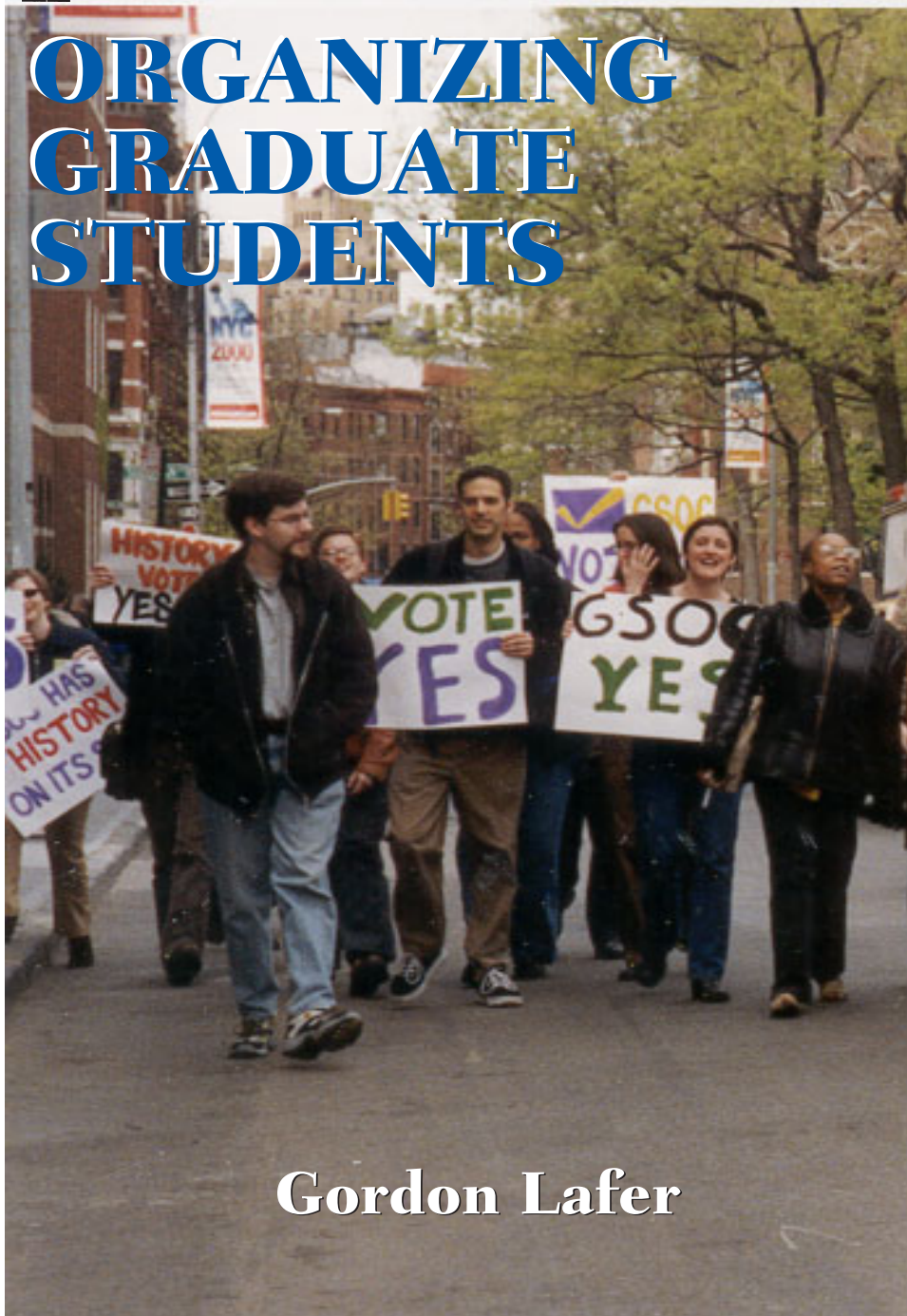


# ORGANIZING GRADUATE STUDENTS



Gordon Lafer

Gordon Lafer is assistant professor at the University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center and is the author of *The Job Training Charade* (Cornell University Press, 2002). He thanks David Sanders for review and comment on this pamphlet.

© 2001 by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas (F.S.I.S.I.), 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, N.Y. 10025.

F.S.I.S.I. is grateful to the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of Teachers for the support and in-kind contributions that made this publication possible.

Order from F.S.I.S.I.  
310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, N.Y., N.Y. 10025  
editors@dissentmagazine.org  
\$3.00 single copy. Inquire about bulk rates.

Cover photo courtesy of UAW *Solidarity* Magazine. Photos on pages 9 and 18 courtesy of the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO) of Yale University.

# Organizing Graduate Students

**Gordon Lafer**

**I**n the spring of 2001, graduate students at New York University made history when they won recognition for the first graduate student union at a private university. To accomplish this feat, they had to overcome the political and legal opposition of virtually every elite school in the country. In a series of hearings before the National Labor Relations Board, arguments opposing the union were voiced not only by NYU's own administration but by those of Yale, Princeton, Columbia, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford, Johns Hopkins, Boston University, the American Association of Universities, the American Council on Education, and the Council on Graduate Schools.<sup>1</sup> In a series of landmark rulings, the Labor Board rejected the arguments of these leaders of higher education and opened the door to a new wave of organizing on the nation's campuses.

The fact that the entire organizational leadership of elite higher education mobilized against the NYU union indicates the scale of what was at stake in this fight. In fact, however, the NYU decision was only one of several recent decisions marking a sea change in academic labor relations. In the past two years, officials in California, Illinois, and Pennsylvania have all issued rulings similar to that of the NYU case, invalidating the claims made by administrators for the past two decades.<sup>2</sup> These rulings have helped spur an unprecedented boom in graduate student organizing. Within three months of the NYU union's winning recognition, unions were voted in by lopsided margins at both Temple and Michigan State, a majority of graduate students at Columbia and Brown petitioned the Labor Board for an election, and new organizing drives were announced at Penn State and the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup> These activities come on the heels of what is already a fast-growing movement. Since 1995, the number of graduate unions in the country has grown from 10 to 27, and an estimated 20 percent of all graduate employees are now covered by union contracts—a level comparable to the most highly organized states in the country and 50 percent above the national norm.<sup>4</sup>

## The Economic Function of Graduate Students in the Corporate University

Although the legal decisions have been important, the recent boom in organizing activity is primarily a reaction to dynamics within the university itself. The traditional ideal of college education pictures a setting that is specifically *outside* the rat race; an opportunity to explore ideas, make friendships, and develop a sense of one's self in ways that are not possible amid the dog-eat-dog pressures of commercial life. For the past thirty years, however, universities have moved progressively away from this community-of-scholars model, fashioning themselves instead in the image of private corporations. Rather than pursuing the romantic vision of the classroom as an encounter between seasoned scholars and eager young minds, administrators across the country have radically shifted teaching duties away from regular faculty and onto the shoulders of graduate students and adjunct instructors. The economic logic of this strategy is simple to grasp: in 1999, an average full professor earned \$71,000 per year, while graduate student teachers earned between \$5,000 and \$20,000.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, the number of tenure-track faculty was cut by 10 percent between 1975-1995—a period during which overall enrollment was expanding significantly—while the number of graduate teaching assistants increased by nearly 40 percent.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, it is estimated that between 50 percent and 70 percent of all teaching hours are now performed by graduate students and other “contingent” teachers; an undergraduate signing up for an English class has a less than one-in-four chance of being taught by a tenure-track professor.<sup>7</sup> And in both natural science and humanities departments, graduate students are responsible for 90 percent of the grading.<sup>8</sup> As administrators have been increasingly driven by bottom-line considerations, graduate students have become an indispensable ingredient in the financial calculations of every major university.

Moreover, graduate students appear likely to play an even more central role in what are emerging as the critical growth markets for American universities: corporate research in the natural sciences and distance learning in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>9</sup> Across the country, administrators are competing to cement corporate partnerships supporting jointly funded science research. Beyond the immediate value of funding, universities have been accelerating efforts to capture the intellectual property rights that emerge from this research, with many schools pioneering in-house venture-capital offices to support for-profit startups based on the results of laboratory research. The potential earnings from pharmaceutical, technology, and biotech patents represent a major source of profit for university managers, and have led many schools to market their science departments aggressively to possible private sector partners. For the

university, these joint ventures could provide revenue to complement or replace federal science funding; they also evoke visions of future profits on a scale never before contemplated. For pharmaceutical giants, they represent a much cheaper alternative to in-house research. Outside the confines of the nation's campuses, it is impossible to get highly educated scientists to do rigorous work for 60 hours a week at \$20,000 per year; this is the unbeatable deal that universities offer their corporate partners. This win-win solution, however, relies critically on the availability of thousands of graduate students who are simultaneously among the nation's most highly trained and most poorly paid technology workers.

**I**n humanities and social science departments, the key emerging market is distance learning. Administrators across the country are racing each other to establish online courses that will be sold to a variety of market niches: working adults who can afford tuition but are unable to attend on-campus classes, individuals in rural communities who are willing to pay for a more marketable degree than that provided by the local community college, and wealthy foreigners who may be eager to pay a premium for an American degree. Administrators have rushed headlong into this emerging market. In 1998, NYU itself made history when it became the first university in the country to establish a for-profit subsidiary devoted to capturing the distance-learning market; since that time, Columbia, Cornell, and Temple—all schools that have vigorously opposed graduate unionization—have established similar enterprises.<sup>10</sup> If graduate assistants are instrumental in the delivery of large lecture classes *on campus*, their importance will be multiplied when popular courses are

---

The same dynamics that make graduate students such a good buy while they are in school make them increasingly unemployable after they complete their degrees.

