

Hi, all,

If you don't know me, I'm a second-year PhD student in the English Department, and I've been volunteering a few hours a week to help organize the graduate student union. As someone concerned with rhetoric and composition, I am increasingly frustrated by the misconceptions spread in these anti-union emails. As someone who teaches my students to avoid plagiarism (such as using someone else's words as your own), I am equally frustrated that the *same* email was sent from different emails using different names, as though it was written by different people.

In an effort to put the two sides of the story on the same page, I've copied the original email below and suggested some line edits (highlighted in yellow). I apologize that the format isn't the easiest to read, but I tried to stay as unbiased as possible in my edit suggestions. I only slip into the personal voice once, but I indicate where that is.

We'll send more evidence in the next few days to show how other graduate student unions have recently raised stipends across all departments, but for now, here's some quick information. Until then, let me know if you have any questions! (You can also bring questions to an organizing committee meeting Wednesdays at 4:00 pm!)

Lara Rose Roberts
roberts.l@husky.neu.edu

Dear Graduate Students:

As you may know, the ~~United Autoworkers~~ Graduate Employees of Northeastern University - United Autoworkers (GENU-UAW) has been promoting its campaign to organize a graduate student union at Northeastern. Over the next several weeks, I will be sharing information that I'd ask you to keep in mind when considering whether to sign a union authorization card.

The Realities of Union Democracy and Local Control

The ~~Autoworkers~~ Graduate Employees would like you to believe that the union organizers on campus are part of a grassroots organic movement, and that any union will be a locally controlled organization at Northeastern. ~~The reality, however, is quite different.~~

The graduate union website was built ~~by the United Autoworkers~~ [and maintained] by the ~~United Autoworkers~~ [Sam Maron, a fourth-year PhD candidate in sociology;] and, as with most graduate union organizing efforts, [four] student organizers are likely paid by the United Auto Workers (UAW) to reach out and connect with students. [These four people were doing this work on a voluntary basis for months before the GENU organizing committee approached UAW for assistance, in part because UAW was willing to pay organizers for the 20 hours/week of work they were already doing voluntarily]. You can also expect that any local union group here on campus will ~~be subject to control~~ [partake in the democratic union process assisted] by the ~~International Autoworkers~~ [United Auto Workers International delegation, whose main headquarters are] located in Detroit, or some regional "mega-local" affiliate of the International Union if they are successful in an election. [Regarding "mega-local" unions, stay tuned for a video from Ryan McGovern Quinn, a second-year law student at Northeastern University who was the Vice-President of UAW Local 2322 for four years. Personally, I like the sound of "mega-local"—like we're a Transformer. But I digress.]

The Autoworkers has a practice of ~~not~~ sometimes granting a charter to local graduate unions which would otherwise give them independence and a stand-alone union local designation, [if everyone decides during the voting process that that would be best]. For example, the graduate union at New York University is part of UAW Local 2110. The front page of the Local 2110 website does not ~~even~~ acknowledge graduate students as part of its membership, and instead highlights “teachers, secretaries, administrators, editors, computer operators, librarians, museum curators, typesetters and graphic artists, among many others.” [You can find a complete list of the workplaces Local 2110 supports here, since all of that information wouldn’t fit onto their front page. Also, since we’re talking about websites, the front page of Northeastern University’s website does not acknowledge graduate students at all, but the front page of the GENU-UAW website does.]

~~The same is true.~~ At UMass Amherst, where graduate students are part of UAW Local 2322 [and the president of the entire Local 2322 union is a UMass graduate employee]. Local 2322 is another “mega-local” that [also] represents custodians, bus drivers, clerical workers, health care workers, mechanics, cooks and many other individuals in three states who ~~have nothing to do with~~ [are essential for the operations of any university of] higher education. [See this post by Corey Robin, a political science professor at CUNY, on his thoughts about whether health care workers have “nothing” to do with the operations of higher education].

What Does a Mega-Union Mean for You?

Being part of a large local union, or an International Union, means you can be subject to ~~control~~ [democratic representation] by union officers and representatives who [we elect and who] ~~have no connection to~~ [are graduate employees at] Northeastern. You can expect that when it is time to negotiate a contract, ~~on your behalf, the representatives of the mega-local, and their lawyers, will be the people making the decisions~~ [every graduate employee has the right to voice their concerns to the bargaining collective that they have elected and every graduate employee has the right to vote on the contract once it has been drafted.]

With a large, university-wide group of graduate students from all disciplines under a single contract, your ability to advocate for your individual priorities ~~can be lost~~ [will be protected by a democratic process in which you can give feedback at every step in the process.] With a large mega-local [graduate employees working with their departments to] ~~making~~ all the decisions, your individual concerns are ~~marginalized even further~~ [taken even more seriously.]

It is worth considering why you should pay money to a mega-local to support ~~the~~ [contractual protection of your own] salaries ~~of union executives~~ and serve the needs of many other working populations [similar to how your taxes also support the needs of a diverse population] ~~when the Autoworkers will not give you local control.~~

More information on this and other matters important to you can be found on our Student Graduate Assistant Union Organizing web-page [and also at the Graduate Employees of Northeastern University web-page.]

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

[The Anti-Union Lawyers that Northeastern has hired to draft emails like this

With suggested edits by Lara Rose Roberts, English PhD]

Phil He

Vice Provost for Graduate Education