



## DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Bloomington

April 4, 2022

Dear Provost Shrivastav and President Whitten,

In May 2019, a College Task Force released its report on the tenuous state of graduate funding at IU Bloomington. Many graduate workers had not had increases in their stipends since 2013-14 and average stipends had fallen considerably below those offered by our competitors and, above all, below a living wage.

In the summer of 2021, the Indiana Graduate Workers Coalition (IGWC) affiliated with the United Electrical Workers (UE), and last fall, they petitioned the campus administration seeking recognition as a collective bargaining unit to be represented by UE. This petition was supported unanimously by the IU Graduate and Professional Student Government body (60 votes in favor, one abstention). This past December, the IGWC submitted 1,584 signed cards to the Board of Trustees expressing the wish of nearly two-thirds of approximately 2,500 graduate instructors to hold an election for the IGWC-UE to serve as their collective bargaining representative. As you know, the Board denied the graduate employees' wish for representation this past February.

Unions help raise wages to reflect the cost of living and strengthen the rights of workers on the job while fostering the spirit of shared governance that it is at the heart of the academy's collegial ideal. The efforts of the IGWC-UE on campus coincide with a federal ruling recognizing student academic appointees as statutory employees. Federal labor law has significant persuasive authority in this matter, but the fact is that graduate unions have been recognized at many public universities since 1969. In the state of Indiana, our public school teachers are unionized and IUB itself has three unions on campus (CWA, AFSCME, IATSE) recognized under our policy HR-12-20. To deny recognition to the IGWC-UE on the basis of a distinction between "student academic appointee" and "employee," as the past administration has done, is to make an artificial distinction out of touch with federal law and the precedents of states such as Illinois, Michigan, California, Washington, Oregon, and Massachusetts.

The graduate students at IU have expressed their wish for collective representation at the bargaining table. They have worked hard and in good faith to clarify and present their concerns to the university administration. Ignoring their substantial efforts will cause serious and long-term harm to the reputation of IU and its ability to recruit top graduate students in the future. Institutions from Michigan State and the University of Illinois to the University of Chicago, from Yale and Columbia to the University of California, have graduate student unions. All reports indicate they are stronger institutions because of it. Potential graduate students will seek

opportunities where their voice is heard, and their work is appropriately recognized and rewarded. Losing these potential students would be a devastating loss to Indiana University.

As faculty members, we cherish the academic relationships we have with our graduate students. Indiana University cannot continue to fulfill its mission as a public research university without our graduate students. Student Academic Appointees (SAAs) perform a vital role in carrying out the teaching missions of various departments while at the same time contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields through doctoral research. In our department, most graduate students are instructors of record, and without them we would have no language program. The questions of fees and stipends that the IU Graduate and Professional Student Government body are currently raising are also critical to the standing, reputation, and future of the University itself. Despite recent increases, IU Bloomington's stipends and recruitment packages (summer stipends, travel grants etc.) remain below those offered by most of our peer institutions in the Big Ten Academic Alliance. Many academic units, including our own, have observed first-hand a significant negative impact on graduate recruitment. A commitment to providing graduate students a competitive wage proportional to the cost of living in Bloomington is in the best interests of both graduate students and Indiana University. In this light, we fully support their efforts to secure a more significant and long-overdue increase in stipends and a considerable decrease or elimination of graduate student fees.

We, the faculty of the Department of French and Italian, write to express our strong support for the IGWC petition and to call upon campus administration to adopt a collaborative, good-faith approach to addressing the graduate students' concerns. We are hopeful that your new leadership can give the question of graduate student representation and support its due and fair consideration. We urge you to meet and discuss the needs of graduate students with their union representatives and come to mutually agreeable permanent solutions that recognize the vital role played by graduate students in the research and teaching missions of Indiana University.

Respectfully submitted by the faculty of the Department of French and Italian