---

marketed to tens of thousands of students around the globe. Although distance learning may suggest a fully automated education, it is unlikely that tuition-paying students will settle for such an outcome. As the market gets more competitive, wealthy consumers in Beijing or Bangalore will look for online chat-classrooms, e-mail "office hours," and detailed feedback on term papers. Indeed, as universities look to identify market winners, most faculty are likely to be squeezed out of the virtual university. In the beginning stages, thousands of professors may be asked to convert their current courses into online offerings.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, however, the logic of distance learning means that universities will look to standardize their educational products by patenting the lectures and course

materials of name faculty who will serve as “content providers”—thus, students in Hong Kong may sign up for the “Henry Kissinger Lectures in Post-War Diplomacy” or similar name-brand courses. Clearly, the big names will have little or no contact with students; their time is too expensive. The profit strategy of these new ventures, then, relies explicitly on an army of graduate students and adjuncts to monitor online discussions, critique papers, answer questions, and get to know individual students’ work well enough to write the endlessly necessary letters of recommendation. Although distance learning initially concentrated on humanities and social science offerings, similar applications are now being developed for science departments as well; thus MIT recently announced an ambitious effort, developed in collaboration with Microsoft Research, to create online science labs that would allow physics and engineering students to participate in laboratory instruction from remote portals.<sup>12</sup> Here too, it is likely that graduate students will play a critical role in the creation of the for-profit market for online laboratory training.

**I**t is because graduate students perform such a critical value-added role in the internal economy of the university that the entire leadership of private higher education lined up against the fledgling NYU union. However, the same dynamics that make graduate students such a good buy while they are in school make them increasingly unemployable after they complete their degrees, leading a coalition of national faculty associations to bemoan “the vanishing traditional faculty member.”<sup>13</sup> The wholesale substitution of casual teachers for tenure-track positions has decimated the academic job market. At Yale, it was estimated that the use of graduate teachers produced a savings of more than \$5 million per year and allowed administrators to eliminate nearly 200 junior faculty positions.<sup>14</sup> Nationally, there are now 200,000 graduate teachers in the nation’s universities, but only 114,000 junior faculty members; thus, even if every single assistant professor quit or got promoted, 40 percent of current graduate students would remain jobless.<sup>15</sup>

In the natural sciences, the turn to commercially sponsored research has also encouraged a more corporate structure in which a limited number of principal investigators oversees a large staff of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. As a result, the number of faculty positions has decreased while the time one is expected to apprentice in the purgatory between graduate school and a junior faculty slot has lengthened, with Ph.D.s in the biological sciences now spending an average of four years in low-wage post-doctoral “fellowships.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the scam of post-docs—the natural sciences’ equivalent of adjunct teachers, in which Ph.D.s whose training qualifies them for a faculty job are instead required to serve as low-wage lab assistants—is so compelling that the private sector has begun instituting “industry post-docs,” thus undercutting the option

of scientists to ditch low-wage campus internships for higher paid industry jobs. Even at the nation's top schools, the share of life sciences Ph.D.s who go on to permanent research jobs in *either* academia or industry has fallen from 87 percent in 1973 to 56 percent in 1995.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Commission on Life Sciences warns that “many graduate students entered life science training with the expectation that they would become like their mentors: they would be able to establish laboratories in which they would pursue research based on their own scientific ideas. The reality that now faces many of them seems very different.”<sup>18</sup>

Finally, even those lucky enough to land tenure-track positions find that they are still not living the lives of their mentors. While other professional salaries have soared over the past three decades, downsizing has enabled university administrators to cut faculty pay, despite significant growth in the higher education market. At the end of the century, average salaries for tenured faculty were approximately 5 percent *lower* than they were in 1970.<sup>19</sup> For young academics who wander through the leafy neighborhoods of college towns wondering how senior colleagues ever managed to afford such nice homes, the answer may have less to do with inflation of real estate values than deflation of faculty salaries. This, then, is the contradiction that lies at the heart of the corporatization process: the very dynamics that make graduate students so useful to the business mission of the university are also destroying the academic careers that are supposed to justify the long haul of earning a Ph.D.

This contradiction is evident, in part, in the reluctance of adminis-

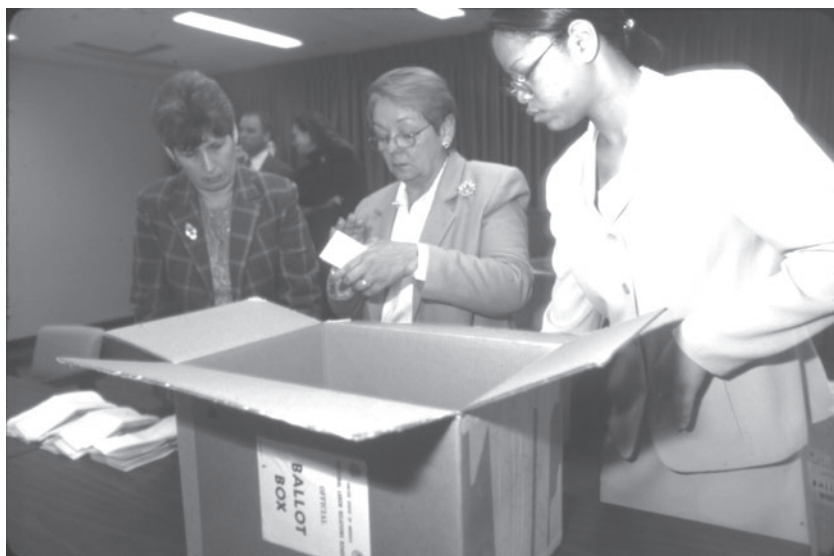


PHOTO: DONNA BINDER

*NLRB officials count NYU ballots.*

trators to cut graduate school admissions to match the job market. If graduate schools were, in fact, primarily concerned with training future faculty, they would dramatically reduce their enrollments; to admit students who (as administrators know) have little prospect of landing faculty jobs is to act in bad faith. However, while universities may not need so many graduate students for the purpose of producing future faculty, they *do* need them to teach classes, lead discussions, grade papers, and conduct laboratory research. Therefore, instead of cutting admissions, administrators have taken to promoting the virtues of nonacademic careers for graduate students. Yale, for instance, recently hosted an event highlighting a music Ph.D. who went on to become an investment banker, trumpeting the opportunity to hear “how he moved from music to finance without getting an MBA.”<sup>20</sup> However, with the exception of private sector science research, there is no reason to endure the travails of earning a doctorate unless one intends to become a professor. That administrators have taken to hawking such transparently foolish career counseling testifies to their desperation to maintain what has become the low-wage backbone of the university’s teaching and research efforts.

In the 1980 *National Labor Relations Board and Yeshiva Faculty Association v. Yeshiva University* ruling that largely banned faculty unions at private universities, Justice William Brennan’s dissent warned of the dangers of leaving academia a union-free environment. Removing the possibility of faculty organizing, he predicted, “threatens to eliminate much of the administration’s incentive to resolve its disputes . . . through open discussion and mutual agreement . . . [and] removes whatever deterrent value [labor law] may offer against unreasonable administrative conduct.”<sup>21</sup> Twenty years later, it appears that graduate education has fallen victim, in part, to the unchecked administrative power feared by Brennan. It is impossible to say what universities would look like had unionization been a real threat twenty years ago. Given a free hand to mold the university to their own liking, administrators have produced a system that—although financially successful—has undercut much of what used to stand at the heart of academic life.

### **Assault on Legal Rights**

Given the instrumental function of graduate labor, it may not be surprising that administrators have fought so vigorously to deny graduate students the right to negotiate their terms of employment. At NYU, it took a two-year struggle to force the administration to recognize the union. While the legal ruling garnered the most national attention, the recognition campaign was waged in thousands of personal conversations on campus. Even after losing two Labor Board rulings, NYU administrators announced that they would “consult” with the community to decide whether to obey the ruling. The following months brought three crucial events: the graduate

student council passed a resolution urging recognition; then the undergraduate student council did the same thing; and finally, a handpicked committee of faculty—who in April 2000 had urged the administration to appeal the initial Board ruling—turned against the administration and voted to recommend recognition.<sup>22</sup> The Manhattan contingent of the New York City Council sent a similar message to NYU president Jay Oliva, stating that “we urge you in the strongest terms possible to negotiate in good faith immediately with the graduate students’ Union, as we would be hard pressed to secure public support for any institution that refuses to obey national labor law.”<sup>23</sup> While administrators publicly proclaimed that they were pondering whether to honor the Labor Board ruling, the Board issued a complaint against the administration for failing to commence negotiations.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the union scheduled a strike vote for the evening of March 1, 2001.<sup>25</sup> Hours before the vote, under the combined pressures of legal defeat, campus-wide loss of support, and the prospect of a strike at the close of the spring semester, the administration finally caved in and signed a recognition agreement.

**A**t every campus where graduate students have organized, the most important element of success has been a strong grassroots organization; organizing has been the key, rather than reliance on legal strategies. Nevertheless, it is worth examining the central arguments of the legal case—in part because administrators have used the same rationales to discourage graduate students from supporting a union as they have to dissuade legal authorities from approving one. In this sense, the legal victories of the past few years have been doubly important. Not only have they guaranteed the legal rights of graduate employees; but they have also provided a moral repudiation of administrators’ arguments, and in so doing have helped boost organizing on the ground. Thus, Christian Sweeney, a doctoral student in history who is on leave from U.C. Berkeley, helping to support the organizing drive at Columbia, reports that when he was organizing four years ago at Berkeley, even liberal students were slow to believe they had a right to organize. Now at Columbia, in the aftermath of the NYU ruling, “even the anti-union students all assume that the issue should be decided in an election, and take for granted that we have the right to choose for ourselves.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, both as legal text and as organizing context, it is useful to examine the arguments that lay at the heart of the NLRB case.

For twenty years, administrators across the country have relied on a common set of arguments to oppose granting their graduate students the same rights afforded secretaries and librarians:

- Graduate teachers and researchers are “students, not employees” and therefore have no right to bargain collectively over the terms of their employment.

- The lab research, teaching, grading, advising, photocopying, and other tasks that graduate students carry out is not actually “work,” but is part of their education and training to become professors.
- Unionization converts a student-faculty relationship into an employer-employee relationship and thereby destroys the collegiality of campus life.
- Unionization threatens academic freedom by requiring administrators to negotiate over educational policy issues that should be decided through academic deliberation rather than contract negotiations.

