Dear Graduate Student Colleagues:

I hope you are enjoying your summer and looking forward to the start of fall semester at Cornell.

Conversations are occurring at Cornell, and at other private universities, regarding labor union representation of graduate assistants. Current federal labor law holds that graduate assistants at private universities are not employees (including titles at Cornell of Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Graduate Research Assistants, and Graduate Assistants). However, two cases (Columbia University and The New School) are pending with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and may result in changes to federal labor law, in which graduate assistants at private universities may be considered employees.

Cornell Graduate Students United (CGSU), a group of graduate students interested in achieving labor union representation for graduate assistants at Cornell University, has affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Anticipating that current federal labor law may change, CGSU/AFT/NYSUT are conducting a union campaign throughout Cornell’s Ithaca and Geneva campuses, including an authorization card drive for the purposes of gathering graduate student signatures to demonstrate sufficient interest in having CGSU/AFT/NYSUT be the exclusive representative for purposes of negotiating the terms and conditions of Cornell graduate assistant employment, and to set the stage for a possible union representation election should federal labor law change.

These discussions and activities have led to requests for more information about issues related to graduate assistant union representation at Cornell. In response, the Graduate School has prepared the attached "Frequently Asked Questions" document (also available online) and additional union representation information is available at www.gradschool.cornell.edu/union-representation to help anticipate and address questions.
I encourage you to review the information in the "FAQ" attached, and to visit the informational website. We'll update the FAQ and the website as new information becomes available and additional questions are raised.

Please contact me at dean_gradschool@cornell.edu with your questions and comments.

I encourage open and constructive conversations about graduate assistant union representation at Cornell, and, should an election occur in the future, full and free participation in a union representation election by all who are eligible to vote.

Warm regards,

Barbara A. Knuth
Senior Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School