

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**  
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

PROVOST

**OFFICE OF THE MINORITY LEADER**

**APR 22 2004**

**SUITE 1930**

April 17, 2004

Senator David A. Paterson  
New York State Senate  
Office of the Minority Leader  
250 Broadway, Suite 1930  
New York, NY 10007-2543

Dear Senator Paterson:

Thank you, belatedly, for your letter to President Bollinger of March 30 about the efforts of graduate student teaching fellows and research assistants to form a union in collaboration with the UAW. He has been traveling in Asia for several weeks and has asked me to respond on his behalf.

We are very grateful for your long support for Columbia, and we appreciate your concern for our students. I have no doubt that the card count that your staff helped certify was a fair one. President Bollinger and I both share your sense of the importance of unions.

Our position on this particular issue, however, has been that graduate students are not employees as defined by the National Labor Relations Act; and while the NLRB decisions of several years ago in the NYU case and in the Columbia case that followed it expressed a different interpretation of the law, we believe that these decisions should be reconsidered. That is why we filed an appeal in 2000. We never imagined that the NLRB would delay ruling for so long, and we are as frustrated by this as are the students. But of course we have no control over the pace of their deliberations.

I want to assure you that we have made clear to everyone at Columbia that students are free to join or advocate a union, and even to strike, without retribution, and we will work very hard to see that this remains the case. We appreciate very much your offer to help.

Sincerely,



Alan Brinkley  
Provost