On any given campus, administrators often present these arguments as if they are the novel and uncoached conclusions that emerged from the considered deliberation of campus scholars. Indeed, in many cases, these arguments are described as reflecting the unique circumstances of a particular campus, which set it qualitatively apart from schools where a union may be less problematic. In fact, these arguments are part of a carefully honed legal strategy that has been developed in collaboration by administrators across the country. They originate not in the cloistered contemplation of campus faculty but in the dark-paneled offices of anti-union law firms. In 1991, Cornell asked its legal counsel for advice on how to defuse a growing union movement. The memo it received, leaked to the union by clerical employees, suggested the same themes as those voiced by NYU and its amici before the Labor Board.<sup>27</sup> In the late 1990s, the graduate dean of the University of Iowa was invited on a speaking tour to share that school’s recent unionization experience with other campus administrators and distill the lessons on how best to resist unionization. Among other recommendations, the dean suggested that fellow administrators portray the result of collective bargaining as a replacement of “collegiality” with “adversarial” relationships, stress the negative impact of being classified as “employees,” and enroll faculty as the spokespeople for administration positions.<sup>28</sup> More recently, NYU, Columbia, and Yale have all used the same law firm—which made its reputation partly by fighting against *faculty* unionization—so it is unsurprising that these schools mouth the same lines.

Given that administrators’ arguments revolve around protecting the integrity of intellectual inquiry against baser political influences, their legal briefs are remarkable for the cynicism with which they deploy transparent and even mutually contradictory arguments. For example, administrators have often argued that graduate students are *superior* to normal “workers,” enjoying the privileged position of junior colleagues to the faculty, and therefore have no need of unions. In its brief to the NLRB, however, NYU argued that graduate students shared the status of mentally handicapped custodial trainees, whose work should all be considered training because they are not yet up to the production standards of true employees.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, NYU argued that graduate students are not



“workers” by relying on the most narrow, almost pre-modern conception of “work” as drudgery—if one learns anything on the job, it cannot be work; “work” is mindless suffering endured only for the paycheck. Yet the university was willing to make quite the opposite argument when it proved useful. When the NLRB excluded from the union those science students whose laboratory work was restricted to their own dissertation research (excluding outside projects), the university objected, apparently believing these scientists would be more likely to vote against unionization. Here, the university argued that even those doing research on their own dissertations are employees because their work “enhanc[es] NYU’s reputation”—thereby encouraging future grant funding—and thus constitutes an important economic function of the university that must be understood as employment.<sup>30</sup> This argument—which one would normally expect from postmodern cultural critics rather than anti-union lawyers—certainly has merit. But for the university to swing so quickly between the most degraded and most expansive definitions of employment suggests that the only point to be taken at face value is the administration’s commitment to finding some argument, any argument, that would effectively deny legal employment rights to its graduate students.

Ivy League administrators appear similarly disingenuous in protesting the unique dangers of a private-sector union. Administration Web sites at both Columbia and Yale stress that under most states’ labor law, public employees are banned from striking, and disputes must be resolved by binding arbitration; but at private universities, there is no provision for arbitration, and unions may strike at will; thus even if unions have

proved beneficial at state schools they bring unacceptable risks to private campuses.<sup>31</sup> However, neither Yale nor Columbia has ever suggested that it would agree to binding arbitration as a non-conflictual means of settling union contracts. On the contrary, classified employee unions at both schools have repeatedly called on the administration to accept just such a plan, and have always been turned down. Thus, although administration literature continues to criticize unions by insisting that universities must be governed by the power of persuasion rather than adversarial conflict, the critique rings hollow. When offered the prospect of binding arbitration—a process uniquely designed to resolve disputes through the power of persuasion—administrators have uniformly rejected this option. The reason seems obvious. In arbitration the two sides meet as equals, with only the power of logic and analysis behind them; but this amounts to a unilateral disarming by the administration, relinquishing its ability to exert subtle or explicit pressure on the universe of employees whose paychecks it cuts. It seems, then, that it is administrators rather than graduate student organizers who threaten to turn Plato's *Republic* into *Lord of the Flies*.

### **Academic Freedom**

The most counter-intuitive argument launched against unionization is the proposition that unions threaten academic freedom. Nevertheless, administrators on every campus have advanced multiple versions of this argument. NYU asserted that a union would threaten academic freedom because “the University will be subject to collective bargaining with its students over educational policy-making.”<sup>32</sup> One might think that administrators were concerned over the prospect that a union would try to usurp faculty judgment over grades, course requirements, or other traditional academic issues. However, no academic union has ever sought to bargain over these issues, and the NYU union ultimately signed a statement pledging that it too would not seek to bargain over “exclusively academic” issues.<sup>33</sup> In any case, NYU's concern was much broader, as the administration insisted that “almost any issue as to which the Union would wish to bargain will involve academic policy.”<sup>34</sup> The university explicitly included graduate teacher salaries among the issues that could not be subject to negotiation, arguing that salaries are an “educational policy” determination based on the level needed to attract the best students.

The Labor Board roundly rejected this argument. The university already negotiates over these terms with individual graduate students, the Board noted, as individuals are free to reject teaching positions if they deem the salary inadequate. Thus, NYU's real concern was to avoid negotiating terms of employment *collectively* rather than *individually*, presumably based on the fear that collective bargaining would prove more expensive. But this has nothing to do with academic freedom and, on the

contrary, amounts to a rejection of the very purpose of federal labor law—to enable workers to negotiate on a more even footing with their employers. “The limitation on academic freedom the Employer anticipates,” the Board reasoned, “essentially appears to be a fear that collective action over graduate students’ conditions of employment will be more influential and powerful than individual action. The issue thus framed is whether the NLRB should deny collective bargaining rights to employees because of this anticipated impact of collective bargaining. This suggestion runs directly contrary to the express purposes of the [National Labor Relations] Act.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite the Labor Board ruling, administrators at Columbia, Yale, and elsewhere continue to insist that it will prove impossible to police the line between academic issues—which must be reserved for the judgment of administrators or faculty—and employment issues. This argument is particularly peculiar in the wake of NYU’s recognition agreement. When the union pledged not to negotiate over “exclusively academic” issues, NYU celebrated the agreement as having finally addressed its long-standing concerns over academic freedom. Now that “we found resolution to those issues,” declared Vice President Robert Berne, “we’re prepared to move ahead.”<sup>36</sup> It is curious, then, that administration Web sites throughout the Ivy League continue to treat this as an insoluble quandary. For Columbia in particular—operating with the same union and the same lawyers as at NYU—the obvious suggestion would be to offer the union recognition on the same terms as were celebrated downtown. That administrators have avoided this possibility suggests that they may find it more useful to perpetuate the fear of academic bargaining than to embrace a simple safeguard against such concerns.

The argument that most strains credulity may be that of Yale Law School dean Anthony Kronman, who suggested in the pages of the *New York Times* that a union might actually stunt the intellectual development of its members. Graduate students “are working to become individuals with distinctive views and voices,” Kronman explains. “Collective bargaining, with its demand that one voice speak for all, is [not] compatible with the individualism of university life—the life the students have chosen precisely because it leaves them free to follow their own path and to speak for themselves.”<sup>37</sup> The notion that unionization might prevent individuals from finding their own intellectual voice requires such a suspension of belief that one almost feels insulted by the demand to treat this as a serious proposition. Perhaps Kronman has never heard of Albert Einstein—a member of Princeton’s American Federation of Teachers faculty union; or never been impressed by the work of any graduates of the University of Michigan, or Wisconsin, or other unionized schools; or never known anyone who teaches at Rutgers, the University of Massachusetts, or other campuses where faculty are organized. When pressed on this

issue, Kronman backpedals, conceding that he would not advise college students against attending graduate school at a unionized campus or discourage faculty from taking a job there, because it might restrict their intellectual development. Asked whether he would oppose a faculty union on these same grounds, Kronman stutters, “Oh boy, that’s a difficult question to answer.” Ultimately, he stresses that “we’re talking about differences at the margin . . . the difference is not between night and day.”<sup>38</sup> Yet the fact that Kronman is prepared to make such large arguments on the basis of such marginal concerns suggests, again, that deeper motives may lurk beneath the rhetorical surface.

Indeed, all these arguments about academic freedom ring hollow for a simple reason: this one has already been solved. Administrators often talk as if the prospect of academic bargaining is a new one, fraught with unknown procedures and unpredictable pitfalls. In fact, the correct response to this worry is, been there, done that. Both graduate student unions and faculty unions have been conducting negotiations for decades; in all this time, there has never been a suggestion that academic freedom was compromised. Like graduate students, faculty unions seek work protections, but have not sought to negotiate what classes are taught, what areas of expertise a department concentrates in, or what the criteria should be for promotion or tenure. At the unionized City University of New York—a short subway ride from NYU—the academic procedures for evaluating tenure, determining curricula, and setting grading standards are carried out exactly as they are at NYU. “After nearly 30 years of experience with bargaining units of faculty members,” the Labor Board concluded, “we are confident that” issues of academic versus employment considerations can be easily resolved.<sup>39</sup>

**A**lthough the arguments reviewed thus far appear to be red herrings, I believe there is a meaningful conception of “academic freedom” that, in part, animates administrators’ opposition to unionization. Unfortunately, it is a disturbing conception. In this sense, it is telling that both NYU and Columbia administrators have pointed to charges that the Labor Board filed against Yale faculty in the wake of that school’s 1996 graduate teachers’ strike as evidence of the propensity of unions to chill academic freedom. In the case in question, Yale faculty and administrators threatened strike participants with being banned from future teaching assignments; suggested that participants could be kicked out of graduate school; and adopted a policy allowing faculty advisers to write negative letters of recommendation, or withhold letters entirely, on the basis of strike participation. These reprisals led the federal government to file charges against both administrators and faculty at Yale, and led to resolutions of censure against the school from the Modern Language Association, the American History Association, the National Asso-

ciation of Graduate and Professional Students, and the American Association of University Professors.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the government dropped most of its charges based on a technicality regarding the particular form of this strike— withholding undergraduate grades at the conclusion of the fall semester—even though such threats would clearly be illegal in the context of a normal teaching strike. The Labor Board agreed to a settlement on the remaining charges that required Yale to post notices outside the graduate school administration offices and the offices of departments that issued illegal threats, promising that in the future no employees would be subject to threats because of their participation in union activities.<sup>41</sup> Given that the threats voiced during the grade strike would unquestionably be *prima facie* illegal in a normal strike action, it is curious that administrators have chosen to uphold these reprisals as the hallmark of academic freedom. For most of the academic community, academic freedom consists precisely in the protection against such threats. Thus, the Modern Language Association voted to censure Yale administrators for a “violation of academic freedom” in “permitting the use of union activity as a criterion for academic evaluations, and for failing to protect the right of Yale’s graduate teaching staff to participate in union activities, including job actions, without fear of reprisals against their academic careers.”<sup>42</sup>

---

Graduate student unions and faculty unions have been conducting negotiations for decades; in all this time, there has never been a suggestion that academic freedom was compromised.

