

YOU'VE HEARD A LOT OF CLAIMS ABOUT UNIONIZATION AND THE UNIVERSITY...BUT DO YOU HAVE THE FACTS?

Columbia students understand that public debate must be based on facts. So here are some facts to keep in mind about some of the claims being made in the campaign for the United Auto Workers:

Stipend increases are not new or in response to recent union organizing.

In fact, doctoral stipends at all Columbia schools have been increasing at an average rate of between 3 and 4 percent a year for the past decade, except for the recession years that affected all university salaries and budgets. The reason? The University and its schools are competing for and committed to attracting the very best students in the world. And that's why stipends at schools on the Morningside campus will continue to increase at a minimum of 3% annually for the next three academic years. Stipends in the four Medical Center schools will continue to increase at rates determined by each school based on rates set by the NIH guidelines. On September 1, 2016, stipends rose by 3.75% or more at each of Columbia's Arts & Sciences departments and all of the professional schools located on Morningside. By contrast, NYU's union contract provides for annual increases of no more than 2.5%.

Students who are research assistants or teaching assistants are covered by Columbia's Workers' Compensation Benefit and are encouraged to apply for it through Columbia University Human Resources (<http://bit.ly/2gQQEDv>). Over the past five years, sixteen students have utilized the workers' compensation insurance benefit. (Note that there is no mention of workers' compensation in the grad student NYU union contract.)

Student teaching assistants and research assistants follow the same procedure as Columbia employees when filing a workers' compensation claim, as follows:

- Report the injury to your supervisor immediately. Complete a Departmental Accident Report Form for Workers' Compensation Benefits (hr.columbia.edu/forms-docs/department-accident-report). You can also get a copy of this form from your supervisor. The form must be completed by you and your supervisor without delay. Be sure to keep a copy of this form for your own records and submit the original to your supervisor or designated departmental administrator. Late reporting may result in a delay in processing your claim.
- *Note for managers:* Workers' Compensation claims are to be reported by the designated departmental administrator by contacting Gallagher Bassett Services Inc. at 1-877-749-1826.
- *Note for employees:* In addition to filling out the necessary forms, you must provide your supervisor with medical documentation (a doctor's note) to cover your absence and keep him/her properly updated regarding your anticipated return to work date.

Gallagher Bassett Services Inc.
100 Wall Street, 25th floor
New York, NY 10005

Phone: (212) 815-8900
Fax: (212) 672-7926

Columbia University HR Disability Benefits
615 West 131st Street, MC 8703
New York, NY 10027
Phone: (212) 851-7000
Email: hrcdisability@columbia.edu

Students participating in the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) have never lacked dental coverage.

In fact, supplemental plan for students not participating in SHIP was canceled by Aetna (not the University) because the insurance company decided enrollment was too low to continue with the plan. In response, Columbia made available an alternative, supplemental plan (<http://bit.ly/2dLYrH2>) for students affected by Aetna's termination. The reality is that our students never faced a gap in dental coverage.

Graduate students already have eye care and vision coverage through SHIP.

In fact, discounts for vision and eye care (<http://bit.ly/2dLYrH2>) have existed for many years. Claims to the contrary are false.

Columbia didn't create, but quickly helped solve the IRS problem experienced by international graduate students at many U.S. universities this past year.

Claims that Columbia created a tax problem that affected international students at many American universities last year are false as a matter of public record and should raise questions about the credibility of those claiming as much. In fact the IRS publicly acknowledged its responsibility (<http://bit.ly/260GFjk>) for a mistake regarding 2014 filings that prevented international graduate students at universities across the country from receiving expected tax refunds. Not only wasn't the problem caused by the university or any of the other school affected, when Columbia became aware of the issue, it extended no-interest loans to students in need and strongly urged our representatives in Congress to help fix the problem.

Columbia students have had a voice at the table and we hope more will make themselves heard.

