. I encourage you to visit our [Student Graduate Assistant Organizing webpage](#) to learn more about this and other important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phil He". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a distinct "H".

Phil He  
Vice Provost for Graduate Education