---

Nevertheless, Columbia administrators now cite the Yale case as a disturbing instance of unions threatening a hallowed right of academic freedom; thus President George Rupp, in an open letter to faculty, explained his concern that “faculty colleagues . . . have felt inhibited from expressing their views, in particular because of the charge of unfair labor practices filed against some Yale faculty in the organizing effort there.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, an open letter from Yale provost Alison Richard points to the federal charges arising from the grade strike as evidence that applying the Labor Board’s standard of behavior to faculty—that is, banning the use of “threats” or “promises” to turn graduate students against the union—would undermine the fundamental nature of higher education. “These restrictions on what could be legally discussed with ‘an employee,’” Richard insists, “would strike at the freedom of expression central to the whole conception of the university as an intellectual community.”<sup>44</sup>

In the minds of campus administrators, then, the principle of “academic freedom” has been reformulated along frighteningly Orwellian lines.

This revised principle seems to boil down to the right of administrators and senior faculty to threaten those lower down the academic food chain. Moreover, while administrators have used the rhetoric of academic freedom to woo the allegiance of campus faculty, some of these same institutions have also opposed *faculty* unions on the grounds that these, too, would unacceptably threaten academic freedom. In the *Yeshiva* case, the same lawyers that spearheaded the opposition to graduate unionization at NYU, Columbia, and Yale argued against faculties' right to organize on the grounds that "collective bargaining in the style of industry is destructive of basic academic values."<sup>45</sup> In an amicus brief for that case, NYU and other schools contrasted "the present collegial framework for decision-making" with the "adversarial" setting that would inevitably result from faculty unionization.<sup>46</sup> What then is this view of academic freedom

---

Beyond the immediate economic issues . . . this is a fight over the extent to which universities will be democratized.

---

in which both faculty *and* graduate students must be silenced? Apparently, for administrators the principle of "academic freedom" boils down to an insistence that no one outside a handful of top officers can be granted meaningful power in crafting the policies that govern campus life. While this analysis may have the ring of tongue-in-cheek sarcasm, it is, in fact, difficult to make administrative statements add up to any other conclusion. Moreover, administrators continue to dismiss the more traditional notions of academic freedom—including graduate students' suggestion that they need a union precisely in order to secure such protection—with an offensive glibness. Earlier this year, for example, Yale's Dean Kronman issued one of those bosses-say-the-darndest-things statements, declaring that "Yale is about as free and humane an environment as any I've experienced and any I can imagine"—this despite the fact that virtually the entire upper echelon of the school, including the chief negotiator, chief financial officer, human resources director, university secretary, and graduate and undergraduate deans, have been charged by the government with violating federal labor law.<sup>47</sup> Of course, one's experience of an institution is inevitably colored by the position one holds in its hierarchy. It seems that at Yale, as Mel Brooks might put it, it's good to be the dean.

This debate over contrasting visions of academic freedom points to the deepest level of what is at stake in campus organizing campaigns. Beyond the immediate economic issues of wages and benefits, this is a fight over the extent to which universities will be democratized. The me-

dieval university governed by its faculty, if it ever existed, is long gone. But the difference between a democratized and corporatized university remains critical—more so than ever as universities face the future.

### **Isolating the Administration**

At both the national and state levels, administrators' arguments regarding the nature of graduate students' work, the threat to campus collegiality, and the requirements of academic freedom have all been repudiated by the highest level of labor officials. Simply put, the Labor Board ruled in the NYU case that "we will not deprive workers who are compensated by, and under the control of, a statutory employer of their fundamental statutory rights to organize and bargain with their employer, simply because they are also students."<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these same arguments have also failed to convince those with the most first-hand knowledge of university operations. Yale president Richard Levin, the self-styled champion of anti-union rhetoric, has repeatedly proclaimed his father-knows-best conviction that "unionization is not in the best interests of graduate students themselves."<sup>49</sup> However, graduate students themselves—presumably one of the best-informed populations in the country, with no shortage of access to administration arguments—are unconvinced. Similarly, while administrators have often contrasted the "real" unions of campus classified staff with the "ersatz" or "wannabe" graduate unions, it appears that clerical and maintenance staff have no troubling recognizing teaching as "work"; in fact, classified employees on a growing number of campuses have established formal alliances with graduate student unions.<sup>50</sup> It is not secretaries and janitors, then, but only the much more elevated and removed administrators, who insist that there is something unreal about the work of teaching and grading. Indeed, the arguments long relied on by administrators have increasingly found no support among any significant campus constituency. A comprehensive survey of faculty at universities with established graduate student unions found little backing for any of the primary arguments of campus administrators. Fully 95 percent of faculty at unionized schools stated that graduate student collective bargaining did not inhibit the free exchange of ideas between faculty and graduate students, and an overwhelming majority reported that graduate student unions had not created an adversarial relationship between faculty and graduate students and that the union had not inhibited their ability to advise or mentor their own students.<sup>51</sup>

Increasingly, both faculty and undergraduates have supported the right of graduate students to choose whether or not they want to unionize. Even those who do not favor unionization *per se* have called on administrators to recognize the labor rights of graduate teachers and to honor the outcome of union elections. More and more campus organizations have

also called for administration neutrality as a means of preserving harmonious relations through the process of union elections. At the University of Washington, the faculty senate passed resolutions urging the administration to recognize the graduate student union and insisting on the right of faculty members to respect picket lines and avoid doing the work of striking graduate teachers.<sup>52</sup> At Columbia too, the executive committee of the faculty of arts and sciences sent a letter to President Rupp urging the administration to adopt a neutral stance toward the prospect of a union election. Many elected officials have also joined this call for universities to eschew anti-union tactics. When Michigan State set up an anti-union Web site and instituted departmental meetings to discourage graduate students from voting for a union, state legislators wrote the school's president insisting that "the Administration should not be creating an uneven playing field by using its power to influence votes. These teaching assistants can study the issues and make a decision without the Administration's undue influence."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, when University of Washington graduate students went on strike at the end of the spring 2001 semester, both the faculty senate and undergraduate student councils supported their right to strike without academic reprisal. Furthermore, the vice-chair of the faculty senate distributed a letter to colleagues criticizing the use of its Web site to disparage union negotiating proposals, stating that this behavior "has deeply compromised faculty-TA relations," and "urge[d] the administration to make renewed efforts to avoid actions that threaten graduate student-faculty collegiality."<sup>54</sup> Finally, a community petition calling on Yale administrators to pledge neutrality on the question of graduate unionization has been endorsed by the local mayor, congressional representative, state attorney general, and 300 area clergy, in addition to being supported by an overwhelming vote of the undergraduate student council.<sup>55</sup>

The fact that those who know the campus best remain unpersuaded by administration arguments suggests that the arguments have grown increasingly hollow and threaten to isolate administrators advocating ever more shrilly for propositions no one else deems plausible. It is this collapse of public support—along with the turn of legal affairs and the strength of graduate students' own organizing—that has lent a sense of inevitability to the national graduate student union movement.

### **The Role of Faculty**

The second front of the graduate unionization struggle is administrators' war for the hearts and minds of campus faculty. Graduate unions have repeatedly insisted that their conflict is solely with the central administration, which determines wages, benefits, and working conditions. For many graduate students, in fact, one of the benefits of unionization is

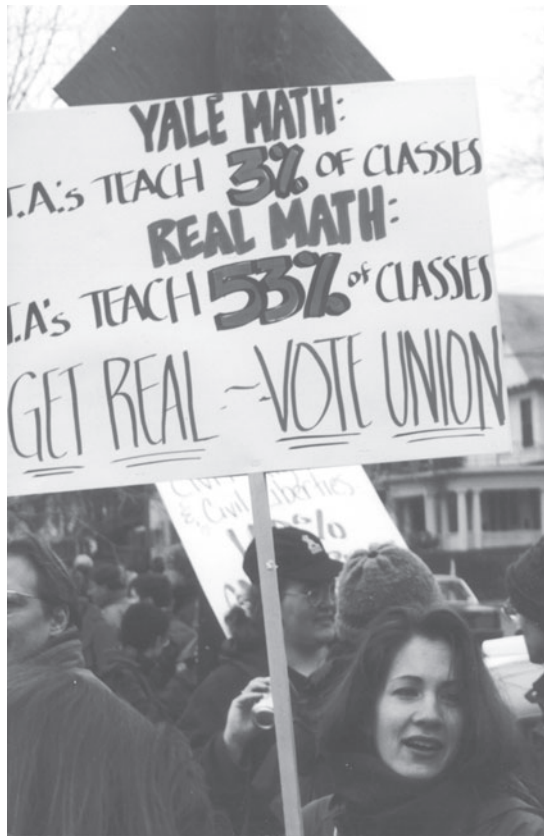


*Graduate students at the University of Michigan.*

the promise of *removing* employment concerns from the faculty-student relationship. Administrators, however, have adopted a conscious strategy of placing faculty at the fulcrum of union conflicts. NYU, for instance, insisted on describing the employment relationship as a relationship between graduate teachers and individual faculty members, going so far as to suggest that in the event of unionization, “faculty might find it necessary to reevaluate their reliance on graduate assistants.”<sup>56</sup> Faculty, of course, have little or no say over their reliance on graduate assistants. They generally do not determine class size, how many courses their department must offer, or the budget for assistants; indeed, the most common faculty response to graduate teacher complaints is to express sympathy and profess powerlessness to change the situation. Nevertheless, administrators have worked hard to suggest that faculty, rather than the central administration, are the real employers.

