

Information About the Graduate Student Union Election

As many of you are aware, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has filed a petition with the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations seeking to represent in collective bargaining UMD graduate students who hold appointments in various teaching, research and administrative positions.

The University has agreed to schedule an election in which the following graduate students will be eligible to cast their ballots for or against representation by the AFT:

- Teaching Assistants
- Teaching Fellows
- Instructional Assistants
- Studio Assistants
- Clinical Assistants
- Research Assistants
- Distinguished Doctoral Fellows
- Distinguished Art Fellows
- Doctoral Fellows
- Graduate Researchers
- Graduate Assistants
- Hourly-paid graduate students appointed for a minimum of 1 semester

In order to provide information about the election process, we will regularly update this page with answers to Frequently Asked Questions.

When will the election be held?

The Department of Labor Relations has not yet scheduled the election because the University has to inform eligible graduate students about a subpoena it issued to obtain contact information for voters. The subpoena seeks contact information for eligible voters so the DLR will know who can vote, and the union will be able to contact eligible voters. It is likely that the DLR will schedule the election in April, 2023. We will keep you informed as soon as the details are decided.

Why did I receive an email from Associate Provost Meressi about a subpoena?

Under a federal law that protects the privacy of student records, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the University cannot disclose the work appointments of graduate students to outside parties, except if the names are subpoenaed. The DLR has subpoenaed this information (name, address, contact information on record). Under FERPA, the University must then make a reasonable effort to notify affected students that you may seek

“protective action” against disclosing this information to the DLR. The email eligible voters received informs them that if they want to seek “protective action” against the disclosure of their names, they must contact the Director of Labor Relations no later than March 3, 2023 of their intent to do so. If students have no objection, they do not have to take any action, and the University will send their contact information to the DLR by March 10, 2023. The DLR will then set up the details of the election.

Is there any reason to object to the release of my name to the state agency and the union?

The release of your contact information will assure eligible graduate students that they can participate in the election, and therefore have a say in the outcome. As you may be aware, your name and other information about your student status is called “Directory Information” and is not private. The only aspect of your contact information as a student that is not public information is the particular appointment you hold, and that is why the DLR has issued its subpoena. Even if a student seeks “protective action” from the DLR to prevent disclosure of the appointment they hold, it is not certain that the DLR will conclude that disclosure of a graduate student’s appointment is an infringement of their privacy.

Does the fact that my contact information has been subpoenaed for purposes of the union election affect my status at the University?

The subpoena and your response to it has absolutely no impact on your status at the University.

Why would you want to vote in the election?

The union election will have important consequences for all graduate students who hold the appointments listed above. Therefore it is important that all eligible students participate in the election. The election is by secret ballot. The outcome of the election is determined by a majority of the votes cast. That means, for example, if only 100 students out of the 350 eligible students voted, and 51 voted for the union, the union would then become the representative for all 350 eligible students. Therefore, if you want a say in the outcome of the election, you should cast your ballot.

What does it mean to be represented by a union?

When employees are represented by a union, the union has the authority and the exclusive right to negotiate with management on workplace issues such as wages, benefits and working conditions. This means that individuals who are in the bargaining unit represented by the union do not have the right to individually negotiate with their supervisors/employers about wages, benefits or working conditions. Academic matters and policies are not subject to bargaining, however.