

Background – Not for Attribution

FACT SHEET: Columbia Graduate Workers Union Wins

After forming Graduate Workers of Columbia-UAW (GWC-UAW) in 2014, research and teaching assistants (RAs and TAs) have won numerous improvements to make Columbia a more inclusive and accessible place to work, including pay increases, paid parental leave, enhanced childcare subsidies, and expanded fee waivers. In just two years, GWC-UAW has grown to a network of thousands of graduate workers in every university department and has significantly increased the voice of RAs and TAs across the university, alongside other student organizations including the Graduate Student Advisory Council.

These victories prove that Columbia University can – and does – do better when RAs and TAs organize, but graduate workers' hard-won rights and benefits remain at risk without a union contract. Columbia graduate workers, who struggle with chronic late pay, growing teaching loads, and the constant insecurity and unpredictability of health insurance and other working conditions, continue to fight for the stability of a union contract to ensure that they can focus on providing quality teaching and research at the university where they work.

Building on the momentum of these victories – and with support from faculty, students, elected officials and others – Columbia graduate workers are calling on university administrators to recognize their right to form a union and support a fair, democratic process that allows them to work together to make Columbia the strongest university possible.

Winning Pay Increases, Parental Leave, Child Care Subsidies and Other Benefits for Graduate Workers

RAs and TAs in GWC-UAW, as well as in the Graduate Advisory Council, have been raising the need for fair pay, parental leave and family support so that workers are able to care for their families while maintaining their standing in academic programs. Child care has been a significant issue of concern, especially for women workers who have been forced to choose between their families and their careers.

After RAs and TAs started organizing as GWC-UAW, adding another voice to the growing calls for improved policies, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) announced 12 weeks of parental leave, a doubling of childcare subsidies to \$2,000 per child per year, and a \$5,000 adoption subsidy and changes in fees, which took effect in Fall 2015 for PhD RAs and TAs.

Since then, Columbia graduate workers organized regular meetings across many departments and met with university deans to call attention to the need for expanding these benefits to TAs and RAs across the university.

In May 2016, Provost John Coatsworth announced an expansion of the parental leave, childcare subsidies, and other benefits won by PhD RAs and TAs in GSAS to all university colleges and departments. GWC-UAW also won two additional years of stipends, fees waivers and health insurance for PhD students in journalism and in social work and increased fee waivers in the engineering department.

In July, the university announced an unprecedented four years of [compensation increases](#) for hundreds of TAs and RAs. The announcement included a 3.75% pay increase next year in most schools, and plans by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and Morningside professional schools to raise stipends by at least 3% for each of the next three years.

Improving International Students' Rights and Benefits

After Columbia University's administration announced a surprise 60% increase of international student fees over the next five years in November 2015, graduate workers organized online and across departments until the proposed increase was rejected. Since its early formation, GWC-UAW's international student working group has

made progress on numerous issues by organizing campus-wide town halls and forums, driving petitions, and sending delegations to meet with university deans. For example, in the last academic year GWC-UAW won 15 summer fellowships for international graduate workers in the social sciences, who typically have few employment options off-campus.

Last year, Columbia University committed a series of IRS reporting errors delaying international students' 2014 tax returns indefinitely. Graduate workers mobilized for several months, [delivered a petition to university administrators](#) with 2,000+ signatures, and built support from New York City elected officials, who [sent a letter to the university](#) calling for Columbia to step up and resolve the financial misreporting. The administration recently took responsibility for causing international student workers financial upheaval and established cash advances to cover money owed while they work with the IRS to resolve the issues. As a result of graduate worker organizing, international graduate workers are now receiving their tax refunds.

Fighting for Full, Fair and On-Time Payment

Since they first came together, Columbia graduate workers have called on their administration to publicly commit to paying graduate workers on time and establishing fair grievance procedures to resolve issues. Ian Bradley-Perrin, a second-year PhD student in the Sociomedical Sciences program at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health, was owed \$25,000 by Columbia for more than a year for work he performed as a research assistant. After his co-workers [joined together on social media to share Ian's story](#) and demand he receive overdue payment from the administration, a university dean reached out to Ian and made sure he received full payment on his next payday. Ian is confident that under a union contract, with a fair grievance procedure, it would not have taken nine months to receive payment for work performed at Columbia University.