This strategy is in keeping with the most basic principles of anti-unionism adopted by industrial employers: use the immediate supervisors, who have the most direct personal influence over workers, as spokespeople for the anti-union message. Thus, one of the Iowa dean’s key recommendations to fellow administrators was to stock the university’s negotiating committee with a majority of *faculty* members, even though they would have no final say over university positions.<sup>57</sup> By forcing graduate students to negotiate with those who have the most immediate power over their course work, grades, and ultimate career pros-

pects—not to mention the moral authority that teachers hold in the eyes of students—administrators seek to gain an edge in intimidating graduate employees into a substandard settlement. Thus, while unions are regularly accused of disturbing the sacred relationship of faculty-student mentoring, it is actually administrators themselves who have mounted the most concerted efforts to convert this relationship into a cynical instrument of control. As a professor, I would never use my authority to tell students whom to vote for in a presidential election; this would constitute an



abuse of the teacher-student relationship. Yet this most basic standard of political ethics is what administrators seek to override in their rush to maintain control over the university; indeed, as I argued above, it is what administrators have put at the heart of their own idiosyncratic conception of “academic freedom.”

Faculty members may find that the biggest threat to academic freedom comes not from unionized teachers but from the anti-union repression enforced by central administrations. Administrators’ visceral anti-unionism has too often led them to impose the equivalent of an academic state of emergency, in which the normal protections of faculty and graduate students are suspended, with everything subject to the single goal of beating back organizing efforts. Increasingly, these anti-union campaigns have threatened the liberties of faculty as well as graduate students. Earlier this year, for instance, the dean at the State University of New York at Buffalo removed Professor Barbara Bono from her position as chair of the English department after she refused to sign a letter threatening striking graduate teachers with being banned from future employ-

ment. Professor Bono explained, “I was not going to turn to threatening my students.”<sup>58</sup> One might view this as a noble defense of the mentoring relationship. In the eyes of the administration, however, department chairs are delinquent in their duties if they refuse to be part of the anti-union machinery. Dean Charles Stiger explained that he removed Professor Bono because “she expressed considerable sympathy for the students’ situation and didn’t see that forceful action was required.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, when University of Washington graduate student teachers staged a two-week strike at the end of the spring 2001 semester—leaving thousands of final exams and papers ungraded—the president of the university American Association of University Professors chapter accused administrators of “[making] faculty feel intimidated into doing the work of their teaching assistants.”<sup>60</sup> Prior to the strike, members of the Spanish and Portuguese department issued the single strongest statement in support of its graduate students, pledging that in the event of a strike they would not do the work of striking teaching assistants. In response, Vice President Steven Olswang sent a letter to each faculty member who had signed the statement, asking each to state “whether you intend to fulfill your University teaching obligations, including giving examinations and grading students and submitting those grades on time,” and insisting that faculty who were not prepared to carry out these duties must apply for a leave of absence without pay. Administrators suggested that, beyond giving up pay, faculty who refused to scab on their graduate students might find their health insurance cancelled for the entire summer, and untenured faculty among them might find their reappointments delayed or cancelled. Under these conditions, the department collapsed, writing the vice provost with a pledge to carry out the grading work of striking TAs.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the most ominous such instance comes from NYU itself,

---

Faculty members may find that the biggest threat to academic freedom comes . . . from the anti-union repression enforced by central administrations.

---

where a prominent professor was fired after being the only non-tenured faculty member to testify before the NLRB in support of graduate student unionization. Professor Joel Westheimer won “exceptional merit” performance reviews in every year until his Labor Board testimony, and was unanimously recommended for tenure by the members of his own department and all eight outside reviewers, but was terminated by School of Education dean Ann Marcus, who herself testified against the union in the Labor Board hearings. Westheimer’s firing—ostensibly on the

grounds of insufficient scholarship, despite the fact that he was awarded NYU's own internal award for excellence in scholarship—set off a firestorm of protest both at NYU and in the national education community, where a petition calling on NYU to reexamine its decision has been signed by four past presidents of the American Educational Research Association. In June, the NYU Chapter of the AAUP held a press conference to denounce NYU's action, suggesting that the administration may have committed a “gross violation of the principles of academic freedom and free speech,” and calling for a special Community Board hearing that will examine threats to both graduate students and faculty engaged in campus labor issues. It now appears likely that NYU officials will be dragged back into labor court to face new charges of violating federal law in the Westheimer firing.<sup>62</sup>

The Westheimer case points to the vulnerability of even respected academics on unorganized campuses. Indeed, the increasingly common experience of seeing departmental tenure decisions overturned by central administrators is one of the factors that has led growing numbers of faculty to turn to unionization themselves.<sup>63</sup> More broadly, while administrators urge faculty to think of graduate unions as an insurgent opposition, faculty interests appear to be largely *served* by graduate unions. The same dynamics of corporatization that have wreaked havoc on the job market for new Ph.D.s have also undermined both the economic status and governance powers of existing faculty. Graduate student unions cannot, of course, save faculty from this fate. However, by making it somewhat more expensive for administrators to replace faculty positions with graduate teachers, unions provide at least a modest hedge against downsizing. And in requiring administrators to negotiate over at least one part of the labor process, graduate student unions often provide the only source of protection against unbridled corporatization of the university. More important, campus unions are often a critical force for at least partial *democratization* of campus life. This, indeed, is part of the reason that administrators are so scared: for those at the top, graduate student unionization is not only an evil in itself; it carries the danger of becoming a cancer that could spread to the faculty, progressively eating away at the discretionary authority of the administration. And this “danger” can only be a good thing for faculty themselves.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

As we look to the future, there is every sign that the recent boom in graduate student unionization will continue. The string of legal and organizing victories has produced a snowball effect, with each win convincing graduate students at other campuses that they too have been silent too long, and convincing international unions to provide increased sup-

port for organizing efforts. Some administrators may hope that a Labor Board appointed by George W. Bush will overturn the NYU decision. However, Jim Jeffords's defection pretty much undercut this hope: Democratic control of the Senate should make it significantly harder to win approval for an aggressively pro-management Board. Moreover, it will be hard for a new Board to formulate a logic for reversing itself, since the recent decisions fit so much more appropriately with the reality of university operations than do the rulings from the mid-1970s that restricted private-sector organizing. Finally, there is an on-the-ground reality to the new unions that will not be changed even if the law is reinterpreted. When University of California administrators refused to bargain with their graduate student union, the leaders of the state legislature warned them that, all legalities aside, their strategy had plainly backfired: in the course of a 15-year campaign to defeat unionization, "huge sums of state money have been spent . . . to circumvent recognition . . . [but] the movement has grown stronger and deeper."<sup>64</sup> At Yale, where the fight is going on its twelfth year, administrators have also learned that a genuine grassroots organization is a tenacious opponent. And at NYU and Columbia, national union representatives warn that "once teachers have gotten organized, we will never go away. We have made a commitment—these people are part of our union—and law or no law we will stick with it to make sure there is a fair contract for graduate teachers."<sup>65</sup>

**A**lthough an outright reversal of the NYU precedent is unlikely, administrators at Columbia, Yale, and elsewhere have pinned their hopes on an ambitious effort to re-disguise graduate employment as "training." On the final day of NYU's 42-day hearing before the Labor Board, the school's attorneys rushed into evidence a plan to make over the funding mechanism for graduate education as a whole. Under the new scheme, most graduate students would receive a fixed stipend for five years, and would be required to teach several times in order to obtain their degree.<sup>66</sup> Since teaching will then be a degree requirement, and graduate students will receive the same "stipend" in semesters they teach as when they do not, the University argued that this plan would legally convert graduate teachers back into "students," and their work back into "training." The Labor Board rejected this last-minute maneuver, and a majority of the panel declared that, even if fully instituted, the new plan would make no difference. One of the three-member panel, however, seemed to indicate that, if teaching was made a degree requirement, if credit was given for teaching experience, and if funding was decoupled from teaching so that it appeared to be a stipend rather than a salary, it might undermine teachers' employee status.<sup>67</sup> This is the slender reed on which administrators' legal strategy now hangs. But the reality of graduate student teaching loads makes it hard to conceal their sta-

tus as “work.” For instance, one of the reasons cited by the Board for including even “fully funded” departments in the NYU union is that, regardless of the funding package, the underlying rationale for employing graduate teachers is made clear by the fact that “the number of TA positions available is tied to undergraduate enrollment, not graduate enrollment.”<sup>68</sup> In order to disguise the work of graduate teachers as part of their own educational training, administrators must concoct elaborate reasons for disparate teaching loads.

Just such an effort is underway at Yale, where the graduate school instituted a plan in which each department is to determine, supposedly according to strictly pedagogical criteria, the number of semesters that their graduate students need to teach in order to gain the proper professional training. Unsurprisingly, the Spanish department, which relies

---

We have moved very far from the model of the university as a community of scholars.

---

heavily on graduate teachers to staff introductory language courses, determined that the particular pedagogy of its profession requires Ph.D. candidates to teach introductory language classes for a minimum of four semesters; while classics, a small department with few undergraduate majors, determined that its discipline does not require any minimum teaching quota.<sup>69</sup> Is it really so much more difficult to learn how to teach Spanish than to learn how to teach Greek? What accounts for the increased requirement in Spanish? It is certainly not the need to prepare graduate students for eventual positions on the faculty—at least not Yale faculty, since at Yale tenure-track faculty never teach introductory language classes, leaving these to graduate students and adjuncts while reserving themselves for the higher level literature classes. It is hard to imagine exactly how the university will justify this system under cross-examination before the Labor Board. Nevertheless, clumsy or not, this is the new project of private sector administrators in the wake of the NYU decision: an effort to defeat unionization through creative redefinition, giving everything new names without changing anything in the actual functioning of the university.

