

Dear PSD Graduate Students,

As we approach the date of a vote on graduate student unionization, I urge you to take an active role in this decision, which is not only for you, but for your peers and future graduate students. I share a concern with deans in other units that the future teaching and research experiences of PSD students may be determined by a small number of voters, so please get out and vote.

Of particular concern for the PSD are the possible effects of unionization on graduate student research. Your training depends on a very personal interaction and relationship with your faculty mentor. Any third party, even one with good intentions, may alter this dynamic. While none of us can fully predict the outcomes positive or negative of unionization, it is especially important to consider the potential impact of a third party on your research training.

Of note, New York University (NYU) is the only private university that has had experience with a graduate student union, and its United Auto Workers-represented bargaining unit specifically excludes "research assistants at Polytechnic Institute, research assistants in the Biology, Chemistry, Neural Science, Physics, Mathematics, Computer Science and Psychology departments."

By contrast, the bargaining unit that the American Federation of Teachers seek to represent here at UChicago specifically includes graduate student researchers in the sciences. Work hours are likely to be an important focus of collective bargaining for the union. It is troubling to consider a future in which a third party without experience in research would take on the legal role of serving as an intermediary between graduate students and their faculty mentors with the potential to determine something as vital as when and for how long you can pursue research leading to your degree.

You are part of our community of researchers. It is important for you to ensure that the PSD continues to provide the best possible training for graduate students. Given that the stakes in the upcoming vote are particularly high for students in the sciences, please vote on Oct 17-18.

Sincerely,

Edward (Rocky) Kolb
Dean, Physical Sciences Division

cc: All PSD Faculty