



# University of Pittsburgh

*Office of the Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor*

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**Patricia E. Beeson**  
Provost  
Senior Vice Chancellor

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Dear Graduate Students:

As you have probably heard, unions are seeking to organize graduate students at universities across the country, with mixed results. The University of Pittsburgh is no exception. The United Steelworkers are here collecting signatures to call for an election to represent Pitt graduate students.

Before you sign anything, I urge you to take time to study the pros and cons of the issue. It is complex and carries long-range implications for you and the University. Speaking on behalf of the administration, I have serious concerns that a graduate student union would not be in the best interests of either our students or the broader University. This is not to say I am unsupportive of labor unions, as Pitt has long worked with many bargaining units on campus. Rather, I feel the unique relationship graduate students have with their faculty, departments, and schools is not well suited to representation by a union.

As graduate students, you came to the University to study and develop the skills for a life as a scholar and researcher. Teaching and research assistantships provide opportunities to develop and practice these skills while also supporting your studies through stipends, tuition remissions, and health insurance. The education, not the financial support, is the goal of graduate study.

In my conversations with graduate students, I have not learned of any single, widespread concern driving students to favor unionization. Often the issues that come to my attention are individual issues or ones that vary by department or school. Our current processes provide the flexibility to address individual concerns while working with graduate student representatives as voting members of important governing bodies to address broader issues and enhance the overall student experience. I believe this system better serves our campus than would a rigid collective bargaining model.

In short, we have a healthy, ongoing conversation—one that should continue. This collaborative approach is more effective than the potentially adversarial approach of collective bargaining, especially one in which a union unfamiliar with our academic values, culture, and mission would represent graduate students and their interests.

I welcome your thoughts, suggestions, and questions as part of the ongoing discussion of this issue. You can offer them at [gradstudent@pitt.edu](mailto:gradstudent@pitt.edu) or reach out to faculty and/or staff members. A Web site (<http://gradstudentunionization.pitt.edu/>) has been created with answers to questions

that my colleagues and I have been hearing about graduate student unionization and other related materials.

Graduate education is core to the mission of the University of Pittsburgh, and I am committed to working with you to continue to enhance your experience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia E. Beeson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patricia E. Beeson