It is unclear what the chances of such a project are. The Internal Revenue Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and federal financial aid offices all have regulations based on the assumption that graduate teachers are employees; and it is unlikely that administrators’ re-labeling project will convince them not to deduct payroll taxes. Moreover, the amount of work done by graduate students is simply too

great and too varied to be disguised out of existence. Universities use thousands of graduate students as the sole instructors for courses or to teach introductory courses over and over again during their graduate careers. If a graduate teaching system truly existed for the sole purpose of training future faculty, graduate students would teach once or twice only, with small classes and heavy supervision. In the NYU case, the economic service provided by graduate teachers was so clear that the Board viewed even those teachers who were fulfilling an academic requirement as employees. Indeed, the NYU decision came on the heels of an even more sweeping ruling granting employee status to medical interns and residents, whose *entire* workload is related to their training in medical specialties.<sup>70</sup> So it is unlikely that imposing a gloss of “academic” credits and requirements over the existing structure of labor relations will prove convincing to labor officials. It has not done so at Columbia, where administrators adopted the same “fully funded” strategy as at Yale and NYU; when the administration proposed to present Labor Board testimony showing that their graduate students were not legally employees because all their teaching was now related to educational training, the NLRB regional director refused to hear testimony on the issue, ruling that the question had already been settled at NYU and no reorganization of credits or funding would change the underlying facts.<sup>71</sup> The bottom line, in the Labor Board’s words, is that “the undergraduate students at NYU, qua customers, pay for the services they receive, which are provided to a large degree by the graduate assistants. . . . If the services were not provided by the graduate assistants, they would be provided by instructors who may be statutory employees.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, unless universities actually reverse the trends of the past three decades, dramatically cutting graduate teaching and boosting tenure-track hires, administrators appear to be stuck. And with all the creative strategies at their disposal, the one thing universities cannot do is to decrease their reliance on graduate labor. In turn, the fact that administrators have responded to the NYU ruling not by finally honoring the democratic rights of their own graduate employees, but by devoting their primary energy to a transparently Orwellian scheme whose sole purpose is to disempower the very people the university is charged with mentoring, is a testament to administrators’ desperation to maintain corporate control. We have moved very far from the model of the university as a community of scholars.

Just as administrators feared, the success of graduate student unions has spurred increased organizing among other academic employees, particularly part-time and adjunct instructors. This past April, part-time faculty at Massachusetts’ Emerson College voted by a 75 percent margin to establish the first new faculty union at a private university in twenty years.<sup>73</sup> Although the 1980 *Yeshiva University* decision still restricts organizing at private universities, it only applies to full-time faculty. Because

the share of part-time faculty has increased so dramatically over the past twenty years, the Emerson election may point to one more way in which the engineers of downsizing have sown the seeds of their own comeuppance. At NYU itself, adjunct faculty kicked off their own organizing drive within months of the graduate student teachers' victory.<sup>74</sup> Shortly after a graduate teachers' union was voted in at Michigan State, adjuncts at Eastern Michigan University were inspired to organize their own union. Jon Curtiss, an organizer for the Michigan Federation of Teachers who worked on both drives, reports that "there's no question that the increase in adjunct organizing is directly related to graduate student victories."<sup>75</sup>

**A**mong tenure-track faculty, organizing has similarly, if less dramatically, picked up momentum. In April the University of Vermont faculty voted in a union, making New England's public research universities 100 percent organized.<sup>76</sup> In the private sector, the same corporate governance ethos that has redefined the university may ironically serve to reinstate the Labor Board's recognition of faculty as employees rather than managers, restoring the right to organize for private university faculty. The *Yeshiva* decision drastically restricted faculty organizing on the basis that, at private universities, faculty hold primary decision-making authority, and therefore, "in the most fundamental sense, the university is the faculty."<sup>77</sup> In retrospect, it is hard to believe this argument won the day even in 1980. It is "ludicrous to speak of the faculty versus the 'management,'" *Yeshiva's* lawyers insisted. "Who is—who are—the 'management'? Trustees? President? Deans? Transient administrators, often chosen by the faculty, who come and go . . . while the faculty endures and guides the destiny of the place . . . if there were a single group comprising the essential heart of management, it would be the faculty."<sup>78</sup> If the image of faculty-run universities was dated in 1980, it has become utterly untenable twenty years later. As the president of NYU's American Association of University Professors chapter notes, "Today it's undeniable that universities . . . are modeled not on medieval guilds, governed by their members, but on modern corporations. Policy is made by [an] . . . administrative bureaucracy accountable not to a community of scholars but to funders and the board of trustees."<sup>79</sup> Incredibly, NYU submitted an amicus brief in the *Yeshiva* case pointing to faculty's power to select university presidents as one of the hallmarks of faculty governance.<sup>80</sup> In May 2001, however, NYU faculties were up in arms over the university trustees' decision to appoint a new president unilaterally, without any faculty consultation whatsoever.<sup>81</sup> At this point in history, ignoring faculty consultation seems like simply skipping the charade and getting on with the process that we all know truly determines campus policy. But this reality also marks how far the corporate university is from the vision that justified the *Yeshiva* ruling. Indeed, for the first time in two decades, the

NLRB last year ruled that faculty at a private college have the right to organize, determining this time that faculty's authority was not truly managerial but merely "advisory" to the administration.<sup>82</sup> While the *Yeshiva* ruling remains in effect until challenged in the Supreme Court, the recent reasoning of the Labor Board suggests that—with the dramatic changes in university governance over the past twenty years—more and more faculty may be defined as not fitting the fact-pattern outlined in *Yeshiva*. At some point, a new faculty union will force a rehearing in federal court; and then the administrators who have remade the university in the decades since faculty were cut out of collective bargaining will be hard-pressed to keep a straight face while suggesting that faculty still run the place.

### **The Ivory Tower of Babel**

The history of campus union struggles shows that it is not clever words but organized power that alone can provide some counterweight to the logic of corporatization. Nevertheless, because so much of the union controversy revolves around visions of how a community of scholars should interact, it may be fitting to sum up with a few words about words. The biblical story of the Tower of Babel recounts God's vengeance against a hubristic society and the fragmenting of language into mutually incomprehensible dialects. Until this point in biblical history, everyone in the world shared a single language. In the child's version of the story, the people of Babel sought to build a tower that would reach to the heavens, in order to challenge God's authority; as punishment, God implanted a different language in the mouth of each inhabitant, so that none could understand the other. Without communication the tower crumbled, the society broke apart, and the people learned their lesson. Rabbinic authorities offer a more compelling alternative to the child's interpretation, however.<sup>83</sup> Here, the hubris of Babel was not architectural but linguistic: the haughtiness of those in power led them arrogantly to distort the meanings of words, calling slavery freedom and professing to assist those they were attacking, until no one could trust anyone else, and no one could trust in the plain meaning of words—until there was no shared language left. This is the Orwellian sin, and the linguistic disintegration, which broke the society apart.

Reading the legal briefs and Web site communiqués of administrators, it appears that we may now be facing a parallel situation. When graduate students are used as a low-wage labor force and then told that it's all for their own benefit; when "mentoring" relationships are viewed as vehicles not for building students up but for bullying them into submission; when "shared governance" denotes a system where both faculty and graduate students are denied any meaningful say in the policies that govern the campus; when "free expression" means the right of managers

to intimidate employees; and when the term “intellectual property” is used to describe a regime in which intellectuals are systematically stripped of their property, it has become clear that we face a situation all too similar to that described by the rabbis. In this case, the corporatization project of university managers has inflicted yet one more casualty: in a profession purportedly devoted to the integrity of meanings, administrators have instead turned campuses into a breeding ground for the most cynical and shameless dissembling. For faculty, it’s important to see that we’re up against something that is not only likely to increase our workloads and decrease our salaries, but that threatens to make a mockery of the very processes of intellectual debate that drew us to this profession in the first place. Twenty years after Justice Brennan warned of the danger of allowing administrators to remake universities with a free hand, we have seen his fears borne out all too tangibly. For those of us still living in the Tower, the question is not whether the unionization movement can or should go forward, but whether it can succeed quickly enough to save what’s left of the academy from the rapacious schemes of petty con men and grandiose entrepreneurs. ●

## NOTES

1. These organizations all filed amicus briefs in NLRB proceedings. 332 NLRB No. 111. New York University and International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Petitioner. Case 2-RC-22082. Decision on Review and Order, October 31, 2000. The American Association of Universities is the self-styled representative of the nation's elite universities; its membership includes, among others, all of the Ivy League universities, plus MIT, Stanford, Duke, Emory, and most of the premier public research universities. Approximately one-third of the AAU's member schools now have graduate unions. ([www.aau.edu](http://www.aau.edu))

2. In the summer of 2000, the Illinois Appellate Court overruled a Republican appointed state labor board, and determined that graduate students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign were employees under state law, with rights to collective bargaining. This ruling was later upheld by the state's Supreme Court. The court instructed the labor board to do the technical work of determining exactly which teaching and research assistants should be included in the union. However, the labor board used its discretion to define the bargaining unit in terms so restrictive that it excludes nearly all graduate assistants. It is expected that this case will go back to the Court of Appeals in the 2001-2002 school year. Meg McSherry Breslin, "Grad Students Await Union Vote; Teaching Assistants at Urbana-Champaign Poised to Break Mold," *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 2001.

3. "Columbia University Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants File Union Petition with National Labor Relations Board," News Release from UAW, March 28, 2001; "Temple Graduate Students Affirm Union," Associated Press, March 29, 2001 [www.cgeu.org/news/00-01/TUGSAvote.html](http://www.cgeu.org/news/00-01/TUGSAvote.html); "Brown University Teaching Assistants and research Assistants File Union Petition with National Labor Relations Board," press release from UAW, May 7, 2001; "MSU Graduate Students Say Union YES," Press Release from AFT/GEU"; "Campuses Fertile Ground for Unions," Associated Press, April 26, 2001; Steven Greenhouse, "Graduate Students Push for Union Membership," *New York Times*, May 15, 2001. all posted at [www.cgeu.org/news.html](http://www.cgeu.org/news.html).

4. Campuses with newly established unions include University of Kansas, University of Iowa, Wayne State University, Oregon State University, New York University, University of Massachusetts at Boston, University of Washington, Temple University, Michigan State University, and all eight campuses in the University of California system. Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions ([www.cgeu.org](http://www.cgeu.org)). Percentage of graduate teachers organized is reported in Michael Amon, "Unionizing the Ivory Tower," *Feed Magazine*, March 12, 2001.

5. Digest of Educational Statistics 2000, Table 238 (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/digest/dt238.html>).

6. Amon, p. 2.

7. Data on national share of teaching hours are from *Casual Nation*, p. 2. Calculations are based on data from New York University, the University of Illinois, the University of Iowa, the University of North Carolina, the University of Washington, and Yale University. Data on English instruction are from "Who Is Teaching in U.S. College Classrooms?"

8. *Casual in Blue: Yale and the Academic Labor Market*, Graduate Employees and Student Organization. New Haven, 1999, p. 7, posted at [www.yaleunions.org/geso/pubs/index.htm#reports](http://www.yaleunions.org/geso/pubs/index.htm#reports).

