

Graduate Student Unionization at New York University

Following an intensive campaign by the Graduate Student Organizing Committee and the United Autoworkers Union, NYU agreed in 2013 to recognize a union representing graduate students employed by the university.¹ The union had previously been recognized between 2001 and 2005.² Following a vote in which a majority of participating graduate assistants supported unionization, the university and union entered into contract negotiations that lasted approximately 14 months and resulted in a tentative contract agreement in March, 2015. The agreement was ratified in April with a retroactive effective date of September 1, 2014.³

Bargaining unit

The bargaining unit defined in the current contract includes approximately 1,200 (5%) of NYU's 24,000 graduate students.⁴ It is a much narrower unit than the unit proposed at Harvard. The unit includes graduate students who teach, PhD research assistants (with some exceptions), graduate assistants, course assistants, and graduate students holding a range of miscellaneous positions who are employed by NYU. Many categories of graduate assistants are specifically excluded from the bargaining unit, including:

- research assistants in the Biology, Chemistry, Neural Science, Physics, Mathematics, Computer Science, and GSAS Psychology departments,
- graders and tutors,
- graduate assistants at the School of Medicine,
- MBA candidates at the NYU Stern School of Business,
- research assistants at NYU Polytechnic Institute,
- graduate employee adjuncts enrolled in PhD programs beyond the 7th year.

Contract Provisions

The current contract calls for annual pay raises of between 2.25 and 2.5% for fully-funded graduate students, annual stipend increases of between 2.25 and 2.5% for research assistants, and a 50% hourly pay raise (from \$10 to \$15) for other work. One subgroup within the unit – fully-funded PhD students who teach – received a one-time 4% increase before union dues. In the year preceding this contract (AY2013-

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/13/nyregion/nyu-graduate-assistants-to-join-auto-workers-union.html>

² On October 31, 2000, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that graduate students employed by private colleges and universities as teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and research assistants were “employees” under the National Labor Relations Act, and in 2002, the Graduate Student Organizing Committee and the United Autoworkers Union (GSOC-UAW) negotiated the first contract between the University and a bargaining unit of over 1,000 graduate assistants. Following the 2004 NLRB reversal of its 2000 decision, NYU asked a faculty committee for advice on whether to maintain or withdraw recognition of the GSOC-UAW at the end of its first contract. The Committee recommended that NYU not re-enter negotiations with the UAW for a new contract, citing concerns about “the readiness of the United Auto Workers to grieve issues of academic decision-making” despite assurances to the contrary in the contract. Following this decision, members of the GSOC-UAW voted to begin a strike, which continued with varying levels of participation until eventually running out of steam in the spring of 2006.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/30/nyregion/nyu-and-union-agree-on-graduate-student-pay.html>

<https://provost.uchicago.edu/initiatives/summary-union-grievances-nyu-and-yale>

<https://www.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu/provost/documents/ga/ap042605.pdf>

³ NYU is currently the only private university in the country with a graduate student union.

⁴ In 2015 coverage, union membership was estimated to be approximately 1,200, and the NYU common data set 2015-2016 lists graduate enrollment at 24,305. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/03/11/nyu-graduate-student-union-says-new-contract-includes-historic-gains>.

14), fully-funded graduate students had their minimum stipends increased by 3%.⁵ Although the funding package that supports all admitted GSAS doctoral students (with a few exceptions) has fully covered premiums for NYU student health insurance since 2010, the contract guarantees 90% coverage of individual medical insurance premiums for those individuals – mainly students pursuing masters degrees – who had not received this fully funded care. The contract also provides for a family health care fund (\$200,000) and a childcare fund (\$100,000).

Dues

Dues for the GSOC-UAW local (Local 2110) are currently 2% of total gross compensation, including stipend and teaching wages. Members of the bargaining unit who elect not to join the union are charged an equivalent agency fee. The current minimum stipend for fully-funded PhD students in NYU's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences is \$26,855. Assuming additional teaching wages of approximately \$5,000 per semester, a student might expect total compensation of \$36,855 per year, before paying \$737 in union dues or agency fees.⁶ The same student would have earned approximately \$35,060 in 2013-14, the year before the contract went into effect.⁷

GSOC and UAW Local 2110

In recent years, disputes have arisen between the GSOC and its UAW local. These disagreements have centered around issues of financial and operational independence. Shortly after winning its second contract in 2015, GSOC proposed its own separate bylaws – UAW Local 2110 argued that it was extremely unusual for a bargaining unit to have separate unit bylaws, and further, that some of the proposed bylaws conflicted with those of the local as well as with the UAW constitution. GSOC also requested its own budget, separate from the other units of Local 2110. Local 2110 responded that this was contrary to the principle of collectively shared resources, and noted that it was “especially dismaying” given the role that dues from other Local 2110 members played in the GSOC's eight-year organizing campaign for collective bargaining rights at NYU.⁸ In 2016, Local 2110 invalidated the results of a GSOC election for seats on the local's governing body, disqualifying some candidates and announcing that the remainder of the slate had been elected by acclamation.^{9 10}

Collective Bargaining Agreement between New York University and International Union, UAW, AFL-CIO and LOCAL 2110, UAW – September 1, 2014 – August 31, 2020:

<http://www.makingabetternyu.org/gsocuaw/read-it/>

⁵ <http://www.nyu.edu/about/leadership-university-administration/office-of-the-president/communications/this-past-academic-year-and-the-year-to-come.html>

⁶ <http://columbiaspectator.com/news/2015/04/02/nyu-contract-process-serves-framework-columbia-graduate-students-seeking-union>

⁷ Assuming \$5,000 per semester in teaching wages on top of the 2013-14 stipend level of \$25,060
<http://www.psych.nyu.edu/programs/financial.html>

⁸ http://2110uaw.org/NYU_Unit_Bylaws_Vote_Concerns_10.13.15.pdf

⁹ <http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2016/04/uaw-local-invalidates-nyu-grad-union-election-101217>

¹⁰ <http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2016/05/grad-students-challenge-union-on-the-meaning-of-work-101851>