It is not true that an outside union like the UAW is the only way for Columbia students to affect the issues they care about. School-based student governance and the Senate provide mechanisms for students to shape policies and programs. The Graduate School Advisory Council (GSAC) (<http://columbiagsac.wpengine.com>) comprises representatives from all schools who offer the doctoral degree at Columbia, and is led by a Steering Committee elected by those student representatives. The GSAC Steering Committee meets regularly with the Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (<http://gsas.columbia.edu>) and with the Provost to communicate student needs and concerns to the administration.

All graduate and professional schools have student government organizations whose purpose it is to maintain fruitful communication with their faculty and dean. These close collaborations have resulted in significant enhancements in the lives of our students in the last ten years. Other structures exist to support and assist students:

Gender-Based Misconduct Office (<https://sexualrespect.columbia.edu>) is a centralized resource to support and provide assistance to all University students who have experienced or have been accused of gender-based misconduct.

The Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (<http://eoaa.columbia.edu>) supports all members of the community with respect to equal opportunity, nondiscrimination and affirmative action.

The Ombuds Office (<http://ombuds.columbia.edu>) provides a confidential place to discuss and strategize about academic concerns, concerns about process, interpretation of policies and procedures, and many other issues.

The International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) (<https://isso.columbia.edu/content/about-us>) supports international students, faculty, and researchers with advising and processing services related to U.S. federal immigration regulations, compliance, and other concerns.

In addition, every School has a professional staff ready to help students with concerns and complaints of many kinds. The staff works with students and faculty to resolve such issues, but if a resolution can't be reached, students can always engage the School's grievance procedures (<https://provost.columbia.edu/policies#k>).

Any student alleging sexual misconduct may be accompanied by an advisor of their choice at every stage and in every meeting in the process.

Claims that Columbia students are unrepresented in such proceedings are false. If a student chooses to have an advisor with them, the advisor may always be present when a student speaks with Gender-Based Misconduct Office staff at every stage. If a student chooses, the university will provide an attorney as an advisor. Columbia's Gender-Based Misconduct Policy (<https://sexualrespect.columbia.edu/university-policy>) provides

more information on the investigation and adjudication process for gender-based misconduct, the rights of students to respect, dignity, and sensitivity throughout that process, and accommodations for support and relief available to students affected by gender-based misconduct.

Help is always available for student concerns about payroll and stipend payments, and to assist in the resolution of any related issues.

We know students are concerned about late payments and addressing those concerns promptly is in everyone's interest. The fact is that while such problems inevitably occur in a historically decentralized system involving necessary paperwork by students, faculty, departments and schools, these issues remain rare. If and when students do have a concern about payments, they should know to call 212-854-5000 to reach a dedicated help line. For questions about student accounts, tuition and fees, refunds, and transcripts, students can contact the Student Service Centers, which can be found at <http://ssc.columbia.edu/>.

Potential benefits under a union contract cannot be guaranteed, but paying union dues are a certainty for all students in the bargaining unit.

With union representation, compensation and benefits will be subject to collective bargaining and there is no guarantee that they will increase or improve upon the university's ongoing efforts to improve student stipends and benefits. What is certain is that the United Auto Workers at New York University (NYU) charges its members 2% of their total compensation during the semesters in which a student is employed in a position covered by the union contract – whether or not they vote for or choose to join the UAW. At NYU, the union contract provides a mechanism by which the dues are automatically deducted from every paycheck. In addition to these dues, the United Auto Workers charges every member an initiation fee of approximately \$50. If dues were the same 2% at Columbia, the annual net outflow from students to the union would be estimated at nearly \$2 million every year - more than \$550 per student.

The experience of state universities cannot predict the experience here.

Private universities are not governed by state laws, which in many instances forbid public employees from striking; nor will state law shield bargaining over academic issues at Columbia as such laws typically do at state universities. At NYU, the only private university with a teaching assistant union, a strike begun in 2005 lasted 10 months and another strike was threatened in 2014, before the current contract was signed. Students may want to consider how their laboratory research and academic progress will be affected by such a strike.