9. For the best description of these business strategies, see David Noble, "Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education," *First Monday*, 1998 ([www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3\\_1/noble](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_1/noble)); and "Digital Diploma Mills, Part II: The Coming Battle Over Online Instruction," 1998, posted at [www.communication.ucsd.edu/dl/ddm2.html](http://www.communication.ucsd.edu/dl/ddm2.html). For one insightful commentary on recent trends in distance learning, see also J. Curry, "Highlights and Observations," from Maximizing Distance Learning Initiatives for Private Colleges and Universities: A two-day seminar for teams of senior university administrators to explore the business side of distance learning programs, Macon, Georgia, May 2-3, 1999; posted at [www.telelearn.ca/g\\_access/](http://www.telelearn.ca/g_access/)

news/mercero\_summary.html.

10. Karen Arenson, "New Company at Columbia Aims to Profit from Internet," *New York Times*, April 3, 1999; Sarah Carr, "For-Profit Venture to Market Distance-Education Courses Stirs Concern at Temple," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 17, 1999; Sarah Carr, "Faculty Members Are Wary of Distance-Education Venture: Talk of 'Brand Name' Offends Cornell Professors and Illustrates Tensions Over For-Profit Units," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 9, 2000.

11. Noble, "Digital Diploma Mills," reports that UCLA required faculty to post lecture notes on a university Web site, where they became the intellectual property of the university.

12. "MIT OpenCourseWare — Fact Sheet," (<http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/nr/2001/ocw-facts.html>).

13. "Who Is Teaching in U.S. College Classrooms?"

14. Calculation is based on what Yale would need to operate as a liberal arts college, with all teaching done by regular faculty rather than graduate students. Ben Johnson and Tom McCarthy, "Casual Labor and the Future of the Academy," *NEA Higher Education Journal*, October 1998; Gordon Lafer, "Historical trends in graduate employment," unpublished analysis conducted for Federation of University Employees at Yale, 1997.

15. Data are from *Casual Nation*, p. 3.

16. Forty-six months is the median length of biological science post-docs, according to a 1998 report by the National Science Foundation, excerpted in "The Post-Doc Parking Lot: Unions and the Science Job Market," in *MSU@Work, Newsletter of the Graduate Employees Union*, Winter 2001.

17. *Casual in Blue*, p. 4. Data are for the top 25 research universities.

18. Commission on Life Sciences, *Trends in the Early Careers of Life Scientists*, excerpted in "The Post-Doc Parking Lot."

19. National Center for Educational Statistics, *Digest of Educational Statistics 2000*, Table 238. [nces.ed.gov/spider/webspider/2001034.shtml](http://nces.ed.gov/spider/webspider/2001034.shtml).

20. Yale University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, MacDougall Center Events ([www.yale.edu/graduateschool/news/index.html](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/news/index.html)), February 2001.

21. 444 U.S. 672 (1980). U.S. Supreme Court, *NLRB and Yeshiva University Faculty Association v. Yeshiva University*. Dissent was authored by Justice Brennan, with concurrence of Justices White, Marshall and Blackmun.

22. UAW Subregional Director Julie Kushner interview with the author, July 6, 2001.

23. Excerpted in "UAW Welcomes NLRB Complaint Against NYU, Is Prepared to Strike if Necessary," press release of GSOC/UAW, February 1, 2001, posted at [www.cgeu.org/news/html](http://www.cgeu.org/news/html).

24. The Labor Board complaint against NYU was issued January 26, 2001. "UAW Welcomes NLRB Complaint Against NYU, Is Prepared to Strike if Necessary," press release of GSOC/UAW, February 1, 2001, posted at [www.cgeu.org](http://www.cgeu.org).

25. Ana Marie Cox, "NYU Becomes the First Private University to Recognize Collective-Bargaining Rights of TA's," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 16, 2001. ([chronicle.com/chronicle/v47/4727guide.htm](http://chronicle.com/chronicle/v47/4727guide.htm)).

26. Christian Sweeney, UAW field organizer, interview with the author, July 3, 2001.

27. The Cornell memo is described in Steve Allison, "Cornell's Labor Relations Firm Advises Administration on How to Silence the GAO," *The Grad Grind: The Newsletter of the Graduate Advocacy Organization*, Ithaca, October 1991.

28. Reproduced in Memorandum to Graduate Committee Chairs from Daniel A Walz, Dean

of the Graduate School, Wayne State University, October 29, 1997. A copy of this memorandum was leaked to the union by sympathetic faculty members, and subsequently shared with the author.

29. 332 NLRB No. 111, New York University and International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Petitioner. Case 2-Rc-22082. October 31, 2000. P. 3.

30. 332 NLRB No. 111, p. 15.

31. This argument is raised in Alison Richard, "Letter to Dean Susan Hockfield;" and on the Columbia administration Web site "Graduate Student Unionization at Columbia University: Frequently Asked Questions," posted at [www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas/gsu/index.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas/gsu/index.html). Because federal law allows strikes, Columbia suggests that "labor disruptions by graduate students would be more frequent at private universities than at public. And unlike most state law, federal law does not provide a mechanism — such as arbitration — for resolving disputes over the terms of collective bargaining agreements."

32. Quote is from NYU's Reply Brief, posted at [www.nyu.edu/publicaffairs/gradissues/posthearing/state\\_collective\\_bargain.html](http://www.nyu.edu/publicaffairs/gradissues/posthearing/state_collective_bargain.html).

33. Letter of agreement from Elizabeth Bunn, et al., UAW, to Terrance Nolan, NYU associate general counsel, March 1, 2001, posted at [www.cgeu.org/news.html](http://www.cgeu.org/news.html).

34. NYU Reply brief.

35. 332 NLRB No. 111, p. 15.

36. Quoted in Ana Marie Cox, "NYU Becomes the First Private University to Recognize Collective-Bargaining Rights of TA's," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 16, 2001 (<http://chronicle.com/chronicle/v47/4727guide.htm>). It appears, however, that this part of the recognition agreement was simply a face-saving device for administrators who had decided it was time to throw in the towel. The agreement clarifies that the union retains the right to bargain over any issue — academic-related or not — related to "terms and conditions of employment," and concludes by reaffirming that "the UAW does not relinquish any rights it has under the National Labor Relations Act." (Letter of agreement from Elizabeth Bunn, et al.) The university explicitly agreed that issues such as class size remained subject to bargaining, and in the negotiating sessions held to date, NYU has not attempted to invoke this agreement to take a single issue off the table. (Julie Kushner, interview with the author) Thus, it appears that the only thing the union waived are things that no academic union has ever sought to bargain over: the criteria for grading, course requirements, length of dissertation, and other purely academic issues unrelated to teaching or laboratory research conditions.

37. Anthony Kronman, "Are Graduate Students Workers?" *New York Times*, May 19, 2001.

38. Anthony Kronman, interview with the author, July 6, 2001.

39. 332 NLRB No. 111, p. 4.

40. For accounts of the 1996 grade strike at Yale, see Cynthia Young, "On Strike at Yale," *The Minnesota Review* (45-46): 179-195, 1996; "The Yale Strike Dossier," *Social Text* 49, vol. 14, no. 4, Winter 1996; or Gordon Lafer, "Yale On Trial: Scholarly Life in the Age of Downsizing," *Dissent* (Summer 1997): 78-84.

41. "Yale Must Post Signs in Grad Labor Settlement," Press release from Federation of University Employees, September 7, 2000, posted at [www.yaleunions.org/news/releases.htm#signs](http://www.yaleunions.org/news/releases.htm#signs). In a split decision, most of the individual charges in this case were dropped because the Labor Board ruled that the specific form of the 1996 grade strike was not considered "protected activity;" four charges remained intact because the threats made were so broad as to apply to any strike action, including "protected" strikes. These charges were settled out of court, with the requirement that Yale post notices pledging to honor the rights of employees. While the Uni-

versity insisted on retaining the right to argue in the future that graduate teachers are not legally employees, the ruling clearly implies that the Labor Board will reject this argument. Yale insisted early in the proceeding that the whole case should be thrown out because, since graduate students are not employees and the Labor Board only has jurisdiction over employees, the Labor Board had no jurisdiction in the case at hand. The Board explicitly rejected this argument and, by requiring Yale to post notices regarding “employee rights” outside Graduate School offices, indicated its own view consistent with the NYU ruling. The text of the NLRB settlement, National Labor Relations Board Settlement Agreement, Approved by an Administrative Law Judge, In the Matter of Yale University, Case No: 34-CA-7347, is posted at [www.yale.edu/opa/gradschool/settlement.html](http://www.yale.edu/opa/gradschool/settlement.html).

42. The Modern Language Association’s resolution of censure against the Yale administration is posted at [www.nagps.org/NAGPS/GESO/yale-GESO-MLA.html](http://www.nagps.org/NAGPS/GESO/yale-GESO-MLA.html)

43. President Rupp’s Response to David Helfand, April 28, 2001, posted at [www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas/gsu/viewpoints.html#april282001](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas/gsu/viewpoints.html#april282001).

44. “Letter to Dean Susan Hockfield from Provost Alison Richard,” August 19, 1998, posted at [www.yale.edu/opa/gradschool/ar\\_letter/html](http://www.yale.edu/opa/gradschool/ar_letter/html).

45. Brief for Yeshiva University, In the Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1978, Nos. 78-857 and 78-997, *National Labor Relations Board and Yeshiva University Faculty Association vs. Yeshiva University*.

46. Brief of Johns Hopkins University, New York University, Northeastern University and the George Washington University, Amici Curiae, In the Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1978, Nos. 78-857 and 78-997, National Labor Relations Board and Yeshiva University Faculty Association vs. Yeshiva University.

47. Kronman quote is from Randall Beach, “Levin takes heat on union organizing,” *New Haven Register*, February 9, 2001. Government charges were filed against Yale officials in the grade strike case discussed elsewhere and in NLRB, Region 34, *Complaint and Notice of Hearing, Case No. 34-CA-7400*, November 22, 1996. These charges were eventually settled as part of the overall 1996 contract settlement.

48. 332 NLRB No. 111, p. 4.

