

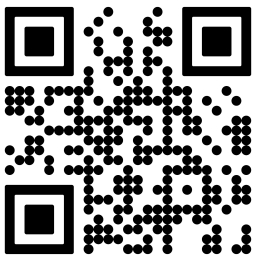
Is it Legal for Grad Students to Unionize? (Yes!)

National Laws

- The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA, also known as the Wagner Act) was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1935
 - Established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which protects private sector workers' right to unionize
- Public sector workers (like us!) are protected by state labor laws
 - There are at least **87 graduate student unions** in the U.S. (*as of July 2023*)
 - i. The University of Iowa has had a graduate student union since 1996 (*Campaign to Organize Graduate Students; COGS*)
 - i. <https://cogs.org/>
 - More than 7 million public sector workers (*33.1% of total public sector workers*) are union members, and the number has been growing
 - i. *US Bureau of Labor Statistics*: <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>

State Laws

- ISU grad students who are paid by the university for their Graduate Assistant work (***including international students***) are considered public sector employees of Iowa
- Our state labor agency is the Iowa Public Employment Relations Board (*PERB*)
 - <https://iowaperb.iowa.gov/>
- As public sector employees, we have the right to organize (*form a union*) and engage in collective bargaining.
 - It is illegal for employers to engage in discrimination or retaliation toward an employee for participating in organizing efforts.
 - *Iowa Code Chapter 20*: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/20.pdf>
- *Collective bargaining*: a negotiation process between an employer (*ISU, Iowa Board of Regents*) and a union (*ISU grad student workers who are part of the bargaining unit*), in which an agreement about worker terms and conditions is reached
 - Terms and conditions regarding salary/compensation (base wages), hours and work schedules, vacation/leave/time off, several other topics
- The benefit of collective bargaining is that the result is a **legally-binding, mutually-agreed upon contract** that cannot be broken or changed until the next bargaining session (unless both parties agree)
 - In comparison, organization handbooks and company policies can easily be changed by the administration, without mandatory input from the workers



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