

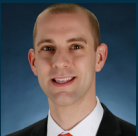
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Recent Unionizing Developments on Campus

There have been two recent developments regarding union organizing efforts on University campuses. At Northwestern University, a mail ballot election among adjunct faculty took place in July 2016. The Service Employees International Union challenged 25 of those ballots but the challenged ballots were not finally resolved and opened until earlier this month. Those ballots, which represented approximately 5 percent of the total vote, were sufficient to determine the outcome of the vote. The Labor Board reviewed the eligibility of each of the persons whose vote the Union challenged and found that each was eligible to vote. The Labor Board then opened the ballots and as a result, the final count led to a University victory. The final vote was 242 to 231 against joining the Union. Although the University prevailed, getting eligible voters to participate in the election process continues to present a significant challenge. In this case, there were approximately 700 eligible voters, but only about 72 percent of them cast votes in the election. In any organizing drive, it is imperative to get eligible voters to vote, particularly those who are apathetic, as they tend to resist change and are not supportive of having to pay a union. Colleges and universities, therefore, must consider the best ways, through actions and words, to inspire voting.

While the Labor Board was counting ballots in Chicago, the Service Employees International Union was concluding negotiations on behalf of graduate student workers at Tufts University. The graduate students voted in May 2017 to join the Union and they have now reached an agreement on their first labor contract. There are about 300 student-workers covered by the agreement who work as teaching and research assistants in the School of Arts and Sciences. The contract is for 4 years and provides raises from 12-19% over the next 4 years depending on where the students work. The new contract provides a new benefit—12 weeks of paid parental leave. Despite the Union seeking changes to the medical, dental and vision coverage the graduate students receive, there was no change in these benefits. The University announced that it would extend the paid parental leave to graduate students who were not in the Union, but worked in other Schools. The Union hopes to use the paid parental leave as an arrow in their quiver for organizing other graduate students.



The question remains whether the Trump Administration Labor Board or the courts will reverse the Columbia University decision that permitted graduate students to organize. Certainly, the Service Employees International Union and other unions are taking a very cautious approach to this situation, almost assuming the present members of the Labor Board will reverse course. If that happens, the unions will continue to try to organize graduate students, but will seek to have colleges and universities voluntarily recognize the union as the bargaining agent for the students. They may picket, strike, or find other ways to pressure the college or university to have a neutral organization, such as the American Arbitration Association, conduct an election or simply demand recognition. The greatest time to use pressure will be around exam times, graduation, or homecoming weekends. To the extent, any college or university becomes aware of union activity, it is vital to plan for all possibilities.

Questions or Assistance:

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