49. “Statement by Yale President Richard C. Levin in response to the NLRB decision regarding the status of NYU’s graduate teaching assistants,” November 1, 2000, [www.yale.edu/opa/gradschool/rcnlrb.html](http://www.yale.edu/opa/gradschool/rcnlrb.html). Levin issued several well-publicized statements calling on NYU to appeal the Labor Board’s decision to the federal courts.

50. The University of Washington’s clerical and service unions, representing 6,400 classified employees, announced that they would support graduate teachers in their strike for recognition. Ruth Schubert, “UW teaching assistants may strike tonight,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 28, 2001. Yale’s graduate union is affiliated with the HERE campus clerical and service unions, and UAW Local 2110 in New York City represents both graduate students and clerical workers at both NYU and Columbia.

51. Gordon Hewitt, “Graduate Student Unionization: A Description of Faculty Attitudes and Beliefs,” presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, 1999. Hewitt’s findings are based on a survey of 300 faculty members at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, State University of New York at Buffalo, University of Florida, University of Michigan, and University of Oregon.

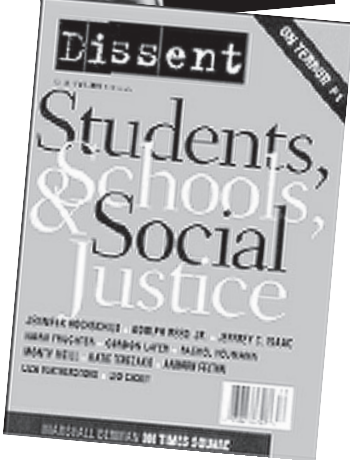
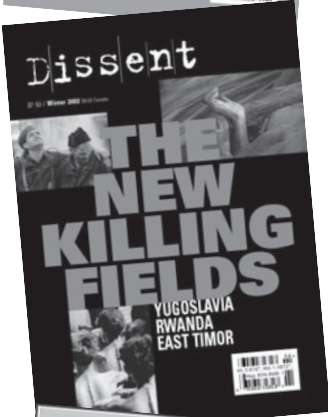
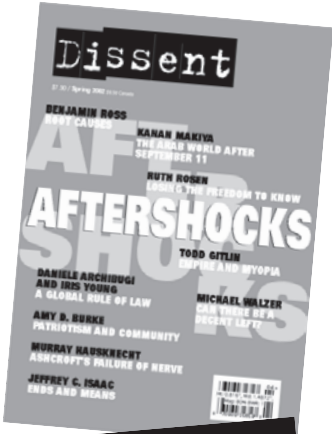
52. Both resolutions were approved November 14, 2000. Provided to the author by Professor James Gregory, incoming AAUP chapter president, University of Washington.

53. Excerpted in “Lawmakers Concerned About Anti-Union Campaign at MSU,” press release from GEU/AFT, April 2, 2001, posted at [www.cgeu.org/news.html](http://www.cgeu.org/news.html).

54. Letter to faculty from Professor Sandy Silberstein, vice chair of University of Washington

- faculty senate. Interestingly, Silberstein based her support for administration neutrality partly on her own experience as founding president of the TA union at the University of Michigan.
55. Matthew Matera, "At rally, GESO to ask for neutrality," *Yale Daily News*, April 19, 2001; Randall Beach, "Clergy petitions Yale to be union-neutral," *New Haven Register*, May 31, 2001.
56. The scenario cited is one NYU suggested in an open letter to faculty as a statement they might make to graduate students in the period leading up to the election. Andrew Schaffer, university general counsel, "Memorandum to Faculty and Administration," September 17, 1999, posted at [www.nyu.edu/publicaffairs/gradissues/memo4.html](http://www.nyu.edu/publicaffairs/gradissues/memo4.html).
57. Reproduced in Memorandum to Graduate Committee Chairs from Daniel A Walz, dean of the graduate school, Wayne State University, October 29, 1997. A copy of this memorandum was leaked to the union by sympathetic faculty members and subsequently shared with the author.
58. Ana Marie Cox, "SUNY-Buffalo Dean Ousts Chairwoman for Not Reprimanding TA's in Suspected Labor Action," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 24, 2001.
59. Ana Marie Cox, "SUNY-Buffalo Dean Ousts Chairwoman for Not Reprimanding TA's in Suspected Labor Action," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 24, 2001.
60. Professor Jim Gregory, quoted in "Impact Huge as TA Strike Ends," press release from Graduate Student Employee Action Coalition/UAW, June 14, 2001.
61. This incident, together with quotes from the Olswang letter, was reported in "Olswang threatens Spanish/Portuguese faculty," an e-mail bulletin circulated to University of Washington faculty by Professor James Gregory, incoming president of the university's AAUP chapter, June 8, 2001. After this e-mail was widely circulated among both faculty and state legislators, the administration backed down, insisting that it had been misunderstood, had never intended to threaten anyone, and that faculty were not, in fact, required to do the work of striking TAs. Once the administration pledged to respect this standard, Professor Gregory and the Spanish Department agreed to describe the incident as a misunderstanding rather than intentional threats. (James Gregory, memo to university faculty, June 13, 2001). While the damage was already done in the Spanish and Portuguese department, the incident seems to have sparked other faculty members to push back against the administration. On June 20, the chair of the faculty senate released an announcement of a new faculty policy that the administration had agreed to, including the guarantee that "no faculty member [will] suffer negative consequences for not taking over the responsibilities normally performed by striking teaching assistants..." Memo to faculty from Professor Mary Coney, chair of the University of Washington faculty senate, June 20, 2001.
62. NYU Chapter, American Association of University Professors, Letter to President Oliva and President-Designate Sexton, June 13, 2001; Rogers, "NYU professor who backed union denied tenure," *The Villager*, June 21, 2001; Piper Fogg, "A Promising Professor Backs a T.A. Union Drive and Is Rejected for Tenure," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 10, 2001. The NYU AAUP Chapter issued a letter to university president Oliva and president-designate Sexton, stating its concern that Westheimer's firing "appears to have been a result of [his] vocal support for the right of NYU graduate assistants to unionize," and calling on them to reexamine the decision.
63. Ellen Willis, "Why Professors Turn to Organized Labor," *New York Times*, May 28, 2001.
64. Open letter from president pro tem of the California State Senate and Speaker of the Assembly, quoted in "UC Teaching Assistant Strike Update," *PR Newswire*, December 3, 1998, posted at [www.cgeu.org](http://www.cgeu.org).
65. UAW Subregional Director Julie Kushner, interview with the author, July 6, 2001.
66. NYU Reply brief.

67. 332 NLRB No. 111.
68. 332 NLRB No. 111, p. 14.
69. Yale graduate school departmental requirements are posted at [www.yale.edu/graduateschool](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool).
70. 330 NLRB No. 30, Boston Medical Center Corporation and House Officers' Association/Committee of Interns and Residents, Petitioner. Case 1-RC-20574. November 26, 1999.
71. Update on Graduate Student Unionization, May 9, 2001. [www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas/gsu](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas/gsu). Columbia argued that "the substantial majority of entering graduate students receive multi-year funding regardless of whether they are performing services as a TA or TA in a particular semester. Therefore ... they are not employees." This is the argument that the Regional Director rejected out of hand, and refused to hear testimony on.
72. 332 NLRB No. 111. New York University and International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Petitioner. Case 2-RC-22082. October 31, 2000. p. 14.
73. "Part-Time Faculty Win Overwhelming Victory in Union Election at Emerson," news release, American Association of University Professors, April 17, 2001, posted at [www.aaup.org/pr01417.htm](http://www.aaup.org/pr01417.htm).
74. Greenhouse, "Graduate Students Push for Union Membership."
75. Jon Curtiss, Michigan Federation of Teachers, interview with the author, July 5, 2001.
76. "Faculty at UVM vote to Unionize in High-Turnout Election," AAUP News Release, April 19, 2001. [www.aaup.org](http://www.aaup.org).
77. Brief for Yeshiva University, p. 27.
78. Brief for Yeshiva University, pp. 36-40.
79. Willis, "Why Professors Turn to Organized Labor."
80. Brief of Johns Hopkins University, New York University, Northeastern University and the George Washington University, Amici Curiae, In the Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1978, Nos. 78-857 and 78-997, *National Labor Relations Board and Yeshiva University Faculty Association vs. Yeshiva University*, p. 12.
81. Willis, "Why Professors Turn to Organized Labor."
82. Courtney Leatherman, "NLRB Lets Stand Decision Allowing Professors at a Private College to Unionize," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 19, 2000. [www.chronicle.com](http://www.chronicle.com).
83. I am grateful to Rabbi Sharon Anisfeld-Cohen for bringing this interpretation to my attention.



# Dissent

The *Utne Reader* says,

“Politics, economics, and culture come together in every article, giving the entire publication a balance most political journals lack.”

*But don't take their word for it . . . or ours. Try it for yourself.*

Yes, I'd like a subscription to  
**DISSENT:**

- \$24/year
- \$40/two years
- students: \$17/year
- single copy: \$7.50
- Check enclosed (drawn on U.S. currency).
- Add \$7 for postage outside the U.S.
- Bill me
- VISA
- MasterCard

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

2LPBB

**www.dissentmagazine.org**  
 Dissent, PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-3000

## Praise for *Organizing Graduate Students*

Gordon Lafer's powerful argument in support of graduate students organizing unions should be read by everyone associated with our universities. Lafer brilliantly describes how the growing corporate influence in the university means that graduate students share many concerns with other American workers—they want fair wages, basic benefits, and a real say on the job. University administrators should read this and be shamed into changing the anti-union policies of the universities. Graduate students should read this and *organize*.

—JOHN SWEENEY  
President, AFL-CIO

As he exposes the University's lies and deceit, Gordon Lafer shows how its anti-union ideology stifles what's left of the "community of scholars." Great universities can and do treat workers with respect and dignity by recognizing their unions while enhancing their own stature as true centers of learning and scholarship.

—ELIZABETH BUNN  
Vice President  
International Union, UAW

Professor Lafer has given us a penetrating analysis of the movement to organize graduate employees in the United States, particularly in the private college sector.

—SANDRA FELDMAN  
President  
American Federation of Teachers

Higher education cannot regain its moral and intellectual authority until universities recognize the democratic organizing rights of their employees. Gordon Lafer demolishes the arguments administrators have used to attack collective bargaining.

—CARY NELSON  
Vice President  
American Association of University Professors